

From Seattle to Nice

A balance-sheet of the anti-globalisation movement

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The movement against globalisation and the world institutions of capital, which was sparked off by the December 1999 demonstrations against the WTO summit in Seattle, has put its mark on the world political arena.

Since then every meeting of the big economic and financial institutions, in Washington, Davos, Prague and Nice and, obviously on a smaller scale, in Genoa, Ancona and Bologna, has been besieged by thousands, and tens of thousands, of demonstrators.

The winds of change are blowing. Since the 1980s capitalism and its ideological dogmas - the free market, flexibility, profit and, of course, globalisation - had seemed to be winning on all fronts. But now, significant sections of youth, workers and even middle class people are questioning the workings of the system. This is happening not only in the poorer Southern hemisphere of the world, but also in the developed West, and in the USA in particular, the cradle of the multinationals and the so-called new economy.

As Marxists we participate in this movement. We see this movement as the clearest sign that a new generation of youth has entered the struggle to transform the world we live in. But precisely because we want this struggle to be successful, we see

the need to discuss and bring out not only all its potential but also the limits of this movement. This is the only way to strengthen it and to go on to achieve significant victories.

The Seattle experience

The mass challenge to the WTO meeting at Seattle also acted as a catalyst setting off mobilisations here in Europe. Fifty thousand people on the streets of Seattle were a sight that had not been seen for many years in the USA. What was the decisive feature of that demonstration? As well as all kinds of more or less radical, environmentalist and other types of organisations and associations, the key element that brought about a qualitative step forward was the participation of the working class, of trade union members from all over the country, organised in the AFL-CIO, the main trade union organisation of the USA. Even Sweeney, the AFL-CIO secretary, was at the counter-demonstration.

Undoubtedly some of the AFL-CIO's demands were of a protectionist, nationalist nature, including opposition to the entry of China into the WTO. This, however, is an understandable, immature reaction of the working class to a situation where they feel threatened, in the absence of an internationalist alternative. It should also be said, by the way, that sections of the movement in Europe, whilst having a far more radical image, are not immune to protectionist sympathies.

The massive participation of sections of the working class in Seattle is simply a reflection of the growing militancy in the USA. There have been important disputes such as those at General Motors, UPS, in the service sector at Las Vegas and in California, and the Verizon struggle last summer. The majority of these ended in victories, or at least partial victories. There is a growth in unionisation in the country. Since 1995, when John Sweeney was elected leader of the AFL-CIO, American unions have been giving more attention to organising new layers of workers. This has been both an attempt to find a way out of their own crisis situation and a response to the growing pressure of the mass of

American workers who are demanding a real improvement in their steadily worsening conditions. In 1998 real wages were 12% lower than in 1979.

It was precisely the involvement of the workers that aroused concern among the US ruling class. And this was at a time of economic boom in the USA, itself based partly on the super-exploitation of the working class.

The mass involvement of the working class and its traditional organisations was the missing factor in the mobilisations in Italy and Europe, at least up until Nice. There on 6 December we saw a significant demonstration of 80-100,000 workers, brought onto the streets by the CES, the European trade union confederation. This was an important turn in events, even though the platform on which it was called was quite a moderate one; the CES supports the Charter of Rights approved at Nice by the EU governments and limits itself to calling for improvements in social rights.

The trade union and labour leaders not only do not oppose capitalist globalisation but in many cases they support it. And when they are in government, they take part in institutions such as the World Bank, the WTO, the OECD etc. The various Veltronis, Cofferatis, [Note: Veltroni is the secretary of the DS, ex-Italian CP; Cofferati is the general secretary of the CGIL trade union federation] Jospins and Blairs pose a considerable obstacle to an understanding by wide layers of the population of the nature of the conflict taking place. However, a serious poll among those taking part in the 6 December demo [in Nice] would have undoubtedly shown that the programme of the leaders was not shared so enthusiastically by the rank and file.

However, other difficulties in getting people involved in the movement arise from the way some sections of the anti-globalisation movement analyse existing class relations. They believe that the working class, at least in the western countries, no longer has a "central" role in the conflict, has been "integrated into the system", that the world of labour is "breaking down and disintegrating", "residual", "annihilated by flexibility and casualisation" and so on.

