

## The European Left Between Crisis and Refoundation

Today we cannot understand anything of Europe, the European Left or any other problem in the world unless we start out, in a spirit of truth, from the epochal shift of the last few years that has resulted in the political, ideological and economic collapse of the Communist states in Eastern Europe.\* It has been an event as overwhelming and as fraught with long-term consequences as the conclusion of the anti-fascist war half a century ago. When the Berlin Wall came down the judgement of many people, especially in Europe, was one of euphoria. They saw the coming of a new historical period marked by world cooperation, disarmament and democratic advance, which would provide a clear opportunity for democratic socialism with a human face. Now we can see that the reality is different and much harsher. Let us be clear. For my own part, I am no orphan of actually existing socialism or the Cold War, nor have I ever looked back at them with nostalgia. I have been active from an early age in a Communist Party, the PCI, which has always striven both theoretically and practically to develop a line independent of the Eastern-

bloc countries. Moreover, twenty years ago I was expelled from the party with the Manifesto Group—a long exclusion due to our openly argued position that we were witnessing a social and political degeneration of the regimes in the East, and that they could not be reformed without a radical break. If I mention this, it is not only to explain why I feel neither surprised nor contradicted by the present crisis, which I regard as inevitable and in many ways a liberation. It is also to recall that an earlier crisis, at the time of our expulsion, did not appear to herald defeat, but rather to constitute the great historic opportunity for a theoretical and practical leap forward by a revolutionary movement that based itself on the major gains of the preceding epoch. Those were the times, we should remember, of anti-imperialist struggle in the Third World, of the student and workers' movements of 1968 in the West, the Prague Spring and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In both East and West that attempt to move forward did not reach fulfilment, but nor did it end in rapid failure.

## 1. An Epochal Turning Point

The present crisis of the Left is occurring under the dual impact of capitalist restructuring, with all its economic and cultural results, and the collapse of the planned economies. It bears the marks of both. The events of the last few weeks in the Soviet Union confirm this. It is true that the worst has been avoided: namely, the success of a coup d'état which was so resoundingly devoid of social consent or ideological bases that it would have had to engage in mass repression before arriving at a regime at once authoritarian and impotent. Nevertheless, the outcome is not a revival of Gorbachev's original aim of self-reform of the Soviet system, but the taking of power by a new social bloc and a new political leadership that have radically broken with the October Revolution and everything it produced.

These dangers, with all their short-term costs for that region of the world, have become visible to everyone through the events in outlying lands of the USSR. At least in a first phase, we shall see not economic development and representative democracy, so much as production crises, mass unemployment and violent outbursts of nationalism—a democratic revolution accompanying and producing social restoration, disaggregation of the state structure of a large nuclear power, and rapid introduction of an unbridled capitalism which, for the time being, is more likely to follow the Brazilian than the German pattern.

But the purpose of my contribution is not to make analyses, judgments or predictions about that whole development in the East, for which I anyway lack the necessary competence. What I wish to stress here are the general, long-term elements that follow for the world order, and their repercussions on political and social struggle well beyond the frontiers of the USSR.

Firstly, a historical experience is now ending in painful defeat—an experience which, both materially and in terms of ideas, served

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sometimes as a model and in any case as a reference point for broad movements of liberation. It is now fashionable in the West, even on the Left, to treat that connection as a thoroughly harmful product of manipulation or folly—that is, to consider the October Revolution and its sequel not as a process which degenerated in stages but as a regression *ab origine*, or a pile of rubble. But the historical reality is rather different. First Stalinism, then the authoritarian power of a bureaucratic, imperial caste, were one side of that historical process, and we were wrong not to have seen its effects in time and denounced it in its roots. But for decades another side also continued to operate: the side of national independence; the spread of literacy, modernization and social protection across whole continents; the resistance to fascism and victory over it as a general tendency of capitalism; support for and actual involvement in the liberation of three-quarters of humanity from colonialism; containment of the power of the mightiest imperial state. First the involution and then the collapse of all that has direct and weighty consequences for the Left throughout the world. For the oppressed, it means the passing away not so much of a model—mistakenly held and now generally discarded—as of an ally and a support. And with it is going a legacy of cultural autonomy which the common sense of Marxism, in its most diverse forms, deposited in the world much more widely and deeply than in the Communist parties alone.

