



**REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY IN THE
ADVANCED CAPITALIST COUNTRIES:
A REPLY TO THE SPONTANEISTS**

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A Reply to the Winnipeg Labor Collective

Since its inception some 150 years ago, the socialist movement has witnessed not a few attempts to develop a theory and practice adequate to the task of bringing about the historical victory of the international working class. Controversy has always characterized this movement and has inevitably resulted in its division and fragmentation, a process which some may decry, but a process which nonetheless has profound historical, political and social bases. The outstanding historical differentiations that have occurred within the Socialist left are well known: Marxism and Anarchism; "evolutionary socialism" and "orthodox" Marxism; social democracy and Leninism; Trotskyism and Stalinism (including Maoism). These are only the most widely known and historically significant differentiations that can be cited. Numerous other divisions have occurred; "new" tendencies and "original" theories are constantly being offered to the discriminating "independent" radical, each to be studied and toyed with only to be discarded when the next "original contribution" is advanced. The political significance of these "contributions" lies not so much in their intrinsic worth or in their capacity to elucidate the tasks of socialists in our epoch as in their capacity to divert attention precisely from these tasks and from the revolutionary Marxist theory that indicates these tasks so clearly to all those willing to look.

It is in this light that serious revolutionary militants should approach the latest sampling of the "theoretical production" of the Winnipeg Labor Collective, a group of Winnipeg Socialists that has over the past year and a half succeeded in transforming itself from a politically amorphous study and research circle into a relatively homogeneous nucleus of neospontaneists. "Advanced Capitalism and the Revolutionary Left" is perhaps their most ambitious attempt to date to articulate the fundamental political conceptions that constitute their basis of political unity. Inasmuch as the Labor Collective considers itself to be a component part of a national political current, the "New Tendency", which is seeking to win hegemony within the Canadian left as a whole, and since it also identifies with an international current that includes such a sizeable formation as Lotta Continua in Italy, it is obvious that a considered analysis of their political positions would not be without value for the revolutionary left in Canada. In fact, given the not inconsiderable specific weight of the New Tendency within this left, such an analysis becomes an extremely important condition for the political maturation of the new vanguard in Canada.

alternative explanation they offer for the failure of the working classes in the advanced capitalist countries to carry out a socialist revolution is that the historical conditions for such a revolution have not hitherto existed; they are only now beginning to ripen. Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci and several generations of revolutionary fighters have struggled vainly for socialism, naively believing that they were living in an epoch of proletarian revolution and that their revolutionary political practice corresponded to the "actuality" of the proletariat's struggle for power, when in fact the proletariat did not as yet possess the capacity to make a revolution, at least not one worthy of the name. It turns out that Kautsky, Martov, Blum and yes, even Stalin had a more correct assessment of the character of the epoch than the very people whom we have naively come to believe represented the continuity of Marxism in the early part of the 20th century. This is, to say the least, quite a revelation. But let us not discount it merely on the basis of the company the Labor Collective keeps. Marxists have never relied on guilt by association. It is necessary to answer a "serious" analysis in a serious manner.

The essential argument of the first section of the L.C. pamphlet is that the organizational concepts of both the social democracy and of Leninism corresponded to a social reality qualitatively different from that of late capitalism. The "qualitative" changes that have been wrought in the capitalist system in recent years have rendered these concepts irrelevant to the strategy of revolutionary socialists living today, and have placed on the agenda the elaboration of a new strategy predicated on the view that the current "class composition" and the new forms that capitalist exploitation has assumed in recent years have created the conditions for a quick transition to communism.

We shall return later to their assessment of the historical period in which today's revolutionaries are functioning. What is necessary to examine first is the Labor Collective's political analysis of the period of so-called classical capitalism, a period in history preceding the full emergence of "state monopoly capitalism". This analysis can be summarized in the following points:

1. This period sees the parallel development of working class political parties (the S.D. Parties) and of trade unions as two expressions of the working class's "coming of age".

2. Trade unions are established as the defense organization not of the entire working class but of the skilled workers, the tradesmen and craftsmen.
3. The "classic" function of the social democratic parties is to "reunite politically the strata divided by the forms of organization."
4. These parties provided political leadership based on an alliance of the intelligentsia and the most highly organized section of the class constituting the "proletarian vanguard", i.e., the skilled workers who are also the most politically advanced workers. (This conception of the party "corresponded perfectly with, or anticipated, the Leninist concept of political organization"). The class's material heterogeneity is compensated for by the party whose task it is to unite the class politically.
5. The "proletarian vanguard" upon which the social democratic parties and later the Communist Parties based themselves was in fact the Labor aristocracy.
6. The political degeneration of both the social democracy and the C.P.'s was inevitable precisely because the politically dominant segment of the class upon which these parties were based had no revolutionary potential due to its structural relationship to capitalism.
7. Lenin went wrong in "seeking to substitute formal organization for the current class composition."
8. Leninism was never anything more than a left variant of Social-democracy, generally capable of adopting positions that corresponded more closely to Marxist principles than did those of the Social democracy. The Leninist strategy could not be revolutionary however because the material basis for the development of a revolutionary socialist strategy had not yet developed.
9. With the emergence of the mass worker and the rise of "state monopoly capitalism", both the social democratic and "Leninist" organizations witnessed the disappearance of the social reality which gave their organizational concepts their original meaning.

The central ideas of the Labor Collectives' analysis can thus be seen to be that "classical capitalism", which

supposedly extended up until 1929, was not a period in which the working class was objectively capable of carrying out a socialist revolution; that no substantive differences existed between the social democratic and Leninist conceptions of working class political organization and strategy; and that both the social democratic and Leninist conceptions were attempts to artificially overcome the objective barriers to the crystallization of revolutionary consciousness in the working class of this period. In attempting to prove these ideas, the Labor Collective demonstrates an amazing ability to distort historical facts and to present matters in a fashion that enable them to avoid the necessity of posing clear alternatives. In a way strikingly reminiscent of the early New Left, the Labor Collective with a single stroke discounts the lessons and experiences of 100 years of working class struggle, and posits the need for a new strategy corresponding to a revolutionary epoch that opened only a few years ago and which has so far yielded only a few lessons. By thus narrowing the scope of debate, they seek to strengthen their own position, write off Leninism-Trotskyism and concentrate attention on the elaboration of a "new" strategy. But it won't work Comrades: it didn't work for the New Left and it won't work for you.

The Character of the Epoch

It is to the Labor Collective's credit that they recognize that before one can pose the question of revolutionary strategy one must first of all determine whether or not the period is one ripe for revolution. This is a fundamental tenet of Marxism. The determination of the character of the epoch can be successfully accomplished only through an examination of the totality of its characteristics. A revolutionary epoch is one in which the possibility of the replacement of one mode of production for another is objectively posed by a high level of socio-economic contradictions which simultaneously expresses the incapacity of a ruling class to continue playing a historically progressive role and the capacity of another social class to take its place and inaugurate a new period in the development of human culture. Thus, to affirm the revolutionary character of our epoch, one must affirmatively answer two questions: Is there a historical structural crisis of the world capitalist system? Does the working class and its allies possess the strength, weight and political potential to carry out a socialist revolution? It would be safe to assume that the Labor Collective would answer these questions affirmatively as they pertain to the present. However, they refuse to do

so as they pertain to the period of classical capitalism, which ended according to them in 1929, or to the period corresponding to the initial stages of the development of what they call "state monopoly capitalism" and which we prefer to designate as "late Capitalism". In part of course, they are right to do so. Since the full burgeoning of world imperialism, Marxists have identified the period of classical capitalism with the stage of capitalist ascent and expansion. During this stage of capitalist development, Socialist revolution was not an objective possibility. This was so because capitalism was still in the process of bringing about a qualitative development of the forces of production on a global scale. It was in fact the consolidation of capitalism as a global system characterized by an international division of labor which marked the completion of capitalism's historically progressive mission. This development coincided with the expansion of the proletariat, an increase in the specific social weight of this class in the most advanced capitalist countries, and in its increasing ability to wage successful struggles against the ruling bourgeoisies at a number of different levels. It is the full consolidation of imperialism as a world system that marks the beginning of world capitalism's historical structural crisis, not the depression of 1929, not the emergence of the "mass worker", nor the introduction of Keynesian economic policies, as the Labor Collective would have us believe.

It is somewhat difficult to pin down the Labor Collective's reasons for believing that classical capitalism ended in 1929 rather than in the period 1900-1914. It is next to impossible to ascertain their opinion as to when capitalism finally entered into historical structural crisis. However the one thing that is clear in their analysis is their belief that the objective pre-condition for socialist revolution is not merely a high level of socio-economic contradictions, as we indicated earlier, but a substantial degree of "material" homogeneity within the working class. Capitalism, according to the Labor Collective, didn't really begin to enter into crisis until this occurred; and this has been a most recent development. But this leaves a whole series of other questions entirely unanswered: Has capitalism played a historically progressive role in this century? Has it allowed for not only a quantitative development of the forces of production on a global scale but also a qualitative one? What significance can one attach to the revolutionary transformations that have occurred in Russia, China, Cuba and the other workers' states in existence today?² The Labor Collective does not attempt to answer these questions in their pamphlet despite the fact that it was absolutely necessary for them

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to do so in order to make their position logically consistent and coherent. The reason they failed to do so might have something to do with the fact that at least some members of the group drew back from some of the more problematic conclusions that their analysis leads them towards. But it is a fact that at least the political leaderships of the Labor Collective adopts a state capitalist position regarding the bureaucratically degenerated and deformed workers' states. The group has yet to develop a homogeneous conception of what state capitalism constitutes however.

This being the case, it is safe to assume that the Labor Collective does believe that capitalism has played an historically progressive role as a social system in the 20th century. Capitalism, it would seem, has succeeded in qualitatively developing the productive forces on a global scale. It is seen as an expanding system that has succeeded in solving in one country after another (in Capitalist Russia, Capitalist China, Capitalist Cuba, etc.) the problems of socio-economic underdevelopment. The implications of such a theory are clearly immense, calling into question as they do the objective possibility of a socialist revolution (as distinct from the complete consolidation of socialism) in any but the most advanced capitalist countries. This is not the place for a polemic against the state capitalist thesis. We cite the above only in order to demonstrate some of the theoretical roots of the Labor Collective's refusal to characterize the first part of the 20th century as an epoch of proletarian revolution.

In arriving at these conclusions, the Labor collective successfully demarcates its own analysis from that of revolutionary Marxism on the critical question of the factors underlying the historical structural crisis of world capitalism.

In his celebrated preface to A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, written in 1859, Marx specifies the preconditions necessary for an historical epoch of social revolution to open up: "At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or--what is but a legal expression of the same thing--with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution".

The basis of Marx's theory of social revolution can thus be seen to be the contradiction between the expansion of the

forces of production on the one hand and the constrictive and increasingly anachronistic character of productive and property relations on the other. This is the fundamental historical contradiction that has characterized the death agony of every mode of production. And it is a contradiction that Marxists have analyzed in relation to the capitalist mode of production for several generations.

To deny that a socialist revolution was objectively possible in the first part of the 20th century is to deny that these previous generations of Marxists were correct in believing that such a contradiction was operative within the world capitalist system in this period.

As was indicated above, the Leninist analysis of the historical structural crisis of world capitalism was predicated on the proposition that capitalism's consolidation as a global system had brought it to its highest stage of development, imperialism, and that the emergence of imperialism concomitant with monopoly capitalism, marked the end of capitalism's historically progressive role. For Lenin, this proposition was definitively proven by the outbreak of the first world imperialist war in 1914, an event which gave substance to Marx's famous prediction that the productive forces, in the era of capitalist decay, would increasingly transform themselves into destructive forces until they were liberated from the fetters that capitalist property relations imposed upon them. Imperialist war is only one expression of capitalism's historical crisis however, and Lenin's analysis of imperialism, which is summarized in a substantively correct fashion in the Labor Collective's pamphlet, does not analyze a number of features of capitalism/imperialism in its death agony.

The crisis of world capitalism has not been expressed over the last 60-70 years by an absolute decline in production (any more than the crisis which preceeded the French revolution of 1789 was characterized by an absolute decline of the productive forces). Quantitative expansion has unquestionably occurred. But this has coincided with a qualitative decay of the world capitalist system which is manifested by capitalism's inability to resolve the social and economic problems it has created even though the material culture which it has also been responsible for developing is capable of doing so. In other words, capitalist property relations, since approximately the turn of the century, have been fetters to the kind of progress which the development of the productive forces has made possible. This contradiction expresses itself in a number of ways:

in the inability of world capitalism to solve any of the economic and social problems of the masses within the framework of imperialism, this being especially true for the so-called third world countries; by the increasing inability of capitalism to contain the expansion of the productive forces within the framework of private property and the nation state; by the ability of the working class to periodically undertake struggles which challenge the capitalist relations of production, and pose the question of workers' power; by the ever-increasing production of commodities of poor quality or dubious value; and by the constant threat that bourgeois social relations pose to the continued existence of human culture through war, pollution etc.

Can anyone seriously deny that these expressions of capitalism's decay have not been true since at least 1914?

