

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the first issue of *ZEROWORK*, which appeared last year, was to begin to provide an analysis of the present crisis from the point of view of the working class. The crisis, we maintained, was generated through a cycle of working class struggle in which capital's postwar Keynesian strategy of planned development was undermined—struggle which occurred throughout the world but which we traced in North America and Western Europe. Beginning with an expanded notion of the working class—one that included the unwaged as well as the waged—we set out to examine the new forms of its activity in the wage struggle, resistance to productivity drives, the battle for autonomy from its official organizations, and the creation of new relations between the employed and the unemployed, the waged and the unwaged, and among the different sectors in each of these groups. The totality of this activity we termed the *refusal of work*. In looking, in particular, at the struggles of state workers, welfare recipients, auto workers, postal workers, coal miners, students, and housewives, we sought to show how the content, direction, and interaction of these insurgencies posed not simply another cyclical dysfunction of the system, but a *historical* crisis of capital itself.

In this second issue we continue to develop this analysis with special emphasis on the international character of both the cycle of struggle and capital's response to it, its counteroffensive. Our implicit aim throughout the articles is to determine the *composition* of the international working class in the context of the *circulation of struggle* from sector to sector, and from place to place around the world. This is not simply a question of labor and capital mobility or internationalization as such but the simultaneous *political recomposition* of the global working class and the restructuring of world capital in the crisis—by which we mean the new ways in which workers everywhere are imposing *their* needs on capital and the ways in which capital is creating new forms of accumulation in which those needs are either incorporated or smashed.

Few would question that the crisis has been developing on a world scale and that capital has been using this critical phase to try to impose a new international "order." But invariably this is depicted as a question of confrontations and deals among *countries*, or groups of countries—whether industrially "advanced," "developing," "underdeveloped," or "socialist"—concerning terms of trade, international credit, foreign aid, etc. This has been the starting point of all theories of imperialism, whether liberal, radical, or "Marxist"; and there is thus a tendency to claim that the real class struggle of today is the essentially diplomatic effort of the progressive governments of the Third World (and now the Fourth World, etc.) to

bring about a New International Economic Order in which the injustices of the global market would be rectified through development. And the issue of imperialism becomes, on the one hand, endless, esoteric discussion of modes of production and forms of dependency, and on the other, lamentations for the death (or at least the limits) of class struggle in the "advanced" countries. For development in those countries is understood as a matter of class collaboration, while the real victims of exploitation—now equated with underdevelopment—are supposed to be the national economies of the Third World. The final step is to declare the workers of the Third World to be partners with the state in the quest for national self-sufficiency—ironically putting them in the same position as their counterparts in the West supposedly ended up in: cooperating with capital for the sake of development, except that in one case that development is called capitalist accumulation on a world scale, and in the other, socialist accumulation. And it is thus no surprise that there is widespread agreement, from the liberal wing of Western capital to the most ardent Third Worldists, on the prescription for curing underdevelopment: the promotion of labor-intensive production, in other words, putting people to work productively—just as, in the West, the solution posed for the crisis of capital is full employment.

It is indeed difficult to break through this perspective, through the ideologies of national liberation, economic nationalism, and socialist reconstruction—but it must be done, and this second issue of *ZEROWORK* is a contribution to that effort. In putting forth class struggle as the pivot of the international dynamics of capital, we find ourselves fundamentally at odds with the theories-of-imperialism tradition, beginning with the question of the origins of imperialist expansion. Not only do we reject the notion that its basis was some sort of class accommodation in the West, we maintain that the growth of foreign investment, especially by the U.S. in the past 30 years, was precisely a response to the *intensification* of domestic class struggle before and after World War II, especially in sectors such as coal, rubber, and transportation. The coupling of U.S. postwar reconversion with the stabilization and penetration of Western Europe and ex-colonial Asia and Africa was the technique by which capital sought to undercut workers' power everywhere through the creation of an international hierarchy of wages, on the basis of which the most powerful sectors of the class could be held in check by capital's mobility, and the *conditions of entry* of new peasant groups into the multinational factory could be better controlled.

The limitations of the cycle of growth founded on this strategy—Western Europe and Japan were the main beneficiaries—led to a new Development Decade in the 1960's based on investment in productivity-raising technologies and "human capital." Yet this strategy too was violently checked by an upsurge of struggle in which guerrilla movements across the world—but especially in Southeast Asia—along with insurgency among the unwaged (women, blacks, students, etc.) in the West posed a massive refusal of the development being offered. By the 1970's, this situation had created a profound international crisis for capital, forcing it to seek new forms of repression and restructuring of the global system—a new structure

of development and underdevelopment in which the Third World as such would begin to disappear.