Secondly, there is a radical change in the relationship of forces or geography of power in international relations, especially after the recent developments in Moscow. A great power and its system of alliances have now dissolved, giving way not to a secure, polycentric world equilibrium, but to the complete supremacy of a group of major capitalist powers centred on the United States of America. Conflicts of interest are certainly taking shape among them, but they are firmly united in their economic structure and show a clear determination to rule the world by their own lights, by force where economic and cultural supremacy do not suffice. The mounting of the Gulf War, the current shifts in NATO towards a world police force, the management of international economic institutions and so-called aid programmes, US policy in Central and South America or European in Africa—all these demonstrate what kind of world government is at issue.

The Left throughout the world, even that part of it which never had anything to do with the ideology and organization of actually existing socialism, is inevitably affected by such trends, both in terms of the objective conditions and relationships of force that it has to face, and in terms of the internalization of defeat.

### Stalled Projects

Let us look now at the Left of Western Europe, which entered into major difficulties independently of the new turn in the East. In fact, these were already apparent towards the end of the 1970s, when economic crisis and the capitalist response through restructuring put intense strains on the political platform, the instruments of intervention and the social basis around which the Left had for decades

defined its presence and its role—that is to say, the construction and management of the welfare state, the redistribution of income and the implementation of Keynesian policies of demand support and full employment, the strength and bargaining-power of trade unions, and the regulatory function of the national state.

The European Left reacted to these difficulties in two different ways which, no longer coinciding with the distinction between Communists and Socialists, passed through both formations at the same time. A number of large parties with a major working-class and popular implantation (PCI, SPD, Labour Party, for example) engaged in a real effort of political and cultural rethinking, in order to define, as it were, a more advanced left-reformism revolving around questions of ecological reconversion, economic democracy and disarmament. Other forces, however, set out to retain a role in government by aligning themselves more clearly with neo-conservative policies and by shifting their own social base and organizational forms in the direction of an American-style, inter-class party of opinion. This was the case of the French, Spanish and Italian Socialist parties.

The first of these two courses gradually ran up against the world context that we outlined at the beginning. But the subjective limits also proved to be stronger than expected: long habits of administering power which had produced leadership groups strongly integrated into the dominant apparatuses and culture; a weak capacity to foster and support mass movements; a deeply ingrained Eurocentric culture. The project therefore came to a halt in mid course, having achieved rather slender results, and in the most important countries is now ebbing into a much more pragmatic attempt to move back closer to government, even at the price of renouncing major points in its programme and allying with conservative forces.

All this has been clearly visible in relation not only to the Gulf War and rearmament but also to social policy, although it has not been enough to restore the electoral fortunes of the parties of the Left. For on the terrain of neo-conservative policies, it is naturally the Right which has the greater credibility. Moreover, as the working classes come to feel less involved and less represented, they distance themselves from politics and often from the ballot, or express opposition through localist or outright racist movements. The political system is thus tending to become more uniform, incapable of expressing conflicts and contradictions present within society or of drawing up real alternatives. There are certainly new movements (ecologism, feminism, pacifism, for example) which are sometimes strong enough to penetrate traditionally conservative sectors like the Catholic or the Protestant Church and to exert an influence on the parties of the Left. But they are not able, in any stable or significant measure, to produce a new culture and organization that will unite with broad masses of workers and marginal layers.

I have neither the task nor the competence to say whether, how and to what degree this same difficulty of the international context is also expressed in the other major component of the progressive front of

past decades, namely, the Third World. But it seems evident that, however diverse the effects, they are generating tendencies to subaltern integration of the ruling classes—sometimes also of their more progressive sectors—and forcing countries and peoples that cannot or will not undergo integration to seek a line of resistance in adventurist nationalism or religious fundamentalism, as has often happened in the Arab world. This fuels and aggravates the vicious circle of non-communication between the Northern and Southern Lefts—a phenomenon that has always existed, but which at certain moments, and within very definite limits, has been overcome by broad movements of solidarity.