All these comrades believe that, with the ending (in the West) of Fordism and the traditional mass working class, workers' struggles are no longer possible, or that "various moments of conflict can develop, but none of these is able to block the mechanism of accumulation" (Andrea Fumagalli, *Sul reddito di cittadinanza*). In fact during the anti-OECD mobilisations in Bologna in June 2000 the majority of "Contropiani", the co-ordinating committee set up for the occasion, opposed the call for a general strike to stop the summit and put forward the slogan of a "citizens' strike".

"Citizens" or workers?

In reality Fordism and Taylorism are just two ways by which capitalism organises or has organised production. Marx had already reached this conclusion in the 1848 Communist Manifesto:

"The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones."

The working class, particular its leaders, has always been disorientated by changes in production methods. In Italy, before the great struggles of the Hot Autumn (1969) and then in the 1970s, the unions simply did not know how to organise unskilled workers arriving from the South, linked as they were to their traditional base among the skilled workers of Milan and Turin.

The bosses may be able to revolutionise the means of production, but there is one thing they cannot do without: wage labour. Human (or animal) labour is the only source of surplus value and it is precisely from this surplus value, these "unpaid workers' wages", that the bosses extract their profit. The number of wage labourers worldwide is not falling but increasing. Even in the

OECD countries, where large-scale restructuring is taking place, the number of workers in industry has risen, if only slightly, from 112 million in 1973 to 113 million in 1995. In the other so-called developing countries, the industrial labour force has grown from 285 million in 1980 to 407 million in 1995.

[source: www.labornotes.org]

In Italy the number of people employed in large-scale industries is falling, but at the same time thousands of jobs are being created in the so-called service sector, often with large concentrations of workers in the same place, as in the call-centres.

The restructuring of industry over the last twenty years or so has not been a revolution. It was a response to the present stage of general stagnation of capitalism. The markets have not been growing at the same levels of the previous period and the capitalists, in order to keep up their profit margins, also with the help of new technology, have been cutting everything there is to cut - the workforce, wages, breaks, warehouse stocks - with speed-ups, longer hours etc.

There is talk of "immaterial" labour, which is supposed to mean anything involving the transmission of knowledge, people working with information technology, on the Internet etc. Some claim that this is a place of "liberation", where "men have ceased to be mere means of production". We would maintain that the mechanisms regulating this sector of the economy are very similar to those of "old" capitalism. Firstly because "information" workers still sell their labour power to one or more bosses, and it matters little whether they do this from home or by sitting at a desk in an office every day. Secondly because in this sector all the casual forms of labour are used to a very wide extent (self-employed, etc.), leaving workers without any guarantees at all. For every operator who feels fulfilled by his or her "immaterial" labour, there are a hundred others who are very "materially" exploited by their bosses.

In fact, while the new organisation of labour does indeed pose new problems of organisation and struggle of the workers, in no way does it eliminate the contradiction between capital and

labour. On the contrary, by increasing exploitation and casualisation in exchange for nothing they are preparing new explosions of the working class.

An example is Verizon Communications in the USA, where 87,200 employees downed tools, forcing this enormous US telecommunications company to the negotiating table with the unions. Verizon is the result of a merger between Bell Atlantic Corporation and GTE. The owners wanted to achieve this merger by cutting jobs and wages. The strike, which took place in several plants at the same time and lasted from 15 to 18 days depending on the area, achieved a good result: a three-year contract providing for a 12% pay increase over three years, a 14% increase in company pensions and some limits posed on "forced overtime", a measure which the company has always made wide use. An equally important result was achieved on trade union rights: union organisers will be allowed to speak to the employees of Verizon Wireless (the biggest American mobile phone company) and unionise them. This is an important development for it opens up the possibility of unionising, in the USA, an increasingly important section of the working class in the developed countries.

The problem is that when it comes to organising the working class there are always certain obstacles: repression by the bosses, the downturn in the workers' movement, the role of the union bureaucracy. Most of the groups involved in the mobilisation against globalisation, at least in Italy, have developed a sectarian attitude towards the main union federations. However, whether we like it or not, these trade unions do organise the majority of the working class. There is a belief that such obstacles can be overcome by denying the central role of wage labour, for example with the idea that the city areas have now become the decisive terrain of conflict. (See "A kind of new cardinal point from which to start in understanding the present. The city areas as a key to understanding the social dynamics but also as a possible answer to the loss of identity that goes with social uprooting". "Carta", May 2000).

