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WHERE

IS

AMERICA

GOING?

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Where is America Going?

Today, profound forces are working to undermine the social and economic equilibrium which has reigned in the United States for more than 25 years, since the big depressions of 1929-32 and of 1937-38. Some of these are forces of an international character, linked with the national liberation struggles of the peoples exploited by American imperialism—above all the Vietnamese Revolution. But from the point of view of Marxist method, it is important in the first place to stress those forces which are at work inside the system itself. This essay will attempt to isolate six of these forces—six historic contradictions which are now destroying the social equilibrium of the capitalist economy and bourgeois order of the United States.

I. The Decline of Unskilled Labour and the Social Roots of Black Radicalization

American society, like every other industrialized capitalist country, is currently in the throes of an accelerated process of technological change. The third

industrial revolution—summarized in the catchword 'automation'—has by now been transforming American industry for nearly two decades. The changes which this new industrial revolution has brought about in American society are manifold. During the fifties, it created increased unemployment. The annual growth-rate of productivity was higher than the annual growth-rate of output, and as a result there was a tendency to rising structural unemployment even in times of boom and prosperity. Average annual unemployment reached 3,000,000 by the end of the Republican administration.

Since the early sixties, the number of unemployed has, however, been reduced somewhat (although American unemployment statistics are very unreliable). It has probably come down from an average of 3,000,000 to an average of 3,500,000 to 4,000,000: these figures refer to structural unemployment, and not to the conjunctural unemployment which occurs during periods of recession. But whatever may be the causes of this temporary and relative decline in structural unemployment, it is very significant that one sector of the American population continues to be hit very hard by the development of automation: the general category of unskilled labour. Unskilled labour jobs are today rapidly disappearing in us industry. They will in the future tend to disappear in the economy altogether. In absolute figures, the number of unskilled labour jobs in industry has come down from 13,000,000 to less than 4,000,000, and probably to 3,000,000, within the last 10 years. This is a truly revolutionary process. Very rarely has anything of the kind happened with such speed in the whole history of capitalism. The group which has been hit hardest by the disappearance of unskilled jobs is, of course, the black population of the United States.

The rapid decline in the number of unskilled jobs in American industry is the nexus which binds the growing negro revolt, especially the revolt of negro youth, to the general socio-economic framework of American capitalism. Of course it is clear, as most observers have indicated, that the acceleration of the negro revolt, and in particular the radicalization of negro youth in the fifties and early sixties, has been closely linked to the development of the colonial revolution. The appearance of independent states in Black Africa, the Cuban Revolution with its radical suppression of racial discrimination, and the development of the Vietnam War, have been powerful subjective and moral factors in accelerating the Afro-American explosion in the USA. But we must not overlook the objective stimuli which have grown out of the inner development of American capitalism itself. The long post-war boom and the explosive progress in agricultural productivity were the first factors in the massive urbanization and proletarianization of the Afro-Americans: the Northern ghettos grew by leaps and bounds. Today, the average rate of unemployment among the black population is double what it is among the white population, and the average rate of unemployment among *youth* is double what it is among adults, so that the average among the black youth is nearly four times the general average in the country. Up to 15 or 20 per cent of young black workers are unemployed: this is a percentage analogous to that of the Great Depression. It is sufficient to look at these figures to understand the social and material origin of the black revolt.

It is important to stress the very intimate inter-relationship between this high rate of unemployment among black youth and the generally scandalous state of education for black people in the ghettos. This school system produces a large majority of drop-outs precisely at the moment when unskilled jobs are fast disappearing. It is perfectly clear under these conditions why black nationalists feel so strongly about the problem of community control over black schools—a problem which in New York and elsewhere has become a real crystallizing point for the black liberation struggle.

2. The Social Roots of the Student Revolt

The third industrial revolution can be seen at one and the same time as a process of *expulsion* of human labour from traditional industry, and of tremendous *influx* of industrial labour into all other fields of economic and social activity. Whereas more and more people are replaced by machines in industry, activities like agriculture, office administration, public administration and even education become industrialized—that is, more and more mechanized, streamlined and organized in industrial forms.