I have intentionally and perhaps too much underlined the distressing side of things, because it is necessary to start by facing reality if we are to rebuild a culture and politics of the Left. As is always the case, we can certainly recognize and appreciate other elements that are already in play: the upheavals in the East also involve an extraordinary explosion of democratic participation that will bear its fruits; the social-democratic model in Western Europe cannot be conflated with that of the USA or Japan and has certain left forces and cultures that could provide a new starting-point; many countries in the Third World (particularly in Latin America and South Africa) are still witnessing popular struggles and the emergence of new subjects, and some of these are achieving successes. But such features have to be placed within a general framework, an overall relationship of forces where another sign is dominant. As Lukács wrote shortly before his death, the analogy that should be drawn is with the middle of the last century rather than with the beginning of our own. Once again, a revolution that changed the world has reached a point of crisis; and again it is upon the contradictory materials left behind that a new historical phase of the struggle for the transformation of society and the emancipation of the oppressed has to be built. This will require not only resistance to a ruling-class hegemony that now seems to be regaining its composure, but also a difficult process of shaping partly new ideas, actors and contradictions. Do the conditions exist for that work of reconstruction, for opposition to the dominant system not just at the level of ideas or individual witness, but in terms of organized mass politics? And does it still make sense today to refer to Marxism, communism and class struggle as useful, if not exclusive and self-sufficient, instruments for such a project? I believe that the answer to both questions is Yes—not because of some moral choice, but on rational grounds that I would now like to present briefly and rather schematically.

## **2. The Actuality of a Radical Critique of Capitalism**

In my view the world today—its most modern and dynamic aspects, and not only its areas of backwardness and stagnation—makes a profound critique of the capitalist social system at once necessary and possible. Indeed it is only today, for the first time, that such a critique can be expressed in a radical form pointing concretely towards emancipatory change.

For the first time, humanity has the resources and productive capacity

to assure the satisfaction of basic needs and a minimum of civilization for all. And yet, a growing part of humanity—whole peoples and continents in the South, but also a not insignificant part of the affluent metropolis—are enduring old and new forms of poverty, fighting and often losing the battle for sheer survival.

For the first time, humanity is running up against the limits of natural resources. It has the scientific and technological means to husband those resources and to pursue greater well-being through improvements in the quality of life rather than senseless growth in the quantity of material goods. But the dissipation of nature is continuing, in some sectors actually accelerating, and with it a model of life that promises disasters in the future and is already undermining human welfare.

For the first time, at least in the North, consumption levels have passed the threshold of natural need: they now allow both for real enrichment of distinctively human consumption and for the satisfaction of remaining needs. Instead, however, the repetitive, imitative and depersonalized character of consumption is becoming more marked, without either satisfying existing needs or creating higher ones.

For the first time, as a result of the scope and pace of technological innovation, it is becoming possible and almost obligatory to reduce the sum total of necessary human labour and to set greater store by its quality. And yet, the reduction in necessary labour is translated into structural unemployment, and an even greater separation is made between stable, skilled labour and insecure, fragmentary, alienating tasks.

For the first time, education and rapid communications offer the means for a general rise in culture and critical awareness, which are in turn the basis for any real democracy. Yet they are turning into instruments of manipulation, of a conformist common sense, disorienting the masses and rendering them passive.

For the first time, then, modernity and progress do not appear as synonyms of civilization and equality, however uneven or gradual in their development, but are threatening to open the way to a caste society and general barbarism. It may be asked what all this has to do with capitalism as a system. Are we not talking of problems which overshadow the capital-labour conflict or the relationship between property and power? We have very good reasons to doubt that this is so. There are not a few contradictions directly or indirectly bound up with capitalist exploitation of labour which are by no means marginal and all too painfully material. Some examples: the debt and interest burden and the unequal exchange between raw materials and industrial goods in relations between North and South; the cost of labour in the developing countries; the earnings hierarchy, low pay and intensity of labour in the advanced core itself; the injustices and exemptions built into the tax system; the inequalities in the actual distribution of public services; and the proportional remuneration of labour, capital and financial assets. All these contradictions not only persist but have started to grow again in the course of the last decade.

If we look at the newer contradictions, which cannot so easily be situated within the immediate conflict between classes, it is certainly true that underdevelopment in the South no longer results only from the transfer of resources from periphery to metropolis, nor is it imposed only by military domination. But is it not true that underdevelopment, like never before, is tied to a certain kind of *subaltern integration*, to the power of finance capital, to the trading policies imposed by dominant states, and above all to the type of technological development and consumption which big capital, and the market regulated by it, impose with a coercive power greater than that of any gunboat?

Of course, the environmental disaster is not only due to capitalist choices. But is it not quite impossible to effect a solution so long as the key parameter of production decisions remains short-term corporate profit, and the guiding priority for economics, research or even individual behaviour is growth in the number of goods to be produced and consumed in an individual manner?