We would like to remind these people, if we may, that historical experience shows that it has always been in moments of upturn of the labour movement, as in Italy in the early 1970s, that move-

ments involving other layers, (for the right to housing and health care, for women's rights and social rights in general), have been able to take decisive steps forward. And, conversely, when there has been a downturn in the struggles of the working class, these sectors have suffered considerable setbacks. This has affected the poorer districts (the "city areas") leading to their increasing degradation.

So where are these forces that are supposed to play an active role in a "citizens' strike"? We are all citizens, at least in our own countries. The capitalists and the bankers, who organise the meetings of the OECD and the IMF, are also citizens. And the workers, the pensioners and the unemployed, who are affected by the decisions of these economic potentates, are also citizens. Are we to believe that the first of these groups [the capitalists and the bankers] can go on "strike" against itself? If we do not clarify which social classes a demand is aimed at, the only result will be participation on an individual basis. This is what we saw in the May and June 2000 demonstrations in Genoa and Bologna. 5-10,000 people turning out on a demonstration is a good starting point, but they are in no way near the levels needed to change the balance of forces in society.

There is of course the issue of citizenship rights for immigrants. But who are the immigrants in Italy? An "excluded" caste who cannot be placed socially? Four out of five immigrants in Italy are wage workers. The struggle to conquer democratic rights therefore has precise class connotations and must be linked to the struggle of the Italian working class, who the immigrants work side by side with. It was not by chance that the movement around the question of legal entry permits last summer began in Brescia. Brescia is one of the most industrialised areas of Italy. Again it was no accident that many of these immigrant workers began to organise around traditional workers' organisations like the FIOM (the metalworkers' union).

The "new places of conflict"

Who are supposed to be the protagonists of change, and where do the conflicts take place within the process of globalisation? Marco Revelli, the well-known Italian

sociologist, has made a great effort to analyse globalisation and how it relates to the recent movement. recently he wrote: "we must first of all build an alternative to the 20th century-style model summed up in the axis 'factory-party-state'. We must identify the places, the spaces and the means by which to organise non-identification with the capitalist model (...). We can talk of the third sector, we can talk of social economy, we can talk of counter-power, of liberated spaces" (M. Revelli, P. Tripodi, *Lo stato della globalizzazione*, p. 17, 1998).

Within the third sector (of social, equitable and solidarity trade co-operatives) there are undoubtedly some worthwhile experiences, which should be supported. But how can anyone fail to see that, far from being "a thorn in the flesh of capitalism", the development of the third sector is one of the levers by which capital is dismantling the welfare state and that often behind these non-profit co-operatives there are actually large profits with huge exploitation of the co-operative workers themselves?

How can anyone imagine, as Revelli does, that the third sector can become "a place in which conscious collective labour can take place, not to produce goods but a social coming together, that scarce resource which the post-Fordist economy consumes and destroys" ("Almanacco di Carta, July 2000)?

We have already witnessed a similar experience, in Italy and other countries of Europe, in the co-operative movement which developed at the beginning of the 20th century with similar aims to those of Revelli today. Within capitalist society these cooperatives had to succumb to the mechanisms of the market and become companies very much like the others, as is shown by the experience of the Legacoop [Cooperatives' League].

If we extend this idea of the "liberated spaces", to the concepts of social coming together and culture, the experience of the "social centres" since the end of the 1970s is a significant one [the 'centri sociali' were buildings that had been occupied and used as alternative centres of socialisation by what was then known as the 'Autonomia']. We obviously defend the existence of any such self-organized spaces against attacks of the reactionary and state forces. However, we have to note the two symmetrical processes

that have been developing throughout the 1990s in these Italian "social centres". On the one hand we have seen a gradual moving away from political struggles, with these centres becoming exclusively places of artistic-cultural production or concert venues. On the other hand there is an ultra-left section which shuts itself off into a ghetto, whose only point of reference is its own political or cultural milieu (autonomi, anarchists, punk, etc.). Very few of these "social centres" have been able to avoid this process.

The strategy of building economic or socially "liberated spaces", islands of "self-management" within capitalism, that gradually conquer more and more important spaces, cannot work except at very low levels of development that do not trouble the ruling class. Sooner or later capitalism absorbs these experiences or annihilates them, if there is no revolutionary overturn which changes the dominant, capitalist mode of production and replaces it with a socialist one.

