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# Fifteen Years of Inprecor

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*Inprecor is a militant, revolutionary Marxist magazine, firmly on the side of all exploited and oppressed peoples of the world. But to change the world it is first necessary to understand it in its complexity, its diversity, its national specificities, regions, histories, etc. That is why Inprecor deliberately publishes, in the first place, facts, firsthand information, and the necessary elements for an analysis, rather than simply ideological proclamations. Likewise, Inprecor has readily opened its pages to other organizations and militants involved in struggles, as well as to researchers specializing in one or another field, even when their opinions are not the same as ours. This has been our editorial approach for more than 15 years, since the appearance of issue number 0, dated May 1, 1974. To mark our number 300 (new system, 367 issues in all), Inprecor has interviewed Ernest Mandel, a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, on the changes which have taken place on the international scene during the last 15 years ; the evolution of the capitalist economy on a world scale ; the upheaval in the countries of the East, its effect on workers' consciousness ; the future of the socialist project and the conditions of struggle in the period opening up before us.*

Inprecor was founded at a time when the Fourth International and the entire revolutionary Marxist movement was still in the period of rapid growth following May '68. A change in the objective situation could clearly be seen after the defeat of the Portuguese revolution and the beginning of a long wave of international capitalist economic depression between 1974 and 1976. But there was something of a lag between these developments and their effects on the workers' movement, in the working class, and in the revolutionary vanguard.

We founded Inprecor and its English language version, International Viewpoint with the idea that we needed a tool for political analysis to influence the broader layers of the vanguard and to construct our own organization. This was a two-sided goal. During an initial period that goal was largely achieved to the limit of our still weak forces, which were nevertheless considerably larger than before 1968.

### **The turn in the situation**

Little by little there was a turn in the situation within the vanguard and within the workers' movement, leaving aside for the moment the new social movements. But in the workers' movement (in the broadest sense of that term) and in the national liberation movements the march of permanent revolution the change was clear.

For one thing, the working class in the imperialist countries was passive and on the defensive, as a result of the effects of the economic crisis, during the second half of the 1970s and certainly during the '80s. For another, the process of permanent revolution in the third world countries suffered a series of setbacks after the victory of the Sandinista revolution in 1979.

This difficult situation reached its lowest point between 1983 and 1985. The retreat of the workers' movement, the move toward defensive struggles, was linked to the objective situation, notably the growth of unemployment. It reacted also to subjective causes : a formidable neoliberal and neoconservative ideological campaign by the bourgeoisie ; the reflection of this in the workers' movement, the near total capitulation of the neo-Stalinist and social democratic bureaucratic apparatuses in the face of the offensive ; the difficulty that healthy forces of the workers' movement had in reorienting themselves politically, strategically, and from the point of view of organizing the struggle in conditions that were very different from the preceding period of virtually full employment.

### The period of retreat

This turn in the situation weighed on all of the revolutionary movements, on the Fourth International " and therefore also on Inprecor. Our expansion was halted. We also experienced setbacks which took the form of an aging of our cadres, fatigue, and a certain skepticism within our ranks after twenty years of fighting against the stream, a reduced subscription base for our publications, etc.

To some degree this reflected both the fact that we were not a sect and also that in a certain number of countries we were no longer simply tiny organizations of propagandists. Groups like that can grow, stagnate, or retreat independently of what happens in the real world. Because we were implanted in the working class and in the mass movement we were more or less tribunes of the fluctuation of that real movement, and therefore of larger forces. When they retreated, we retreated in a similar fashion.

Though inevitable in part, our retreat also resulted from a grave error which we committed at an international leadership level. We had strongly underestimated, in the wake of our movement's expansion after 1968, the necessity for a systematic policy of theoretical development, and for the renewal and rejuvenation of our cadre. We were too spontaneist in this regard. We believed that our growth would carry with it automatically a parallel development of the membership and the leadership. But this idea has proven false. We therefore find ourselves in a situation where the same number " or even a slightly smaller number " of cadres are available to be leaders in organizations which have grown considerably.

This gave rise to a series of tensions "not so much on the political plane, since in this area we have known relatively little internal dissent compared to other periods (not to mention the situation of Stalinism, Maoism, or Social Democracy)"but these tensions and contradictions have certainly weighed on the psychological level. We have experienced the inevitable consequences of hyperactivism when we wanted to do too much ; a partial feeling of failure, etc. We have therefore had great difficulty in stabilizing our national leadership apparatuses and in renewing them.