Of course, the hierarchy of social roles depends rather less directly than before on the ownership of property, and more on specialist knowledge and the talents required to exploit it. But is it not true that such capacities are one-sidedly shaped and subordinated by extrinsic priorities; that the power to define them comes mainly from ownership of capital and its goal of unlimited growth, which increasingly stamp the very character of technology and research?

I could go on adding to the examples. But there already seems enough evidence to support two conclusions. First, even those phenomena which appear quite remote from the capital-labour conflict over distribution of the social product are tightly bound up with the powerful mechanisms regulating the capitalist economy. Secondly, modern triumphant capitalism, like never before, displays the features of overall irrationality, including in the economy itself. For what else can one say of a subject which, having largely met certain needs and seen the emergence of new ones that have still to be satisfied, devotes ever more material and human resources to the former; a subject which is not capable of steering its own choices towards goals generally recognized as essential?

### **The Obstacles to Advance**

Despite the incessant campaign conducted by apologists of capitalism, all this is present in the consciousness of many people, at least in a large part of the Left and of European culture in general. But it has to face two basic obstacles. First of all, the objective mechanism of the unified international market, with its huge multinational concentrations that dominate capital, research and the media, constitutes a dense and powerful force paralleling the crisis of national states, parliaments and organized democracy. This force is now such as to render vain and impotent any reform-oriented politics that is incapable of reaching a critical mass of innovations with which to operate, at least at the level of continents, a diverse and coherent system of accords and to resist the inevitable counter-attacks.

Secondly, any reform-oriented politics will suffer from the weakness of its potential base of support, apparent in the decline of large factories, the corporate segmentation of social interests, the inherently dispersed and fluctuating character of the new movements, and the contradictions of culture and interests that develop among them. In order to overcome these, such a new politics would as a whole have to achieve a large degree of cultural autonomy, as well as organizational changes and a clarity and consistency of programme. The point I wish to stress, however, is that this presupposes a radical transformation, a true refounding, not just for Communists but for all the forces involved. In particular, it will be necessary to develop beyond certain notions which, though marking socialism in the Eastern bloc, prove on closer inspection to have been held in common throughout the history of the workers' movement.

These defective notions may be summarized under four headings. *Economism* identified progress with quantitative growth of (especially industrial) production, thereby underestimating other than directly economic moments and dimensions in the appraisal of individual and collective life. *Statism* overemphasized the role of centralized political power, state ownership of the means of production, and abolition of the market by decree as a lever of socialist transformation, instead of laying the stress on self-government and intellectual-moral reform in the construction of a new hegemony. *Jacobinism* separated off the Party, as enlightened vanguard, from the masses, and thus entailed a bureaucratic organizational form of the party itself. *Eurocentrism* involved the idea that the Western model could be extended world-wide, defining the social subjects and cultures of other peoples in terms of underdevelopment and reducing them to the rank of mere allies. This whole complex of mentalities helped to produce degeneration in societies where a revolution was accomplished, but it has also hindered the Western Left from uniting with Third World movements and from mobilizing the new social subjects that are emerging under advanced capitalism.

Of course, such a way of thinking about socialism as a social process has not appeared out of thin air. In Marx's own theory, and in many strands of Marxism (Gramsci, Lukács or Korsch, for example), there was certainly a conception of communism and socialism grounded on the critique of quantitative growth, the social division of labour and delegate democracy. It is no accident that some like myself continue to affirm their communist identity by referring precisely to these Marxian roots.

Evidently that other tradition remained marginal in the actual history of the workers' movement, unable either to achieve adequate theoretical expression or to produce an effective politics. The world today, however, does allow and is even compelling us towards a new definition of theory and practice, in which cultures and experiences outside Marxism or the workers' movement will make an indispensable contribution. There is certainly nothing fortuitous in the role of advanced Catholic currents in Latin America, or of ecologism, feminism and the peace movement in Europe.



The objective conditions and an embryonic subjectivity therefore exist for the reconstruction of a Left in opposition to the present system, and a revolutionary project in which democracy and socialism are joined together. It is a long and far from simple task, and it will have a chance of success only if we do not linger over nostalgic orthodoxies or delude ourselves that the confused, spontaneous growth of conflictual moments is sufficient to produce an alternative. All the evidence today indicates that, without an organized political theory and practice, new movements will arise but only to be defeated, in such a way that the system recovers with greater strength than before. Precisely because socialism can no longer be separated from democracy, it has all the more need of awareness, programmes, organization and education.

