



6 Cottons Gardens
London E2 8DN

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Letter to the International Socialists (United States)

Comrades,

From everything we have read over the last six weeks, it appears that your EC has decided to pursue the course we advised against in January, namely, forcing the Left faction out. For the reasons we outlined in the Appeal from Tony Cliff and Duncan Hallas two weeks ago, we believe that this course—if agreed to by a majority of your membership—marks a qualitative descent by your organisation into the graveyard of American sectlets.

There exists, it appears, a little confusion as to where our organisation stands on the substantive political issues involved. This letter is intended to clear up any remaining doubts.

Economic Perspective

The decline of the Permanent Arms Economy as an international stabiliser during the 1960's encouraged an increasing synchronisation of the business cycle throughout the world. Slumps now coincide throughout the world, and slumps are getting deeper, booms shallower.

World capitalism is thus in crisis. Earlier temporary palliatives, a significant rise in arms expenditure, an extension of imperialist control to cover new markets, are not available given the intense level of competition between the key national capitalisms.

Within this world crisis, US capitalism is experiencing a crisis of declining growth. By contrast, with the British crisis—chronic inflation, low investment, low productivity, massive balance of payments deficit, instability of the £—the American crisis is at a very early stage of development.

World capitalism is as strong as its weakest link. But United States capitalism is not that weakest link. Nor are the hammer blows struck against that link experienced equally all the way round the chain.

In 1977, the OECD estimates that

US growth will fall to 5 per cent, and British to zero. In ISJ 94 and ISJ 95 you will find the following charts, which, while indicating that the American crisis is much 'milder' at this point than the British, also show that the crisis is genuinely world-wide.

US profits as a percentage of employees' compensation and adjusted profits (a measure that underestimates the rate of profit):

1966:	21 per cent
1972:	14.5 per cent
1974:	9 per cent
1976:	14 per cent

source: OECD Economic Survey, United States July 1976

Average rate of return on German capital:

1960:	14 per cent
1975:	6 per cent

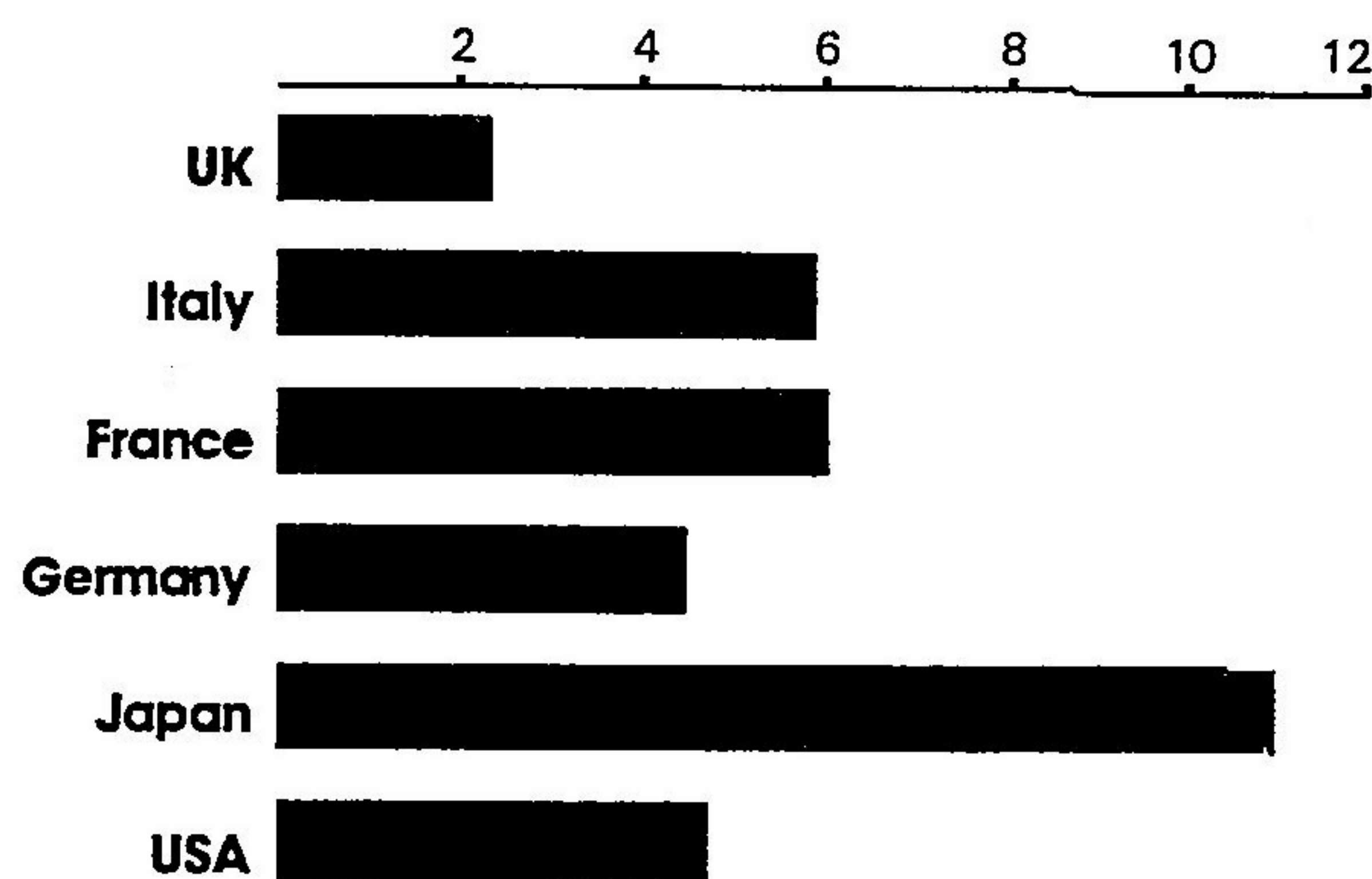
source: OECD Economic Survey West Germany May 1976