This leads to very important social consequences. These may be summed up by saying that, in the framework of the third industrial revolution, manual labour is expelled from production while intellectual labour is reintroduced into the productive process on a gigantic scale. It thereby becomes to an every-increasing degree alienated labour—standardized, mechanized, and subjected to rigid rules and regimentation, in exactly the same way that manual labour was in the first and second industrial revolutions. This fact is very closely linked with one of the most spectacular recent developments in American society: the massive student revolt, or, more correctly, the growing radicalization of students. To give an indication of the scope of this transformation in American society, it is enough to consider that the United States, which at the beginning of this century was still essentially a country exporting agricultural products, today contains fewer farmers than students. There are today in the United States 6,000,000 students, and the number of farmers together with their employees and family-help has sunk below 5,500,000. We are confronted with a colossal transformation which upsets traditional relations between social groups, expelling human labour radically from certain fields of activity, but reintroducing it on a larger scale and at a higher level of qualification and skill in other fields.

If one looks at the destiny of the new students, one can see another very important transformation, related to the changes which automation and technological progress have brought about in the American economy. Twenty or thirty years ago, it was still true that the students were in general either future capitalists, self-employed or agents of capitalism. The majority of them became either doctors, lawyers, architects, and so on or functionaries with managerial positions in capitalist industry or the State. But today this pattern is radically changed. It is obvious that there are not 6,000,000 jobs for capitalists in contemporary American society: neither for capitalists or self-employed professionals,

nor for agents of capitalism. Thus a great number of present-day students are not future capitalists at all, but future salary-earners, in teaching, public administration and at various technical levels in industry and the economy. Their status will be nearer that of the industrial worker than that of management. For meanwhile, as a result of automation, the difference of status between the technician and the skilled worker is rapidly diminishing. us society is moving towards a situation in which most of the skilled workers for whom there remain jobs in industry will have to have a higher or semi-higher education. Such a situation already exists in certain industries even in countries other than the United States—Japanese shipbuilding is a notorious example.

The university explosion in the United States has created the same intense consciousness of alienation among students as that which is familiar in Western Europe today. This is all the more revealing, in that the material reasons for student revolt are much less evident in the United States than in Europe. Overcrowding of lecture halls, paucity of student lodgings, lack of cheap food in restaurants and other phenomena of a similar kind play a comparatively small role in American universities, whose material infrastructure is generally far superior to anything that we know in Europe. Nevertheless, the consciousness of alienation resulting from the capitalist form of the university, from the bourgeois structure and function of higher education and the authoritarian administration of it, has become more and more widespread. It is a symptomatic reflection of the changed social position of the students today in society.

American students are thus much more likely to understand general social alienation, in other words to become at least potentially anti-capitalist, than they were 10 or 15 years ago. Here the similarity with developments in Western Europe is striking. As a rule, political mobilization on the us campus started with aid to the black population within the United States, or solidarity with liberation movements in the Third World. The first political reaction of American students was an anti-imperialist one. But the logic of anti-imperialism has led the student movement to understand, at least in part, the necessity of anti-capitalist struggle, and to develop a socialist consciousness which is today widespread in radical student circles.

3. Automation, Technicians and the Hierarchical Structure of the Factory

The progress of automation has also had another financial and economic result, which we cannot yet see clearly in Europe, but which has emerged as a marked tendency in the United States during the sixties. Marxist theory explains that one of the main special effects of automation and the present technological revolution is a shortening of the life-cycle of fixed capital. Machinery is now generally replaced every four or five years, while it used to be replaced every ten years in classical capitalism. Looking at the phenomenon from the perspective of the operations of big corporations, this means that there is occurring a shift of the centre of their gravity away from problems of *production* towards problems of *reproduction*.