It is hard to imagine that even the Labor Collective would do so, yet it seems apparent that the L.C. would take exception to at least one of our examples of the capitalist decay of this period--the ability of the working class to periodically undertake struggles which challenge the capitalist relations of production and pose the question of workers' power. In this respect they adopt a classically spontaneist position. Capitalism is only now entering into crisis, because it is only now that the greatest of the forces of production in capitalist society --the working class--is entering into contradiction with the capitalist relations of production. In the past, because of its material heterogeneity, the working class was incapable of doing so. Hence, capitalism faced no crisis. Now that the working class is becoming more homogeneous, capitalism is in crisis. Thus, the Labor Collective presents us with a tedious tautology: there was no capitalist crisis in Lenin's time because the working class was not revolutionary. And the working class was not revolutionary because there was no capitalist crisis. Well comrade, tautologies are all well and fine, (though hardly a substitute for dialectics), but only if the premises upon which they are based are true. But it has in no way been demonstrated anywhere in the course of the pamphlet why a contradiction did not exist between the working class and capitalist property relations before 1929. All we are told is that the working class was too divided, and that the most politically conscious section of the class was incapable of attaining a world view superior to that of social democracy because of its "privileged" position within

the class structure and because of the nature of its work (skilled crafts and trades, etc.) However, as Marxists, we should be able to recognize that the "privileges" that the upper section of the proletariat enjoyed did not mitigate the objective contradiction that existed between their historical interest and the continued existence of world capitalism. (If this were so, we would be in even bigger trouble today!) And the divisions that existed within the class, substantial as these were, did not reflect any differentiation in terms of these historical interests. The Labor Collective's stress on "material heterogeneity" then turns out to be a cover for a fundamentally objectivist approach to the determination of revolutionary potential. It would seem that the working class has no revolutionary potential because it was objectively incapable of developing a revolutionary consciousness. But the Labor Collective totally fails to demonstrate how this incapacity stemmed from objective conditions. They merely point out the differences existing between today's objective conditions and the objective conditions confronting the working class in Lenin's time and conclude that if class was not subjectively revolutionary in Lenin's time, it must have been due to the objective conditions. But if this is your criterion for determining revolutionary potential comrades, how can you say that even today's working class has a revolutionary potential? How many workers here in Canada or in the U.S. or even in Europe for that matter have even a rudimentary revolutionary political consciousness? Is this because the objective conditions for socialism have not yet ripened? Think carefully on this comrades. If revolutionary political consciousness is generated within the working class only by objective changes in the functioning of the system, then why is it that even now, when the working class is more homogeneous than ever and when the objective conditions for socialist transition are more ripe than ever, in countries like the U.S.A. or Canada there is a smaller revolutionary working class movement than there was fifty years ago? It is clear that the Labor Collective's objectivist reductionism, which is just another form of idealism, furnished no answer to this problem.* In fact it is only through an understanding of the dialectical interplay between objective and subjective factors in the class struggle and in the revolutionary process, which the L.C. obviously has no comprehension of, that we can understand the history of the last seventy five years and apply what we have learned to the task of elaborating a comprehensive revolutionary strategy for the advanced capitalist countries of today. A serious examination of this history will demonstrate that the same factors that mitigated

*It is idealistic inasmuch as it does not take into account the dialectical notion of "totality" and indicates a linear relationship between objective and subjective factors.

against a socialist revolution 50-65 years ago are mitigating against it today; but that these factors are primarily subjective in character and can be overcome through an understanding of the Marxist science of the subjective factor and the implementation of a strategy based on that science. We are convinced that this science has reached its most highly developed form in Leninism, and that the Labor Collective in rejecting Leninism, not only misinterprets its essence, but betrays an underestimation of the importance of the subjective factor in the revolutionary process. In answering the Labor Collective's misconceptions concerning the history of the social democracy and Leninism, we can disclose the significance of this factor in the workers' movement of the 20th century.

Social Democracy and Leninism

Is the Labor Collective correct in asserting that there is no substantive difference between the organizational and political concepts underlying the respective "strategies of classical social democracy and Leninism? The pamphlet adduces only one proof for this assertion, which is that both the social democratic and the Leninist organizations sought to base themselves upon the "vanguard" layer of the working class, defined rather arbitrarily by the Labor Collective as the "labor aristocracy". No attempt is made to contrast the political program, organizational norms, historical or conjunctual analysis, or actual practice of the two currents. It is simply taken for granted that these questions are all rather irrelevant located as they are within an historical period that offered no perspective for socialist revolution at any rate. Yet, these questions are not only relevant to an understanding of the historical differentiation between social democracy and Leninism; they are in fact crucial to an understanding of contemporary revolutionary strategy.

It is first of all necessary to point out a contradiction within the Labor Collective's own understanding of the "classical" character of the social democratic parties. On the one hand, we are informed that the classic function of the social democratic parties was to "reunite politically the strata divided by the forms of organization." On the other, we are told that "the party provided political leadership based on the alliance of the intelligentsia and the most highly organized sectors of the class," constituting the "proletarian vanguard." There are two very distinct conceptions of political organization to be found here. The first statement suggests that the self-defined task of the

social democratic parties was to politically represent and organizationally embrace a politically and socially heterogeneous working class which was severely divided in terms of its other organizational expressions or lack of them. The second statement suggests that the social democracy sought rather to base itself upon only those elements within the working class that were highly organized, together with the socialist intelligentsia. In fact neither of these conceptions of the nature of the social democratic parties is correct. The Social Democratic organization did not seek to politically embrace the entire working class; nor did it consciously seek to base itself upon a proletarian vanguard, understood in purely organizational terms. The classical social democratic parties had a political criterion for membership just as do Leninist organizations, Stalinist organizations, or even spontaneist organizations today. The political basis for membership in the German social democracy was agreement with the Erfurt programme adopted in 1895 (as corrected by Frederick Engels). With respect to strategical perspective, the social democratic organizations displayed a high degree of heterogeneity. Prior to World War I, revolutionary currents coexisted with reformist and centrist ones. Organizationally, the parties were quite loose, demanding only a minimal degree of discipline. To the extent that one can say that the social democracy was based on the vanguard of the working class, one is simply stating what is obvious: that the most advanced elements of the class rallied to the political party with the most advanced working class political program of its day. And if it was primarily those sections of the W.C. organized into trade unions that did so, then that only demonstrates that the unions did in fact comprise the proletarian vanguard of that time.

But all this really misses the point. It is not enough to "indict" Leninist organizations for seeking to base themselves on the most politically advanced elements of the class, in order to prove a fundamental "continuity" between social democracy and Leninism. All socialist organizations, and perhaps even the Labor Collective, have always sought to link up with and recruit from the "proletarian vanguard", understood as both a social and a political phenomenon within the class. The error the Labor Collective makes in its pamphlet is in giving this category of the "proletarian vanguard" a static definition. For them, the "proletarian vanguard" can only be those sections of the class organized into craft unions--"the skilled workers who were also the most politically advanced workers." The Labor Collective compounds their error by asserting that since these skilled

workers also constituted the Labor aristocracy as defined by Lenin, the proletarian vanguard must therefore be seen as synonymous with the Labor aristocracy. (This is thrown in more for shock value than for anything else). Thus the Labor Collective informs us that the "proletarian vanguard" upon which Leninist as well as social democratic organizational concepts are based turns out to be a segment of the class which has been "bought off" by the bourgeoisie. There are two problems with this conclusion however: the first is that the rigid definition that the L.C. gives to the category of the "proletarian vanguard" is not at all the Leninist definition, and the second is that both the real definition given by Lenin to the concept of the Labor Aristocracy as well as that imputed to him by the L.C. are theoretically problematic (infact this is suggested by the L.C. themselves when they point out that the labor aristocracy is "the same class vanguard which in 1914 accepted the war and national chauvinism but which in 1919 was to bring capitalism to a near standstill").

The Leninist definition of the "proletarian vanguard" will be discussed when we examine the theoretical bases of Leninism's differentiation from the social democracy. It is necessary first of all to dispose of the Labor Collective's argument concerning the nature of the labor aristocracy.

The reasons for the acceptance of the war in 1914 by not only the vanguard of the class (the majority of the memberships of most European Social Democratic parties) but by the broad masses, can be understood only in terms of the historical political role of the working class in the period of capitalist ascent. The tendential opportunism of the social democracy was, in even its most progressive and healthy days in the final analysis, a function of that political role and a reflection of the social democracy's inability to break from that role even when it was in the objective interests of the working class for it to do so. Trotsky in his book The War and the International (1914) provides a summary analysis of this point.

"As long as capitalism remained on a national basis, the proletariat could not refrain from cooperation in democratizing the political relations and in developing the forces of production through its parliamentary, communal and other activities. The attempts of the anarchists to set up a formal revolutionary agitation in opposition to the political fights of the social democracy condemned them to isolation and gradual extinction. But when the capitalist states overstep their national form to become imperialistic

world powers, the proletariat cannot oppose this new imperialism. And the reason is the so-called minimal programme (the social-democratic Erfurt program) which fashioned its policy upon the framework of the nation state. When its main concern is for tariff treaties and social legislation, the proletariat is incapable of expending the same energy in fighting imperialism that it did in fighting feudalism. By applying its old methods of the class struggle--the constant adaptation to the movements of the markets--to the changed conditions produced by imperialism, it itself falls into material and ideological dependence on imperialism."

What Trotsky is saying here is that it was the "old methods of the class struggle" which developed as a fundamentally empirical response of the workers' movement to a period of capitalist rise in addition to the bureaucratization of the workers' movement that led to the capitulation of the social democracy and the European working class to national chauvinism in 1914. We might add that it was the experience of capitalism's first serious indication of structural crisis, World War I, combined with the lessons provided by the Russian working class in 1917 of "new methods of class struggle", that enabled the European working class to challenge the bases of capitalist rule so seriously in the period immediately following the war. This challenge was made despite the opposition of the bureaucracy in the workers' movement, a bureaucracy whose political nature and objective role the war had only served to highlight.

The degeneration of the Social Democracy was explained by Lenin in terms of two factors, not one as the Labor Collective suggests: 1) The development of a petty-bourgeois bureaucratic layer within the trade unions and the social democratic parties, which politically controlled these organizations and which sought above all to maintain the privileges it had acquired both within these organizations and outside (political offices, journalists, etc.) The organizational and political stranglehold that this bureaucracy maintained over the social democracy ensured the increasing inability of these parties to develop a practice based on Marxist theory, and after 1914, their inability to make the "turn" demanded by the change in the objective situation, i.e. the beginning of capitalism's historical structural crisis. Hence the capitulation to national chauvinism in 1914. Hence the working class's political incapacity to resist this capitulation. 2) The sociological roots of this bureaucratic layer, according to Lenin, are to be found within the "labor aristocracy" which is defined as

that part of the working class inside the imperialist countries that has been won over politically to the bourgeoisie by means of colonial super-profits.

? Lenin's
economic
determinism

Even though Lenin's concept of the labor aristocracy has been widely used by Marxists since it was first conceived, it is clear that a critical re-examination and redefinition of this concept is called for in light of a number of considerations. First of all, imperialist capital invested abroad brings home a comparatively negligible sum compared to the total wage bill of the working class in the major imperialist countries. There are of course variations from country to country; but it is impossible to explain the bureaucratization of the workers' movements in the imperialist metropolis purely in these terms.

Secondly, and more importantly, it is clear that by any objective criterion it is more justifiable to speak of the entire working class of an imperialist country constituting a labor aristocracy in relation to the working class of a colonial or semi-colonial country than it is to speak of the labor aristocracy as being a layer or phenomenon within the working class of the advanced capitalist countries.

For example, the wage differential between a worker in the U.S. and a worker in Bolivia may be on the order of 1-20, whereas the wage differentials within the American working class would be on a much smaller scale.

Does this mean that the entire American working class constitutes a labor aristocracy which has been bought off by the bourgeoisie? Certainly not! It is no consolation to a "privileged" American worker to know that his wages are 20 times those of his Bolivian counterpart when he is faced with an economic crisis in the U.S. which threatens to undermine his standard of living or throw him out of work. The point to be understood here is that a relatively privileged status within the international working class or even within the working class of a single country does not signify that a group of workers has been "bought off." It can often mean the exact opposite. Unionized workers are generally the highest paid sector of the working class. Historically, they have also been the most combative and the most radical in terms of defending their right to organize, in struggling for immediate demands, and in adopting demands directed against the bourgeois state. Of course it is necessary to make a distinction between craft and industrial unions. But even understanding that, it is clear that any attempt to demonstrate the non-revolutionary potential of a sector of the working class solely in terms of a "privileged status"

or its "forms of organization" is nonsense. The Labor Collective's use of the concept of the "Labor Aristocracy" does not clarify anything concerning the history of the workers' movement or its present. In fact it only raises more questions concerning its own analysis.