Real rate of return on British capital:

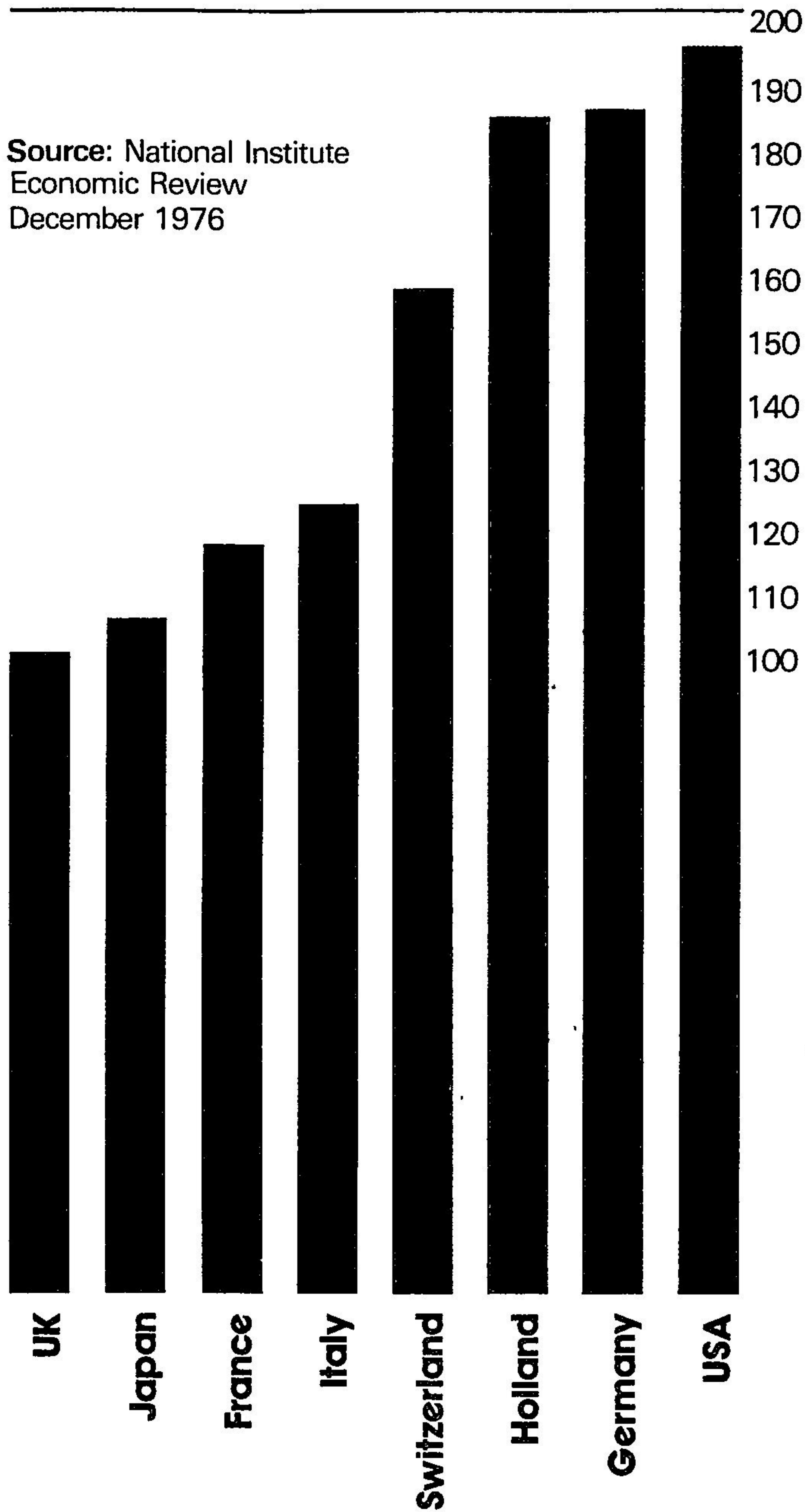
1960:	13.4 per cent
1972:	7.5 per cent
1974:	4 per cent

