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Zapatista Autonomy Project

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the crisis; it is rather an innocent victim of the internal contradictions of capital, a subordinate element in a contradictory whole. This is why the Left is preoccupied with the defense of the working class.

Our analysis of the crisis implies a rejection of the basic proposal of the Left: socialism. We must rid ourselves of old terminology that has no application to the present level of class confrontation. The first on the list is "socialism" which at the present moment can mean only one of two dubious things. Either, as the ideology of the libertarian Left, it finds in small-scale production the solution to the "degradation of work," or it is a capitalist strategy of economic planning. In the first respect socialism is romantic and quaintly useless. In the second respect, however, socialism means primarily disciplining the working class. (The socialist countries are already playing the second role in the international context by inviting capital investments from strike-ridden countries, e.g., GM in Poland or Fiat in the Soviet Union.) In both cases the demand for socialism clashes with the working class demands against work.

The present task is not a matter of developing new versions of an automated 21st Century Utopia. The practical and theoretical challenge is to build a society where the creation of wealth does not contradict the autonomy of the working class and its refusal of work. This challenge cannot be met unless we re-define, and not avoid, those classic questions that our tradition has bequeathed as relics, the questions of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and "the seizure of power."

and dimensions of these struggles demonstrate that the cutting of the link between income and work is the decisive point at which the class recomposed itself and expressed its political autonomy from capital. The magnitude of the struggle is best measured by the magnitude of the present crisis. Capital's response could not avoid the terrain of confrontation laid down by the working class. It is for this reason that the present capitalist strategy is characterized by a strenuous effort to sever its "dependency on workers." We interpret the macroscopic changes that the recent "oil crisis" has brought about in this way. Not a scramble over "natural resources" nor the product of rapacious corporations nor the narrow-mindedness of nationalist governments, it is rather a specific international strategy aimed at charting a new course of accumulation. The energy multinationals have become the leading force in this process precisely because of their capital intensive production and their relative "freedom" from labor problems. At the same time capital will not get rid of work, on the contrary, its political necessity is more apparent than ever as the fundamental form of control over the working class.

The contemporary Left sees the crisis from the point of view of economists, that is, from the viewpoint of capital. The Left is basically for work. It cannot grasp either in theory or practice that the working class struggle against work is the source of the crisis and the starting point of organization. Hence the Leftist image of the crisis is still mired in the paleomarxist view that sees the crisis as the product of capital's lack of planning of production. The "anarchy of production" is an external irrationality of the capitalist mode of production that dooms it to crises of inter-capitalist competition and imperialist wars. For the Left the working class could not have brought about

Introduction to Zerowork I
Zerowork Collective

The present capitalist crisis has made the problem of working class revolutionary organization more urgent. But any discussion of revolutionary action must be based upon an analysis of the present relation of the working class to capital. The first issue of Zerowork takes up this task.

This historical crisis of capital is the product of a cycle of struggles, waged in North America and internationally, between the class and capital. This is our starting point. There is nothing simple or mysterious about a cycle of struggle. The class struggle has many circuits, sectors, internal divisions and contradictions, but it is neither a mystical unity nor a chaotic mess. The articles in this issue describe the circulation and development of struggle through the different sectors of the working class that have culminated in the present crisis.

All capitalist crises may well look alike in the spectacles of economists. From the view point of working class organization, however, there is a vast difference between 1929 and 1975. It is the difference in the changed role of the working class in the determination of the capitalist crisis. Unless this difference is grasped we will fail to identify the present source of working class power and be condemned therefore to the repetition of old nostrums and discredited strategies.

Capitalism is not always and eternally the same, nor are the revolutionary potentialities of the working class. In order to clarify the novelty of the contemporary relations

of class power, we may pick out three main stages of struggle over the last century, each characterized by a different class relation and producing different types of crises.

The first is the period of the "anarchy of production." Recurrent capitalist crises and restructuration were aimed at reproducing the reserve army of labor in order to depreciate the value of labor power and maintain the "proper" ratio between necessary and surplus labor. The possibility of "free market" control ended internationally with the Great Depression when a new relation with the working class was forged: the Keynesian era. Whereas formerly wages rose and fell in spasmodic movements, in the Keynesian era the power of the working class was expressed in constantly increasing wage levels. The wage was taken, therefore, by capital as the pivot of the economy: development was geared to the expansion of demand. The consumer goods industry (primarily the automobile sector) consequently set the pace of growth. What was lost in the rigidity of wages was recaptured by inflation. The recessions of the 1950s were used as tools for the "fine tuning" of working class consumption and for moderating wage demands. Crisis kept the equilibrium between wage demands and inflation levels. "Fine-tuning" required new institutional arrangements. Working class organizations, the trade unions, were recognized as the sole bargaining agent of working class demands and the attempt was made to integrate them as a force of capitalist development.

The present crisis is neither a Keynesian recession nor a return to those of the "anarchy of production." This crisis opens a new stage in the class relation. It marks capital's recognition that the control of the working

that imposes the crisis on capital.

Further, these articles show how the struggle has obliterated any distinction between politics and economics, the distinction that in previous phases dominated conceptions of revolutionary organization. The struggles leading to the Keynesian era materially destroyed the separation between the state and the "economic infrastructure." The political nature of capitalism is not "unveiled" by the "exposure" of political institutions. All the elements of capitalist society are based upon the essential relation of command that capital seeks to impose on the working class. The wage relationship is not a mere "economic" relation. It is above all an expression of the power conquered by the working class and cannot be dismissed as a "reformist" struggle. The "labor markets" as well as the so-called political institutions the kitchen and the assembly line, are all determined by the power relation materialized in the wage.