We have been too slow in paying attention to this gap. We tried to overcome it by creating permanent educational structures which have served us well. We have likewise attempted to redress the situation through Inprecor, International Viewpoint, and the similar publications in other languages, as well as through the theoretical organs of the international. We have launched the international youth camps. The results of these efforts are real but modest, and have not totally neutralized the negative effects of these phenomena.

## The Perspectives for Growth in the New International Situation

This second period has, without doubt, finally come to an end. We are now entering into a third phase, the outlines of which we can begin to see. Clearly, the retreat of workers' struggles has ceased. We are participating in a revival, partial to be sure, throughout Western Europe. In the countries of the third world, the struggles of the masses are seeing a spectacular new growth, above all in Brazil, in South Africa, in South Korea, in Algeria, etc. ; at the same time in important countries like India or Indonesia, the period of retreat has not yet reached an end.

The mass movement in the East

But what has changed the world situation most profoundly is, of course, the rise of the mass movement in the postcapitalist bureaucratic countries, firstly in the USSR, then in China, in the GDR, in Czechoslovakia, and finally in Romania.

It is true that there was also the development of Solidarity in Poland from 1980-81, which previewed what would happen in 1989. But the consecutive defeats of Jaruzelski's coup and the repression weakened that movement. We were right to say that on the organizational level Jaruzelski would be unable to wipe out a mass movement of such scope. But, incontestably, we underestimated at the time the disastrous effects of this defeat on the level of politics and ideology, certainly among the working class.

Now, for the first time since 1968 and on a larger scale we are seeing a rebirth of the mass movement in the three sectors of the world revolution. I think therefore that our movement is going to experience a new expansion, which will certainly be in proportion with our existing forces.

We approach this new rise of the mass movement, of course, stronger than in 1968, but weaker than 1975. It is evident that this fact is going to partially limit our growth, which will not be as great as it might have been, but will be real. It is not a question of breaking through to a mass movement, but the scope will be, without doubt, on the same scale as it was after 1968 on a numerical level but, what's more, with a more important and more significant geographic extension than at that time, and also with a greater implantation in the trade unions and in the working class.

We have other advantages as well : above all, the changed social composition of many of our sections means that there will be an important implantation in the working class salaried and trade union. Secondly, in a series of key areas we have succeeded in sharpening our theory and our programmatic analysis. Compared to the period which immediately followed 1968 our analysis and written texts are less all-encompassing than before, but more serious, more scientific, more durable. Without false modesty, it can be said that ours is among the best work done during the last 15 years by those who consider themselves part of the world Marxist movement. There do remain some areas, notably ecology, where we have been very slow and continue to have a great deal to learn.

### **Social and democratic internal transformation**

We must also add another element which we have not yet completely come to grips with. The transformation of the social composition of our organizations, their proletarianization, poses a new problem.

At the beginning, most of our sections were organizations of revolutionary activists detached, in part, from the social reality of their countries. Involvement in internationalist activity absolutely necessary for a revolutionary organization substituted itself in part, therefore, for their participation in the real mass struggles of their own countries. Their redefinition, their transformation into organizations composed mostly of normal working people having a family life, a significant trade union activity, etc., and for whom the rhythms of militancy are no longer the same, was a difficult change and has had consequences, notably in their internal functioning.

This poses the question of the real not formal essence of internal democracy. Internal democracy is not measured only by the number of reports at a congress, or by the number of pages in the internal bulletin. It is measured by the real participation once again, not the formal participation of the rank and file, and especially the rank-and-file workers, in the development of political ideas and in making political decisions. And this raises many questions which have not yet been completely resolved.

The balance sheet of former experiences by the second and third internationals is a balance sheet of semifaillure. The development of the mass base of these two organizations was accompanied by the phenomenon of bureaucratization which progressively though with a certain unevenness reduced, and then stifled, workers' democracy. This will be, without doubt, the decisive test of our own history. Will we be capable, in the ten years to come, of solving this problem, of finding a method to combine the growth of our organizations with the maintenance

and reinforcement of internal democracy and a constant effort at education and development ?

# A Profound Ideological, Political, Strategic, and Moral Crisis of the Working Class

On the ideological and political plane, also on a strategic plane, the situation does not allow us to entertain hopes of a breakthrough in the short term, with the exception of a few countries – and even there ! All of this continues to be marked by the absence of a united strategic vision, a fundamental goal, a global « plan » for changing society. The general tone is profoundly skeptical, and we cannot just say that this is because of the influence of the bourgeoisie – though that changes very little as far as the result is concerned.

