

Imperialist Economism, or the European Disease

—Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

In the past year or so a fresh breeze has swept over the old continent. In Britain, the broadest outbreak of mass revolutionary violence in contemporary history; in West Germany, massive demonstrations on an almost weekly basis and very often going over into pitched battles with the police; in the East, too, there is Poland . . . All of this, it would seem, provides fertile ground for revolutionary work and certainly no reason to be discouraged. But where are the revolutionary communists?

The more or less complete collapse of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Europe is a complicated question, which deserves to be studied, debated and, most of all, rectified. In this article, however, we'll limit ourselves to examining a particular and stubborn malady which certainly has contributed to the current sorry state of affairs and which, unfortunately, continues to infect many of the revolutionaries who are struggling in the midst of a very difficult situation and upon whom a great responsibility rests. Our purpose here is not to propose a treatment but merely a diagnosis of this disease, for as Lenin pointed out, recognizing the problem is more than half of solving it.

We call this disease *imperialist economism*, by which we mean essentially the political trend of economism against which Lenin waged a fierce and protracted battle, especially as that trend manifests itself today under the conditions of imperialism and in the imperialist countries.

The arguments of the "economists" of today in general are, with some minor alterations, the same ones Lenin addresses in *What Is To Be Done?*, which may well be the most distorted, misused, and buried of all the great Marxist-Leninist works. One hears often (indeed, such a line existed powerfully in our own Party) that *What Is To Be Done?* can only be understood on the basis of the particularities of Russia to which, alone, it is applicable; that the work only applies to countries where, like Russia, a democratic revolution is on the agenda—while others claim it is only of use in imperialist countries and has little practical value for revolutionaries in the oppressed countries. Still others hide behind the numerous sins committed in the name of *What Is To Be Done?* to avoid any systematic study and application of it (a method of reasoning which would, by the way, lead one to abandon *all* Marxist works).

In fact, the allergic reaction to *What Is To Be Done?* and the intense emotions that it arouses are more explained by its *applicability* than the lack of the same, and that Lenin criticizes thoroughly and not very politely many points which continue to be accepted as articles of faith among many revolutionaries. For example, what revolutionary active in the 1970s (to say nothing of previous decades where the following was even more unchallenged) has not heard such statements

as "The economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into active political struggle," "The Social-Democrats [communists] are now confronted with the task of lending the economic struggle itself, as far as possible, a political character," of the importance of carrying out "political agitation on an economic basis," or of the need for "close organic connection with the workers' struggle." Who has not heard the criticism levelled at those who refuse to accept this reasoning, such as "*Iskra* displays a tendency to minimise the significance of the forward march of the drab everyday struggle in comparison with the propaganda of brilliant and complete ideas" or, simply a denunciation of "dogmatism and doctrinairism." All of these quotes from Lenin's opponents refuted by him in *What Is To Be Done?* reveal starkly that many of the "burning questions of the movement" in turn-of-the-century Russia still smoulder today.

In answering his critics, Lenin showed, and correctly in our opinion, that socialist consciousness did not and could not develop spontaneously or "organically" out of the daily struggle waged by the working class against the capitalists. He pointed out that such a struggle inevitably developed on the basis of the contradiction between labour and capital, in particular the struggle over the conditions of the sale of labour power (wages, working conditions, etc.). Lenin agreed that such struggles would develop a *political* character but was quick to point out that such politics would in the final analysis remain bourgeois since it remained a struggle essentially over the price of a commodity (in this case labour power). He pointed out how even at that time the working class had a great deal of experience with such "politics," as in England, for example, where the struggle had long since taken the form of making demands on the State regarding working conditions, wages and so forth. In opposition to the worshippers of spontaneity, he stressed that the attention of the workers could not be focused on their conditions and their own struggle, but had to be *diverted* from its natural course through the work of conscious revolutionaries into an all-around political struggle aimed at seizing State power.

