To the BIDOM editorial board.

Dear comrades,

From Marilyn Vogt-Downy I received a copy of Larri Brenner's article "To-day's Jews in To-day's America", included the corrected version, and of Marilyn's comments, with which I wholeheartedly agree. The reproduction of the Brenner article, with its clear antisemitic innuendo, in BIDOM, a publication associated with the F.I., would be a scandal, for which we would have to pay a price for many years, in many countries. The only possible form of publication possible seems to me in an internal discussion bulletin, accompanied in the same bulletin by several answers and a clear statement of the FIT leadership that it totally disapproves of the antisemitic innuendo of that article.

If the BIDOM editorial board would nevertheless decide to print the Brenner article, I would have no choice but to dissociate myself publicly from that article and its publication, to withdraw my name from the list of contributing foreign editors.

It is useful to add a few remarks to Marilyn's critical comments.

Antisemitism is a variant of racism. It is therefore thoroughly alien to marxism. It is based on the idea that Jews as Jews, i.e. members of a specific ethnic (or ethnic and religious) group, play a specific social role, either throughout history, or in given periods and given countries. It is therefore based on an ethnic (i.e. in the last analysis biologic) interpretation of history, of which the Nazi's social Darwinism is but the end result. The nonsense of that interpretation is obvious: race (the Untermenschen) are supposed either to aspire to world domination or are ready to dominate the world. The political function of that conspiracy theory is likewise obvious when one looks at its origins. It was originally concocted by the Tsarist secret police to counter and divide rising opposition against the autocracy in Russia.

The interpretation of history as a struggle between races, ethnic groups, religious etc. is incompatible with the marxist interpretation of history as a struggle between social classes and major class fractions, irrespective of their "racial", ethnic or religious origins.

Capitalists basically behave like capitalists, indeed are forced to behave like capitalists by bourgeois society, not because they have white, yellow, brown or black skins, not because they are of protestant, catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Shintoist or Parso faith, but because they are capitalists.

For sure different historical, national, cultural traditions and situations partially influence that behavior, which is never identical for all layers, in all countries, at all times. Social classes and major class fractions always combine in their behavior (and even more in their ideas) general and specific features. But for such statements not to lead to vulgar (and politically paralysing) eclecticism to stress that the capitalists' behavior is basically determined by the material constraints which bourgeois society imposes upon them.

As long as they remain capitalists, i.e. do not "opt out", capitalists of whatever religion, ethnic origin or color of skin cannot avoid laying off workers and trying to cut wages when their sales drop heavily and their profit are dramatically cut.
The idea that Jews are somehow "inclined" to be merchants, grasping, speculators, overexploiting middlemen etc. is as racist and reactionary as the idea that blacks, as blacks, are lazy, that the Japanese as Japanese, are arrogant, the Chinese devious, the Italians mafiosi, the French dirty, the Germans brutal, the Russians servile (or alternatively servile and anarchistic), the Koreans pushing etc. etc.

The incompatibility of such racist prejudice - and one of its variants: antisemitism - with any form of scientific approach to history and certainly with marxism appears clearly when one recalls that all ethnic and religious groups are divided into different social classes (except in a totally classless society), which behave not only in an antagonistic way. The Russian labor and socialist movement was largely created by Jewish workers standing up against Jewish capitalists.

Likewise, the great majority of the members of a same ethnic or religious group behave in a totally different way in different social frameworks. Compare the behavior of Arab nomades, Arab slave traders, Arab town dwellers in what was for centuries the most brilliant civilization in the world outside China, and the pauperized Arab town dwellers during of the 19th century to note that fact. And what has become in Israel of the antisemitic myth about the physical cowardliness and inabilit use arms of the "typical" Jew? Do we not correctly accuse the Zionist "Jews" of continuous military aggressivity? But is that also a characteristic of the Jewish masses in Argentina or in London?

From Larri Brenner's antisemitic assumptions flow a series of theories on important other issues.

Brenner states that 20 out of 67 billionaires and 98 of the 400 richest Americans are Jewish. But this reflects a serious misconception of the power structure of US monopoly capitalism (indeed of the the power structure of all imperialist countries). Those who "rule America", the top of the social pyramid, do not do so on the basis of personal fortunes only, although colossal personal wealth is obviously a precondition for that rule. They based upon the control of the largest industrial and financial corporations, often interlocked and spread over many corporations. This enables them to be the masters of assets 10 times larger than their personal wealth.

If one examines the list of the 50 or 100 largest of these corpora- tions, one will note that not more than a couple of them are controlled by people of Jewish origin, certainly not a higher percentage than the fraction of the US population which is of Jewish origin or faith (whatever that means).

Larri Brenner's statement that "the Sephardic Jews...played almost no role in the industrialization of the country", And that "the German Jews...ended up as successful department store owners...wholesale networks in investment banking...brokerage houses...marginal industries like the new movies...realty sharks", is a straight echo of the 19th century antisemitic accusation that Jewish capitalists are "unproductive" speculators and "usurers" (the Nazi spoke about "Wucherkapital", usury capitalists which harks back to the traditional catholic antisemitic assertions from the 12th century on), as opposed to the "productive" if not "creative" non-Jewish capitalists.