Even more fanciful is the idea "that employers finance self-organisation and self-management centres, where the workers can work to reclaim the land and remove the damage created by industrial activity" (M. Revelli, op. cit., p. 27). Can anyone imagine Lucchini and Agnelli [two major Italian capitalists] laying out millions of dollars for self-managed activities of the workers to reclaim Mirafiori [the biggest FIAT plant in Italy] or Cornigliano [an old steelworks]? There is little difference between these ideas and the moaning of the DS and CGIL leaders who 'tell the bosses off' for not investing in the "development of the country". Any abandoning of a Marxist analysis of the contradictions between wage labour and capital opens the door to all kinds of reformist ideas.

The state of the movement

*"I would have liked to make a revolution;
But for the moment
I make movement for the movement's sake"*

(words of the group Assalti Frontali, (frontal attacks) from their album Conflitto).

The layers involved up to now in the antiglobalisation movement in Europe have been largely made up of students, some unemployed and casual workers, and sections of the middle classes, particularly in France, around Jose Bovè's Confederation Paysanne. In Prague the organised workers' movement was conspicuous by its almost complete absence, along with a very low participation of the Czech population in the protests.

It is an important movement, but not yet a mass movement and, as we have already explained, the only way for it to become a mass movement is to involve the working class. From this point of view, both the demands and the methods of struggle are paramount.

Up to now, spontaneity and "movimentismo" [i.e. the movement is everything] have been the dominant features of the mobilisations. From Seattle to Washington, from Davos to Genoa and then Geneva, via Bologna, Prague and Nice. And don't forget 2001, with Porto Alegre, the G8 summit at Genoa and so on... The activists are asked to put in a lot of free time with the will (and means) to travel around the world. Obviously this is possible only for a small group of people, whose numbers tend to dwindle with the passing of time. This makes it very difficult to guarantee genuine democracy in the decision-making process. Votes are rarely taken in the meetings of this movement, and often all forms of delegation are rejected and decisions are taken by those most prepared for physical resistance, and by the more assiduous meeting-goers.

The question many activists might ask themselves is: to go from one demo to another to achieve what? Everybody knows that the IMF and the G8 are not going to be democratised that easily.

You cannot keep thousands of people in a permanent state of mobilisation. Movements are an exception in history, not the rule. In general the masses choose other routes to solve their problems. A vanguard can try to speed up the consciousness-raising process of the rest of the mass, but can't expect to substitute themselves for the masses by "creating" a movement. When mobilisations break out, the task of a more conscious group (we dare say a party, at the risk of irritating our fellow participants with more modern ideas) is to provide them with a perspective and coordinate the struggles through a programme which sets common objectives.

One of the most glaring limits of the movement is precisely the absence of a series of demands linking the final objective to the struggle for better working conditions, to defend wages, the right to study, to housing and health. A programme which addresses the concrete contradictions that the masses experience every day would achieve results, extending and generalising the awareness of the need to struggle for a different world also among those who generally do not concern themselves with the big issues.

In the absence of such an approach, with the majority still politically inactive, the spontaneity of an angry minority gets the upper hand and is expressed, in the destruction of property belonging to well-known multinationals, in clashes with the police, etc.

What is worse is that there are those who give theoretical backing to these acts, defining them as "direct action", "the conquest of symbolic objectives" etc.

Immediately after the Prague events, the Document of the *Tute Bianche* [White Overalls] of Italy, Finland, the Czech Republic, Greece, Madrid, explained that the destruction of MacDonald's was "a direct action of civil disobedience and a new legality, from below (...). In Prague we wanted to start precisely from this point: broadening the concept and the practice of civil disobedience and

direct action, not restricting them to fleeting acts of liberation, but genuine mass action of a new constituent legality".

Our criticism of these actions is not based on the fact that they are violent. In a society where the ruling class uses violence daily through wars and state repression, and where there are thousands of workplace deaths each year in Italy alone, the condemnation of "violence" by the ruling class and its spokesmen is outright hypocrisy.

But the question we should always ask is: who is using the violence? For what purpose? What concrete results does each individual action achieve? Does it take the movement forward or backwards? Does it help to raise the level of consciousness of those taking part in demonstrations and of the masses they want to influence?

Our aim is not to destroy a MacDonald's but to expropriate the entire multinational chain and place it under workers' control. The company is harmed more by a strike of MacDonald's workers, as happened first in Florence and Catania and then nationally at the beginning of this year, than by actions such as those that took place in Prague. In fact the efforts used for "direct action" should have been addressed to persuading the workers there, and in the main workplaces of the city, to join the anti-WTO demonstration... which was unlikely to happen as the megaphone announcements by the protest organisers were translated into several languages with the notable exception of Czech!