### **Crisis of socialist perspectives...**

The international working class is deeply troubled, if not to say traumatized, by the historic bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social Democracy with their promises about constructing a fundamentally different society from the one in which we live : a society that is unjust, unequal, burdened with catastrophes, which the masses reject without having the ability to define anything to replace it.

The crisis – which could be called a crisis of socialist perspectives, of a plan to transform society on a world scale – is an extremely profound ideological, political, strategic, moral crisis. The very promising mass movement that we see developing – at least in its initial phase – is therefore revolving around immediate objectives, which it believes it has the ability to win and which have been won at times with a surprising rapidity and energy, and not only in the countries of the East.

Here you have the negative side, which means that we must wage a long fight – against the current – on the political, theoretical, and strategic plane. The conclusion that must be drawn is that the questions of education, development, defense of program and of the fundamental values of socialism, must occupy a more important place in the forefront of our activity. We can in no way confine ourselves exclusively to the immediate demands of the masses. Certainly we will take an active part in these struggles, trying to play a leading role. Regarding this, we have made important progress thanks to our implantation in the working class and in the mass movement. But that is not enough.

Finding a global alternative for society is not an automatic product of a growing struggle. Here we have an essential job to do. And we are practically the only ones who can accomplish it, since we cannot be accused of treason, crimes, or lies. We have a spotless banner. We are the only ones who are in a position to claim, as an international current, to represent the tradition of socialism and of communism as it was established by the founders of the workers' movement, of Marxism.

### **... And new possibilities**

But on the other side, beyond this profound weakness which must not be underestimated, we now have a gigantic advantage which completely changes the situation as we have known it. The failure of Stalinism, of post-Stalinism, and of traditional reformism, is opening up a very large arena beyond the power of the traditional bureaucratic apparatuses to control. This is the first time that there has been such a situation since the beginning of the 1920s. The weaknesses of Stalinism and reformism create significant openings in a whole series of countries. This liberates very broad social forces.

That is the common explanation for what has happened in Poland in 1980-81, Brazil, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, El Salvador, South Africa, South Korea, and, on a more modest scale, in the trade union left in Western Europe, etc. All of these movements are deeply committed to independence and workers' democracy. They are infused with an antibureaucratic and antiauthoritarian spirit, and they are opposed to manipulation, "verticalism," etc. This opens up great possibilities for us. In this milieu we are like fish in water. We are able to defend our entire program. We are not denounced, censured, or slandered, and still less persecuted or assassinated.

### Promising shifts

This is a completely new situation. Do not forget that even in France, in the French Democratic Workers Federation (CFDT) [the social democratic trade union federation] "home of the grand defenders of democracy" when a fighting union left-wing emerged in which we worked and made some progress, the axe fell; they were expelled. We were likewise treated as "black sheep." This type of development is, for the moment, impossible in the Brazilian PT [Workers Party], impossible in the embryonic mass movement in South Korea, or in South Africa, and it is certainly impossible in the GDR, in Czechoslovakia, and also in the USSR, where people went through a terrible experience with Stalinism and have become ultrasensitive to any form of repression in the workers' movement.

Certainly, all of this is only a promising shift, nothing more. The rest depends on our ability to intervene in the mass movement, to practice politics in our own name, to not be sectarian, to defend and enrich our program—and also on our numerical forces, since you can only grow on the basis of what you have to start with. But this is a new situation which our movement, and others besides, have not yet taken the real measure of. Paradoxically, it is in those countries where the workers' movement seems to be the weakest, because of the crisis of Stalinism, that there exists the greatest opportunity for the development of a mass movement which will escape the control of the bureaucratic apparatuses.

## The Evolution of the World Capitalist Economy

The situation in the international capitalist economy is characterized, since the beginning of the 1970s, by a long wave of depression which continues to indicate a traditional industrial cycle. Many people were astonished at the duration of the expansion after the recession of 1980-82. But what has been most characteristic of this expansion is not its duration, but its limited nature.

Despite the favorable conjuncture, the rate of expansion is much lower than what it was during growth periods 25 years ago. Unemployment continues to increase; inter-imperialist contradictions are becoming accentuated. The economic crisis in the third world countries is reaching catastrophic proportions, unequalled even by the situation 10 or 15 years ago.