The real bosses of the big corporations no longer mainly discuss the problems of how to organize production: that is left to lower-echelon levels of the hierarchy. The specific objective in which they are interested is how to organize and to ensure reproduction. In other words, what they discuss is future plans: plans for replacing the existing machinery, plans for financing that replacement, new fields and locations for investment, and so on. This has given the concentration of capital in the United States a new and unforeseen twist. The process of amalgamation during the last few years has not predominantly consisted in the creation of monopolies in certain branches of industry, fusing together automobile, copper or steel trusts, or aviation factories. It has instead been a movement towards uniting apparently quite *unconnected* companies, operating in completely heteroclitic fields of production. There are some classical examples of this process, widely discussed in the American financial press, such as the Xerox-CIT merger, the spectacular diversification of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, or the Ling-Temco-Vought empire, which recently bought up the Jones and Loughlin Steel Corporation.

What this movement really reflects is the growing pre-occupation with 'pure' problems of accumulation of capital. That is to say, the imperative today is to assemble enough capital and then to diversify the investment of that capital in such a way as to minimize risks of structural or conjunctural decline in this or that branch—risks which are very great in periods of fast technological change. In other words, the operation of the capitalist system in the United States today shows in a very clear way what Marxists have always said (and what only economists in the Soviet Union and some of their associates in East European countries and elsewhere are forgetting today), namely that real cost reduction and income maximization is impossible if profitability is reckoned only at plant level. In fact, it is a truth which every big American corporation understands, that it is impossible to have maximum profitability and economic rationality at plant level, and that it is even impossible to achieve it at the level of a *single branch of industry*. That is why the prevailing capitalist tendency in the USA is to try to combine activities in a number of branches of production. The type of financial empire which is springing up as a result of this form of operation is a fascinating object of study for Marxists.

But the more Big Capital is exclusively pre-occupied with problems of capital accumulation and reproduction, the more it leaves plant management and organization of production to lower-echelon experts, and the more the smooth running of the economy must clash with the survival of private property and of the hierarchical structure of the factory. The absentee factory-owners and money-juggling financiers divorced from the productive process are not straw men. They retain ultimate power—the power to open or to close the plant, to shut it in one town and relaunch it 2,000 miles away, to suppress by one stroke of their pens 20,000 jobs and 50 skills acquired at the price of long human efforts. This power must seem more and more arbitrary and absolute in the eyes of the true technicians who precisely do *not* wield the decisive power, that of the owners of capital. The higher the level of education and scientific knowledge of the average worker-technician,

the more obsolete must become the attempts of both capitalists and managers to maintain the hierarchical and authoritarian structure of the plant, which even contradicts the logic of the latest techniques—the need for flexible co-operation within the factory in the place of a rigid chain of command.

4. The Erosion of Real Wage Increases through Inflation

Since the beginning of the sixties and the advent of the Kennedy Administration, structural unemployment has gone down and the rate of growth of the American economy has gone up. This shift has been generally associated with an increased rate of inflation in the American economy. The concrete origins and source of this inflation are to be located not only in the huge military establishment—although, of course, this is the main cause—but also in the vastly increased indebtedness of the whole American society. Private debt has accelerated very quickly; in the last 15 years it has gone up from something like 65 per cent to something like 120 per cent of the internal national income of the country, and this percentage is rising all the time. It passed the \$1,000,000,000 (thousand billion) mark a few years ago, in 1966, and is continually rising at a quicker rate than the national income itself. The specific price behaviour of the monopolistic and oligopolistic corporations, of course, interlocks with this inflationary process.

This is not the place to explore the technical problems of inflation. But it should be emphasized that the result of these inflationary tendencies, combined with the Vietnam war, has been that, for the first time for over three decades the growth of the real disposable income of the American working class has stopped. The highest point of that disposable real income was reached towards the end of 1965 and the beginning of 1966. Since then it has been going down. The downturn has been very slow—probably less than 1 per cent per annum. Nevertheless it is a significant break in a tendency which has continued practically without interruption for the last 35 years. This downturn in the real income of the workers has been the result of two processes: on the one hand inflation, and on the other a steep increase in taxation since the beginning of the Vietnamese war. There is a very clear and concrete relation between this halt in the rise of the American working class's real income, and the growing impatience which exists today in American working class circles with the us Establishment as such, whose distorted reflection was partly to be seen in the Wallace movement.