As the international circulation of working class struggle accelerated, and as capital in response became more and more a planned, integrated world system, underdevelopment increasingly came to be no longer identified with certain geographical areas. Not only was underdevelopment not an original state, a condition to be overcome through "modernization"—it was no longer simply a function of the interaction of national economies, of a metropole and peripheries. As the focus of the class struggle everywhere began moving away from national development—whether capitalist or socialist—to the refusal of work and the demand for social wealth, the generation of development and underdevelopment became a set of strategies, weapons used by capital to fragment growing proletarian power by creating a new geography of labor-power and forms of exploitation. In the place of a clear division between a developed West and an underdeveloped Third World, there emerged a complicated pattern of situations, such that we now find rapid accumulation in the Middle East, uneven growth in Brazil, famine in the Sahel, and the rapid flight of investment from Italy, Britain, and New York City, resulting in the "*underdevelopment*" of the *metropolis*.

To meet the growing challenge posed by the internationalization of class struggle, capital has been forced more and more to internationalize its circuits as well as its means of control (particularly the state), making it clear that the real "anarchy" of capital lies not in the confrontation of "rich" and "poor" nations, nor in the contradictions of international competition, but in the confrontation of classes on a world scale. Ultimately, the only unplannable and anarchic element of capitalist society is working class struggle, and it is the attempt by capital to stem the international growth of that struggle that has made interimperialist rivalry of secondary importance. Consequently, we now find, for example, the U.S. selling grain to the Soviet Union to help the Kremlin cope with the struggles of Russian agricultural workers; Libya investing in Fiat in the midst of an upsurge of Italian workers; Western banks putting credit pressure on Eastern Europe after another successful struggle over food prices in Poland; China forging improved relations with the governments of Malaysia and the Philippines while insurgent movements continue in those countries; and North Vietnam shipping coal to England during a strike by British miners. What all this points to are increasing concentration and coordination of multinational state power in the West and growing cooperation between capitalist and socialist states—all aimed at resisting a generalized working class struggle for *the appropriation of wealth internationally produced*. "Imperialism" can now only be understood as essentially the dynamics of the confrontation between the strategy of capital and the struggle of labor on a world scale.

The current phase of class relations in the international crisis shows very clearly not only the extent of capital's counterattack—in the forms of the manipulation of development and underdevelopment, the supposed energy and food shortages, monetary coercion,

etc.—but also its limitations. To be sure, there have been serious working class defeats suffered in such places as Chile, Portugal, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh; and it is crucial to understand how this took place. Yet it is also quite clear that in many places capital has faced considerable difficulty in imposing austerity. In Argentina, the military coup has not produced a Chilean situation but an endemic civil war. In Italy, the sacrifices being promoted by the Communists have prompted a confrontation bordering on open warfare. In Poland and Egypt, attempts to increase food prices were defeated by massive riots. In Canada, behind the constitutional crisis set off by the recent electoral victory of the Quebec separatists is a crisis of the national economy resulting from uncontrollable working class demands. In Mexico, rural workers responded to the government's anti-inflation program with widespread land seizures. As far as the U.S. is concerned, despite the talk of a trend towards reinvestment here because of relative stability compared to much of the rest of the world, the "state of the union" is best summarized by the words of the recent report of the Task Force on Disorders and Terrorism: "The present tranquility is deceptive. It is urged that it not be taken as a sign that disorder in the United States is a thing of the past. Many of the traditional indicators for disorders are clearly present and need but little stimulus to activate them." (For more on the report, see *New York Times*, 3 March 1977.)

It is in this context and from this perspective that the articles in this second issue of *ZEROWORK* seek to analyze the international crisis and thus help to create a framework for understanding the emerging international working class strategy.

The issue begins with a long piece by Harry Cleaver, "Food, Famine, and the International Crisis," which examines the phases of postwar class struggle concerning food and agriculture. Cleaver shows how the various forms of rural insurgencies, along with struggles by urban workers over the availability and price of food, have challenged the successive development/underdevelopment strategies posed by capital in its quest for expansion and global integration of production. From the postwar emphasis on industry and the exploitation of agriculture, to the demise of the Green Revolution and the Development Decade, to the creation of food shortage and famine, Cleaver analyzes the circulation of struggle between workers in agriculture and industry in single countries, between native workers and immigrant workers in regions, and among workers in the First, Second, and Third Worlds—all culminating in a discussion of the present international class confrontation over the basic means of existence.