### A question of the depression ?

As a result, an expansion of the capitalist economy comparable to the boom which took place during the postwar years is for the moment totally unrealistic. It is another matter whether, in the longer term "let us say during the twenty-first century" such an expansion is possible. But it is necessary to point out the conditions. A new recession is inevitable, even if the date is a matter for discussion. But if the next cycle of expansion that follows this recession is going to develop into a new boom of the 1948-73 type two conditions must be met.

The first would be an extremely grave defeat of the working class in the imperialist countries. In all of these countries, the decline of real wages for the workers has only been 10 or 15 percent during the last 15 years, which is insufficient for the bourgeoisie. If in the coming ten years this cut reaches 30 or 40 percent — what would be equivalent to the situation in Germany after the victory of Nazism in 1933 — then there will be a growth in the rate of profit thanks to a spectacular growth in the rate of surplus value. This could relaunch a process of accumulation of productive capital — rather than speculative capital — on a grand scale. But simply a growth in the rate of profit is not sufficient. There is a second condition : a spectacular expansion of the market.

This could come about on two conditions. Firstly, the appearance of an area of mass production which would be a driving force for the whole capitalist economy, comparable to the role played by the automobile industry and housing construction during the postwar boom — that is to say, merchandise which could find hundreds of millions of buyers on a world scale. For the moment we cannot foresee anything of this nature — not for a lack of new inventions, new technological innovations, but because of a matrix of economic and social factors. The great majority of workers, even those who are well paid, do not have the means to buy computers, or cellular telephones for their cars. At the same time, they do not see what use they can make of these things.

The second requirement would be a geographical expansion, which implies a qualitatively superior integration of the USSR and China into the capitalist world economic market. Therefore, it is not a question of 6 million dollars a year, but 60 or 100 million dollars per year in the growth of East-West exchanges. That appears totally unrealistic for the moment. Outside of the countries of the East such an expansion of the market is excluded. It is not possible, simultaneously, to superexploit the countries of the third world — even less those undergoing development like Brazil or Turkey — and also have them act as purchasers on a large scale. It is here that we find the source of all of the contradictions of the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and of the indebtedness faced by these countries.

What would be more useful for international capitalism in the long term would be, on the contrary, to increase the funds available to these nations and not their debt. But who will be able to bring such a thing about in a climate of extreme inter-imperialist rivalry made worse by the long depression and by

the absence of an imperialist power able to impose its will ? The United States is not up to the task and Japan is no longer ready to start out on that road. As for European imperialism, and certainly German imperialism, at the same time that they seem more inclined to pursue such a course, they do not have the necessary political apparatus on a world scale and are too divided amongst themselves.

As a result, in terms of the long wave, none of the conditions which would favor an economic boom, an easy way out of the current depression, are coming together. The decisive factor will be, once more, the issue of the class struggle in the imperialist countries, in Eastern Europe and the USSR, and in the third world. Despite certain retreats and partial defeats, the workers' movement still maintains the capacity for struggle and resistance. The conservative forces of the bourgeoisie and of the bureaucracy have committed a grave error in underestimating this capacity to fight.

### **A period of crisis and of struggle**

This characterizes, moreover, the entire world situation. The conservative wings of the bourgeoisie and of the bureaucracy are incapable of imposing their solution essentially because of an objective weakness. The working class and its allies are not yet up to the task of imposing their own revolutionary solution — as a result of essentially subjective factors. We remain, therefore, in a long period of crisis and of struggles.

In a certain number of third world states the bourgeoisie "backed into a corner by mass protests over hunger and the impasse of the debt" has systematically resorted to repression and military dictatorship. But the question of the relationship of forces also has to be taken into account. In a series of countries the proletariat is on the increase numerically, and is constructing powerful trade union organizations. The electoral impact of the workers' movement, its capacity to mobilize its allies in the peasantry, in the marginalized urban layers, in the youth, etc., is such that the bourgeoisie will pay a high price for any attempt to return to an open military dictatorship. This is also true on the economic plane : the powerlessness, the inability to control this change in the relationship of forces at the level of the enterprises. To the degree that "with regimes that are ultraconservative, that are dictatorial" the combative wing of the working class becomes increasingly marginalized, the means disappear for controlling what happens day by day in the factories. A strike cannot be ended because there is no leadership, and no one is able to negotiate. The problem does not reveal itself in the absence of strikes, but when they do take place this factor is present "therefore, the bourgeoisie is confronted with a real dilemma. Everything depends, one more time, on the scope of the mass movement and the impact of the eventual repression.