We do not believe that the "showdowns" with the police which seem to take place in every demo, for mainly publicity reasons (as admitted by Luca Casarini, spokesman of the centri sociali of North East Italy), can serve to raise the consciousness of all the workers and youth who are watching, and who even sympathise, with the movement. At most they can cheer from the sidelines... but what will they propose to their fellow workers or students the next day? A "showdown" with their boss or head teacher?

Thus the "actions" organised by these groups in the end are in fact nothing but "fleeting acts of liberation". A few thousand people from all over Europe in Prague are not insignificant, but neither

are they a mass force and it is difficult to imagine them imposing a "new constituent legality" on governments. The attempt to obstruct the conferences of the IMF or the WTO may well be of great symbolic value, but it would be a dangerous illusion to imagine that this is the way to block the workings of the capitalist system. In the end the whole thing boils down to a clash with the police, who will be better prepared with each conference, while the "bosses of the world" take their decisions elsewhere.

In addition, symbols have a value so long as they are seen to represent a real content. In Italy we have seen the importance of "symbols" such as the "hammer and sickle" emblem of the Italian Communist Party. Why was it so important for millions of people? The PCI was seen as the party that (with the essential contribution of mass struggles) had achieved great conquests for the working class. Once the PCI and union leaders started along the road of counter-reforms and sacrifices in the 1970s, that symbol lost its meaning for an important part of the masses and it became relatively easy for Occhetto [the then general secretary of the Italian Communist Party] and company to gradually abandon it. It will take new struggles, and particularly new victories, of the oppressed classes to bring the traditional symbols of the labour movement back into their own, possibly alongside other, new ones.

Market reform?

The central point in any case is the programme. Even in what is considered the most radical mind of the movement, the *Tute Bianche* and the *Ya Basta* association, we find a lot of confusion on this point. The document already quoted states: "To us, making a society means destroying and building, blocking the mechanisms of the empire, being slaves in rebellion and not enslaved rebels. Building, because we dream of a different world, where all the differences of this planet find a way to live together, where inclusion and social justice are the antidote to generalised barbarism".

Aside from the fine imagery of the prose, the objectives remain unclear. What does a "different world" consist of? How can we achieve "social justice" and free ourselves from slavery?

The antiglobalisation movement has so far been a movement "against", which is running into considerable difficulty in defining what it is struggling "for", and setting out an alternative to the capitalist system.

In the final document of the Geneva alternative summit we read the following: "We demand a radical change in the IMF and the World Bank because they are at the origin of world poverty, exacerbated by growing inequality (...). The conference calls for: openness and democratisation of the IMF/World Bank (...). The future existence, the structure and the policies of these organisations must be determined through a democratic process.

The schemes of the World Bank and the policies of the IMF must respect and promote human rights (...)".

These formulations are nothing but pious illusions. How can anyone believe that the IMF and the World Bank will respect human rights? The only "rights" they will respect are those of their founders, i.e. the logic of profit. Even if the president of the International Monetary Fund were elected democratically by the nations, the policy he would have to carry out, remaining within the confines of capitalism, would be that of the great economic giants. It is not a question of calling for changes, even radical ones, in these institutions; even their abolition, whilst having an enormous value, would not solve the problem. It would have to be related to the struggle against the capitalist system and could not be limited to "democratising" the decision-making process within the existing system. Leaders of reformist parties often talk of "bringing politics to the forefront in relation to economics", but politics is not neutral; it defends the interests of one class or another. In the last few years in much of Europe we have seen left or centre-left governments not wanting to question the free market and, as a result, have basically carried out the interests of the capitalist class through neoliberal policies.

Neoliberalism is depicted as a new capitalist poison, requiring some kind of antidote. In reality there is nothing new about the free trade policy, which was applied by Britain in the second half of the 19th century to impose its domination of the world market. The bourgeoisie has often alternated between free trade and

protectionism, between state intervention and laissez faire politics, depending on which they felt was more useful to maximise their profits. Their choices have also been influenced by the pressure of other social classes, mainly the working class, but where reforms were granted (as in Europe in the 1960s and 70s), they were aimed at heading off a revolutionary movement. Neoliberalism, like Keynesianism, represents just one face of capitalist exploitation. Neither policy represents a solution to the problems of humanity.