From the point of view of empirical evidence, this is an unsubstantiated mys- tification. In many countries, industrialization was partially (Holland, Britain, Germany) or totally (Hungary, Bohemia, Slovakia, parts of Russia, Poland, Romania) launched by people of Jewish origin.
But the underlying assumption is much worse and again in radical conflict with marxism. All profits in bourgeois society originate from unpaid surplus labor. Is the fact of forcing wage earners to produce unpaid labor - de facto forced labor - more "productive" and morally "superior" than the fact of participation in the redistribution of surplus-value originating from that forced labor? Is the role of middle men and "speculators" morally more condemnable and socially more obnoxious than the role of "productive" capitalists who forced 8 year old girls to work 1,000 m. underground in coal mines standing 12 hour shifts which destroyed their health? What about the "productive" textile workers who toil 14 hours a day for starvation wages? What about the "entrepreneurs" in India who make small boys carry 50 lb. loads on their backs, not even for a starvation wage, just for a meal a day?

Worst of all: Larri Brenner draws the political conclusion that somehow, in the USA, anti-semitism is passé, a conclusion which on the basis of his reasoning should be extended to all Western countries - as a result of the growing integration of "The Jews" into the upper class and their growing assimilation. This is a faithful reproduction of similar illusions which prevailed in Germany during the twenties. We know the disaster which followed.

Brenner himself reveals the source of the illusion and the analytical mistakes that the majority of the "young Jews" go into - college professions (lawyers, teachers, electronic experts etc.) But these are not layers of the ruling classes, they are parts of the middle classes, which will be harder and harder hit by the unfolding depression. Exactly like the shopkeepers in Europe met more and more hostility and hatred from their non-Jewish competitors during the depression of the thirties. These Jewish university graduates will meet more and more hostility and hatred from their competitors during the present depression if it lasts long enough.

Jewish social upward mobility, "deproletarization" and political shift to the right (in a more limited way the same phenomenon occurred in France, Britain and Argentina) is undeniable. But it was essentially a result of the long postwar boom. That boom is now over. We are going through a depression which will last a long time. That depression tends to stop and reverse upward mobility. If the socialist movement does not succeed in stopping growing unemployment and growing demoralization and despair among the less protected or unprotected sectors of the "dual society" which the system tends to extend, a similar disaster as that of the thirties is not only possible but likely.

For sure, the Jews will not be the only targets of inhuman barbarism which world peoples. They will probably not be the main target. But they will be targets. From that point of view Le Pen's electoral successes in France, those of Haider in Austria, of the carapintadas in Argentina, the fact that the absolute majority of the white electorate in Louisiana voted for an apologist of Hitler and the holocaust (and incidentally of the Ku Klux Klan) are ominous signs which only people bent upon police an ignorance.

Larri Brenner is right in stating that socialists should be in the forefront of the fight for "affirmative action" in the USA and in the struggle against the crimes which the Zionist establishment commits against the Arab people in general and the Palestinian people in particular. Socialists have the elementary duty to be always in the first place on the side of the over-exploited and the over-oppressed.

But this duty in no way contradicts our principled fight against all forms of chauvinism and racism, whatever may be the motivation of those who hold
them, even among the over-oppressed. These ideologies
which antisemitism is a variant, are utterly reac-
and mere
oppression more difficult.

cally, and therefore

The best help you can give to the Zionist is to glide over, be it by
inward, from anti-Zionism to antisemitism. This confirms their myth,
that antizionism is but another expression of antisemitism.

Our position must be: 100% opposition to Zionism, 100% opposition to
antisemitism, without giving in an inch to either of them.

Comradely yours,

Ernest Mandel.

[Signature]

The interpretation of history as a struggle between ethnic
or religious groups is incompatible with the variant, interpretation of histor-
ogy in a variant of racism. It is therefore thoroughly alien to conceiv-
e the Jew as Jew, i.e., member of a specific ethnic (or ethnic and
religious) group, play a specific social role in a given society or in

canons that interpretation is obviously
es either to aspire to world domination or af-
dominate the world. The political function of that conspiracy theory is
nally directed against any group at all levels of society. It was originally con-
d by the Zionist secret police to counter and dissolve other oppositions against
the world

Capitalists basically behave like capitalists, indeed are forced to behave like
capitalists in bourgeois society, not because they have white, yellow, brown or
black skins, not because they are of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu,
shintoist or Farsi faith, but because they are capitalists.

For example, different historical, national, cultural traditions and situations parti-
cially influence that behavior, which is superstructural for all laborers, in all
countries, at all times. Social classes and major class fractions always combine
in their behavior (and even more in their ideas) general and specific features.
but for each statement not to lead to vulgar (or politically paralyzing) conclu-
ions that the capitalists' behavior is basically determined by the material
straints which bourgeois society imposes upon them.

As long as they remain capitalists, i.e., do not "opt out" capitalists of whatever religion, ethnic origin or color of skin cannot avoid laying off
workers and trying to cut wages when their sales drop heavily and their profit
are dramatically cut.