source: Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin March 1976

INCREASE IN OUTPUT PER YEAR 1964-1975
in manufacturing industry

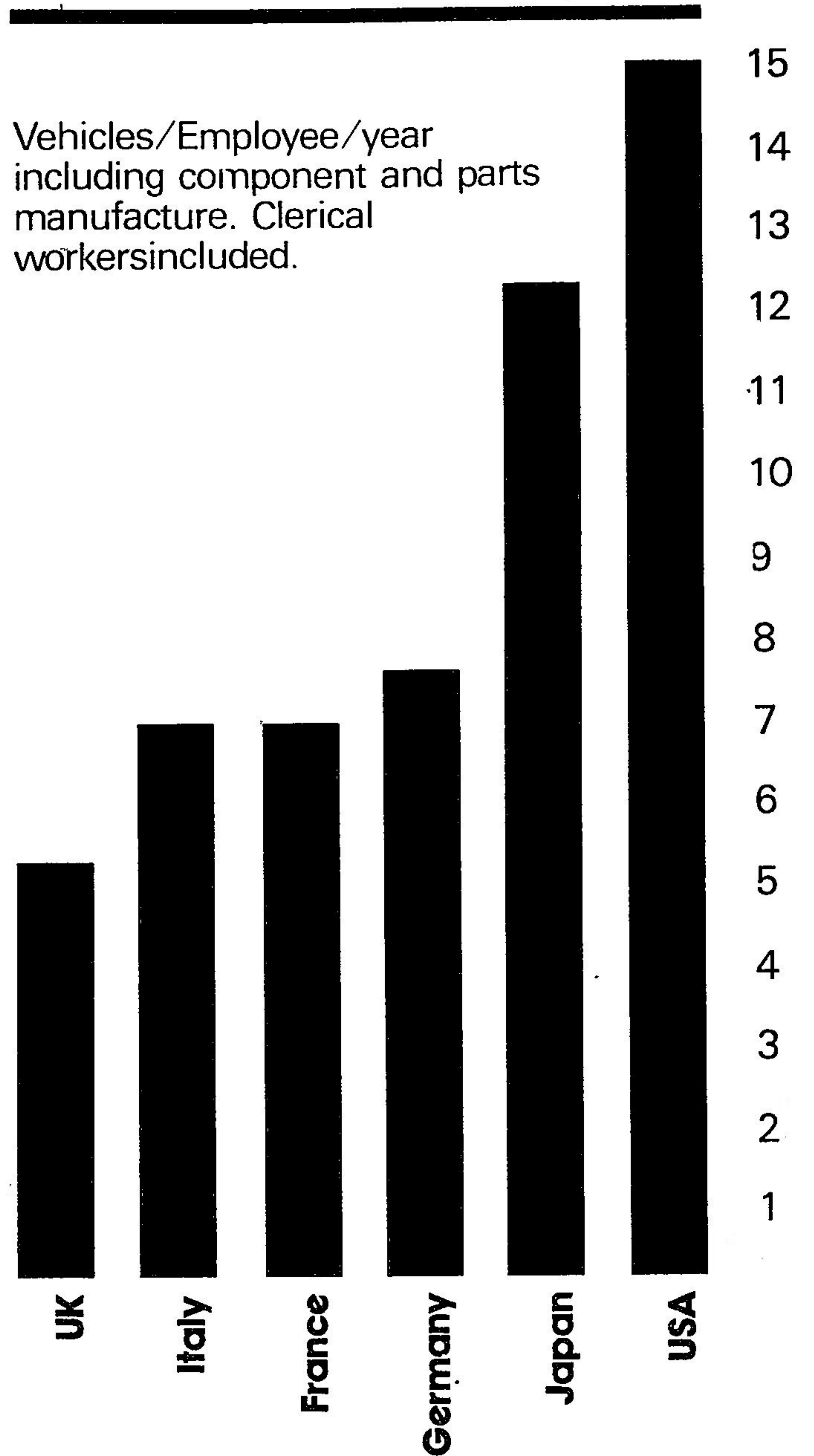


LABOUR COSTS IN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY (1974)



Source: National Institute Economic Review December 1976

PRODUCTIVITY: Motor Industry



Vehicles/Employee/year including component and parts manufacture. Clerical workers included.

Source: CPRS Report on the Motor Industry 1976 (figures for 1973)

A comparison of the last two charts, showing productivity in the motor industry and labour costs in manufacturing by 1974, draws out another element of the American crisis.

Yes, American workers are costing their employers nearly twice what British workers cost, but they are three times more productive. The rate of exploitation is much greater. The pace of work is tougher in the US and shift-working is endemic.

As the expansion of US capitalism begins to slow down, therefore, it makes workers unemployed more rapidly than does British capitalism. This and the weaker rôle of the trade unions explains why although at an earlier stage of acute crisis than Britain,

America has the same level of unemployment (the official figures currently are Britain: 6.1 per cent; US: 8.2 per cent—this difference is insignificant because the US figure is calculated on the basis of the total number of jobs and workers available in the economy, while the British statisticians get a much lower figure by only counting those who actually register as unemployed).