"We movements and organisations, undertake to work for a system of international fair trade under democratic control"

(Document of the alternative Geneva summit).

Many people support the idea that neoliberalism can be fought by building an alternative chain of production and exchange. The small producers in the southern hemisphere, (even better if they produce organic products), are supposed to be helped by a "critical consumers" movement here in the northern hemisphere, in order to weaken the power of the multinationals. Unfortunately it is impossible to change the capitalist system starting from consumption, the last link in the chain. "Equitable solidarity trade" cannot compete with mass production and modern distribution systems, at least in a market economy. The idea seems to be that it would be enough to change the purchasing choices of the population, who are relegated to the role of consumers.

The domination of the agricultural and food multinationals and the big commercial chains is based on their ability to cut prices and control all sectors of the market (land ownership, seed and animal feed production, slaughtering, conservation, scientific research etc.). How can anyone realistically believe they can put these giants in difficulty with a return to small scale trade and production? At the same time, it is already clear to everyone how easily big business also cashes in on issues such as healthcare, respect for workers' and producers' rights, defence of the environment, etc. What are naively defined as forms of production or trade that are incompatible or even antagonistic to the

market, are in reality regarded by the bosses as new market sectors to be conquered. Supermarket shelves are now full of "equitable, solidarity, organic" products; multinationals like Ikea, Nike, Apple and others try, not unsuccessfully, to give themselves an "alternative" image (Ikea: "democratic design"; "Apple: think different", etc.) as a weapon of competition in the market. The key to their success does not of course lie in their "astuteness" but in their prices and extensive distribution systems, which can beat the competition of any "alternative" chain or at least relegate it to negligible market niches.

In the end it all boils down to appealing to the conscience of consumers to buy "clean". But such an appeal can only affect better-off consumers in a position to spend more and will be less effective the nearer it gets to lower income working class families, who have more difficulty in making ends meet. In other words, the appeal will be all the less effective among those who, as workers and as consumers, suffer more the abuses and horrors of capitalism on health and the environment. Ultimately we are back to the old sentimental talk that to change the world we must first change the way people think, fight selfishness and stir individual consciences. This may be convincing for the "progressive" intellectual, but much less so for people who do not go to the supermarket mainly to salve their consciences; the latter would be quite happy to be able to spend more on better quality products (including organic ones) but can't afford to do so except perhaps occasionally. It should also be said that in the unlikely event of the alternative trade sector really becoming a protagonist in the economy, capable of competing with the big multinationals, we would inevitably see it develop according to the same logic that regulates the market in general, with the formation of large companies, maybe as consortiums. There would be a proletarianisation of their workforce on one side and the formation of a new sector of the agricultural and commercial bourgeoisie on the other, and so on.

The problem is therefore to understand how to fight our enemies, and what forces can really challenge them. Nike has no difficulty in going along with philanthropic campaigns for "ethical" footballs and the like. It would be much more difficult for it to cope with revolutionary developments in a country like Indonesia,

where it produces most of its shoes and where the workers who have made Nike's fortune have rebelled against the dictatorial Suharto regime and are beginning to understand that they possess the power to fight and to change their future.

For a revolutionary programme

In the vast majority of these documents the question of the class struggle is totally absent. The theoreticians of the movement have drawn completely the wrong conclusions about the struggles of the workers' movement in the 1900s, and even more so about Stalinism.

According to these 'theoreticians' because the Western working class has not conquered power to date, it will never more be able to do so, according to some supreme divine law. As the Russian revolution degenerated, giving way to a monstrous bureaucratic ruling caste, any attempt by the oppressed classes to take power will inevitably develop into the most ruthless authoritarian regime.

No serious analysis is given as to the causes of the defeats of the working class in Italy or France, or the role of obstacle and brake played by the reformist or Stalinist organisations (of which these intellectuals were often an integral part). No explanation about the collapse of Stalinism or the reasons for capitalist restoration in the Eastern countries (of which many of them were fervent supporters, whether of Moscow, Beijing or Belgrade).

Thus all or most of the thinking of the labour movement of the 19th and 20th centuries is thrown overboard, particularly the aspects regarding the conquest of the hegemony of the working class and the taking of power, developed chiefly by Lenin and Trotsky, but also by Marx and Engels.