This broader consciousness can only develop on the basis of seeing the relationship of all classes in society to each other and to the State, the political tendencies of the different classes, their strengths and weaknesses. Only in this way could the working class become capable of understanding its own mission to lead in seizing state power and moving toward communism. The means of creating this class consciousness among the workers would not be principally through their experience in the economic struggle, but, on the contrary, through wide and extensive political exposure in the party press and by other means. This political exposure must be drawn out of *all* the important

political, social, cultural and scientific questions affecting *all* classes in society.

Coupled with bowing to the economic struggle has always gone "workerism," which can be translated as a philistine contempt for non-proletarian sections of the revolutionary masses (such as revolutionary students), appealing to the workers on the basis of a spirit of "revenge" against the capitalists, and a worship of what are actually backward and non-proletarian characteristics of sections of the workers.

Third International

Contemporary history has well demonstrated the bankruptcy of economism. One of the main lessons of the history of the degeneration of the great majority of Communist Parties that made up the Third International is what a pernicious influence economism has exerted in the history of the international movement. As far back as the 6th Congress of the Comintern in 1928, when, it should be pointed out, the Comintern was following an overall revolutionary line, serious economist deviations were already in evidence—in particular the call of the Comintern for the parties in Europe to become "mass parties" and to fight for the leadership of the day-to-day struggle of the workers. Although this line had many "left" aspects, in particular a tendency to see the coming crisis as the imminent collapse of capitalism, it remained economist in the sense that it held that the struggle around the immediate needs of the workers would, itself, lead to a revolutionary movement of the working class provided the Communists joined and led this movement. Missing entirely was the emphasis of Lenin on the need to *divert* this movement; instead the existing movement could lead to the proletarian revolution. These tendencies became accentuated when the worldwide economic crisis of 1929 led to a big upsurge in hard-fought economic struggle and in general to a more revolutionary mood among the workers and other sections of the masses.

The Social Democrats made considerable efforts to contain and suppress this movement, although they were also able to pose as champions of the workers' demands and their struggle in order to contain and suppress the masses of workers ideologically and politically. The Communists believed that mainly by encouraging and developing the spontaneous struggle and conducting propaganda and other political work on the *basis* of this movement, the grip of the Social Democrats on the workers could be broken and the revolution could be accomplished.

This view was furthered by the erroneous belief that the bourgeoisie, beset by crisis, would be unable to deliver on any economic concessions and thus the workers would be forced to seek a "revolutionary solution" to their most immediate needs. While it is of course true that the bourgeoisie was unable to resolve the crisis except through World War 2, it is also true that they were able to make concessions to sections of the proletariat in the advanced countries. In the U.S., Roosevelt conceded unemployment insurance and Social Security and some make-work projects were set up. In France, the Popular Front government of Léon Blum (supported by the Communists) instituted the now famous Congé Payé (paid vacation). In Hitler's Germany unemployment fell significantly. One should contrast the ease with which the bourgeoisie or its political representatives "conceded" to these demands (and in some cases became their champions) with their intransigence in the face of those political demands which actually called into question the bourgeois State power even if these demands were, from an economic point of view, easily grantable. In the U.S. the case of the Scottsboro Boys (nine Black youth condemned to death after being falsely accused of raping two white women, a case which became the focus of the Black people's struggle in the 1930s) and the fact that the U.S. bourgeoisie, while forced to call off the executions, never reversed the verdict on this outrage, illustrates Lenin's point that "Economic" concessions (or pseudo-concessions) are, of course, the cheapest and most advantageous from the government's point of view, because by

these means it hopes to win the confidence of the working masses." While such political struggles were occasionally taken up by the CPUSA and other Comintern parties (although from an increasingly bourgeois-democratic viewpoint) there was never the understanding that *these* types of questions had to become the vital concern of the proletarian movement if that movement was to escape the narrow confines of the struggle over the terms of the sale of labour power. There was never the understanding that a *political strike* in the U.S. over the Scottsboro Boys or in France for the liberation of Algeria, even if limited in extent, would be worth a hundred hunger marches or fights for paid vacations because such struggle would train the masses of workers as the vanguard fighters of the oppressed in the broadest definition and to understand their historic role in seizing political power and systematically attacking all the inequalities and oppression of the old society. Without this understanding there can be no revolution, at least not a *proletarian* revolution.