What is the significance of this 'milder crisis' analysis for the working class?

Firstly, the world slowdown has brought unemployment and/or short-time working back into the lives of millions of American workers for the first time since the 1930's. Coupled with even the low level of price inflation now being experienced (5 per cent as compared with 16 per cent in Britain) workers' living standards are being generally forced down.

For black workers in particular the slowdown increasingly means that unemployment becomes permanent and affects a larger and larger proportion of the black population.

The 1970's therefore, unlike the long years of substantial economic expansion, are bringing American workers back onto the stage of history. The categories of rich and poor are beginning to be replaced by an awareness of class.

Yet we must not exaggerate the force of this change. Unemployment benefit for laid-off carworkers in the United States, for example, still exceeds a carworker's weekly take home wage in Britain (and prices are now hardly any higher in the US than in Britain).

And the experience in Britain, now 15 years into a crisis that began in the early 1960's, is that breaking through the stranglehold of ruling class (including racist) ideas is a very, very long process indeed.

Secondly, the fact that the American crisis is 'milder' than in other parts of the world, means that the American ruling class have other methods of trying to solve it than those of brute force and/or political cooption currently being used in Britain and Italy.

It appears likely at this point that the employers will attempt a new productivity offensive aimed at cutting labour costs. If true; this is far from a last-ditch effort, and suggests a significant degree of confidence on the side of the ruling class, which we should not underestimate.

Another side of the ruling class offensive to halt the long-term decline in the rate of profit in the midst of a world crisis, will be their continuing attack on the public sector. In a long drawn out crisis, the ruling class can make attack after attack on the quality of life as indicated by the level of social services without precipitating either a complete breakdown or a major revolt. Yet these attacks, on education, health, social welfare, and

even on transport services, are in many ways more visible to workers as a class (those who work in the public sector *and* those who consume the services) than is the productivity offensive.

Lastly, and perhaps of the greatest significance for the American working class, the relatively mild character of the present crisis means there is correspondingly little pressure on working class organisations to react to it.

Scattered throughout the 1970's, from the wildcat strikes amongst Teamster union members in 1970, through Miners For Democracy to the Chrysler rebellion of 1973 there are repeated traces of rank and file militancy.

Yet in virtually every trade union, business unionism (the domination of the members by the union bureaucracy in the interests of management—bureaucracy collaboration) has survived unscathed. In the miners' union it may even be staging a comeback.

The record number of strikes that took place in 1974, most following the end of wage controls on 1 May, did not create a permanent cutting edge that could sustain a struggle in the recession of 1975.

The token displays of fight provided by the Teamsters' and Autoworkers' Unions in 1976, in the aftermath of recovery from recession, also failed to ignite independent rank and file bush fires. And 1977, beginning with the victory of the business machine in the steelworkers' union, looks likely to tell a similar story.

The picture remains a mosaic: fragments of militancy here and there; occasionally they take on a certain temporary, accidental order; then the pattern disappears again. The organised socialists, necessary to give isolated rank and file militancy a wider coherence, were driven from the trade unions in the 1950's. In the movements of the 1970's and 1980's they are still to be re-made.

Mass Work and a Workers' Combat Organisation

James P Cannon wisely observed that *"If the (revolutionary) group misunderstands the tasks set for it by the conditions of the day, if it does not know how to answer the most important of all questions in politics—that is, the question of what to do next—then the group, no matter what its merits may otherwise be, can wear itself out in misdirected efforts and futile activities and come to grief."*

Are the 'conditions of the day' in the United States in 1977 ripe for 'mass work' and 'building a workers' combat organisation'? That is the question which is at the hub of the faction fight in your organisation today. Unequivocally, the analysis above leads us to answer no!

'Mass work' in our revolutionary tradition implies exactly what it says: we assess the political 'conditions of the day' as being favourable to the direct intervention of revolutionary politics in the broad class struggle; then, assuming we have the necessary forces, we organise that intervention.

This is very different from 'work with your fellow workers' which all revolutionaries carry on (or should do) to build up their credibility on the day-to-day issues facing them, like wages, safety, sackings etc. 'Mass work' is therefore a distinct political process, one that becomes possible when the level of class struggle and consciousness among masses of workers can be clearly raised as a result of revolutionary workers carrying through a decisive course of action.

The suggestion that the class struggle and the penetration of revolutionaries are at this level in the United States today is, for us, both absurd and politically dangerous.

Chest-beating talk of a 'workers combat organisation' does not impress us either. Certainly, revolutionary 'combat organisations' can be created independently of the level of working class struggle, but genuine workers' organisations are not.

The fatal flaw of many Trotskyist organisations throughout the world has been to ignore this simple but basic truth. As a result, they have easily degenerated into sects, pacing their internal regimes and expectations not on the level of struggle in the real world, but on their own analyses predicting the big bust—always tomorrow.

Great levels of sacrifices are demanded from the comrades (your National Secretary boasts that one third of your membership is ready to tear up its roots and move anywhere at the command of the organisation) and for a time things might even hold together.