The accusation which is often hurled at us Marxists should really be applied to these exponents of "critical thought". They are guilty of downright "dogmatism" in their rejection of the experience of Bolshevism up to the early 1920s, Lenin's analysis of imperialism and the state, Trotsky's analysis of fascism, revolutionary tactics and strategy, and of the theory of the degenerated

workers' state. As we have seen, this closure and deafness towards revolutionary ideas leads them to embrace the ideas of reformism, even though dressed up in radical phraseology and methods.

What is worrying is that these ideas have found an increasing echo also within our party, the PRC, and in the Young Communists, with a section that even goes as far as saying that in practice we should dissolve the party into this movement with a total "contamination" (in other words subordination) to the elements of the so-called "alternative left". The reason for such proposals is to be found in the complete lack of an independent theoretical elaboration on the part of the PRC, which, like a body without an immune system, catches disease at the first exposure.

"The modern day problem concerns the breaking away from capital, the construction of subjectivities outside and against the capitalist processes (...). Today the problem is one of managing the exodus from capital, of the transfer of vital resources from within the capitalist, mercantile production relations towards antagonistic forms (...). We are no longer dealing with a hydraulic conception of the revolution, whereby capitalism produces from within itself the class which grows to burst asunder the network of production relations through an increasing internal pressure. What we require is for our world to be built outside and against capital, through a cultural effort of subjective production of a different social coming together"

(M. Revelli, op. cit., p 33).

The struggle against capitalist globalisation cannot be fought outside this system. The world to be changed is the one we live in and we cannot emigrate to a different planet to build another one. The capitalist class will not allow the transfer of "vital" resources to "antagonistic forms" or "another social reality" without striking a blow.

Without expropriating the big multinationals and the big financial groups, without transferring control of the economy from the hands of the bourgeoisie to our own, to the hands of the working class, a different world is impossible. Only through democratic planning of production by the working class itself and the abolition of the logic of the market and of profit is it possible to put an end to oppression, exploitation, the destruction of the environment, starvation and the underdevelopment in the southern hemisphere. This is what we call a struggle for socialism. To reach this objective a revolution is needed.

What is a revolution? Recently comrade Bertinotti, the leader of the PRC, gave an interview, a passage of which is worth commenting. "Revolution is not a revolt and cannot be conceived as a conquest of state power. And it cannot be done in a single country. We have to get back to the idea of revolution as a worldwide, long term process" (interview with *Corriere della Sera*, quoted by *Liberazione*, 21-1-2000).

We agree with Bertinotti that the revolution has to be worldwide, as the workings of capitalism are inextricably linked up internationally and socialism has to replace it. That this is a process, even a long-term one, is only partly true. It is certainly not a gradual process but undergoes sharp accelerations and sudden changes. In the course of this process of accumulation of molecular forces, which (we are sorry to have to contradict Revelli on this one) takes place precisely within capitalism and arises from its contradictions, a break comes about, with a transformation of quantity into quality. An insurrection, a revolt, where the question of the conquest of state power takes on decisive importance.

The result of a revolution depends precisely on whether the masses succeed in tearing power from the ruling class. The reasons for the defeat of the insurrection in Albania in 1997, or in Ecuador last January, lie precisely here.

However, it is not enough for the exploited classes to seize state power. This was already clear to Marx in the 19th century:

"The working class cannot simply lay its hands on the ready-made state machine and wield it for its own purposes"

(Marx, *The civil war in France*).

And again, after the Paris Commune, in 1871:

"The next attempt of the French revolution will not consist in transferring the military and bureaucratic machine from one hand to another, as has happened up to now, but in smashing it"

(Marx, 'Letters to Kugelmann', quoted in Lenin, *State and Revolution*).

Thus a socialist revolution implies the taking of power by the working class, to overthrow the bourgeois state and build another, i.e. a workers' democracy.

The task of a communist party is precisely to intervene, to pose itself as the vanguard in the movements, to coordinate those millions of exploited people who, in certain moments in history, decide to storm heaven. The lack of a revolutionary party has been the main reason for missed revolutionary opportunities, such as those mentioned above.

We do not hide the fact that this is a hard and difficult enterprise. However, the movement against globalisation, with tens of thousands of people rebelling against the capitalist system, is an anticipation of the mass struggles to come. The radicalisation of sections of the youth has often anticipated real revolutionary explosions, as at the time of the Russian revolution or in 1968 in France and partly in Italy.

Those who want to defend a Marxist programme must take up this challenge and build such an alternative in the movement, but more in general in the PRC, in the unions and in everyday life.