### 3. Opportunities of the Current Phase

Even if we accept that all these considerations are correct, perhaps adding others along similar lines, they do not yet provide a minimum basis with which to orient the Left and to rebuild faith in its immediate political future. Effective political action of a mass character requires more than just a strategic perspective and an identity at the level of ideas; it cannot operate only in the *longue durée*, with regard to epochal contradictions. It must also take up position in a determinate short-term future, and acquire leverage over immediate contradictions and forces that are already in play.

In fact, one of the most frequent and costly errors in the history of the workers' movement has been to confuse historical actuality with an immediate political perspective. Even great thinkers could, like Marx, see the Paris Commune as the beginning of the socialist revolution or, like Lenin, argue that the October Revolution would rapidly spread to Western Europe. In 1968 the same mistake was committed in an even more naive and unjustified manner.

The conviction that there are profound objective reasons for the reconstruction of a worldwide anti-capitalist movement should not, therefore, lead us to forget that the present situation does not immediately promise any revolutionary opportunities. All it allows is the defence of certain spaces, the accumulation of forces, the achievement of some partial gains, in a long and tortuous process that will necessitate alliances, intermediate stages and realistic programmes.

This takes us on to a second question. Do the objective and subjective conditions exist today for the building of a left-wing politics that will have immediate effects? In this brief report I cannot even attempt to give an answer: that would require not general assertions but concrete analyses of the economic and political situation, differentiated by country and sector. I can, however, underline the essential factors which, in my view, allow us to be reasonably confident that the Left will revive in a not too distant future—or, in other words, the grounds upon which the Left can rebuild mass support and forge new alliances.

*(i) The Growing Economic Crisis*

First, a critical point is again looming up in the economic crisis, despite the headlong processes of restructuring that have already had their effect.

It is a crisis that began in the mid seventies with the exhaustion of the Fordist–Keynesian cycle, on which there already exists an abundant literature. The system reacted with three successive responses, each solving some problems whilst creating others. The first period (1974–79) was characterized, so to speak, by ‘renewal in continuity’. While strong pressure was brought to bear on wages and labour organization so as to restore eroded profit margins, governments and employers tried to keep the old growth mechanism in place by maintaining demand and recycling into investment capital the resources set loose by the oil crisis. This policy successfully contained the recessionary spiral but also set off the various restructuring processes: the take-off of the so-called NICs in the Third World, the reduction of wage costs, and the launching of industrial conversion in the West with moves towards new technologies and decentralization of production. But this was not enough either to restore the conditions for profitable investment or to put an end to inflation, and it left behind a mountain of internal and external debt that could not easily be repaid. A second phase then followed when the Reagan administration imposed a general clampdown on credit and social expenditure, with the aim of reducing employment, selecting out the fittest companies, and forcing the debtor countries to keep up repayments. This shock therapy produced rapid results, but it also unleashed the biggest depression since the war and brought the system to the brink of collapse.

After 1983 the Reagan administration closely stuck to three of these policy planks: the containment of social expenditure, deregulation of the labour market, and pressure on Third World debt. At the same time, however, it made a 180-degree turn in relation to internal demand by boosting military spending, consumer credit and tax relief—a kind of conservative neo-Keynesianism, financed not by the issuing of money but by expansion of the public debt at high rates of interest. An extraordinary seven-year conjuncture of growth, in which new jobs were created in the non-productive sector and financial miracles were regularly performed, thus allowed the United States to live beyond its means, while providing a market outlet for European and Japanese industry and high-interest income for financial investors. But there was a very high price to be paid, not only in social terms (mass unemployment, for example) but also for the economy as a whole. The United States, suffering deindustrialization and an overall decline in productivity and savings potential, ran up a public debt of \$3,000 billion as well as a colossal trade deficit. More drastically, in the Third World a squeeze on internal consumption and new investment was required merely to keep up interest payments. And even Europe, dragged along the road of high interest-rates, was forced to deepen its export dependency and to widen its own regional imbalances.