It is, of course, impossible to speak at this stage of any political opposition on the part of the American working class to the capitalist system as such. But if American workers accepted more or less easily and normally the integration of their trade union leadership into the Democratic Party during the long period which started with the Roosevelt Administration, this acceptance was a product of the fact that their real income and material conditions, especially their social security, improved during that period. Today that period seems to be coming to an end. The current stagnation of proletarian real income means that the integration of the trade union bureaucracy into the

bourgeois Democratic Party is now no longer accepted quite so easily as it was even four years ago. This was evident during the Presidential Election campaign of 1968. The UAW leadership organized their usual special convention to give formal endorsement to the Democratic candidates, Humphrey and Muskie. This time they got a real shock. Of the thousand delegates who normally come to these conventions, nearly one half did not show up at all. They no longer supported the Democratic Party with enthusiasm. They had lost any sense of identification with the Johnson Administration. All the talk about welfare legislation, social security, medicare and the other advantages which the workers had gained during the last four years was largely neutralized in their eyes by the results of inflation and of increased taxation on their incomes. The fact was that their real wages had stopped growing and were even starting to decline a little.

It is well known that dollar inflation in the United States has created major tensions in the world monetary system. Inside the USA, there is now a debate among different circles of the ruling class, the political personnel of the bourgeoisie, and the official economic experts, as to whether to give priority to restoring the us balance of payments, or to maintaining the present rate of growth. These two goals seem to be incompatible. Each attempt to stifle inflation completely, to re-establish a very stable currency, can only be ensured by deflationary policies which create unemployment—and probably unemployment on a considerable scale. Each attempt to create full employment and to quicken the rate of growth inevitably increases inflation and with it the general loss of power of the currency. This is the dilemma which confronts the new Republican administration today as it confronted Johnson yesterday. It is impossible to predict what course Nixon will choose, but it is quite possible that his economic policy will be closer to that of the Eisenhower Administration than to that of the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations.

A group of leading American businessmen, who form a council of business advisors with semi-official standing, published a study two weeks before the November 1968 election which created a sensation in financial circles. They stated bluntly that in order to combat inflation, at least 6 per cent unemployment was needed. These American businessmen are far more outspoken than their British counterparts, who are already happy when there is talk about 3 per cent unemployment. Unemployment of 6 per cent in the United States means about 5,000,000 permanently without work. It is a high figure compared to the present level, to the level under 'normal' conditions, outside of recessions. If Nixon should move in that direction, in which the international bankers would like to push him, the American bourgeoisie will encounter increased difficulty in keeping the trade-union movement quiescent and ensuring that the American workers continue to accept the integration of their union bureaucracy into the system, passively submitting to both bosses and union bureaucrats.

5. The Social Consequences of Public Squalor

impact on the American economy and especially on social relations in the United States. Inflation greatly intensifies the contradiction between 'private affluence' and 'public squalor'. This contradiction has been highlighted by liberal economists like Galbraith, and is today very striking for a European visiting the United States. The extent to which the public services in that rich country have broken down is, in fact, astonishing. The huge budget has still not proved capable of maintaining a minimum standard of normally functioning public services. In late 1968, the *New York Times Magazine*, criticizing the American postal services, revealed that the average letter travels between Washington and New York more slowly today than it did a hundred years ago on horseback in the West. In a city like New York street sweeping has almost entirely disappeared. Thoroughfares are generally filthy: in the poorer districts, streets are hardly ever cleaned. In the richer districts, the burgers achieve clean streets only because they pay private workers out of their own pockets to sweep the streets and keep them in more or less normal conditions. Perhaps the most extraordinary phenomenon, at any rate for the European, is that of certain big cities in the South-West, like Houston or Phoenix, which have half a million inhabitants or more and yet do not have any public transport system *whatsoever*: not a broken-down system—just no system at all. There are private cars and nothing else—no buses, no trams, no subways, nothing.

The contradiction between private affluence and public squalor has generally been studied from the point of view of the consumer, and of the penalties or inconveniences that it imposes on the average citizen. But there is another dimension to this contradiction which will become more and more important in the years to come. This is its impact on what one could call the 'producers', that is to say of the people who are employed by public administration.