If the labor aristocracy is defined by the L.C. as the upper sectors of the working class which have been bought off by the bourgeoisie with superprofits extracted through imperialist plunder and through the super-exploitation of other strata in the working class, and in the form of "higher wages, union recognition, bourgeois respectability" and so on, then we are compelled to ask the Labor Collective: what has become of this phenomenon? At no point is it referred to in the pamphlet's analysis of contemporary capitalism. Are we to understand then that it no longer exists? That it has "disappeared" along with imperialist plunder, wage differentials within the working class and differentiated forms of organization within the class? This obviously cannot be the case. But it would seem that the Labor Collective takes a much less harsh view of the "new labor aristocracy" than it does of the old. It is clear that the L.C. does not believe that those sectors of the contemporary working class organized into unions have been bought off by the bourgeoisie and therefore have no revolutionary potential. Yet, in terms of their relative "privileges", they constitute no less of an aristocracy within the class than did unionised workers in Lenin's time. In order to partially shield itself from this line of attack, the Labor Collective provides us with a third explanation of the origins of the Labor Aristocracy: "The third is the mitigation of the class conflict inherent in skilled production; the accompanying productionist mentality accepts capitalist production but challenges capitalist control."

Now the first thing to be noted here is that at no time did Lenin explain the rise of a labor aristocracy in these terms. It can therefore not be used by the Labor Collective as evidence of a "contradiction" within Lenin's position, as the Labor Collective obliquely tries to imply. It is purely the invention of the Labor Collective comrades themselves.

The problem with it of course is that it is totally incomprehensible. It is thrown out without any explanation whatsoever. (Explain yourselves, comrades!) How does skilled production lead to the "mitigation of the class conflict?" Is the class struggle "mitigated" only because of the "productionist mentality" of the skilled workers?

In what sense does the "productionist mentality" accept "capitalist production but challenge capitalist control?"

A number of observations are in order. First of all, the class struggle is the product of the most fundamental contradictions of capitalist society. Every strike that occurs is an expression of this basic contradiction between the interests of capital and labor. But the outcome of every class conflict is determined by an ensemble of objective and subjective factors. Often what appears objectively possible in terms of broadening or extending a particular struggle is not feasible in terms of the combativity or radicalization of the class. This in turn is often a function of the quality of the working class's leadership.

In this sense, it is true to say that the class's level of consciousness and political understanding can act as a brake on the class struggle, and may therefore "mitigate the class conflict." But this is true in all non-revolutionary situations precisely because as long as the working class continues to function within the framework of generalized commodity production, and continues to be subjected to the reification and alienation that this entails, the majority of the class will remain under the sway of bourgeois ideology. Only a sudden disruption of the capitalist routine can create the conditions for a dramatic leap of consciousness on the part of the mass of workers. This again is as true now as it was in Lenin's time. But this is not to imply that the methods of production have not changed. It is undoubtedly true that the craft worker faced very different working conditions and had different tasks than does the so-called "mass worker" of today. But this is a conjunctural question. Nothing fundamental or qualitative separates the social objectivity of these two different kinds of workers; their interests are identical.

But what of this notion of "productionist mentality?" We can only assume that the Labor Collective means by this that craft workers were oriented towards the production of commodities. But this is true of the modern worker as well. The only difference is that the craft worker was payed on the basis of piece work primarily, and the modern worker is payed for the most part on the basis of the amount of time spent on the assembly line. Both have "productionist mentalities" however, inasmuch as both realize that their existence is dependent on the production of commodities. If the modern worker does not have a "productionist mentality", what does he have Comrades? A consumptionist mentality? This is really not very profound. A Socialist mentality perhaps?

And what about the modern "skilled worker", the intellectual labourer in whom the L.C. place so much confidence? Is the fact that he uses his technical and intellectual skills in the course of his work sufficient to qualitatively distinguish his mentality and his revolutionary potential from the rest of the class? Does this enable him to challenge capitalist control, but not capitalist production? This would seem to fly in the face of the L.C.'s own hopes concerning his role in the "revolutionary strategy" that they have mapped out.

Finally, what are we to make of this opposition that the L.C. has constructed between capitalist production and capitalist control? How is it possible for a worker to accept one and not the other? What the Labor Collective is trying to say here is that even though a worker might be anti-capitalist, even though he may wish to see the destruction of the capitalist state and the dissolution of the capitalist ownership of the means of production and so on, he has not reached a revolutionary consciousness unless he can challenge capitalist production. But what is capitalist production? The capitalist mode of production is characterized by the generalization of commodity production in which all elements of production (land, labor, power, labor instruments, etc.) become commodities. According to Mandel, "Capitalism is a mode of production in which the generalization of commodity production unleashes a historic process of accumulation of capital, which is in turn a constant (be it discontinuous) growth of commodity production, of production of exchange values and reinvestment of surplus."³

An attack on capitalist ownership and control is precisely an attack on the foundations of generalized commodity production. This does not mean that in the transition to socialism commodity production will disappear immediately. Only a very high level of development of the productive forces can bring this about.

But what the Labor Collective seems to be saying is that the working class cannot become truly revolutionary and pose a genuine challenge to capitalism until such time as the productive forces have been developed to the level where the complete disappearance of commodity production is objectively posed. Again we see the Labor Collective's objectivist determinist method at work. For them, there can be no such thing as a period of transition between capitalism and socialism. It is capitalism that will create the objective and subjective conditions for an immediate transition to socialism and no such transitional stage.⁴ Again we see how this notion fits in with the L.C.'s "state capitalist" analysis of the Soviet Union and the other workers' states.

And again all the old questions that we have already posed reappear concerning the character of the epoch.

It is true that the productive forces under capitalism have undergone a quantitative expansion over the last 50 years. But on a global scale, capitalism is nowhere near developing the forces of production to the point where an immediate transition to socialism is objectively possible. In fact the productive forces have not been expanded to that point even in the United States as yet. But the point is that capitalism is incapable of doing this, as a global system undergoing deep structural crisis. Moreover, at the present time it is undergoing one of the worst conjunctural crises in its history. If the Labor Collective were rigorous in the application of their criteria concerning the character of a revolutionary epoch, they would nonetheless have to conclude that even today the objective conditions have not developed sufficiently to allow for a rapid rise in the revolutionary potential of the working class. They would in fact be forced into defending the ludicrous position that until capitalism has brought about a global development of the forces of production to the point where the production of exchange values is dictated solely by the requirements of the capitalist relations of production, socialist revolution is not objectively possible.

Thus we can see that the Labor Collective's concern about the conservating effect of commodity production on the political consciousness of the working class cannot be restricted to the "labor aristocracy" of Lenin's time; it is a factor that is just as operative today in relation to any worker engaged in the process of production. We do not deny the existence of this factor, but we do question the Labor Collective's unbridled pessimism concerning the possibility of overcoming this impediment to the development of revolutionary consciousness within the class.

As we have already indicated, capitalism is in the epoch of its death agony, a period characterized by Lenin as one of wars and revolutions. Conjunctural crises within the system periodically create the conditions for revolutionary mass upsurges which go beyond the struggle for immediate demands related to wages or working conditions. The pre-condition for such an upsurge is not and cannot be a full revolutionary consciousness on the part of the mass of workers. Yet the struggle must be of such a nature that it poses a serious challenge to the bourgeois state and simultaneously opens up the possibility of the widespread appearance of

organs of dual power. It is in the course of such upsurges that the reifying, mystifying and depoliticizing effects of generalized commodity production and bourgeois social relations on the consciousness of the mass of workers can be blown apart and the conditions created for a rapid rise in their political consciousness. But this is not an automatic process. To ensure a favorable outcome to such upsurges, an organized revolutionary vanguard must exist which is capable of taking advantage of these exceptional circumstances to advance the consciousness of the working class to the point where the class itself can undertake the destruction of the bourgeois state. Such revolutionary explosions are the key to Lenin's whole theory of revolution, for it is only through the correct intervention of a revolutionary party in such "exceptional" circumstances that a socialist revolution becomes feasible in the advanced capitalist countries. Without such an intervention, such revolutionary upsurges will recede and capitalism will be unable to restabilize itself. There is nothing in Lenin's theory of revolution which allows for a "final collapse" of capitalism occurring purely through the operation of objective contradictions. Short of the successful intervention of the revolutionary party in a period of revolutionary upsurge, no crisis of the capitalist system is insoluble. This has been amply demonstrated by historical experience: in Germany in a series of upsurges between 1918 and 1923; in England in 1926; in Spain and France in 1936; in Italy in 1948; in Greece in 1945; in France in 1968; and in Italy in 1969, to name just a few. These missed opportunities for socialist revolution are tragic reminders of the price that the working class has paid because a sufficiently strong revolutionary Leninist tendency was not present to provide an alternative political leadership to the old Stalinist and social democratic leaderships which the masses in fact by-passed in the course of these struggles--a tendency whose political direction was indispensable to maintaining the momentum of the upsurge and giving it a strategic perspective.

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Thus the Leninist theory of revolution, which we have just summarized, does take into account the very factors which the Labor Collective approaches with such trepidation. The difference in the approach of the Leninists and the spontaneists lies in the fact that the Leninists have a strategy to overcome the subjective impediments to the development of a revolutionary consciousness within the class whereas the spontaneists insist that these impediments will be removed through a further development of essentially objective factors. What shape this

development of the objective conditions must take is never made clear, though hints are dropped throughout the pamphlet, some of which we have discussed (further expansion of the productive forces making possible an immediate transition to a socialist mode of production based entirely on the production of use values; further homogenization of the working class, etc.)

It is this question which the Labor Collective attempts to sidestep through their monstrous misrepresentation of Leninism as a left variant of classical social democracy. The foregoing has attempted to demonstrate the falsity of the L.C.'s identification of social democracy and Leninism, by attacking the Labor Collective's assumptions concerning the Leninist definition of the proletarian vanguard. In order to go beyond this, a positive delineation of the political difference between these two historical currents in the working class must be undertaken. These differences can be summarized in the following points: 1) even though Lenin borrowed heavily from Kautsky in defining the tasks of the revolutionary party, Lenin's conceptions regarding the nature of socialist consciousness and the autonomy of Marxist theory in relation to the class struggle are incomparably richer than those of classical social democracy.

In What is to be Done?, Lenin quotes the following passage from Kautsky: "Socialism as a doctrine has its roots, of course, in modern economic relationships, just as the class struggle of the proletariat has.... But socialism and class struggle emerge side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, for example, modern technology, and the proletariat, however much it wishes to do so, can create neither the one nor the other. Both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia... thus socialist consciousness is something is something introduced into proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arises within it spontaneously." (my emphasis)

Lenin does not differentiate himself from a number of problematic aspects of this analysis in What is to be Done? But in practice it is clear that Lenin did understand the shortcomings of this approach. Marxist science is obviously not sufficient for the development of revolutionary theory and consciousness. It must be organically connected to the

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working class and subject to its criticism. Revolutionary theory cannot survive in isolation, it must be upheld by an organization which continuously refines it on the basis of its experience in the class struggle. In this way Marxist science avoids becoming a lifeless dogma which sanctions proletarian revolution merely as the formalization of an objective process defined in purely economic terms.

It was Kautsky and the social democracy's inability to understand this that led them gradually to adapt to the very evolutionist and spontaneist positions that they had earlier attacked Bernstein for espousing. In the social democracy's case, this became little more than an ideological rationalization for an increasingly opportunist political practice which stemmed from the growing bureaucratization of the official workers' movement. In Kautsky's case, it led to his complete incomprehension of the significance of the Russian revolution, a revolution which he characterized as premature, as well as to his repudiation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Lenin's theory of party organization then is based on a far richer conception of the autonomy of Marxist theory in the class struggle than is the social democracy's. In fact the classical social democracy in practice did not base their day-to-day * or organizational expansion on Marxist theory or on a revolutionary program. Typically, the social democratic parties were relatively heterogeneous organizations lacking a revolutionary political perspective and without an orientation to building a cadre organization of professional revolutionaries capable of defending the theoretical capital of Marxism and developing it in accordance with the development of the class struggle.

2) The reason why the social democracy degenerated was that its whole preceding history made it virtually impossible for these organizations to make a turn en bloc towards preparation for revolutionary struggle--a turn which became objectively necessary in the early years of the 20th century with the beginnings of capitalism's historical structural crisis. This is the key difference between Leninism and social democracy. Lenin's understanding of the character of the epoch enabled him to see the need to construct revolutionary combat organizations based on a full revolutionary program which corresponded to the tasks of socialists in a revolutionary epoch.

The democratic-centralist organizational principles of the Leninist Party are designed to better enable it to implement such a revolutionary strategy and to assist in the prevention of a political degeneration of the party resulting from tendencies towards bureaucratism in the leadership and political passivity within the base.

*activity

if there was one thing they were oriented to, it was to building a cadre organization of professional revolutionaries. Lenin specifically praised them for it before he changed his mind and decided the social democracy cadres were actually bureaucrats (unlike the Bolshevik cadres of course).

Lenin's acceptance of Kautskyism in the pre-1914 period and his unwillingness to criticize the organizational and political concepts of European social democracy in this period stemmed from his acceptance of the social democracy's historical prognosis concerning the objective situation in which socialists were working in Europe. He broke with these concepts in building the Bolshevik Party precisely because he believed that Russian socialists faced a qualitatively different situation, one in which revolution was placed on the immediate historic agenda. Even though Lenin was mistaken in believing that the Russian Revolution which was approaching would have an entirely democratic character, he nonetheless prepared the Bolshevik party for a leading role within this revolution. Thus the Bolshevik party was constructed by Lenin as a combat organization. To the extent that a large section of the party faltered in 1917 in believing that the dictatorship of the proletariat was not on the order of the day, this can be attributed to Lenin's incomplete analysis of the dynamics of the revolution in the pre-1917 period-- in particular his rejection of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution which held that not even democratic tasks of the revolution could be fully carried through without the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even so, with the publication of his April thesis in April, 1917, Lenin was able to reorient the party toward a concerted struggle for socialist revolution.