Sooner or later, however, they fall apart. Quite simply, the greater the differentiation the sect draws between the sacrificing member and ordinary people, the fewer genuine people it recruits.

If you intend to remain at all true to a serious perspective, aiming to help create a revolutionary party numbering hundreds of thousands, that is largely made up of manual workers, and really does combat the ruling class, then it does matter that you are both honest and modest. For if you don't know where you are now, don't expect workers to come looking for you.

This is why, in January 1977, for example, we published in ISJ 94 the following sober account of the problems facing the new Socialist Workers' Party and the embryonic rank and file organisations in Britain:

'At the same time the ability to intervene independently, to deliver even simple solidarity action with workers involved in particular struggles, is still minimal if not altogether lacking..

'This fact is not at all the fault of the Organising Committee; least of all is it due to 'lack of correct programme' or 'failure to discuss the nuts and bolts of the policies' as various and assorted splinter groups inevitably asserted.

'The problem is one of the relationship of forces, of the still embryonic state of confidence and cohesion on the militant left, of a level of consciousness that makes it difficult to transcend sectionalism.'

An honest appraisal of what can be done is the best starting point for changing things.

Does this mean that revolutionaries in the US should resign themselves to inactivity or discussion group politics? Far from it.

The economic perspective outlined above will, if the group does not 'wear itself out' or go completely off the rails, guide you towards a different but realistic and important question.

Are the 'conditions of the day' ripe for recruiting tens and indeed hundreds of individual workers to revolutionary socialism? To that question we answer yes, provided you actually know 'what to do next'.

'What to do next' in our book starts from basic honesty about where you are. To waste paper proving how 'successful' you are by boasting of 20 to 30 'workers' among your 280 members is not a good sign. Nor is the division of your tiny membership into first and second class citizens. (Teamsters and 'the rest'), and the political denigration of public sector and white collar workers and students.

Not only does this approach indicate an absolutely mechanical approach to the possibilities for the class struggle in the United States but it also actually impedes recruitment and the integration of new members in the here and now.

A new awakening of American working class consciousness is only just beginning. Those who argue that it can take off sharply again, as in the mass unionising drives of 1933-4 forget that not only was the crisis more severe then, but more important still, socialists and socialist organisations had been active in working class struggles during most of the preceding twenty years.

Today, by stark contrast, socialists have played virtually no part at all in workers' struggles in the US during the last twenty years.

The American working class is possibly among the most fragmented in the world. Fragmented by geography; fragmented by race and ethnic origin; fragmented by sex; fragmented by the political defeat of the 1940's which wiped out its socialist tradition and institutionalised bureaucratic control of its trade unions; and fragmented by the experience of living through the twenty five years of capitalism's biggest ever boom.

The likelihood that the early stirrings of this class will reveal themselves in mass, nationwide rank and file upheavals is therefore, we suggest, remote.

Revolutionaries in the United States today, we believe, should look to the fragments, to the groups of workers and the individuals often isolated both by geography and by the trade union bureaucracy, who are prepared to fight.

The need for national rank and file organisations to mobilise the masses in struggle against the employers and the bureaucrats, like the need for a workers' party, must be central to the socialist argument we present. But be wary of confusing this propaganda position with the promise that we are capable right now of overcoming fragmentation. Phoney triumphalism breeds demoralisation.

Our answer to that key question posed by Cannon, What to do next?, must be: gear the organisation up for a series of interventions in the fragments of the class struggle that occur in the areas where we have members. Encourage every member to think and work as an organised socialist inside his or her workplace. 'Insiders' can often make more effective interventions than 'outsiders' although working from the outside is an inevitable and necessary task as well.

The role of the revolutionary paper, servicing both inside and outside interventions with argument on the specific struggles taking place and making the case for socialism, is therefore crucial to both. The organisation and its members must see the need to grow as your most important contribution to the struggle.

Unless the revolutionary socialist current has expanded to a certain take-off point where it becomes (even on a very small scale) available to those workers ready to start generalising from the fragments, then however concentrated your tiny numbers in one or two particular fragments, you will be irrelevant to the unfolding of events.

Precisely because of the enormous fragmentation of the American working class the size of the revolutionary socialist current is key.

How to build

How does a small revolutionary group grow so that it can become a significant current?

This is one of the questions at the centre of the differences between the ISUS leadership on the one hand, and the Left Faction and ourselves on the other.

All historic experience is that a small socialist group (which is what you are) does not grow in the main from its direct intervention in class struggles.

Historically, socialist groups have always gone through a period in which they have been little more than propaganda circles before being able to attract substantial numbers of workers from their direct interventions. This has been particularly true when the class struggle has been at a relatively low ebb (with occasional, not too bitter, not too long, strikes as in the US at present).

It took the Marxists in Russia, for instance, nearly 20 years from the foundation of the first circles to the establishment of the beginning of a real party. The circles of course contained many workers—but they were usually unusual workers, as Krupskaya's biography of Lenin shows, attracted more by the ideas than by the mass agitation of the party.