With the coming to power of Hitler and the crushing of the Communist Party and the working class movement in Germany, the great shift rightward began in the international movement. The goal of proletarian revolution, if not dropped altogether for the instant, became nebulous and vague with little or no implication for the tactics and strategy of the Communists in that period. What joins in large measure the earlier "left" period with the openly right-wing line adopted in the 1930s and consolidated at the 7th Congress in 1935 (see G. Dimitrov, *United Front Against Fascism*) was the infatuation with the mass, militant, day-to-day struggle and the failure and/or refusal of the Communists to strive to turn the spontaneous movement into something else, into an all-around political struggle. In place of what Lenin called a "bitter struggle against spontaneity," one finds instead the Communists transforming themselves into the agents or expressions of this spontaneity.

More recent history, too, underscores the bankruptcy of economism. The great movements that shook the advanced countries in the 1960s did not have as their origin the economic struggles of the workers against the capitalists, nor has that struggle been the most favourable grounds for the agitation and propaganda of communists among the workers. In the United States, for example, it was above all the resistance of the Black masses to national oppression and the struggle against the Vietnam war that propelled millions of people into motion, including significant sections of the proletariat. When the proletariat in France in May 1968 demonstrated its potential as the most revolutionary force in society, it did not do so as an outgrowth of its *own* struggle against the bourgeoisie but, on the contrary, as the outgrowth of the struggle of *other* sections of the people struggling around *other* questions, in particular the revolutionary youth and students who were raising political demands against the political power and, if in a confused, unsystematic and often idealist fashion, demanding a reversal, a revolution, in the existing social relations. The fact that when the bulk of the proletariat joined the oppositional revolutionary movement of '68 it raised its own economic demands (pushed in this direction by the French Communist Party, especially) is neither surprising nor in any way contradictory to the stubborn fact that that great movement grew out of the political movement of the revolutionary youth. In all truly profound revolutionary movements, the broad masses of the working class (as opposed to the advanced minority of the proletariat) generally join in on the basis of economic strikes which are closely linked to the prevailing political climate and which usually go over themselves into overtly political strikes. This is, for example, what took place in the Iranian revolution when the working class joined in the mass movement against the Shah, first raising economic demands and then, very quickly, going over to political demands for a Republic and in fact turning down economic concessions as a "dirty bribe" (and this lesson remains valid despite the fact that the Iranian revolution has yet to be successfully carried through to completion of even its initial

stage).

This process of mass economic strikes becoming mass political strikes is a common feature of the development of an insurrectionary situation and is one which Lenin paid great attention to in analyzing both 1905 and 1917. But this process, really, has little to do with the economist conception of "rendering the economic struggle itself a political character." The mass economic strike in these types of situations is a *means* (and not the only one) by which the *masses* of the proletariat enter an already developing revolutionary political struggle which as often as not is "provoked" or initiated by the activities by other sections of the people. The ability of the masses of workers to "go over" from economic to political strikes and, most of all, to a proletarian insurrection is also a kind of "diversion" of the mass movement which is itself dependent on a politically mature, class-conscious section of the proletariat able to lead the broad revolutionary masses, as well as broader sections of the working class itself, through the intense upheaval and swirl of a revolutionary situation marked by rapid twists and turns to launch a successful revolution. It was to the training of exactly this revolutionary section of the proletariat that Lenin attached uppermost emphasis.

That revolutionary situations will arise or that broad sections of the proletariat will rise up in the course of them has been amply demonstrated. But it has also been demonstrated that without this revolutionary section, led by a genuine revolutionary communist party, the masses will never succeed in waging a proletarian revolution. If the opportunities are not lost altogether, the best that comes about is the masses used as a battering ram by a bourgeois clique to batter down the existing power and establish its own.

Do Events in Poland Justify the Worship of Spontaneity?

Events in Poland since August 1980 have occupied the attention of Marxist-Leninists, and justly so. The ferocity and depth of the mass rebellion coming, as it seems so often, "out of nowhere," is indeed an important sign of the intensification of the contradictions in the East as well as the West and the certainty of mass, revolutionary battles in the period to come. But can it be said that this mighty spontaneous movement somehow negates Lenin's teaching on the need to combat "spontaneity" or, on the contrary, do events in Poland underscore Lenin's thesis and especially his stress on the "conscious element"?