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It was only in 1914 that Lenin came to realize what had been clear to Trotsky and Luxemburg for many years: that the non-revolutionary perspective of European social democracy was less a function of a non-revolutionary objective situation than a function of the social democracy's growing bureaucratism and political bankruptcy. It was at this point that it became clear to Lenin that a new "organizational ideological form" was needed in order to lead the working masses in a struggle for power in the new epoch that was opening up. He, together with other revolutionaries in Russia and throughout the world, resolved to build new working class parties on the Bolshevik model in all countries as national sections of a democratically centralized world party of socialist revolution.

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3. The programmatic differences between social democracy and Leninism are reflective of their divergent historical perspectives, as well as their antagonistic social characters. In place of the old minimum-maximum program of the social democracy (most explicitly enunciated in the German section's

Erfurt program of 1894), the Communist International at its third and fourth congresses advanced a transitional program, whose object was to overcome the subjective deficiencies in the class consciousness of the working class in order to prepare the class for the tasks which were required by the new objective situation. The 3rd Congress of the C.I. in 1921 described this program in the following terms: "...the Communist International mounts a struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which taken together will disintegrate the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat and constitute stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and in which each particular demand will express a need of the great masses, even if these masses are not yet consciously in favor of a dictatorship of the proletariat."

Trotsky in his Transitional Program of 1938 gave an even clearer definition of the function of transitional demands. He described transitional demands as the bridge connecting the present consciousness of the class with the socialist goal of the revolution. Hence transitional demands are demands that revolutionaries must inject into the day-to-day struggles of the masses in order to raise the consciousness of the masses and raise the stakes of the struggle. They are demands that pose a structural challenge to capitalism and which simultaneously pose the need for organs of workers' power capable of consistently implementing these measures. But the strategy of transitional demands involves no opportunist adaption to the present political understanding of the class. Trotsky made this point clear in his discussions on the transitional program: "We know that the mentality of every class of society is determined by objective conditions, by the productive forces, by the economic state of the country, but this determination is not immediately reflected. The mentality is in general backward, in relation to the economic development..."

"The programme must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness."

Trotsky made these observations in order to anticipate and immediately refute any one sided opportunistic interpretation of the function of the Transitional Program, an interpretation which nonetheless has found great currency among many who falsely describe themselves as Trotskyists. For Trotsky, transitional demands are transitional precisely

all you need is correct demands and the class struggle moves inexorably forward.

the revolutionary as doctor, giving injections to the working class (the doctor "knows what's good for you, even if you don't")

because they are capable of unleashing specific types of struggles through which successive sectors of the masses can develop an understanding of the need for socialist revolution. The struggle for Transitional Demands creates the conditions for overcoming, in action first, and in political understanding afterwards, the immaturity of the masses' present level of consciousness. For Leninists, the struggle for transitional demands within the labor movement is the means through which a revolutionary organization can prepare the working class for the struggles it must wage in order to successfully challenge the bourgeois order.

4. Another essential difference between the social democratic and Leninist concepts of the party has to do with the question of revolutionary initiative. This point is related to the previous ones but deserves to be underlined in a particularly serious manner.

Instead of adapting to the backwardness of the working class' consciousness and seeing propaganda (socialist education) alone as the means to overcoming it, the Leninist approach predicates itself on an understanding of how revolutionary initiatives can modify the relationship of forces in favour of a rapid development of the political consciousness of the masses. Such initiatives can take a variety of forms and should not be confused with an adventurist or voluntarist approach. It may involve the organization of political campaigns around a series of transitional demands. It may involve leading exemplary struggles in an arena in which the revolutionary organization has a mobilizable base. But in all such actions the revolutionary organization seeks to develop and modify the political understanding of the class, constantly preparing it for the political tasks that it must undertake.

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The Leninist theory of organization can most clearly be understood as a dialectical unity of the elements that we have discussed above. It is a theory of revolution which takes into account a far greater number of factors than our Labor Collective comrades wish to acknowledge or even seem capable of understanding. It is a theory of revolution which takes into account the relative autonomy of Marxist theory, and which therefore demands the existence of an organization based on that theory and capable of developing it in accordance with the development of the class struggle; a theory of revolution which recognizes that a revolutionary epoch demands the existence of a combat party of revolutionaries capable of taking revolutionary initiatives,

promulgating a transitional program of struggle, and leading the class struggle through to the end; a theory which acknowledges the unevenness and discontinuity of the development of class and socialist consciousness within the working class and which therefore posits the need for a revolutionary party capable of organizing, co-ordinating and centralizing the activities of the proletarian vanguard, that section of the class which has already developed at least a rudimentary understanding of the historical interests and tasks of the proletariat and which has already transcended a purely trade unionist consciousness (that is, an understanding of the need for workers to band together in struggle to advance their most immediate economic interests, as distinct from historical interests).

Instead of dealing with this, the political essence of Lenin's theory of party organization and revolution, the Labor Collective chooses to erect a straw man, a social democratic "Leninism" which, for all its good intentions, was incapable of leading revolutionary struggles because the "class composition" was not yet sufficiently "ripe".

Thus the Labor Collective sneers at the twenty-one conditions of membership of the Communist International labelling such questions as "propaganda for violent revolution", the dictatorship of the proletariat, and democratic centralism as mere "organizational principles". The Labor Collective proceeds to depict Lenin's strategy as "work in the social democratic parties and trade unions", in order to win the "leadership of the class vanguard"--a strategy which of course leads the Comintern straight to the trash can of history by 1929. No attempt is made to discuss the kind of work Lenin advocated in the trade unions; no attempt is made to give a full definition of the Leninist strategy for revolution; and, what is most remarkable, no attempt is made to distinguish between the revolutionary Leninist period of the Comintern and the period of its political degeneration at the hands of Stalin and Co. This degeneration was certainly not the product of an orientation to the "class vanguard" or the product of an "irrelevant" or "unworkable" strategy. It was the product in the last analysis of the bureaucratization of the Russian workers state and party, the result of the Soviet bureaucracy's successful efforts to subordinate revolutionary movements in other countries to its own narrow "national" interests.

This has been fully documented not only by socialist observers but even by bourgeois historians. The Labor Collective's attempt to ignore this fact in developing their argument is just another indication of their non-dialectical

approach to politics. It is undoubtedly true to say that the Comintern under Stalin's leadership came more and more to approximate the political practice of social democracy, especially after the turn to "popular frontism" in the nineteen thirties. But it is politically irresponsible to suggest that this political practice was but the logical extension of Lenin's strategy of "work in the social democratic parties and trade unions," especially since this definition of Leninist strategy is not only imprecise, vague and insufficient, but also just plain wrong. It is clear that the comrades in the Labor Collective fail even to understand the differences between strategy and tactics as defined by Leninists. They should read Trotsky's Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch:

"The conception of revolutionary strategy took root only in the post-war years, and in the beginning undoubtedly under the influence of military terminology. But it did not by any means take root accidentally. Prior to the war, we spoke only of the tactics of the proletarian party; this conception confirmed adequately enough to the then prevailing trade union, parliamentary methods which did not transcend the limits of the day to day demands and tasks. By the conception of tactics is understood the system of measures that serves a single current task or a single branch of the class struggle. Revolutionary strategy on the contrary embraces a combined system of actions by which their association, consistency and growth must lead the proletariat to the conquest of power."

The Leninist strategy embraces at least three elements, each of which contains a system of tactics which serve or assist in the realization of the strategy as a whole. These three elements can be defined as: a) the construction of a revolutionary combat party based on a full revolutionary program, b) the mobilization of the masses in struggles around demands which pose the question of dual power and which periodically give rise to situations of dual power leading to assaults by the working class against the bourgeois state. c) the armed struggle of the working class to defend itself from the bourgeois repression and to consolidate its gains at whatever stage these might be, (this may involve the organization of armed workers' militias; military revolutionary detachments; revolutionary armies, depending on the stage). Work in the trade unions is not an end in itself; in this sense, it is but a tactic to better enable revolutionaries to carry out the strategic perspective outlined above.

It is significant that none of the elements of this strategic

perspective can be found in the Labor Collective's pamphlet. This is clearly because the Labor Collective has no strategy as such. In this respect the Labor Collective has the same approach as the pre-1914 social democracy which Trotsky describes so well:

"The epoch of the Second International led to methods and views according to which, in the notorious expression of Bernstein, 'the movement is everything, the ultimate goal nothing'. In other words, the strategical task disappeared, becoming dissolved in the day to day 'movement' with its partial tactics devoted to the problems of the day."

The Labor Collective has managed to do precisely the same thing, only unlike the classical social democracy it cannot resort to the excuse that it is functioning in a non-revolutionary epoch.

Having totally demolished the straw man called "leninism", the Labor Collective then proceeds to pat the Third International on the back for a nice try in a situation where a revolution was not objectively possible. It is pointed out after all that Lenin (and presumably Stalin) had no alternative but to implement the strategy he did, hopeless as it was, since there was no basis for "organization in a different stratum or sector of the class". In order to verify this, numerous examples are given of the failure of industrial unionism to make headway in this period...in North America! This is all fine and interesting but it proves absolutely nothing concerning the correctness of Lenin's strategy.

The Labor Collective falls into the interesting situation of seeming to say that socialist revolution was impossible as long as the working class was not organized into industrial unions. On the other hand, at a later point, they assert that work in the trade unions is not central to a revolutionary strategy anyway! One other interpretation of this stress they place on the historical immaturity of industrial unionism could be that so long as the unions were organized along craft lines the "class composition" was not yet ripe for revolution. The pamphlet states: "The masses stayed with the Second International because the class vanguard was also the labor aristocracy and their outlook was the outlook of classical social democracy." Ignoring the apparent ambiguity of this statement, it is clear that the Labor Collective is again harking back to their old theme concerning the insuperable obstacles that the "labor

aristocracy" places in the road of socialist revolution. A transformation in the nature of factory work creating the conditions for industrial unionism (and presumably the disappearance of the labor aristocracy)"abolishes the type of worker upon which (the Leninist and social democratic organizations were based)." As we have already seen however, there is no qualitative difference between the old craft worker and the new industrial worker and certainly the change in their functions would not be sufficient to allow for the disappearance of the Labor Collectives' much vaunted "labor aristocracy" within the working class.

The real concepts of Leninism--not the Labor Collective's self-deluding caricatures--remain as relevant today in the era of late capitalism as they were when Lenin first enunciated them.

Economics and Politics in the Era of Late Capitalism

The section of the Labor Collective's pamphlet dealing with "Post Depression Developments" is an attempt to demonstrate that today's revolutionaries are functioning in a qualitatively different capitalist environment than the revolutionaries of Lenin's time. The analysis that it presented is an eclectic combination of correct, though hardly original, observations on the changes that capitalism and imperialism have undergone in the course of "the third industrial revolution"; exaggerations of tendencies at work within late capitalism which are presented as already realized social facts; and a plethora of incorrect historical and economic hypotheses. Before getting into the problematic and inaccurate aspects of the analysis, it might be well to point out a number of areas of agreement:

1. The Labor Collective is substantially correct in their analysis of the shift that imperialism has undergone over the last several decades towards an increasing export of capital between imperialist countries. This shift in capital movements and its political consequences has been analyzed in depth in a number of articles and books by Ernest Mandel of the Fourth International.
2. The Labor Collective is also correct in seeing that a "third industrial revolution" has taken place within the framework of the capitalist mode of production, a revolution which has created the technological potential for a progressive automatization of the productive process and the complete disappearance of wage labor, if not on a global scale, then at least in a number of the most highly developed countries.

3. They are also correct in recognizing the tendency towards the integration of intellectual labor into the productive process in the era of late capitalism.

The areas of disagreement between us are somewhat more substantial:

1. The Labor Collective's theories of "collective capital" and "state monopoly capitalism" are in total contradiction with the Marxist analysis of the capitalist mode of production, as well as the Marxist theory of the state.

2. The significance the Labor Collective attaches to the rise in industrial unionism in the 1930's in the United States is totally wrong.

3. Their understanding of working class alienation and the role it will play in the revolutionary class struggle constitutes an abstract attempt to obfuscate the fundamental factors underlying working class radicalization and thereby obscures the tasks of revolutionaries in relation to that radicalization.

4. The "new working class" is a much more heterogeneous phenomenon than the Labor Collective seeks to suggest. Their view of the "mass worker" and the sources of his social strength within the class struggle are again weak attempts to obscure the dynamics of working class radicalization. The modern worker's "alienation" from trade unions is also misinterpreted, and the potential for revolutionary work within the unions is criminally underrated.