Philip Mattera's article, "Vietnam: Socialism and the Struggle Against Work," continues a number of themes from the Cleaver piece by focusing on the class struggle history of a country that has played a central role in the postwar period. Mattera reinterprets the course of revolutionary activity against France, Japan, and the U.S. to show that that activity was not simply aimed at the abolition of colonial and neocolonial rule, but was also a refusal on the part of

Vietnamese workers to participate in the multinational factory. The establishment of socialism in the north after 1946 and in the south in 1975 turned out to be not the triumph of this struggle, but rather a change in its terms as the plans of the state for Soviet-style industrialization came into conflict with continuing working class resistance to the accumulation of capital in all its forms. Consequently, in his discussion of present-day Vietnam, Mattera goes beyond the current debate among leftists concerning human rights and U.S. obligations to provide reconstruction aid to discern a growing conflict between the demands of the people for greater access to social wealth and the state's efforts to integrate Vietnam into the world economy—a situation that illustrates the crisis of “Third World socialism” and raises the question of the alternatives to it.

The article by Christian Marazzi, “Money In the World Crisis,” analyzes how the postwar cycle of struggles has generated an ever-worsening crisis of the international monetary system in the context of the more general crisis of capital. Making the link between unrest in social production and reproduction, and monetary instability, Marazzi argues that the situation following the 1971 inconvertibility move by the U.S. has been one in which a new phase of planned development, a further socialization of capital, is impossible; and as a result, the current international class confrontation, reflected in monetary dynamics, is one of “permanent emergency” in which monetary terrorism is being used to undermine the wage struggle and to thwart a generalized class challenge to the rule of capital. Capital is seeking to maintain this stand-off through the increasing centralization of multinational state power and the simultaneous regionalization of the implementation of austerity, as is seen clearly in the growing power of the International Monetary Fund and the emergence of social democracy as the executor of cuts in social expenditures.

Donna Demac and Philip Mattera’s “Developing and Underdeveloping New York” looks at these monetary dynamics in the context of the paradigmatic struggles within the city that has been at the center of the “fiscal crisis.” Beginning with an account of the struggles of welfare recipients, public sector workers, private sector workers, etc., and showing how the unique interaction of these struggles in the 1960’s and early 1970’s undermined the social order in the city, Demac and Mattera go on to describe the forms of capital’s counterattack in New York. Using reductions in state and federal aid to the city as well as the creation of a debt crisis, business and government have made massive cuts in the budget, laid off tens of thousands of city workers, and ended even the semblance of democratic rule—all in the attempt to bring the working people of the city back under control and thus permit New York to play its role for world capital more effectively.

The article on New York not only concludes this issue, it serves as the starting point for one of the main aspects of the future research and analysis of those of us involved with *ZEROWORK*. Some of us are working with a group in New York in order to extend our examination of the current crisis by looking at the ways in which the

implementation of austerity and the intensification of work in the social factory have affected the life and struggles of people in New York. Taking the city as a paradigm, we are especially interested in the new forms of the segmentation of the working class and how these are reflected in the various alternatives to steady waged work that people have chosen or have been forced to adopt, including living on unemployment insurance or welfare, part time and occasional jobs, hustling, and crime. Our aim in this is not to engage in urban sociology or labor market research, but to determine how different sectors of the class are coping with austerity and how they are organizing to fight it.

Others of us are continuing the examination of capital's counteroffensive on the three vital fronts of food, energy, and money. We will study closely the emerging working class strategies for resisting these assaults, and in doing so we hope to clarify the mechanisms of both world capitalist planning and the international circulation of working class struggle. Finally, we want to extend the analysis of the crisis of socialism begun in Cleaver's (Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union) and Mattera's (Vietnam) articles in this issue—particularly the case of China.

Still others of us are engaged in ongoing research in working class history. In all, we are a network of militants with centers currently in New York City, Rochester, Texas, and Montreal and associated collectives in Britain and Italy. We have no pretensions of forming any sort of party; rather, we are seeking to make a major, new contribution to the international debate on the crisis and the working class response. The first issue of *ZEROWORK* began with the statement: "The present capitalist crisis has made the problem of working class revolutionary organization more urgent." That problem, of course, remains urgent and remains the basic concern of *ZEROWORK*. And we intend to address this problem more explicitly in our future issues as we work to develop and circulate organizational strategies that do not contradict the autonomy of the working class. This is obviously not the project of *ZEROWORK* alone, but what we hope is that *ZEROWORK* can become a forum in which the fundamental questions of the struggle can be discussed in a new and totally undogmatic manner. We invite you to join us in this endeavor.