Certainly, one of the most important lessons to be drawn from the Polish events is precisely the possibility, and increasing probability, of mass upsurges including in the advanced capitalist countries. That the masses will rise up and struggle, even search out an alternative to the existing State power and social relations, is not, however, the point of contention. What the events in Poland also show, and very vividly, is the critical role played (or in this case, not played) by a vanguard party and an advanced section of the class.

It is certainly not surprising, given the history of Poland, that the majority of workers in the movement believe they are rebelling *against* Marxism-Leninism. Nor does this fact in itself seal the fate of that movement; Lenin's remark on the Easter Rebellion in Ireland is to the point: whoever expects to find two ready-made armies lined up will never live to see the revolution. The problem in Poland is not nearly so much that the large mass of the proletariat is strongly influenced by nationalism, Catholicism, bourgeois-democratic illusions and strong pro-West sentiments, but that there is no viable force in Poland that is politically and ideologically challenging the "spontaneous" pull on the masses. The workers in Poland showed a tremendous infatuation with bourgeois democracy, as if the mere extension of democracy, including to the factory level, would solve all the problems of society. In fact, Poland before the military coup was probably much the same as Russia in the months before the October Revolution when Lenin called the then imperialist Russia "the most democratic country in the

world." What the movement showed objectively was the *limitations* of bourgeois democracy, that democracy is and must be the rule of one class over another. If the movement as a whole drew opposite conclusions from the same experience, it only underscores the importance of revolutionary theory.

In the swirl of events in Poland there is a great deal of raw material, of experience, from which the masses of workers could quickly learn vital lessons, but these lessons have not and will not be learned without the intervention of a political force drawing its revolutionary theory out of the accumulated worldwide experience of the class struggle and of social experience more generally, that is, Marxism-Leninism. To believe that the political line and the revolutionary ideology necessary to direct a victorious revolution in Poland will emerge spontaneously is wrong and dangerous. The movement has certainly posed the questions of state power, of a scientific understanding of socialism and so forth, but these questions will not and by their very nature cannot be resolved within the narrow confines of the immediate class struggle in any one country.

On the most empirical level one can easily see that the classic syndicalist line of accomplishing everything through the general strike took its toll in Poland. The leadership of that movement posed questions regarding the nature of state power but made no real and serious preparations for seizing it.

In fact, the Polish events demonstrate that the "spontaneous" ideas of the masses have very conscious and organized promoters and supporters. The Catholic Church, various pro-Western forces in and outside Solidarity, and other agents of bourgeois influence of various kinds have and continue to exercise an important sway over the Polish workers. To insist on worshipping spontaneity means abandoning the struggle against these very "non-spontaneous" enemies as well as against the force of habit and tradition on which they thrive and which they *re-inforce*.

Mao vs. Lenin!?!

One of the arguments of those who find Leninism or at least *What Is To Be Done?* outdated or worse is that Mao Tsetung, and especially his teachings on the mass line, have somehow "corrected" Lenin's teachings on spontaneity. In fact, Mao's teachings overall and especially his writings in relation to the class struggle under socialism (which represent his most important contributions to revolutionary theory) refute this view.

Mao, and the revolutionaries in China who followed his line, attached a tremendous importance to the conscious factor: that only by arming the proletariat and the masses with an understanding of the nature of socialist society and the class struggle, of the historic task of achieving communism worldwide, in short by arming them with Marxism-Leninism, would it be possible to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat and advance on the socialist road. Indeed it was the revisionists in China who constantly tried to focus the attention of the workers on their "own" most immediate and narrow concerns.

If the spontaneous understanding of the masses was always basically correct, why did Mao find it necessary to stress that "going against the tide is a Marxist-Leninist principle"? In fact it is interesting to note that a slogan of the early years of the Cultural Revolution, "The mainstream of the mass movement is always correct," was dropped and not taken up again by the revolutionaries. It was also Mao Tsetung who stated succinctly, "In order to seize political power it is necessary to first create public opinion," which led him to give great attention to the struggle in the superstructure of the socialist society. From all this it is difficult to see how Mao's teachings supposedly contradict Leninism.