Now the chickens are coming home to roost. A recession spreading

out from the United States to the other developed countries is already on the horizon, driven by the unsustainable weight of financial profits, the expansion of parasitic or low-productivity sectors of the metropolitan economies, and the general slowdown in the developing countries. As to the former Eastern bloc, now in free fall, it will be a long time before it offers any promise of new markets and opportunities for guaranteed profits, and its compelling short-term need of financial support will actually diminish the supply of capital on the international market and exert a further upward pressure on interest rates.

The crisis, then, is not simply a conjunctural phenomenon: it is rooted in the assertive thrust by a new social bloc of unearned income and capitalist profit, which has replaced the labour-capital bloc of the Fordist phase and will prove very hard to dismantle. The wrestling match of the coming years has already begun over who will pay the bill for the 'festival' in the West and the collapse in the East and South. And as we can see, the dominant classes will be trying to impose their will in the shape of further cuts in social spending, employment and wages, surgical strikes in the economies of the former Eastern bloc, and final marginalization of the poorest countries from aid programmes.

Such prospects will, or at least may, produce a revival of the basic social conflict between capital and labour, periphery and centre, as well as of contradictions within the dominant bloc between income and profit, between various middle-layer groups, and between the various capitalist powers. Nowhere in the world, including the central heartlands, is it a phase of stability, expansion and social peace that now awaits us.

### *(ii) Defending Democracy*

The new turning point in the economic crisis is compounded throughout the West by a no less serious problem of the political system and its institutions. For in its hour of apparent triumph, parliamentary democracy is facing a dual crisis of representation and efficacy, one that also goes back nearly twenty years. Its two aspects were the social fragmentation brought about by parasitic degeneration of social spending and bureaucratization of the mass parties and unions, and an unmanageable surplus of social demands in a situation where veto rights acted as a countervailing power but were unable to constitute an alternative. Who does not remember the lucid and reactionary analysis of the Trilateral Commission in the mid seventies, concerning the conflict between democracy and development?

The system sought an answer to that crisis not only through a new distribution of income and power within the economy, but also through a two-pronged neutralization of democratic institutions. On the one hand, the essential political decisions were transferred to sites sheltered from popular sovereignty: to the international institutions (IMF, central banks, European Community) or the multinationals and the centres of private finance. On the other hand, the popular political subject which ought to exercise sovereignty underwent a process of

deconstruction, through manipulation of the media, reshaping of politics as spectacle, promotion of charismatic leaders in place of the mass organizations, and massive use of clientelist or corporatist vote-switching. The sovereign was not just repressed but lobotomized. In this sense, the new-style presidentialism that developed in some Latin American countries (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Peru) pointed emphatically towards a tendency now operating in the major countries of the West. It is enough to think here of the last presidential campaigns in the United States, or the process of European unification from which parliamentary-democratic representation is completely excluded.

This all worked so well that the system's spontaneous mechanisms became virtually self-sufficient, the only task of political government being to give them the necessary back-up or to mediate their social consequences by distributing financial resources that could still be found on the market. But now we have come to the crucial point. For the capitalist system itself, the new problems in managing the economy and society require that a political authority autonomous from particular interests should be capable of tackling such long-term problems as the public debt, mass unemployment, regional underdevelopment with its growing poverty, criminality and violence, the need for ecological retooling of industry, efficient research and education, and the provision of services to companies. Furthermore, the new mode of assuring electoral consent has become too costly in terms of public assistance and privileges small or large, while the political passivity of wide layers of the population is not only resulting in absenteeism on election day but also creating the potential for localist, nationalist or racist subversion.

In order to assert its grip on the economy and society, the system therefore needs to accentuate still further the oligarchic and repressive character of political power. In many countries, including my own, the signs of this can already be seen. The battle to defend democracy is thus becoming a great opportunity for any Left that is prepared to fight it seriously. But in this battle it is absolutely essential to attack not only the most explicit forms of authoritarianism but also the de facto centres of power such as the information and education apparatuses, the internal company regimes or the international institutions. It has to be fought and won not only in the institutions and at the ballot box but also in the midst of society, through an effort of organization, education and day-to-day struggle that will restore life and autonomy to the sovereign people. In short, it is a battle for real and not just formal democracy, which can also bring together sizeable sectors from the liberal tradition, the religious world and the established political parties.

### *(iii) Cooption and Marginalization*

Finally, although I do not have the time to develop an argument which you anyway know as well as I do, there is the whole field constituted by the struggle for peace, disarmament and the development of the Third and Fourth Worlds. Here, too, we know that the road to a genuine alternative will be long and arduous. But it seems clear to me that today,

as never before, the bases are developing for a conflict between the peoples of the South and the policies of the capitalist metropolis.