## The Breakup of Stalinism and the Three-Sided Struggle in the East

The breakup of the bureaucratic dictatorship in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania, along with its weakening in the USSR, has to be understood in all of its contradictory aspects for our movement. We are the best placed "as a result of our entire history and our theoretical analysis of the bureaucratic dictatorship" to understand the real terms of what is happening in these countries. It is a matter of a three-way struggle between social forces. Of course, in each country this struggle takes its own unique political form, but it is first of all necessary to understand the actions of the broad social mechanisms.

### The present social forces

There are three key social forces involved : the nomenklatura, that is to say those at the top of the bureaucracy, the layer of bureaucrats that is socially and materially the most privileged ; the petty- and middle-bourgeoisie, pushed by the international bourgeoisie ; and the working class. Any approach to events in these countries that is reduced only to ideology, to proclamations, to verbal declarations of intention, which eliminates the potential or even the real intervention of the working class, is totally false and will rapidly lead to a completely erroneous analysis.

In basing ourselves on the experience of previous crises of the bureaucracy, in contrast to others, we know that a hardened nucleus of the nomenklatura will hang onto its power and privileges. It will be able to maneuver, it will be able to divide, that is certain. Today, one wing of the nomenklatura is trying in a conscious and rapid way to fuse with the middle bourgeoisie, and to fuse with international capital. But that is not true for the entire bureaucracy. Most of the bureaucracy is holding onto its present position for a very simple material reason : it cannot hope to do better under a capitalist regime, and still less so under a socialist democracy. No dominant social layer in history has ever committed suicide.

### Restoration of capitalism

The outcome of this struggle is not predetermined "not even in countries like Poland or Hungary where they seem to have already cut themselves off decisively from the old ideology. It is possible to proclaim ten times that you have restored capitalism. But it is one thing to restore it in words, and still another to do so in fact. Without doubt the danger is real, mostly in these two countries, but capitalism has certainly not been restored in reality. The decisive struggle is still ahead of us.



And here is where the working class comes in. The restoration of capitalism can only be accomplished to its detriment, through a lowering of its standard of living, by the loss of the substance of its social conquests, by a great social injustice, as well as by the reappearance of poverty on a colossal scale – except perhaps in the GDR – and the rest. All of this will provoke a reaction and a terrible moral crisis. In Poland, there are already five million people who live below the poverty line. There are retirees who are unable even to buy bread, etc. A more and more repressive policy will develop in these countries, without doubt, to combat the explosions and protest. What is brewing is an extremely grave social and political crisis. It is only as a result of the outcome of that crisis and of these struggles that the question will be settled.

We think that the Stalinist and post-Stalinist bureaucracy is not a new class. It does not have deep roots in society, nor a legitimate social role, nor even a consciousness of its own legitimacy (and this, moreover, explains a great deal about what is happening today). Therefore, it has none of the attributes of a social class, and its overturn, once the masses take action, will be relatively easy, since nothing stands in the way except its hold on governmental power.

In the final analysis, everything turns around the degree of mobilization, the self-organization, and the consciousness of the masses in these countries. But the situation is contradictory. In terms of the mobilizations, I think that we will yet have some happy surprises, and there will be an explosion of mass struggles the likes of which history has never known before.

On the level of self-organization, the picture is less positive at present. Self-organization is not only a matter of how strong the mobilizations are, but also of their goals. And when the goals were not clear, and the successes of the first phase were rapid despite this, people did not understand very well why and how they should get organized. They organized mostly because of their distrust of the leaders.

One of the principal tasks for the far left in these countries is, as a result, to formulate and advance progressive ideas for rank-and-file committees, for councils, but also to demand the ability to recall elected officials. This corresponds to the present state of consciousness, the distrust of the population. Elections and universal suffrage, yes, but with the possibility to recall those elected. Such a thing would already change the situation.

### **Neither bureaucratic despotism nor the dictatorship of the market !**

The third factor, the most important, is the lack of revolutionary direction and of a precise understanding concerning objectives. In this circumstance it is evident that the standard of living of the imperialist countries and the social democratic models are exercising an important attraction.

For the first two factors to overcome the third it will take a period of time. It is necessary to develop an alternative economic model. Theoretically, programmatically, one aspect of this is already clear : neither bureaucratic despotism nor the dictatorship of the market. But it is above all necessary for this option to demonstrate that it is a real one. And the first prerequisite for that is a struggle to realize these objectives, so that such an alternative can have a genuine impact.

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