5. While correct in seeing that a multi-faceted struggle against alienated social relations under capitalism is capable of drawing into struggle sectors of the oppressed masses peripheral to the class conflict at the point of production, the Labor Collective errs in not making clear that the workers' struggle at the point of production is central to the class struggle.

We will deal with each of these points of contention individually. The basic idea underlying the Labor Collective's use of the terms "collective capital" and "state monopoly capitalism" is that the bourgeois state has been able to achieve an unprecedented degree of independence or institutional autonomy in relation to the capitalist class since at least the nineteen thirties.

The term "state monopoly capitalism" has been used in a

number of different ways and for a variety of political purposes. Lenin originally coined it as a description of a sector of the capitalist economy protected by the capitalist state. The "official" Communist Parties have altered this definition to give it a meaning similar to the one the Labor Collective attaches to it. The bourgeois state is seen as an institution standing above the capitalist class, indifferent to the ephemeral needs or problems of this or that sector of the capitalist class. It stands as the embodiment of the collective interests of the bourgeoisie and the promulgator of policies predicated on its long term historical interests.

Thus according to the Labor Collective, the role of the state becomes one of planning crises (recessions, inflation, wage cuts, unemployment), as well as development (insuring that consumption by the working class keeps pace with economic growth). Collective capital, through the planning mechanisms of the state, determines workers' and capital's share of the value produced through incomes policies, manipulation of the labor market, and the legalization of collective bargaining and compulsory arbitration.

There are several problems with this analysis that need to be pointed out. First, the concept of a "collective capital" implies the complete subordination of individual capitals to an idealistic notion of the "general" interest of perpetuating capitalist social relations. In light of the Labor Collective's state capitalist analysis of the Soviet Union, the very existence of such individual capitals is not seen by them as crucial to the perpetuation of these social relations. It is, then, from the standpoint of their theory, conceivable that "collective capital" as represented by the capitalist state could totally abolish such individual capitals and still remain committed to the perpetuation of capitalist social relations. From the standpoint of Marxism however, such notions are clearly preposterous. Marx himself in the Grundrisse explicitly stated that the capitalist mode of production was inconceivable without the existence of separate capitals competing with one another and thereby constantly maintaining a process of capital accumulation.

The really striking thing about the Labor Collective's theory of state monopoly capitalism is that it suggests the total disappearance of economic contradiction within the capitalist mode of production. Through the medium of the state, "collective capital" is able to overcome and subordinate the contradictions existing between individual capitals. Through the use of Keynesian economic measures, "collective capital" is able to maintain complete control

but it just so happens that there is more than one nation-state in the world therefore the context of the world system there are separate capitals even if cap is completely within the individual state

of the capitalist economy, "planning" crises, preventing overproduction, permanently reversing the tendency of the rate of profit to decline, overcoming, in short, all the major contradictions of the capitalist system with the possible exception of one: the contradiction between the historical interest of the working class in creating a non-alienating environment for itself and the continued existence of capitalist social relations.

Our view of late capitalism is quite different. For us, late capitalism is a period in the development of capitalism characterized by all the same contradictions that characterized classical capitalism, but a period which exhibits a number of supplementary features. The capitalist state, while comparatively autonomous, remains fundamentally responsive to the immediate interests of the politically and economically dominant segment of the bourgeoisie. The planning capabilities of the state, while extensive, are not sufficient to enable it to overcome any of the major contradictions of the system or to mitigate the drive of individual capitals to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class, of the extraction of surplus value, in order to maintain their rate of profit. Indeed the state has no interest in the latter inasmuch as it is the instrument not of a single capital but of separate capitals which see the role of the state as being one of creating the best possible conditions for the maintenance of a high rate of profit. The Labor Collective makes the mistake of seeing in Keynesian economic policies a means of mitigating the contradictions that flow from these factors. The point however is that the Labor Collective does not even understand the Marxist theory of economic crisis. They accept the Keynesian view according to which Marxism is essentially a theory of under-consumption. In doing so they miss what is the heart of Marx's theory of economic crisis: the contradiction between the means and the relations of production leads to a falling rate of profit resulting in a drive to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, but the most effective way is still through driving the real wages of the working class down.

John Robens of the International Marxist group provides an excellent summary of Marx's theory of economic crisis in the following passages:

"Capitalism's basic structural characteristics limit the extent of the consumption of the proletariat." This means that capitalism is incapable of expanding on the basis of consumption of means of consumption. However, the capitalist system is continually forced to accumulate and, in consequence of the limited base of consumption of the

proletariat, it can only do this by continually expanding the market for means of production and continually increasing the rift between the development of the productive forces and the limited possible consumption of the masses. However, the crisis does not arise from underconsumption (overproduction). As long as capitalism can continue to accumulate by expanding the production of means of production, the system is "stable". However, the means of production are not produced as an end in themselves, but only insofar as they produce surplus value (and therefore profit). The possibility therefore exists of a contradiction between the needs of capitalism to continually accumulate and the possibility of doing so at a profit. The result of this is that capitalist production accumulation may, and does, cease at a point not where the world's shortage of use values is satisfied, but at a point governed by the ability to make profit. It is therefore the conditions governing the production of profit which are the key to understanding capitalist accumulation and crisis. The problem of crisis in no way stems from factors external to production such as the Keynesian concept of "effective demand".

"The rate of profit may, as we noted, decline either because of a decline, for whatever reason, in the rate of exploitation or because of an increase in the organic composition of capital. Considered on a historic scale, Marx showed that the organic composition of capital must rise. This results in a fall in the rate of profit and consequently a faltering in the rate of accumulation. However, this may occur while an increase in the mass of profit continues. In such a situation, a life and death competitive struggle is unleashed as the increase in the mass of profit can make up for the decline in the rate only in the case of the largest capitals. It is important to note here that the increase in competition is the result and not the cause of the fall in the rate of profit, and that this also gives rise to the phenomenon of the export of capital. In the short term, this fall in the rate of profit may be offset by a slump and the depreciation of capital but this of course introduces its own contradictions. In particular, the process of competition and slump between them produce a continual tendency towards monopolies which in turn give rise to a fall in the drive to accumulate. However, as we have seen, a capitalism with a drop in the drive to accumulate i.e., with a tendency to stagnation, is a capitalism in permanent crisis. It is this tendency that Lenin noted in his theory of imperialism when he summarized the essence of the imperialist stage of capitalism as being that of "monopoly capitalism". He notes: "The deepest economic foundation of imperialism in monopoly" and "If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of

imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism". Furthermore: "Like all monopoly, it inevitably engenders a tendency to stagnation and decay" and although "the possibility of reducing costs of production and increasing profits by introducing technical achievements operates in the direction of change", nevertheless "the tendency to stagnation and decay which is characteristic of monopoly continues to operate, and in certain branches of industry, in certain countries, for certain periods of time, it gains the upper hand." One of the decisive effects of this is that "An enormous 'super-abundance of capital' has arisen in the advanced countries." It is this which determines all the other aspects of imperialism such as the division of the world, and, as we have seen, the export of capital.

"It is, as we have seen, the rate of profit determined by inter-relation of the organic composition of capital and the rate of exploitation which regulates the accumulation process. As we have seen, at a given rate of exploitation, an increase in the rate of profit causes the accumulation process to falter and overproduction and crisis ensue. However, conversely, given any organic composition of capital, a decrease in the rate of exploitation may make it no longer possible for accumulation at the old rate to occur and this gives rise to a tendency of the over production of capital. This overproduction is never, of course, overproduction in the sense that the world, in terms of the needs of use value production, is ever endowed with means of production, but is purely overcapitalization. This overproduction of capital produced by the fall in the rate of profit produces a general crisis of the system."

It is precisely because of these factors that capital will never cease its long-term attempts to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class and it is for this reason, that the struggle against this exploitation, which does indeed involve the struggle for higher wages, will continue to be a key aspect of the class struggle, the Labor Collective's analysis notwithstanding. This does not mean that the struggle for higher wages will always be accompanied by a radicalization of the class. This depends very much on the conjuncture. The Labor Collective is right in pointing out that in certain circumstances alienation from one's work situation can have a more radicalizing effect on individual workers than the struggle for higher wages. But in a period of deep conjunctural economic crisis of the system, the mass of workers will begin to radicalize in the process of struggling around basically economist demands (which include not only

wage demands, but also other immediate demands related to working conditions, hours, "speed-up" and so on.) It is in this context that we can expect to see a change in the workers' attitude towards their trade unions, from one of indifference to one of active interest and concern.

This takes us to the next question in dispute: the significance of industrial unionism and the rise of the CIO in the 1930's. The Labor Collective state that the bourgeois state encouraged the development of industrial unions through the National Recovery Act and came to see labor as "united, political and strong, a body with which to negotiate, i.e. as the working class." The CIO is seen not only as the success of the mass worker at industrial unionism; it is seen also as a necessary component of the economic strategy of "collective capital". Therefore, even though individual capitalists may have bitterly fought attempts to organize the CIO (including some of the leading segments of the American bourgeoisie), "collective capital" saw industrial unionism as a way to maintain "effective demand" within the class and as offering a framework within which to deal with the class politically and economically.

The bitter struggle that the American working class waged against capital in the 1930's to extricate itself from the condition that the depression created for it are all seen as part of the strategy of collective capital.

Anyone familiar with the history of this period will not believe this for a minute.

Even though the NRA guaranteed the right of workers to organize, this did not signify the bourgeois state's intention of promoting industrial unionism as part of an over-all strategy. The NRA's "guarantee" of the "right to organize" represented a concession to the American working class which the bourgeoisie was forced to make because of their unstable political and economic situation. The struggle for the CIO was a struggle against capital every inch of the way and including against the state. The gains that the American working class made in this period were made as a result of the working class's own strength and were resisted, not promoted, by all significant sections of the capitalist class. It is true that in the period 1935-37 substantial gains were made by the working class which coincided with the bourgeoisie's capacity in this period to make large concessions given the comparatively healthy economic climate. But the Labor Collective themselves recognize that after 1937 the bourgeoisie was again forced to make an offensive against

the standard of living of the workers. Even though this offensive was largely successful, it was fiercely resisted by the labor movement at that time. Clearly, wages were still an issue in the class struggle.

With the advent of the post-war boom, capital was again in a position to make large concessions to the class in terms of wages. The decline in the rate of profit was temporarily reversed in most countries through a combination of economic measures as well as the effects of the third industrial revolution. The "permanent arms economy" a phenomenon which is not even mentioned by the Labor Collective plays a significant role in this process. The ability of the bourgeoisie to increase the standard of living of the working class results in the temporary demobilization of the class and in its political dormancy for a long period. No appreciable radicalization occurs in any segment of society.

The political climate begins to change only in the sixties with the appearance of a mass youth radicalization which is the product of two basic factors: identification with anti-imperialist struggles in the third world, and alienation from various aspects of bourgeois social relations --racism, sexism, institutional authoritarianism etc. But the movements that arise from this radicalization have a fundamentally petty-bourgeois world view; most fail to see the centrality of the class struggle to social change. This was an almost inevitable weakness within this radicalization precisely because the working class was not yet playing a vanguard role in relation to these other movements and struggles. And this was due to the fact that a significant radicalization had not yet begun to occur within the proletariat itself.

It has only been within the last few years that a working class radicalization has begun to develop and it is still at a very incipient stage in most parts of the United States and Canada. But the beginning of this radicalization has coincided with the beginning of one of the worst conjunctural economic crises in capitalism's history. It has coincided with a new offensive on the part of capital against the standard of living of the proletariat, especially since Nixon unveiled his "new economic policy" in August 1971, a policy which signified the collapse of the Bretton-Woods monetary system, increased inter-imperialist competition, and a new effort to force the working class to bear the economic burden of the crisis so that the rate of profit could be prevented from falling.

It is in the framework of this new economic situation that the strong position that the unions have acquired can be seen as significant, even though the union bureaucracy can be counted on to do everything in its power to blunt the labor movement's response to the bourgeois offensive. Workers will increasingly be turning to their unions for a strategy to answer the bosses' attacks. This is why that it is imperative that revolutionaries have an implantation here and are able to provide a programmatic alternative to the bureaucratic leaderships. The trade unions can appear "irrelevant" to workers only if their economic position is not being seriously challenged by the bourgeoisie. In the new period opening up, this is decidedly not the most likely variant.

The problem of working class alienation will continue to be an important factor in the radicalization both of workers and of other oppressed layers peripheral to the productive process. It is not likely to become the driving force of the class struggle, however, at least not as it is defined by the Labor Collective. Past history will bear this out.

The "organization of work" under late capitalism has undergone no dramatic changes over the past fifteen years. Why then has a working class radicalization not occurred around the issue of alienation in the past? The recent history of working class radicalization in Europe will not bear out the Labor Collective's analysis either. The working class is still very much interested in economic issues and in this sense has not outgrown a "trade unionist" consciousness. Only a vanguard layer of workers has been able to do this, a layer which has led a number of fairly successful exemplary struggles in recent years. (The LIP struggle in France recently is particularly instructive inasmuch as it involved the takeover of a plant by the workers as their answer to the bosses' plans to lay off hundreds of workers. The immediate issue which sparked the struggle had an immediate, even "economist" character. However, the forms of struggle used by the LIP workers in order to prevent the lay-offs went a long way towards posing the need for workers' power: socialization of production under workers' control.) This vanguard layer of the class that has emerged in recent years in Europe is still a relatively heterogeneous phenomenon. Some elements within it have been attracted to the sectarian, anti-vanguardist approach of the Labor Collective. But the vast majority within this new vanguard have an understanding of the need to work within the trade-unions--to fight for a democratic structure and a revolutionary program; and an increasing number are developing an understanding of the need for an organized vanguard party capable of giving their dispersed activities a degree of co-ordination and, most importantly, a strategic focus.