The number of these employees is increasing very rapidly. Public administration is already the largest single source of employment in the United States, employing over 11,000,000 wage earners. The various strata into which these 11,000,000 can be divided are all chronically underpaid. They have an average income which is lower than the income of the equivalent positions in private industry. This is not exceptional; similar phenomena have existed or exist in many European countries. But the results—results which have often been seen in Europe during the last 10 or 15 years—are now for the first time appearing on a large scale in the United States.

Public employees, who in the past were outside the trade-union movement and indeed any form of organized social activity, are today becoming radicalized at least at the union level. They are organizing, they are agitating, and they are demanding incomes at least similar to those which they could get in private industry. In a country like the United States, with the imperial position it occupies on a world scale, the vulnerability of the social system to any increase in trade-union radicalism by public employees is very great. A small example will do as illustration. In New York recently both police and firemen were, not officially but effectively, on strike—at the same time. They

merely worked to rule, and thereby disorganized the whole urban life of the city. Everything broke down. In fact, for six days total traffic chaos reigned in New York. Drivers could park their cars anywhere without them being towed away. (Under normal conditions, between two and three thousand cars are towed away by the police each day in New York.) For those six days, with motorists free to park where they liked, the town became completely blocked after an hour of morning traffic—just because the police wanted a 10 per cent rise in wages.

The economic rationale of this problem needs to be understood. It is very important not to see it simply as an example of mistaken policy on the part of public administrators or capitalist politicians, but rather as the expression of basic tendencies of the capitalist system. One of the main trends of the last 25 or 30 years of European capitalism has been the growing socialization of all indirect costs of production. This constitutes a very direct contribution to the realization of private profit and to the accumulation of capital. Capitalists increasingly want the State to pay not only for electrical cables and roads, but also for research, development, education, and social insurance. But once this tendency towards the socialization of indirect costs of production gets under way, it is obvious that the corporations will not accept large increases in taxation to finance it. If they were to pay the taxes needed to cover all these costs, there would in fact be no 'socialization'. They would continue to pay for them privately, but instead of doing so directly they would pay indirectly through their taxes (and pay for the administration of these payments too). Instead of lessening the burden, such a solution would in fact increase it. So there is an inevitable institutionalized resistance of the corporations and of the capitalist class to increasing taxes up to the point where they would make possible a functional public service capable of satisfying the needs of the entire population. For this reason, it is probable that the gap between the wages of public employees and those of private workers in the United States will remain, and that the trend towards radicalization of public employees—both increased unionization and even possibly political radicalization—will continue.

Moreover, it is not without importance that a great number of university students enter public administration—both graduates and so-called drop-outs. Even today, if we look at the last four or five years, many young people who were student leaders or militants three or four years ago are now to be found teaching in the schools or working in municipal social services. They may lose part of their radical consciousness when they take jobs; that is the hope not only of their parents but also of the capitalist class. But the evidence shows that at least part of their political consciousness is preserved, and that there occurs a certain infiltration of radicalism from the student sector into the teaching body—especially in higher education—and into the various strata of public administration in which ex-students become employed.

6. The Impact of Foreign Competition

States economy have been slowly tending to transform the subjective consciousness of different groups of the country's population—negroes, especially negro youth; students; technicians; public employees—has now been indicated. Inflation has begun to disaffect growing sections of the working class. But the final, and most important, moment of a Marxist analysis of us imperial society today has not yet been reached—that is the threat to American capitalism now posed by international competition.

Traditionally, American workers have always enjoyed much higher real wages than European workers. The historical causes for this phenomenon are well known. They are linked with the shortage of labour in the United States, which was originally a largely empty country. Traditionally, American capitalist industry was able to absorb these higher wages because it was practically isolated from international competition. Very few European manufactured goods reached the United States, and United States industry exported only a small part of its output. Over the last 40 years, of course, the situation has slowly changed. American industry has become ever more integrated into the world market. It participates increasingly in international competition, both because it exports more and because the American domestic market is rapidly itself becoming the principal sector of the world market, since the exports of all other capitalist countries to the United States have been growing rapidly. Here a major paradox seems to arise. How can American workers earn real wages which are between two and three times higher than real wages in Western Europe, and between four and five times higher than real wages in Japan, while American industry is involved in international competition?