There are fundamental, long-term reasons why this is so, such as the model of productive growth and consumption which cannot be extended as such to the whole planet. But there are also a number of immediate issues behind the perspective of conflict: an irrecoverable external debt with a crippling level of interest rates; the support for subaltern privileged classes, for the comprador bourgeoisie and its raging free-tradism; the implementation of protectionist policies in international trade, and so on. The prevailing attitude to the South in the capitalist heartlands is now one of harsher selection: the aim is to coopt a certain fringe of countries and classes, to hasten the marginalization of the whole African continent and of huge masses in Asia or Latin America, and to tackle the ensuing conflicts by means of an armed-to-the-teeth international police. All these trends have been apparent in the Gulf War followed by Pax Americana in the Middle East, the strangling of Nicaragua and similar plans for Cuba, and the conversion of NATO into a rapid-deployment force. But apart from the fact that these trends arouse opposition in the South and offend moral sensibilities, they open up quite a few problems within the West itself, where they contradict the tradition of European democracy. Above all, in objective terms, the collapse of the South within a unified world immediately threatens to have a number of catastrophic effects on the North: for example, the environmental disaster (think of Brazil's Amazonian question as a world problem); the further twist in the spiral of militarization; or the biblical migration of labour from South and East towards the West, with all its repercussions in social dumping and cultural racism.

This is the *material* foundation for a new internationalism which, in uniting the European Left and progressive forces in the Third World, could draw in a huge array of political forces and social interests. I do not mean to say that I am expecting another 'new deal' in the near future, or an easy return of the Left to office in Europe on the basis of new ideas and programmes. But I do think that some of the conditions exist for a Left that is serious in intent to constitute a determined opposition of mass proportions (not a sermonizing minority) and to forge a series of genuine alliances.

#### 4. The Old PCI and Communist Refoundation

In conclusion, you might find of interest a few words about what is happening today in the Italian Left, in which I am myself personally involved. The Left in Italy has been represented by a Communist party rather different from others, which until a few years ago regularly won 30 per cent of the vote, with a membership of one and a half million and a strong presence in the unions and local administration.

You will certainly know that at the end of 1989, after the Berlin Wall collapsed, the Secretary of the PCI proposed a change in its name; that a considerable section of the party leadership and rank and file opposed this move in the resolutions it tabled at a special congress; and that

although the opposition was marginal in the party apparatuses, it won the support of a third of the membership, nearly a half in the big cities. What you may not know, however, is that unlike elsewhere this opposition was not, and is not today, characterized by dogmatic, conservative or pro-Soviet positions. Indeed, in Italy the impetus towards a critique of actually existing socialism and research into the new themes of modern capitalism has mainly come from the Left of the party. This Left, then, did not stand against radical renewal but opposed a hasty change of name which would blot out the PCI's independent history, uncritically take on board social-democratic or even liberal traditions and cultures, and above all serve as the accompaniment to a further rightward shift in the party's programme and policies.

The eventual outcome was a crisis and a split. Of the 1.4 million members of the PCI, only 700,000 joined the new party, the PDS. Its electoral support, judging by recent local results, has fallen beneath 20 per cent. In response to this diaspora, others have set themselves the aim of keeping alive a different, refounded communist party—which may be possible at least in Italy. The building of a new organization, whose name precisely is *Rifondazione Comunista*, is now underway, and in a few months it has recruited 150,000 members and averaged 6 per cent of the vote in local elections. At the same time, it intends to keep the broader founding process open to other anti-capitalist forces and movements, and to pursue a unity policy towards other forces on the Left including the Socialist Party and the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS), the only proviso being that they should be serious about their role as an opposition.

The reflections here submitted for your discussion have obviously been made in my personal capacity, because that is the basis on which I was invited. But they largely reflect orientations that were quite widespread in the quest of the old Communist Party, and a fortiori in the one that is seeking a refoundation. I am particularly happy to be able to discuss these matters here with you, for the important political reason that Brazil is today a world vantage point of exceptional interest—both negatively, as an operational model of the animal spirits of unbridled capitalism, and positively, because of the strong presence of a new and combative, militant and creative, Left that you as a party represent. I thank you for inviting me to speak, but more especially for what I will be able to test out and learn from you.