It is true that some of Mao's writing during the period of the armed struggle in China can be open to a misinterpretation with regards to the question, particularly Mao's insistence on "paying attention to the

needs of the masses" and of basing the work of the party on the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the masses (90 percent).

In correctly situating these teachings of Mao it is necessary to consider two extremely important features of the Chinese Revolution: that it was a protracted period of armed struggle taking the form of a war between two different *regimes* and that the Chinese Revolution had to pass through a national, democratic stage. The fact that the revolution took the form of two regimes confronting one another meant that it was absolutely necessary for the Communist-led base area governments to meet the needs of the people who lived in those areas. It is in this context that Mao's call to pay attention to "cooking oil and salt" must be seen; he never insisted that the struggle for cooking oil and salt was somehow a "preliminary stage" but simply that in waging the armed struggle—which is, after all, the highest form of revolutionary struggle—it was necessary to correctly handle these lesser, secondary contradictions. Furthermore the ability—and necessity—of the Chinese Communist Party to develop policies and a "mass line" that corresponded to the needs and sentiments of 90 percent of the population was contingent on the bourgeois-democratic character of the first stage of the Chinese Revolution, which meant that the great majority could be united and that even sections of the national bourgeoisie, and perhaps more importantly those sections of the upper petit bourgeoisie strongly influenced by it, could and did support the programme of the CPC for the first stage of the revolution.

In a fundamental sense, the question of *diverting* the spontaneous course of the revolution was posed by the task of transforming the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution, a task to which Mao devoted great attention, not only *after* seizing power but also during the long democratic period. The stubborn resistance that Mao met at every step of this struggle is again testimony to the fact that the socialist revolution and socialist consciousness do not and cannot develop spontaneously.

While revolutionary strategy and tactics can never be "carbon copies" of the experience in another country or the past, and especially revolutionaries must take into account the distinction between the imperialist countries and the oppressed nations, it is nonetheless true that the basic questions involved in Lenin's criticism of economism are broadly applicable to *all*. One saw in the Cultural Revolution, for example, the tremendous attention Mao Tsetung and the "Gang of Four" which supported him paid to the *consciousness* of the masses, of their need to be concerned with "affairs of state," of not being content with "simple class hatred"—all of which earned them the label of "idealist" and "ultra-left" from the revisionists currently in command in China. Even in those countries where the revolution will not necessarily mainly take the form of insurrection in the cities, the question of forging and training an advanced section of the proletariat (and revolutionaries from other strata won to the cause and outlook of the proletariat) is no less vital. In no country can the movement be left to its "spontaneous" course. In Iran the task of communists among the workers is not, as some would have it, to focus their attention on their *own* condition and their struggle with the employers, but to arm the advanced workers with a vivid and profound understanding of *all* the social forces at work (friend and foe alike) and the political tasks of the revolution—this alone will enable the revolutionary section of the proletariat to correctly determine its friends and enemies and lead the revolutionary masses in preparing to seize power and advance toward the elimination of classes and class society worldwide.

The economist political trend in Iran is often associated with a "left" deviation, particularly a tendency to deny the two-stage character of the revolution in that country. This view, common among Trotskyites in Latin America, also negates the political struggle to overthrow imperialism and carry out various other important democratic tasks (the national democratic, or new-democratic revolution) with sectarian and at root *economist* calls for an immediate

socialist revolution. Such a line has the effect of concentrating the attention of the workers on their immediate economic relation to their employers, ignoring the fundamental economic relation of dependency on imperialism, and abandoning the political leadership of the opposition to imperialism and the fight to fulfill democratic tasks to the national bourgeoisie, which is always more willing to be cursed than politically challenged!