The 'pre-history' of our organisation (the Socialist Workers Party of Britain) was even longer—indeed, it is not fully over even now. During those long years, like the Marxist circles in Russia we paid continual close attention to the development of the mass workers movement, to the strikes, the union elections, the conferences.

We insisted that only in this movement was the potential for recasting history to be found. We commented on what needed to be done on a day to day basis in the working class movement.

But the actual growth of our movement took place on a different basis—from workers and non-workers who were attracted by general ideological issues, whose origin was often (or even usually) in struggles that did not spring directly from the factories.

Key fields for the 'primitive accumulation' of members for us were, for example, the anti-nuclear movement of the 1960's and the reflection of this inside the Labour Party youth organisation.

Like revolutionary organisations throughout the world a fantastic boost to our organisation (in terms of worker members as well as students and white collar) came from the 'Victory to the NLF' and student movements of the late 1960's, to which we succeeded in giving considerable leadership.

These political, mainly non-worker movements, only tangentially related to the class struggle, provided us with an audience to whom we could argue the centrality of the struggle in the factories. The people we won in these arguments were not, of course, usually the 'best militants' in the factories.

But they did give us the numbers and the confidence to begin to attract some of the best workers thrown up by the economic struggles of 1969–74 to our organisation, without having to resort to the demoralising and depoliticising device of sending ex-student missionaries into the factories. (In the same way the individual isolated workers (and students) drawn to Marxism before the mid 1890's in Russia were thereby to organisations large enough to attract

large numbers of workers in later years.)

Even with the development of big struggles in 1969–74, it was not by any means always the case that it was 'the best militants' who were attracted to us. 99 per cent of workers were still attracted by our politics, as well as by our willingness to relate those politics to their work situation. It was these individually recruited workers, often drawn from areas which were not central to the national class struggle, that enabled our organisation to develop a working class style and to attract other workers.

And above all, it was not just the big nationally significant confrontations of the class that opened up workers' minds sufficiently for them to consider revolutionary ideas. Even today, recruitment to our party comes as often as not from individuals involved in small struggles, isolated from the main battle lines, involving fairly small numbers of workers. (eg a long drawn out battle of a small group of workers against a very reactionary small employer can politicise workers much more than relatively short lived struggles by the big battalions—and, of course, our organisation can seem more significant to small groups of workers involved in struggle than to the giants).

Let us repeat, for a small revolutionary group, there is a difference between the goal you focus on at the end of the day—leading the great battalions of the class into battle—and the way you build towards that goal, through individual recruitment on the basis of winning people to a total socialist perspective.

A key danger for your organisation, we believe, is the failure of your leadership to recognise this difference.

The reason why we have been so concerned to intervene in the debate in your organisation, and to support the Left Faction, is that we have seen the consequences of such a failure on other organisations in Britain.

They moved in one of two directions (if not both simultaneously). Either to become insignificant sects with an inflated opinion of themselves (the path of Gerry Healy) or reaching an accommodation with the trade union bureaucracy (the path of Ken Coates, and spasmodically, of the fourth international).

In the much more difficult situation that exists for revolutionaries in the US today, the road to one or other form of deformation (or both combined) can be much quicker than that in Britain in the 1950's and 1960's.

Economism and the Popular Front

An incorrect analysis of the period, followed by the almost inevitable orthodox Trotskyist conclusion that the tiny group has to substitute itself for the lack of motion on the part of the class, also leads over time to the bending of the essential politics of the group. Whether it bends in an ultra-leftist direction or to the right (or even in both directions) is determined by the politics of its leadership and the character of its principal initiatives as it sets off on the road to degeneration.

In Lenin Vol 1 Tony Cliff clearly points to the dangers inherent in an exaggerated stress on the correct need for the early Russian marxists to turn towards agitation.

"'On Agitation' (1894 pamphlet) had a mechanical theory of the relation between the industrial struggle, the struggle against the employers, and the political struggle against Tsarism, based on the concept of 'stages'. In later years this became the theoretical foundation for the development of 'economism' . . .";

Cliff describes this stages theory as follows:

'Socialists should limit their agitation to purely economic issues, first to the industrial plant, then to inter-plant demands, and so on. Secondly, from the narrow economic agitation the workers would learn, through experience of the struggle itself, the need for politics.'

And he quotes Krupskaya on the timing of the development of this tendency:

'The weavers' strike of 1896 took place under Social Democratic (marxist) influence. This turned the heads of many comrades. The basis arose for the growth of 'economism' .

A well known historian is quoted approvingly by Cliff for his description of the relation between agitation and economism:

'From agitation, which pushed politics into the background as a matter of tactical expedience, it was only one step to economism proper, which subordinated politics to economics as a matter of principle.'