The answer is, of course, evident. These higher wages have been possible because United States industry has operated on a much higher level of productivity than European or Japanese industry. It has enjoyed a productivity gap, or as Engels said of British industry in the 19th century, a *productivity monopoly* on the world market. This productivity monopoly is a function of two factors: higher technology, and economy of scale—that is a much larger dimension of the average factory or firm. Today, both of these two causes of the productivity gap are threatened. The technological advance over Japan or Western Europe which has characterized American imperialism is now disappearing very rapidly. The very trend of massive capital export to the other imperialist countries which distinguishes American imperialism, and the very nature of the so-called 'multi-national' corporation (which in nine cases out of ten is in reality an American corporation), diffuses American technology on a world scale, thus equalizing technological levels at least among the imperialist countries. At the same time, it tends, of course, to increase the gap between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Today, one can say that only in a few special fields such as computers and aircraft does American industry still enjoy a real technological advantage over its European and Japanese competitors. But these two sectors, although they may be very important for the future, are not decisive for the total export and import market either in Europe or in the United States, nor will

they be decisive for the next 10 or 20 years. So this advantage is a little less important than certain European analysts have claimed.

If one looks at other sectors, in which the technological advantage is disappearing or has disappeared—such as steel, automobiles, electrical appliances, textiles, furniture, or certain types of machinery—it is evident that a massive invasion of the American market by foreign products is taking place. In steel, something between 15 and 20 per cent of American consumption is today imported from Japan and Western Europe. The Japanese are beginning to dominate the West Coast steel market, and the Europeans to take a large slice of the East Coast market. It is only in the Mid-West, which is still the major industrial region of the United States, that imported steel is not widely used. But with the opening of the St. Lawrence seaway, even there the issue may be doubtful in the future. Meanwhile, automobiles are imported into the United States today at a rate which represents 10–15 per cent of total annual consumption. This proportion too could very quickly go up to 20–25 per cent. There is a similar development in furniture, textiles, transistor radios and portable television sets; ship-building and electrical appliances might be next.

So far, the gradual disappearance of the productivity differential has created increased competition for American capitalism in its own home market. Its foreign markets are seriously threatened or disappearing in certain fields like automobiles and steel. This, of course, is only the first phase. If the concentration of European and Japanese industry starts to create units which operate on the same scale as American units, with the same dimensions as American corporations, then American industry will ultimately find itself in an impossible position. It will then have to pay three times higher wages, with the same productivity as the Europeans or the Japanese. That would be an absolutely untenable situation, and it would be the beginning of a huge structural crisis for American industry.

Two examples should suffice to show that this is not a completely fantastic perspective. The last merger in the Japanese steel industry created a Japanese corporation producing 22,000,000 tons of steel a year. In the United States, this would make it the second biggest steel firm. On the other hand, in Europe the recent announcement that Fiat and Citroen are to merge by 1970 has created an automobile corporation producing 2,000,000 cars a year; this would make it the third largest American automobile firm, and it would move up into second place, overtaking Ford, if the momentum of its rate of growth, compared with the current rate of growth in the American industry, were maintained for another three or four years.

These examples make it clear that it is possible for European and Japanese firms, if the existing process of capital concentration continues, to attain not only a comparable technology but also comparable scale to that of the top American firms. When they reach that level, American workers' wages are certain to be attacked, because it is not possible in the capitalist world to produce with the same produc-

tivity as rivals abroad and yet pay workers at home two or three times higher wages.

7. The Wage Differentials Enjoyed by American Workers

The American ruling class is becoming increasingly aware that the huge wage differential which it still grants its workers is a handicap in international competition. Although this handicap has not yet become a serious fetter, American capitalists have already begun to react to it in various ways over the past few years.