Have the unions been rendered powerless? Is it true that the "material basis of the power of the unions, i.e. skill, has been destroyed by the creation of the mass worker?" To answer this affirmatively is not only to exaggerate the homogeneity of the class^o, but also to misdefine the material basis of the union's power, for "skill" is not the basis of the unions' power and never was. The material basis of the power of the working class and hence of the unions is its labor power and the class's capacity to withdraw its labor power from the productive process, thereby bringing this process to a halt.

Despite all the Labor Collective's ravings concerning the inadequacies of the unions--their acceptance of classification systems; their promotion of an economist or "productionist" mentality; their refusal to struggle seriously against the alienation stemming from capitalist production; their frequent acceptance of state imposed restrictions; their reformism--it is clear that the trade unions will continue to be a vital centre of the working class's struggle against capital. It is not enough to indict the unions for the sins enumerated above: as long as the trade unions do not have a revolutionary leadership, all of these things will be true of the unions. But these shortcomings do not stem from the "very nature" of unions; they stem from the fact that the unions are dominated by a bureaucratic layer whose role is to integrate the trade unions increasingly into the state. A struggle against the bureaucracy, against the integration of the unions into the state, and for a revolutionary transitional program must therefore be the axis of revolutionary intervention within the unions.

The Labor Collective's alternative to the unions is said to be "workers' councils". But outside a revolutionary situation, a workers' council or a system of workers' councils, could undergo a bureaucratic degeneration just as serious as that which has occurred in the unions. Moreover, the appearance of isolated workers' councils outside of a revolutionary situation would be crushed by the bosses almost as soon as they arose, provided, that is, that they played the role that revolutionaries have traditionally attached to such bodies, i.e. exercising real control over the individual factory, not just participating with the management in a reactionary co-management scheme. If the task of the labor Collective's "workers' councils" is more modest, then what is being proposed is really nothing more than a trade union with a new name, a union which moreover would not serve the workers nearly as well precisely because it would be isolated and unable to back up its demands on

yes, but
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side?

an industry wide basis. The key problem with contemporary unions is not the structure or the label one gives it; the key problem is the absence of a revolutionary program and leadership. Workers' councils worthy of the name will correspond to a stage in the development of the class struggle, when the class is beginning to assume some of the tasks of a ruling class, i.e. in a situation of dual power, during a revolutionary upsurge. (Workers' councils springing up in a non-revolutionary situation can nonetheless play a valuable exemplary role, even though this can only be for a short duration. The LIP workers' council in Beccancon France illustrates this point very well.) So long as the class has not embraced a revolutionary perspective and a revolutionary program, it will be necessary for revolutionaries to work within its basic defense organizations. To fail to do so would be suicidal for any revolutionary tendency because a policy of abstention in relation to the unions can only lead to political isolation.

Unlike many other mass organizations of the working class (such as the deformed "workers'" or "labor" parties); the trade unions offer a particularly useful field for revolutionary intervention inasmuch as they are frequently compelled to participate and lead in actual struggles of the proletariat around immediate issues. This necessity is dictated by their very nature. If the unions failed to do even this, the workers would turn their backs on them; the bureaucracy would lose its base, and would no longer be able to play the role of intermediary between the bourgeoisie and the workers, from which its privileges flow. This gives the trade union bureaucracy its well known "dual character". It is forced to lead struggles in order not to lose its influence within the class; at the same time its social character prevents it from leading these struggles seriously -- in a way that could lead to real gains being won by the class (and not merely illusory ones which disappear almost as soon as they are granted through inflation, state economic policies etc. The revolutionary organization can most effectively expose the bureaucracy by participating in the struggles of the trade unions and by simultaneously advancing a program and strategy capable of winning real gains for the workers. This perspective only makes sense however if one believes that the kinds of issues and demands around which trade unions are struggling in this period can only be won in a genuine way on the condition that the struggle transcend an economist character and take on an overtly political nature.⁸ The reformists and the spontaneists are united in their opposition to this view, though obviously for different reasons. Both are confident of

the workers are smart enough to reject the unions if they don't lead struggles but not smart enough to be able see that they are leading them. 'serious'

capitalism's ability to meet the economic needs of the class. For the reformists, this means that a struggle for working class political power is not really necessary. For the spontaneists it means that the struggles for workers' power will develop out of "other" vaguely defined issues ("alienation" in the abstract) and not out of the struggles of the proletariat for their basic economic, social and political needs. This analysis leads the Labor Collective quite logically to completely ignore the current economic crisis of world capitalism, and to leave it out of their political perspective altogether. But there is a contradiction in the Labor Collective's own analysis which could lead to very different conclusions than those the Labor Collective has drawn.

Implicit in the Labor Collective's analysis of "state monopoly capitalism's" wage concessions to the working class is the notion that economic questions are of concern to the class and can result in its radicalization only if the class is at the subsistence level. With the rise in real wages, beginning in the thirties and resuming again after World War II, the class achieves a standard of living well above this level. Under these new conditions, "alienation" becomes the motor of the class struggle. At the same time, the working class is subjected to a relentless stream of advertising which conditions it to perceive new, "false" needs, resulting in the massive consumption by the working class of products of dubious value and quality, as well as new products which, if not "basic" to human existence, are at least useful or potentially useful. What happens, comrades, when under the impact of an economic crisis the bourgeoisie is again compelled to launch an offensive on the living standards of the working class? Will this result in the class's radicalization only if it threatens to again reduce its living standards to the subsistence level? Or will a relative decline in the standard of living --sufficient to deprive the working class of many of the commodities they have come to enjoy as well as reducing the quality of the commodities required to satisfy the so-called basic needs--be sufficient to generate a radicalization within the class?

The history of the last few years, of the new rise of the revolution in the advanced capitalist sector, demonstrates that the latter question can be answered affirmatively. This is not to say that a militant struggle for purely economist demands will bring about a revolutionary situation automatically. Only if struggles are opened out into the struggle for transitional demands and workers' control can they create the conditions for the revolution. This is why it is not enough for revolutionaries in the trade unions to be the "best" trade unionists. In order for them to play an effective political role in the unions, they must advance a system of transitional demands relevant to the particular situation and attempt to win

workers to a perspective of struggle around them. At the same time, revolutionaries must be cognizant of the other factors underlying working class radicalization in a period of crisis; not only economic questions, but feelings of alienation, long suppressed by the workers in a period of economic stability and political dormancy, can suddenly come to the fore rapidly in connection with the struggle against the bourgeoisie's "offensive." It is precisely for this reason that the demand for workers' control can become popular so rapidly in such a situation, because the workers instinctively sense that the alienation and reification they endure in their work stems, in the last analysis, from their lack of control over their economic and political environment.

We do not underestimate the importance of working class alienation to the development of the class struggle as many reformists do in order to reinforce economist tendencies within the labour movement. But we do believe that it is necessary to give this concept some concrete content in order to elaborate demands and a strategy capable of recognizing and relating to this phenomenon. The Labor Collective fails to do this and is therefore unable to draw any strategic or even tactical political conclusions from their stress on these questions.

Not only is the Labor Collective incapable of elaborating a coherent programmatic and strategic alternative to Leninism; they are incapable of doing so even on the "organizational question." After devoting at least half of their pamphlet to attacking the undifferentiated "vanguard" left (which presumably includes both the social democrats and every tendency calling itself Leninist), the Labor Collective in points "f" and "g" of their "conclusions" get around to proposing what they seem to think is an alternative:

"f/ Thus the new role of the intellectual is to recognize his/her objective proletarianization. To forge links with other progressive workers, to act with them as seeds or nuclei of the class struggle rather than to organize to bring the truth to the workers from outside, i.e., not to fetishize the role of the intellectual."

"g/ Finally, the revolutionary organization of the proletariat must spring from the proletariat, that they be a political expression of a concrete organic vanguard internal to the class, but distinct from other sectors and autonomous within the larger struggle"--a struggle which will also include women, students and other oppressed layers.

There are many nice sounding phrases to be found here, unfortunately they do not advance by one iota our understanding

of the organizational tasks incumbent on those who have achieved a revolutionary socialist consciousness. Point "f" poses the organizational question in a completely false way. Leninists do not propose to organize intellectuals within a vanguard party which will then proceed to "bring the truth to the workers from the outside." We recognize just as clearly as does the Labor Collective that the intellectual of today faces a process of "objective proletarianization." This factor will undoubtedly make easier the task of constructing a proletarian vanguard party with a highly conscious membership. But the basic organizational concepts of Leninism retain their full force. Of these, the most important is that the party should embrace only those who have already achieved a revolutionary socialist consciousness, who accept the party's revolutionary strategy and who have at least begun to assimilate the historical lessons of the international working class, as well as the theoretical capital of Marxism. It is not a question of "fetishizing" the role of intellectuals; it is a question of not underestimating the importance of revolutionary theory to the class struggle. All of the other organizational concepts of the Leninist party flow from and cannot be understood apart from this membership criterion.

The Leninist party attempts to recruit people from all social backgrounds on this basis: workers, students, intellectuals (proletarian or petty-bourgeois). The Leninist party is built on the basis of a high degree of programmatic and strategic homogeneity because it is only on this basis that the party can become the instrumentality for linking the immediate struggles of the working masses to the socialist program of the revolution. The party represents the memory of the class as well as the continuator and developer of Marxist theory. For Lenin, as Mandel has pointed out, Marxist theory "though conditioned by the unfolding of the proletarian class struggle and the first embryonic beginnings of the proletarian revolution, should not be seen as the mechanically inevitable product of the class struggle, but as the result of a theoretical practice (or "theoretical production"/which is able to link up and unite with the class struggle only through a prolonged struggle." The shape that this struggle must take is the struggle of the revolutionary organization to win the leadership of the working masses. This will be no easy task, and it will certainly not be resolved by waiting for some idealized proletariat to spontaneously generate a revolutionary consciousness and then throw up its "own" revolutionary organizations. It is a task that must be consciously undertaken now by all those who have achieved a revolutionary consciousness, be they workers, students, women, intellectuals or whoever.

This approach is totally opposed to the Labor Collective's "sectoralist" methodology whereby each of the above mentioned groups would develop their own separate organizational-ideological forms for the common struggle against the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is united in their opposition to all demands of the working class that threaten the long term interests of capitalism; the combat organization of the oppressed masses must be unified as well. It must be capable of centralizing knowledge and analysis regarding every oppressed sector in order to elaborate a comprehensive but proletarian revolutionary strategic plan. Without this centralization of knowledge and the elaboration of such a plan, the political consciousness of each of these sectors can only be partial and therefore inadequate to the tasks at hand. A partial consciousness is of necessity a false consciousness and can very easily degenerate into a totally reformist consciousness; workers' organizations capitulate to economism; student organizations capitulate to studentism; women's organizations capitulate to crass feminism. As Lenin stated in What is to Be Done?: "A basic condition for the necessary expansion of political agitation is the organization of comprehensive political exposure. In no way except by means of such exposure can the masses be trained in political consciousness and revolutionary activity." Mandel further elaborates on this theme: "And it is for the same reason that Lenin emphasizes so strongly the absolute necessity for the revolutionary party to make all progressive demands and movements of all oppressed social layers and classes its own--even "purely democratic" ones. The central strategic plan advanced by Lenin in What is to be Done? is therefore one of party agitation that unites all elementary, spontaneous, dispersed and "merely" local or sectional protests, revolts and movements of resistance. The emphasis of centralization clearly lies in the political and not in the formal organizational sphere. The aim of formal organizational centralization is only to make possible the realization of this strategic plan."

This does not mean that there is no room in the Leninist strategy for autonomous workers', students' or womens' organizations, any more than it means there is no room for spontaneity. All it means is that spontaneity and the organization of autonomous organizations such as these are not sufficient for the development of the revolutionary struggle: an organized revolutionary party based on the working class remains an indispensable element in the revolutionary process.⁹

The thread running through the Labor Collective's faith in the spontaneous struggles of the working class and the oppressed sectors and their rejection of the role of a

vanguard organization can be seen to be the same old objectivism that we have analyzed elsewhere. For the Labor Collective, independent struggles of different oppressed layers against the alienation they face under capitalism can set an anti-capitalist dynamic in motion which will lead to the crystallization of a revolutionary consciousness in the participants in these struggles. Historical experience demonstrates that rarely does such a dynamic automatically develop when these struggles are made against specific features of their oppression. And how struggles will develop against alienation in the abstract is not made clear by the Labor Collective. Their organizational conception turns out to reflect a non-existent strategic perspective.