How do revolutionaries concerned to undertake agitation avoid this step? Duncan Hallas pointed out (in an article recently reproduced from ISJ 56 in your Internal Bulletin) that 'The

economists were so called because they advocated 'assistance to the economic struggle of the proletariat' as an alternative to building a party . . .'. And Cliff quotes Lenin's reply to the economists written from Siberia in 1899:

'For the socialist, the economic struggle serves as the basis for the organisation of the workers into a revolutionary party, for the strengthening and development of their class struggle against the whole capitalist system. If the economic struggle is taken as something complete in itself there will be nothing socialist in it . . . It is the task of the bourgeois politician 'to assist the economic struggle of the proletariat' . . . The task of the socialist is to further the indissoluble fusion of the economic and political struggle into the single class struggle of the socialist working class masses.

Agitational activity among the masses must be of the broadest nature, both economic and political, on all possible issues and in regard to all manifestations of oppression whatever their form.'

Thus the short step towards economism is avoided by the continuous stress on the need for independent working class politics; by the rejection of a 'stages theory'; and by the use of all agitation for the purpose of building the revolutionary organisation.

No one in the leadership of USIS today would challenge any of these assumptions in theory. Yet the practice of your organisation today exactly meets the description 'economist'.

This is what is implied when your paper is not sold because your members are too busy distributing copies of a rank and file publication. This is what is meant when comrades argue it was 'necessary to liquidate the IS' into last year's Teamster work. And, more critically, this is what's meant by the stages theory you have developed for the building of a revolutionary socialist party in the United States.

This stages theory is available in many different forms, like the two expressed in your November 1975 pamphlet 'The Struggle for Workers' Power':

1) As the crisis of capitalism deepens, members of the IS will prove themselves to be the best and most effective leaders of the rank and file movements that will grow to massive proportions. These movements, in turn, will sort out and select the most dynamic and dedicated working class militants, who will be open to recruitment to a revolutionary program, politics, and organisation.'

2) 'To defend itself, the working class needs a massive rank and file movement uniting blacks and whites, men and women, young and old, to fight the bosses and make them pay for the growing crisis instead of us. When the crisis gets bad enough, even this won't be enough. The working class will need its own revolutionary party to overthrow capitalism.'

To put it bluntly, we believe that the argument that the peculiar conditions of the United States (and Portugal!) mean that the revolutionary party will be built after a massive united anti-capitalist rank and file movement has come into existence is to stand Marxism on its head.

It is pure economic determinism that can only lead one way: to political passivity and accommodation to anyone who happens to have a lever with the 'rank and file' at any particular point in time.

We maintain, on the contrary, that the fantastic strength of American capitalism and the relative weakness of the American working class make it less likely than elsewhere that spontaneous working class movements will develop in advance of the building of a powerful revolutionary socialist current.

Even in Britain, where pro-capitalist ideas have a weaker grasp on the consciousness of the working class and the crisis is more developed than in the US, our experience has been that rank and file movements require thousands (and possibly tens of thousands) of conscious socialists within them in order to take off, let alone survive.

The expectation that the crisis will deliver the movement, and that the main task for revolutionaries is simply to be there ready to lead it, strengthens the political danger of the phoney 'mass work' method.

In essence this is to search for the lowest common denominator demand that can evoke any response, then to organise around it, and finally to claim any movement that results as a 'victory for revolutionary mass work' (in spite of the total absence of any specific socialist dimension).

Well, if what matters is no longer the demands you raise, but what results you get, then clearly who you associate with takes on a vital significance. This explains why your leadership is now abusing another strategic term that used to have a clear meaning in our revolutionary tradition, 'the united front'. Along with their misuse of the terms 'mass work' and 'workers' combat organisation' it is being employed to masquerade a drift to the right in the clothes of a viable revolutionary tactic.

The united front is, of course, the strategic political concept born during the third and fourth Congresses of the Communist International when the revolutionary tide in Europe was being rolled back, and later applied with particular skill by Trotsky in his analysis of Germany in the early 1930's.

It is about periods when revolutionaries need to unite in action with others in the working class movement to defend existing gains and lay the basis for advance. It assumes that the revolutionaries have significant forces at their disposal yet are still too weak to accomplish the immediate tasks confronting the class alone.

Unlike the attempt to win individual non-revolutionary workers into activity with us in our workplaces, which is something we should be doing at all times, the united front strategy is therefore not applied at all times. When the revolutionary left is very small without any real forces at its command, when the class is not in retreat, when there is no real possibility of testing differences in action before the class, and in numerous other situations, we do not apply the united front strategy.

We do not therefore believe that the united front, or the struggle to build it, has any application in today's conditions in the United States. To the extent that you try to do so, then the step is so inappropriate that it will force you towards a popular front with forces well to your right, and in which you will surrender your politics. Duncan Hallas in the February 1977 ISJ 95 describes our approach to working with the trade union bureaucracy and contrasts it with the popular frontism of the CPGB:

'We are for unity in action with all those in the working class movement who are willing to fight, even when the agreement about objectives is only partial and temporary. This includes of course, unity with whatever sections of the 'official leaderships' can be induced to collaborate in particular actions. Contrary to the CP claim, we are not ultra-lefts.

However, to cooperate with left-wing union leaders—and indeed with right-wing ones where possible—for particular ends is by no means the same as relying on them. Still less is it the same as believing that 'progressive officials' can ever be a substitute for organised rank and file activity. This is the basic disagreement between the CP (and most of the Labour Left) and ourselves on the industrial and trade union issues.