The export of capital is precisely designed to counteract this wage differential. The American automobile trusts have been investing almost exclusively in foreign countries, where they enjoy lower wages and can therefore far more easily maintain their share of the world market, with cars produced cheaply in Britain or Germany, rather than for higher wages inside the United States. Another attempt to keep down the growth of real wages was the type of incomes policy advocated by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations—until 1966, when it broke down as a result of the Vietnam war. A third form of counteraction has been an intensification of the exploitation of labour—in particular a speed-up in big industry which has produced a structural transformation of the American working class in certain fields. This speed-up has led to a work rhythm that is so fast that the average adult worker is virtually incapable of keeping it up for long. This has radically lowered the age structure in certain industries, such as automobiles or steel. Today, since it is increasingly difficult to stay in plants (under conditions of speed-up) for 10 years without becoming a nervous or physical wreck, up to 40 per cent of the automobile workers of the United States are young workers. Moreover, the influx of black workers in large-scale industry has been tremendous as a result of the same phenomenon, since they are physically more resistant. Today, there are percentages of 35, 40 or 45 per cent black workers in some of the key automobile factories. In Ford's famous River Rouge plant, there are over 40 per cent black workers; in the Dodge automobile plant in Detroit, there are over 50 per cent. These are still exceptional cases—although there are also some steel plants with over 50 per cent black workers. But the average employment of black workers in United States industry as a whole is far higher than the demographic average of 10 per cent: it is something like 30 per cent.

None of these policies has so far had much effect. However, if the historic moment arrives when the productivity gap between American and West European and Japanese industry is closed, American capitalism will have absolutely no choice but to launch a far more ruthless attack on the real wage levels of American workers than has occurred hitherto in Western Europe, in the various countries where a small wage differential existed (Italy, France, West Germany, England and Belgium, at different moments during the sixties). Since the wage differential between Europe and America is not a matter of 5, 10, or 15 per cent, as it is between different Western European countries, but is of the order of 200–300 per cent, it is easy to imagine what an enormous handicap this will become when productivity becomes

comparable, and how massive the reactions of American capitalism will then be.

It is necessary to stress these facts in order to adopt a Marxist, in other words a materialist and not an idealist approach to the question of the attitudes of the American working class towards American society. It is true that there is a very close inter-relation between the anti-communism of the Establishment, the arms expenditure which makes possible a high level of employment, the international role of American imperialism, the surplus profits which the latter gets from its international investments of capital, and the military apparatus which defends these investments. But one thing must be understood. The American workers go along with this whole system, not in the first place because they are intoxicated by the ideas of anti-communism. They go along with it because it has been capable of delivering the goods to them over the last 30 years. The system has been capable of giving them higher wages and a higher degree of social security. It is this fact which has determined their acceptance of anti-communism, and not the acceptance of anti-communism which has determined social stability. Once the system becomes less and less able to deliver the goods, a completely new situation will occur in the United States.

Trade-union consciousness is not only negative. Or, to formulate this more dialectically, trade-union consciousness is in and by itself socially neutral. It is neither reactionary nor revolutionary. It becomes reactionary when the system is capable of satisfying trade-union demands. It creates a major revolutionary potential once the system is no longer capable of satisfying basic trade-union demands. Such a transformation of American society under the impact of the international competition of capital is today knocking at the door of us capitalism.

The liberation struggles of the peoples of the Third World, with their threat to American imperialist investment, will also play an important role in ending the long socio-economic equilibrium of American capitalism. But they do not involve such dramatic and immediate economic consequences as the international competition of capital could have, if the productivity gap were filled.

As long as socialism or revolution are only ideals preached by militants because of their own convictions and consciousness, their social impact is inevitably limited. But when the ideas of revolutionary socialism are able to unite faith, confidence and consciousness with the immediate material interest of a social class in revolt—the working class, then their potential becomes literally explosive. In that sense, the political radicalization of the working class, and therewith socialism, will become a practical proposition in the United States within the next 10 or 15 years, under the combined impact of all these forces which have been examined here. After the black workers, the young workers, the students, the technicians and the public employees, the mass of the American workers will put the struggle for socialism on the immediate historical agenda in the United States. The road to revolution will then be open.