The Labor Collective's Footnote Theory of Revolution

A lack of strategic perspective does not always signify the absence of an underlying theory of revolution. In the Labor Collective's case, their theory of revolution (or should we say "evolution"?) is nicely summarized in a footnote (!!!) on pages 21 and 22 of their pamphlet. Rejecting a revolutionary perspective based on a theory of "economic collapse" (which Lenin never espoused incidently), the Labor Collective presents the following alternative perspective: "the forces of production have developed to a stage where a qualitative leap in production is not only possible, but vividly possible for all to see. Instead of this happening the division of labor is increasingly intensified, a process that leads to a struggle not just against ownership but against the capitalist organization of production. This moves the struggle away from a sudden event where an economist consciousness turns into a political consciousness, i.e., a struggle against the state and private ownership led by the revolutionary party. Marxism regains its original form (? ! ? !) : the revolution becomes a social fact, a development within the class itself, before being a political one. The conquest of state power becomes the means for formalizing the new social hegemony of the proletariat developed in the course of protracted struggle."

The revolution becomes a "social fact" before the conquest of state power by the proletariat! A truly astonishing statement for self-styled "revolutionaries" to make, though hardly a novel one: for it corresponds almost letter perfect to the evolutionist scheme of that redoubtable personification of the "original form" of Marxism, Edouard Bernstein. The only difference between Bernstein and the L.C. would seem to be over the form the "protracted struggle" will take, culminating in the "social hegemony" of the class. For Bernstein, this struggle was to occur primarily through parliament and the trade unions. The Labor Collective does not clearly state what it considers to be the vehicle for this "protracted struggle" though it seems likely that they would opt for idealized "workers' councils", free of

bureaucratic tendencies. We have already dealt with some of the problems of this approach. It is clear that genuine workers' self-management can begin to develop only after the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat; it cannot flourish in a capitalist environment.¹⁰ moreover, the proletariat cannot establish its "social hegemony" without first breaking with bourgeois ideology en masse. The Labor Collective totally fails to explain how this will come about under conditions of bourgeois ideological hegemony stemming from the work process under capitalism and capitalist control over most social and educational institutions. We are simply told that it will be a "protracted struggle" that will arise from the working class's own perception of the lag between what has been made possible by the development of the productive forces and what is imposed upon them by the continuing existence of bourgeois social relations. The only problem comrades, is that such a consciousness has never developed spontaneously in the class in a sustained way. And there is absolutely no reason to believe that it ever will. A struggle by the masses against the bourgeois state remains central to revolutionary strategy.

We could repeat many things we have already stated throughout the pamphlet in answering the L.C.'s "footnote theory of revolution". However, we will refrain from doing so in the interests of brevity. It is to be hoped that we have made our own analysis and strategic perspective clear enough in the preceding pages that the critical differences between the scientific approach of Leninism-Trotskyism and the utopian approach of the Labor Collective can be clearly understood by those who have made a thorough study of both.

We have decided not to make a criticism of the Labor Collective pamphlet's section on "Women and the Class Struggle" because the political approach to be found here on this question has been adequately dealt with in the Old Mole series on Selma James (issues 5 & 6) by Varda Kidd and Jennifer Penney (sections of which we are publishing as an appendix to this pamphlet).

While the Revolutionary Marxist Group bases itself on the theoretical acquisitions of Leninism-Trotskyism and while we understand the vital need to construct a revolutionary combat party in Canada, we make no claim to being that party. The RMG is less than a year old and at this stage of its development cannot be considered anything more than a revolutionary nucleus with an extremely limited base and influence within the masses. Our program and strategic perspective, though based on revolutionary Marxism, are not as yet fully developed inasmuch as we have not as yet made a comprehensive analysis of the Canadian Social formation, an analysis which is indispensable to an understanding of how revolutionary

Marxism can be applied to the specificities of the situation within which we are functioning. We are only in the initial stages of developing such an analysis. In the process of developing this analysis we look forward to discussing and exchanging ideas with other comrades on the revolutionary left.

Comrades who are interested in learning more about the politics of the Revolutionary Marxist Group and the Fourth International are invited to participate in our Red Circle program, small study circles which meet on a weekly basis and discuss Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, as well as a wide range of other topics of interest to Canadian revolutionaries. Phone: 943-9578, evenings between 7:30-9:30.

NOTES

1. For those who think that the RMG is being somewhat presumptuous in stating this, we can only point out that the specific concepts of Leninism that the Labor Collective tries to criticize in the course of their pamphlet are for the most part "unique" to the Trotskyist interpretation of Leninism. The pamphlet in parts reads as a critique of Mandel's "Leninist Theory of Organization". However, when it leaves the field of theory to discuss the historical experience of "Leninist parties" it makes no attempt to distinguish between Leninism-Trotskyism and Stalinism. The dishonesty of this dual approach is evident, for it enables the Labor Collective to create an identity between Bolshevism and what Trotsky described as its "thermidorian negation", Stalinism, thus obfuscating the real nature of Leninism.
2. This is a particularly touchy question within the New Tendency nationally inasmuch as the differences around it take on extreme forms. For example, most people in the Labor Collective in Winnipeg will acknowledge that a socialist revolution occurred in Russia in 1917, although they go on to say that capitalism was restored during the period of the New Economic Policy in the early twenties. Members of the New Tendency in Toronto, on the other hand, insist that what occurred in Russia in 1917 can only be viewed as a state capitalist revolution. While we are pleased to note that our spontaneist comrades in Winnipeg are somewhat more in touch with empirical reality than their Toronto counterparts, it is necessary to point out that the Toronto position at least possesses the virtue of logical consistency. If the Labor Collective believes that a socialist revolution was possible in backward Russia in 1917, then why was it not possible in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe as well?

4. The Trotskyist analysis on the Soviet Union and the other workers' states is based on the notion of a period of transition between capitalism and socialism. The workers' states are given this class designation because the mode of production and the property forms conform to the historical interests of the working class. These states are not considered socialist because the distributive norms in effect in these countries are still bourgeois, even though a bourgeoisie does not exist. This gives the workers' states a transitional character. So long as bourgeois distributive norms are still in effect the production of exchange values will continue (commodity production will still continue). With the development of the productive forces, the material basis for bourgeois distributive norms, i.e., scarcity, will disappear, bringing about the complete realization of a socialist mode of production based on the production of use values. The Labor Collective's refusal to recognize the need for a transitional period stems from an overestimation of the level to which capitalism can raise the productive forces on a global scale; an underestimation of the gigantic problems the working class will face in constructing socialism not merely in one country, but on a global scale; and on a utopian belief that the production of use values will involve the production only of basic needs, rather than the range of products that workers have come to view as necessary, partly through capitalist conditioning and partly as a response to genuinely useful innovations. Communism cannot be realized through asceticism; the material culture which forms its basis must be capable of satisfying the perceived as well as the "basic" needs of humanity.
5. The struggle at the Lip watch making plant in Besancon, France represents one of the most important exemplary struggles that has occurred in France in recent years. As a response to a new owner's plans to lay off hundreds in the plant, the Lip workers first occupied, then actually took over the management of the plant, opening the secret books of its owner and demonstrating that they were capable of running the plant on their own. In the sharpest possible way, the workers of Lip demonstrated how totally unnecessary the capitalist class is to the functioning of a modern economy. The lip struggle received wide support from the working class in France and later throughout Western Europe. The struggle was ultimately crushed by the French government with the notable assistance of the French CP and its trade union federation, the CGT, which did everything in their power

does this mean
the relations
of production
are socialist?!

to sabotage the movement of solidarity with the Lip workers that the French far left, in particular the French Trotskyists was largely responsible for building.

6. The homogenization of the class can only be a tendency under capitalism; only socialism can bring about its complete realization. "Skilled labor" does not disappear under late capitalism. Mandel: "...what is valid is the fact that the distinction between the "purely" productive manual production worker, the "purely" unproductive clerical white-collar worker, and the "semi-productive" repairman become more and more effaced as a result of technological change and innovation itself, and that the productive process of today tends more and more to integrate manual and non-manual workers, conveyer-belt semi-skilled and data-processing semi-skilled, highly skilled repair and maintenance squads and highly skilled electronics experts. Both in the laboratories and research departments, before "actual" production starts, and in the dispatching and inventory departments, before "actual" production starts, and in the dispatching and inventory departments, when "actual" production is over, productive labor is created if one accepts the definition of such labor given in Marx's Capital."
7. The Lip workers in setting up this council did not at the same time reject their unions; in fact they continued to work through them. One of the leaders of the Lip workers during this struggle was in fact a CFDT official.
8. The syndicalist error of seeing unions as an adequate instrument to overthrow capitalism must also be rejected. Leninists call for the formation of strike or action committees in connection with every struggle of the workers, bodies which are under the immediate control of the rank and file and which elect a leadership for the struggle which is immediately responsible to the rank and file. Such committees can be the prototype for a workers' council if the struggle is able to broaden and extend itself sufficiently. In periods of lull, the revolutionary organization does propaganda around transitional demands and workers' control of production, constantly posing workers' councils as a superior form of organization to prosecute the class struggle, but making clear at the same time that they cannot take the place of the unions and can play an

important role in the development of the struggle only if they are not isolated from the broader struggle of the working class as a whole.

9. Leninists view the revolutionary organization not as a federation embracing the most advanced elements of the different oppressed sectors. While it recruits from all oppressed social layers, its class character must be thoroughly proletarian in terms of program and world view, and, to the extent possible, in terms of social composition. The revolutionary organization must have a primarily proletarian class character precisely because the working class is not just another "oppressed sector": it is the only social force in society that possesses the cohesion, strategic location and political/organizational potential to destroy capitalism. It is the social vanguard of all oppressed layers in capitalist society, although it is not in every conjuncture what one might call the "tactical vanguard".
10. Workers' self-management within individual plants before the destruction of the bourgeois state and the capitalist relations of production is not merely a utopian idea, it is a very dangerous one, if it is seen as a strategy capable of displacing the struggle for workers' control, dual power, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It can lead to the breakdown of working class solidarity to the extent that the workers involved would take their stand on the ground of competition in the capitalist market rather than on the ground of the expanding class struggle. As Lip showed however, the bourgeoisie is unlikely to even tolerate such experiments in self-management, precisely because the example provided is a dangerous one. Only through a co-ordinated struggle for workers' control on a national scale could the Lip struggle have had a chance of succeeding. Because the Lip struggle posed this so clearly, it was seen as an extremely dangerous struggle by the bourgeoisie and as an exemplary struggle by the revolutionary left. The Labor Collective is dreaming if they actually believe that workers' self-management can be realized before the dictatorship of the proletariat. The very most the bourgeoisie would tolerate would be co-management schemes involving both the workers and the bosses, and the problems inherent in this approach should be transparent even to the comrades of the Labor Collective.

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APPENDIX

The fundamental theoretical problems of James and Dalla Costa must be addressed here, because of their critical bearing on the political conclusions they draw.

First is their concept of the housewife as "productive labourer". When James says "to be productive is to be producing capital", she is close to the truth. In fact, to be productive is to be producing surplus-value. However, when James implies that every worker (including the housewife) produces "capital" and that distinctions between productive and unproductive workers are "a lot of shit that has nothing to do with Marxism" then she must be set straight by Marx himself, who says in Theories of Surplus Value: "Productive labor, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage labour which, exchanged against the variable part of capital ---reproduces not only this part of capital (or value of its own labour-power), but in addition produces surplus value for the capitalist.

"Productive labour is only a concise term for the whole relationship and the form and manner in which wage-labour figures in the capitalist production process. The distinction from other kinds of labour is, however, of the greatest importance, since this distinction expresses precisely the specific form of the labour on which the whole capitalist mode of production and capital itself is based."

Now, it is very clear from these quotes, that a productive labourer is: 1) a wage labourer, 2) a direct producer of surplus-value (some wage labourers are not); 3) the direct source of capital accumulation.

But the housewife does not labour for a wage, has no direct relations with capital, and in reproducing labour power (where the use value of that labour power is exchanged for the wage) has no direct part in the production of surplus value. Clearly the housewife is not productive in the specific capitalist context in which Marx applies it.

Flowing from James' and Dalla Costa's assertion that domestic labour is productive is the corollary--that she is exploited. "(The housewife) created the working class, for exploitation outside of the home; and that preparation, that service was precisely her exploitation.

Here again, as with so much of James' work, the term 'exploitation' is used in a colloquial manner which in fact describes the housewife's oppression in the home, and has nothing to do with economic exploitation. To fulfill the Marxist criteria of exploitation, a portion of the value of a worker's labour must be directly appropriated by capital.

This does not occur for the housewife--rather her labour reproduces the wage workers' labour power which is used by capital to create value. Part of the value that the industrial worker creates returns to the family via the wage (this part is necessary value) and the remainder goes to capital as surplus value (eventually to be realized as profit). In this way, the housewife stands behind the labour-capital relation and her labour is appropriated indirectly by capital. Her labour is not at all irrelevant to the labour-capital industrial relation--she is, after all, central to the reproduction of labour power--but that is not the same as saying she is directly "exploited" by capital.

She is however, oppressed by her relation to the wage worker, because, though her work is contained in the commodity "labour power", the wage which pays for that commodity is not in her control, but in that of her husband. She is therefore immediately subjected to the power relationship inside the family, about which so much has been documented in the recent past.