We believe that active and effective rank and file movements are indispensable. The CP once thought so too. Now it puts the emphasis on the 'left political alliance', the core of which are the 'left officials'. The difference is not an accidental or transient one. It is fundamental.'

Your recent practice, in the motor industry contract and election in the Steelworkers' union, where you formed or worked uncritically within alliances with 'progressive officials' had nothing to do with the united front.

They were popular front 'alliances' (if that's not too grand a name for activities involving a total of about 25 of your members) characterised by i) a near total absence of action; ii) your reliance on the left bureaucrats for results; iii) your refusal to raise your own demands within the alliance; iv) your non-critical attitude towards the bureaucrats you were involved with; v) the absence of any attempt to build independent organised rank and file activity within the alliances; vi) your weakness on the ground which pushed you to play down your politics even more than you had intended.

Our task when left union bureaucrats are up for election is not to build illusions in the rank and file about what great changes are in store if they get elected; but rather it is to continuously point to the dangers of relying on them, particularly those of a left variety and to get the argument into the open about what real issues need taking up and fighting over. We summed up this analysis in relation to the election of left governments in ISJ 94 as follows:

'The lesson for revolutionary socialists is clear. It is certainly necessary to support the coming to power of left governments. In France and Italy the establishment of a left government would undoubtedly raise the level of struggle and strip the bureaucracy of excuses. But this is only a subordinate theme, not the main emphasis. The primary task for revolutionaries is to arm workers for the attacks that come from the left at least as much as from the right. That means the building of rank and file movements independent of the union bureaucracy, and able to fight directly and unambiguously in workers' interests. The form of such movements will vary enormously according to national union structures and traditions; the principle will not.'

Conclusion

Our intervention has been characterised by your leadership as 'frivolous', 'personally motivated', 'irresponsible.' An attempt has been made to make it appear that 'the British' are passable in Britain but 'chauvinist', 'insular', 'seeing only through British eyes' the minute we leave our island. Quotations have been dug up to try and prove our inconsistency with the clear implication—don't take them seriously.

Comrades, it is an old debating trike to try and defeat an argument by attacking the credibility and motives of your opponents.

We have intervened, written two letters to your leadership, sent a CC member to tour the States for a month, and supported the Left Faction in their fight to turn the group from its present right-ward drift, because we are serious internationalists. We are not only concerned in the abstract about the strength of the revolutionary left in the United States, but because at some point in the future, the question will become an immediate practical one for us.

In order to survive, any revolution in Western Europe will have to spread to the heart of international capitalism, North America. This is why, in the midst of an important expansion of the SWP when we are under the biggest attack from the ruling class and the trade union bureaucracy, we nonetheless have made time to concern ourselves with the crisis in the ISUS.

The seriousness with which we take your present crisis is also the reason that Steve Jefferys, on the basis of a decision taken by our Central Committee, informed your EC on 19 January that if they went ahead and expelled the Left Faction we would sever relations with the ISUS rump and give what support we could to the Lefts in their task of building a genuinely democratic revolutionary socialist organisation.

We indicated that in our opinion the political differences which existed within the ISUS were compatible within your organisation, and indeed, within our joint tradition. We made it absolutely clear that we were opposed to a split but in the event of your leadership continuing with its chosen course and expelling the Lefts we would give our full support to them. That is still our position today.

Trotsky wrote that 'A false-political theory bears within itself its own punishment. The strength and obstinacy of the apparatus only augments the dimensions of the catastrophe.'

To those members of ISUS who believe they can tinker with the apparatus and so avoid the catastrophe we wish to make two final points.

First, don't allow your actions to be determined by previous personal feuds. A false political theory is at the heart of the crisis in ISUS. It is to that theory that you must address yourselves.

And second, don't delude yourselves about the extent to which the apparatus can be controlled. In his article for ISJ 40 on **Building the Leadership**, Duncan Hallas described the internal regime of the Healey group in Britain as follows:

'Discussion, which is dangerous to the leadership, can be checked by hyperactivity; and this, in turn, is justified by the nearness of crash (or bust). The membership, driven at a frenzied pace, has a high casualty rate: A large proportion is always new—and therefore does not remember the nonfulfilment of past prophecies. A vicious circle is set up which makes the correction of the line more and more difficult . . . The leadership, which alone has much continuity, becomes unchallengeable and finds it less and less necessary to check its policies and practice.'

The expulsion of nearly a third of your membership, after a mere three months discussion, must be close to a record even for Healey's standards of sectarian faction fights.

An apparatus that initiates and then gets away with this kind of manoeuvre is virtually independent of its declining membership, whether its remaining rank and file supporters on the left or the right believe so or not.

The SWP (GB) protests against the proposed expulsion of the Left Faction from ISUS, calls on the Political Solution faction to unite against the expulsions, and urges the whole Convention to reject the drift to the right.

Central Committee
Socialist Workers Party (Great Britain)