We have attempted to summarise those points which illustrate the general applicability of Lenin's thesis on economism as expressed in *What Is To Be Done?* and again in addressing the alleged "conflict" between Mao and Lenin we've attempted to show that the political essence of Lenin's teachings is valid in all types of countries. Nevertheless, as the title of the article indicates, our target is *imperialist economism*, the economist tendency in the advanced countries in a time when imperialism has long been established. We have not used the term strictly the way Lenin did, but while there are some differences between the imperialist economists Lenin struggled against in World War I and their contemporary counterparts, both share some important features: a one-sided and mechanical attachment to the working class/bourgeoisie contradiction within a given country; a disdain for the political struggle and for non-proletarian sections of the masses; and, most importantly, a failure to proceed from one of the most fundamental characteristics of our epoch—that "a major division in the world is between a handful of advanced capitalist countries and a great number of oppressed nations comprising a large part of the world's territory and population, which the imperialists parasitically pillage and maintain in an enforced state of backwardness, blocking the development of national capital, fostering capitalist relations only to the extent that these serve the interests of imperialism, and maintaining pre-capitalist relations, especially in the countryside." (*Basic Principles for the Unity of Marxist-Leninists and for the Line of the International Communist Movement*, draft document prepared by leaders of the RCP of Chile and the RCP, USA).

In his struggle against the social-chauvinists of the Second International, who openly or guilefully supported the victory of the "fatherland" in the first world war, Lenin explained at length the material base of social-chauvinism and its connection with economism. He begins his famous article "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism" with the following:

"Is there any connection between imperialism and the monstrous and disgusting victory opportunism (in the form of social-chauvinism) has gained over the labour movement in Europe?

"This is the fundamental question of modern socialism."

In this article and many others he shows that, yes indeed, there is a close connection between opportunism in the advanced countries and the fact that imperialism "increasingly transforms the 'civilized' world into a parasite on the body of hundreds of millions in the uncivilized nations" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 106) and that this economic fact results in a "shift in class relations" (*ibid.*, p. 116).

Of course all Marxists are familiar, to one degree or another, with Lenin's teachings on the "labour aristocracy" and it is generally accepted that revisionist parties of Western Europe or the bourgeois labour movements in the U.S. or Britain find a social base in such a labour aristocracy. But at the same time there is a tendency to narrow the conception simply to a handful of union officials and parliamentarians and some traditionally highly paid and highly skilled workers. On the contrary, the important conception in Lenin's treatment of the labour aristocracy is the division of the working class into *two camps*; one, a genuine proletariat with "nothing to lose but its chains," and another section with a material stake in preserving and defending imperialism. Each of these two political poles finds a material base of support in the existing (imperialist) relations of production and each finds sections of the *masses* who will rally around its banner.

It is because of this fundamental division of the working class into

two hostile camps that the conception of the "monolithic unity" of the working class, of waiting for and expecting the working class to rise up in a single bloc, takes on particularly ominous implications in relation to today's imperialist countries. Of course even in the backward Russia of 1903 Lenin stressed the importance of winning the adherence of a minority of the workers to a revolutionary political line and correctly ridiculed the worship of the "average worker." But in the advanced imperialist countries of today the worship of the "average" worker, especially in "average" (or normal) times, is a recipe for falling into pro-imperialist politics.

Has the latest period (spiral) in the development of imperialism, the post-World War 2 period, led to a greater unity of the working class, or, on the contrary, has it accentuated its divisions? This is at the heart of the question of strategy and tactics in the imperialist countries.

It is undeniably true that in the latest period tl. "socialization" of society has increased—that is, the tendency to impose more and more modern methods to broader and broader spheres of production and to impose the "factory system" to virtually all of social life. Many of the traditional highly skilled and almost artisan occupations have been increasingly supplanted by the technique of the assembly line—a case in point being the building trades in the United States where some of the conditions of labour of carpenters, long a bedrock of the labour aristocracy, approach those of, say, auto workers.

Some conclude from this that the social base for revisionism or for imperialist influence in the working class more generally is being weakened by this phenomenon. In other words, the more "socialized" the productive method, the more "proletarian" the work force. From this mechanical method comes the view that workers in large factories are, almost by their essence, more class-conscious than workers in smaller plants and that there is a direct relationship between how many workers there are in a country and how thoroughgoing the character of the revolution will be. Transferred onto a world scale, such a view holds that the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries should be more class-conscious and thoroughly revolutionary than in a country like, for example, Turkey.