The third major theoretical error of James and Dalla Costa has more obvious strategical implications. When they assert that domestic labour is productive and exploited, they remove a vital component in the differentiation of industrial and domestic labour and as a result, they cannot account for the profound divergence between these two "work places" under capitalism.

Because productive labour is the direct source of surplus value, its organization and reorganization into a more efficient labour process is a constant imperative for capital. The more efficient socialized industry becomes, the more productivity the worker's labour time acquires and as a result, the greater is the rate of surplus accumulation. Because this imperative to accumulate is built into capital's very nature, the organization of labour in production has undergone a rapid (and uneven) development in the history of capitalism. This transformation is a contradictory process. It sponsors the growth and increasing efficiency of capital while it creates the material conditions for a revolutionary overthrow of capital.

It does this by centralizing work at the points of production where a seizure of the means of production will directly and immediately stop the functioning of capital. And it organizes workers in social production in such a way that their collective work habits set the stage for the development of class consciousness, and for the reorganization of industry under socialism.

These conditions are in stark contrast to those under which the housewife labours. Dalla Costa describes them eloquently but fails to learn the lesson from them: "With the advent of the capitalist mode of production, women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect on men, To the extent that women were cut off from direct socialized production, and isolated in the home, all possibilities of social life outside the neighbourhood were denied her, and hence she was deprived of social knowledge and social education. When women are deprived of wide experience of organizing and planning collectively industrial and other mass struggles, they are denied a basic source of education, the experience of social revolt. And this experience is primarily the experience of learning your own capacities, that is, your power and the capacities, the power, of your class."

The reason why the household has remained in such a privatized, atomized state, undergoing no transformation comparable to the factory, is precisely because domestic labour is unproductive and its efficiency is therefore of no interest to capital. If the housewife must work four or fourteen hours a day to prepare her husband for work and her children for school, the difference of ten hours effects the rate of capital accumulation not one iota. And so the housewife remains atomized, her labour uncollectivized. The consequence of this is that the household is an extremely limited social base for the revolutionary contestation of capital.

'If James and Dalla Costa looked beyond their noses, they would discover that it was precisely the massive post-war influx of women into industrial production, into the schools and universities and out of the household that set the stage for the impressive women's upsurge of the late '60's and early 70's. And it is these new conditions to which we must address ourselves in order to help focus the women's movement in a revolutionary way.

This imperative immediately comes into conflict with James' and Dalla Costa's central demand--wages for housework. Instead of organizing around the conditions which have already served to raise the consciousness of millions of women, and which have provided the basis for the challenge to the family, they abandon the arena altogether.

Even if we accepted the focus of their strategy, it is clear that their demand "wages for housework" cannot achieve the hoped-for result of liberating women from domestic slavery.

Only the withering away of the family will accomplish that task. And only a massive re-organization and socialization of domestic labour (daycare, food production, collective laundry, community centres, etc.) can provide the material preconditions for such an end. In fact, the demand "wages for housework" serves to institutionalize and reinforce the role of the woman as domestic worker-wife-mother.

But "wages for housework", they argue, is the "revolutionary" demand to counterpose against the demand for jobs. Wrong again. Full employment is precisely the demand that cannot be met by capitalism. Capitalism does not want workers militantly demanding jobs. Wages for housework, on the other hand, is a demand that could be realized, but of course, only in a "welfarist" or "minimum income" context paid from state revenue.

James and Dalla Costa correctly criticize the trade unions for being bureaucratized, chauvinist and reformist. However, to conclude from this that women (and men too, by implication) should attempt to smash or ignore trade union organization betrays an a-historical, undialectical view of the trade unions. Trade unions are the basic organizations of the working class. They have won many important victories for the class, and have served to protect the worker from total victimization under capitalism. Revolutionaries should not work to destroy or bypass these organizations but must struggle, both within and without, against the bureaucracies entrenched in the unions, and to win the workers to the understanding that, in raising political demands and organizing to overcome the imperialist epoch only by unions taking the offensive--all divisions in the class (sexual, racial, etc.) can they defend the interests of the entire working class.

The combined 'strategies' of the demand for wages for housework and the refusal to work, even taken together, fail to confront the locus of power in this society, and consequently fail to provide a revolutionary strategy. Posing the demand for wages for housework to the State--by the utopian tactic of abandoning the home--in no way directly confronts either the State or capital (as say, a strike in the public sector or in the factories would). Having abandoned the home to little effect, James and Dalla Costa then propose that women abandon the struggle in the work place (through the refusal to seek jobs). Should women follow this lead, they will also abandon their lever for power. The argument for the necessity to organize at the point of production needn't be reiterated at this point.

Suffice to say it is at the very heart of the Marxist analysis of how to make the revolution. The argument for abstentionism from the work place is the crowning glory of the 'strategy' for paralysis and powerlessness proposed by James and Dalla Costa.

Despite their Marxist terminology, James' and Dalla Costa's view of the revolutionary process is not Marxist, but something we might call "anarcho-feminist". Taking women in the home as their point of departure, James and Dalla Costa have placed the women's movement, theoretically and strategically, outside of the history of the working class, the workers' movement, and consequently the left. They have drawn no lessons from one hundred years of working class struggle. As a result, they have fundamentally failed to come to grips with the question of organization. Their view--"doing something" is the best way to raise consciousness, and raising consciousness will lead to making the revolution--has been demonstrated, time and again, to be hopelessly inadequate to the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and its state. Rather, the historical lessons compel us to build a revolutionary party of the working class, which represents and unites under its banners the interests and demands of all the oppressed within society, including most vitally, women.

Because her relation with capital is indirect and mediated by her husband, and because he embodies the product of her labour, she finds it very difficult to get a clear perception of its use by capital. The wage worker, by contrast, turns over the fruits of her-his labour to capital directly, and therefore may experience her-his alienation and enmity for the boss without apology. A housewife cannot do this. Her work is understood in non-economic terms as a labour of love done out of devotion to her family. This produces a more profound mystification of the function of her labour than the wage worker experiences. The consequence of these limitations is that rebellion for the housewife becomes at one and the same time objectively untenable and subjectively unthinkable.

For James and Della Costa of course, no such limitations exist. Domestic labour is "productive"; the household is a "social factory" and all the structural differences between the domestic and industrial units are conveniently dismissed. This is an exercise in pure voluntarism and consequently produces a utopian strategy. The fundamental differences between the household and the factory and between the character of the labour that is performed in each, are

produced by the very nature of the capitalist mode of production and are not sexist fabrications of the male left or the trade union movement.

With an understanding of these crucial differences, socialists and women's liberationists must raise demands which attack the industrial-domestic division of labour and which suggest the ultimate necessity of dismantling the nuclear family. Such demands then will contain within them a thrust towards the socialization of domestic labour, and point away from the reinforcement of the woman's role in the home. James' and Dalla Costa's demand--pay for housework--pay for the individual housewife in her individual home, for her atomized labour in no way subverts the present organization of domestic labour and instead its logic suggests a retrenchment of the nuclear family. This is a crucial dividing line in the women's movement between revolutionary politics and reformism.

James and Dalla Costa's strategy ignores the strategic nature of the location at the point of production. Opposition in the productive sectors is a direct attack on capital which can be of itself crippling to the economy and hence to the ability of capital to survive. Opposition in unproductive sectors, or sectors not fully integrated into capitalist economic relations, have no such immediate and critical impact though they do play a role in detonating and-or supporting rebellions in productive and crucial sectors.

James' pamphlet "Women, The Unions and Work" argues that the trade unions must be fought not only in the interests of women, as institutions which perpetuate sexism but also in the interests of the entire working class, for they obstruct the class struggle. The unions, she says, are inherently reformist organizations which not only divide the working class and stand in the way of militant action, but also serve the ruling class by mediating between workers and employers. Now this contention has some validity, but only in the context of an understanding of the contradictory role unions play in capitalist society.

The organization of trade unions was a monumental step forward for wage workers. It was only as a result of the tremendous battles fought by the workers in such organizations that the gains which the working class has made were brought about--for example, the working day halved from 16 hours to 8, child labour outlawed, working conditions vastly improved, and workmen's compensation established. Unions, staffed by full-timers, for the advancement and defense of workers' interests were and still are, indispensable.

The contradictory nature of the development of the unions, however, was that these full-timers developed into a full-fledged bureaucracy (better paid, better working conditions, all dependent on the rank and file base) whose interests as a layer are different, and in fact in contradiction to, the interests of the rank and file. These bureaucracies give the unions their conservative and reformist character, and not the rank and file, nor the form of organization per se. It is James' and Dalla Costa's superficial understanding of the unions which has allowed them to overlook this critical difference between the rank and file and the bureaucracy in the unions. Instead of abandoning the unions, escalating anti-bureaucratic struggles should be the goal of rank and file militants of both sexes. It is in this way, utilizing the strengths and progressive aspects of unions as they are presently organized, and attacking their reactionary aspects, that workers' self-interests will be realized.

The working class is divided along sex lines. As James correctly states, this division plays into the hands of capital. But the division, is not created by the trade unions, as James and Dalla Costa contend.

Bourgeois society is itself sexist, and that sexism is reflected in all institutions that exist within its framework. Those on the left who deny this reality feed the flames of the anti-working class, anti-union sentiment expressed by James and also found among many women who have recognized their own oppression (and experience sexism in the working class as much as in other classes) but have not yet understood the fundamental roots of that oppression in the overall organization of their society. The task however, is not to tear down the unions, but again to utilize the strengths of the organization and combat its weakness.

Drives to organize women workers in sectors where unions are presently non-existent and organizing in existing unions to advance women militants into leadership positions within the rank and file are immediate tasks. But as well, they are part of the long range fight (which can only be begun under capitalism) to eradicate sexism in the working class and in doing so, to strengthen its power as a class. This is a struggle that radical women must take up, not abandon.

James and Della Costa not only deny the historic class-defense role of the trade unions, they also attack the unions because they demand jobs for workers. "Capital wants us to demand jobs...It's certainly clear that you have a lot of power if you refuse what capital has in mind for you. That is what a revolutionary movement is all about."

The revolutionary approach then, is to drop out of production altogether. What's more, they say the line between "reformism and revolutionary politics in the women's movement" will be drawn on this point. James may well be correct regarding the line between reformism and revolutionary politics, and if she is, she falls squarely into the reformist camp.

There are certain economic characteristics of capitalism that are clearly visible. One of these characteristics is chronic and endemic unemployment. The capitalist system needs the unemployed. It is not able to provide full employment (let alone meaningful employment) even in periods of tremendous boom. It can do so even less in periods of recession such as we are entering today.

This condition exists for two basic reasons. First, capitalist competition necessitates the constant technological refurbishing of plant equipment, automating factories and offices and throwing workers out of jobs. Second, a reserve army of unemployed is utilized to drive wages down and keep workers in their places.

It is not the unions which have divided the class into waged and wageless, men and women, black and white, but the capitalist social order itself. And it is not the unions, representing a portion of the working class and oppressed, that will unite all the anti-capitalist forces.

Rather, revolutionary leadership must be taken up by political organizations of the Left who seek to win the confidence of the working class, and eventually build mass working class parties. It is these parties that will lead the proletariat in the expropriation of the capitalist class and the seizure of state power. There are many different groups who function with this as their goal, and several historical currents (Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, etc.) to which most of these groups adhere. James slanders all these organizations as one undifferentiated mass of sexism and counter-revolution. She portrays the women in these organizations as the betrayers of the women's movement: But 'marxist women' as a woman from the movement in New Orleans says 'are just marxist men in drag'. The struggle as they see it is not qualitatively different from the one the organized labour movement under masculine management has always commended to women, except that now, appended to the 'general struggle' is something called 'women's liberation' or 'women's struggle' voiced by women themselves.

In criticizing James' and Dalla Costa's simplistic

optimism concerning the political potential of housewives, we do not dismiss the opportunities that are emerging for housewives as the protracted crisis of advanced capitalism unfolds. Precisely because of their location and the nature of domestic labour, they are hit first by the loss of real income which working class families are beginning to suffer. As inflation spirals upwards and wage controls go into effect in many advanced capitalist countries, housewives must intensify their work in order to absorb the family's loss of real income and prevent a precipitous decline in their family's standard of living. Either they must take jobs to supplement family income or work harder domestically to stretch existing income. In these conditions housewives are becoming overtly angry and beginning to blame landlords, corporations and governments for their situation. As a result, consumer boycotts, rent strikes, price-watch committees and campaigns against inadequate state services are increasing in frequency and militancy. In these mobilizations, housewives are the largest single constituency and often provide leadership.

But given that such mobilizations intensify, and even given that they are not hopelessly sidetracked into reformism, housewives still will not provide the decisive motive force of the women's struggle as James and Dalla Costa suggest. We argue quite the opposite. It was the huge flood of women into higher education and industrial production in the 60's that created the material preconditions for a women's radicalization at the end of the decade. Women now constitute between 30 to 45 per cent of the labour force in most Western nations, and their absolute numbers and relative proportions are steadily increasing. It is mainly from within this population, rather than from the diminishing numbers of women who are still exclusively housewives, that women's leadership will come in the years ahead.

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