Everywhere, this is evident today. Gone is the time when "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay" was the slogan around which the working class movement rallied. The crudeness of the working class attack has shattered the apparently sophisticated distinction between qualitative and quantitative demands. The straight-forward imposition of higher income regardless of productivity has been the leading edge of working class political strategy. This appropriation of wealth on the part of the working class has taken many forms; demands for higher wages, for greater welfare benefits, rent strikes, subway strikes, and all the various types of direct appropriation that, under capital's justice, go under the label "crimes against property." The intensity

because it brings to the fore power of the working class to transform capitalism.

Through these interdependent levels of class analysis we can understand the relation between the working class and capital. They enable us to specify the composition of the working class. At the same time such an analysis allows us to see how the working class changes that relation and reconstructs its composition at a greater level of power, that is, in its political recomposition. By "political recomposition" we mean the level of unity and homogeneity that the working class reaches during a cycle of struggle in the process of going from one composition to another. Essentially, it involves the overthrow of capitalist divisions, the creation of new unities between the different sectors of the class, and an expansion of the boundaries of what the "working class" comes to include.

The articles in the first issue of Zerowork give a historical outline of the political recomposition in and among different sectors of the working class. Our analysis starts with the process of working class repression and technological reconversion that made up in the 1950s capital's response to the cycle of struggles that culminated in the immediate post-war years. It then shows how the working class regained the initiative in the 1960s. Each article demonstrates how the struggle of both the waged and the unwaged parts of the class thwarted the fundamental tool of accumulation –the division between the waged and the wageless. Those struggles against capital show a unity of demand –more money, less work—and not an organizational unity. Their power brought to a close the Keynesian era. Thus it is the political recomposition of the waged and the unwaged

class through Keynesian methods has proved illusory: in fact those methods provided an occasion for the largest generalization of the wage struggle. Planned crisis is now the capitalist long term strategy. The present crisis is not the end of a business cycle. It is the end of an age.

Why was capital forced into this situation?

The political strategy of the working class in the last cycle of struggles upset the Keynesian plan for development. It is in this cycle that the struggle for income through work changes to a struggle for income independent of work. The working class strategy for full employment that had provoked the Keynesian solution of the 1930s became in the last cycle of struggle a general strategy of the refusal of work. The strategy that pits income against work is the main characteristic of struggle in all the articulations of the social factory. The transformation marks a new level of working class power and must be the starting point of any revolutionary organization. The strategy of refusal of work overturns previous conceptions of where the power of the working class lies and junks all the organizational formulae appropriate to the previous phases of the class relation.

We put these conclusions forward on the basis of a class analysis of the cycle of the 1960s and early 1970s. Only on the basis of such an analysis can organizational proposals be made or strategic conclusions drawn. Capital is a class relation, and as such it admits only two ways of approach: either the capitalist viewpoint or the viewpoint of the working class. In theory as in struggle, no middle ground is given.

From the capitalist viewpoint every crisis appears to be the outcome of a mysterious network of economic "laws" and relations moving and developing with a life of its own. Capital pictures itself as a completely self-enclosed, self-guiding system. It might not always work right, but its "flaws" are internal as are its "cures." From its vantage point the working class appears only as a product of capital's motion and structure, as one variable among many that capitalist planning must calibrate and put in motion. Capital, on pain of extinction, must continually re-establish its control in the face of working class initiative in order to force the working class to become a simple "factor of production."

Our class analysis proceeds from the opposite viewpoint, that of the working class. As a class relation, capital is first of all a power struggle. Capital's "flaws" are not internal to it and nor is the crisis: they are determined by the dynamics of working class struggle. To be understood, that dynamics and cycle of struggle requires an analysis that must operate at four interconnected levels.

First is the analysis of the struggles themselves: their content, their direction, how they develop and how they circulate. It is not an investigation of occupational stratification nor of employment and unemployment. We don't look at the structure of the workforce determined by the capitalist organization of production. On the contrary, we study the forms by which workers can bypass the technical restrictions of production and affirm themselves as a class with political power.

Second, we study the dynamics of the different sectors of the working class: the way these sectors affect each other and thus the relation of the working class with capital.

Differences among sectors are primarily differences in power to struggle and organize. These differences are expressed most fundamentally in the hierarchy of wages, in particular, as the Wages for Housework movement has shown, the division between the waged and the wageless. Capital rules by division. The key to capitalist accumulation is the constant creation and reproduction of the division between the waged and unwaged parts of the class. The Left has perpetuated and intensified this division to the extent that it still identifies the working class with the "producers" or with the waged. But for us, as for Marx long ago, the working class is defined by its struggle against capital and not by its productive function.

Third, we consider the relations between the working class and its "official" organizations, that is, the trade unions, the "workers' parties," welfare organizations, etc. We should never identify the working class with its organizations. Indeed, much of the working class struggle producing the present crisis arose outside or against these very organizations. But, by the same token one cannot follow the ideological line of "class purity" that analyzes struggle independent of these organizations. Whether a particular organization advances the interests of the working class or not, it plays a role in the relationship between the working class and capital.

Fourth, all these aspects have to be related to the capitalist initiative in terms of general social planning, investment, technological innovations, employment and to the institutional setting of capitalist society. It is in this relationship between the dynamic of working class struggle and institutional changes that the analysis of class recomposition reaches its most significant level,