In fact, a correct materialist analysis demonstrates that the main economic development since the second world war has been the intensification of the exploitation of the underdeveloped countries and, as a necessary corollary, the increased parasitism of the "advanced" countries. The period of relative social peace in a handful of countries in Europe, North America and Japan, bought and paid for in large part by the workers and oppressed in the underdeveloped world, has greatly strengthened the material supports of bourgeois labour politics and increased the ideological and political stranglehold of the bourgeoisie (generally through its agents) on the "average worker."

While it is certainly true that the working class will spontaneously struggle to improve the conditions of the sale of its labour power, it is not at all true that the workers will spontaneously come to recognize that their class interests are opposed to imperialism (and this, of course, leaving aside those workers who actually do benefit from imperialism and thus have an objective basis for defending the imperialist system and siding with their own imperialists in particular). The politics that spontaneously arise out of the workers around their own interests lead inexorably toward their identification with the imperialists themselves, and these will be the politics of the masses of workers if the struggle is allowed to remain on that terrain and not diverted.

Everybody is familiar with the crimes committed by the revi-

sionists in this respect—from the Communist Party of France's shameless support for *l'Algérie Française* to various Buy _____ campaigns (fill in the blank according to what imperialist country you live in). Unfortunately, the track record of the new Marxist-Leninist forces is not always that much better. The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), led by a well known labour leader, Reg Birch, distinguished itself a few years back by publishing a pamphlet saying the flood of immigrants in Britain was lowering "the level of skill of the British proletariat" (!). More recently a group of professed Maoists in West Germany, the Communist Workers League of Germany (KABD), has made the fight for the 35-hour work week central to its political work, even going so far as saying on the occasion of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that the way to oppose war developments was to intensify the struggle for the 35-hour work week (and if the war is accompanied by a big wage increase, as was World War 2 in the U.S. . . .). To give this bald-face economism a kind of "internationalist" twist they launched a campaign for a *European-wide* struggle for the 35-hour work week (are Yugoslavia and Portugal invited?) at a time when most workers outside Europe are much more likely to be working a 60-hour work week than a 40-hour one.

The above are, of course, extreme cases, but the fact that these monstrous examples could even exist in a movement claiming to have broken with revisionism should serve as an ample warning that there is still much destruction to do in order to construct a correct line for the international communist movement.

Yes, but isn't the deepening crisis of imperialism undermining the bribery and corruption of the workers in the imperialist countries and won't this lead them to struggle? Certainly the crisis is undermining the breadth of the bourgeoisification that the imperialist countries have experienced (though it is wrong to conclude from this that crisis will ever negate this entirely) and it is certainly true that this worsening of living standards will propel workers to struggle. But again, around what line, with what leadership, for what end? In fact, spontaneously the bulk of the workers (the "average") are more likely to follow the leadership of revisionists or even fascist elements with their program of restoring and/or improving the glorious days of class collaboration and imperialist crumbs for all, than the path of proletarian revolution. The revolutionary communists cannot "outbid" the revisionists and imperialists in their appeals to the workers on an economic basis. Lenin rightly ridiculed German Communists who insisted on promising the workers that their wages would not fall (or was it a promise for a 35-hour week?) if the proletariat came to power. Certainly to promise the workers of the imperialist countries today a quick improvement in their standard of living is to abandon a real conception of proletarian internationalism and goes completely against the spirit of Marx (and a point stressed in the Cultural Revolution in China) that "the proletariat can only liberate itself by liberating all mankind."

To put it bluntly, for the communists to act as the expression of the spontaneous sentiments of the "average" worker, to take the "drab, everyday struggle" as their starting point and most favorable arena of political work, in short, to tail the spontaneous movement of the workers, is to abandon the proletariat to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. And, in the imperialist countries, this can only mean abandoning them to the imperialist politics of the ruling class. In these countries, social-chauvinism is the inevitable bed partner of the worship of spontaneity.