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# International Communist Current

3rd Quarter 2010

# International Review

**Capitalism has reached a dead-end:  
neither austerity packages nor recovery  
plans can change anything**

What are workers' councils? (iii)  
**The revolution of 1917 (July to October):  
the renewal of the workers' councils  
and the seizure of power**

The decadence of capitalism (vii)  
**Rosa Luxemburg and the limits  
to capitalist expansion**

The Communist Left in Russia  
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# Capitalism has reached a dead-end: neither austerity packages nor recovery plans can change anything

*"The G20 in search of a new way of governing the world"*. This was the ambitious title given to an article in *Le Monde* (26 June 2010) on the latest summit of the world's "great". An ambition in keeping with the catastrophic state of the planet!

An improvement in the situation is no doubt the subject of ardent hopes. But over the past two years, attacks on workers' living standards have been speeding up all over the world. Despite all the announcements about an economic recovery, the world economy is stagnating and its future looks increasingly sombre. In the face of all this, a meeting of the leaders in charge of running this world economy, the people who hold the fate of the planet's inhabitants in their hands, was obliged to discuss ways of making things better.

The meeting of the G8 which preceded this G20 had to agree on the policies to follow to take the world economy out of the crisis: carrying on with recovery plans as the US recommends and is doing, or imposing austerity plans to deal with the threat of bankruptcy looming over a growing number of states, as the most important countries of the European Union recommend and are doing. The G20 had to look at taxing the banks in order to build up a fund for resolving financial crises – the crisis of 2007 has not been resolved even if its most devastating effects have for the moment been held in check; at the same time, it had to agree on ways of regulating the financial system in order to avoid the most destabilising forms of speculation and to guide the financial resources liberated as a result towards developing production. What came out of this summit? Nothing. The mountain didn't even give rise to a mole hill. No decision was taken about any of the problems; as we will see in more detail later on, the participants could do no more than register their complete disagreement: *"On the subjects which made up the bulk of this G20, the participants at the summit judged that the most urgent thing was to wait. The divergences were too great and so was the lack of preparation"*.<sup>1</sup> President Sarkozy of France did his best to play down this demonstration of powerlessness by the world bourgeoisie, commenting that *"you can't take historic decisions at every summit"*!

1. *Le Monde*, 29 June 2010.

The previous G20s had promised to introduce reforms based on the lessons of the "sub-prime" affair and the financial crisis that followed. This time, there weren't even any promises. Why did the grand managers of world capitalism prove so incapable of taking the least decision? The root of the problem is that there is no solution to the crisis of capitalism other than the overthrow of this historically senile mode of production. There is also another, more circumstantial explanation: since the heads of state are aware that the world economy is sinking into a very deep hole, they are wise enough to avoid having to repeat the famous phrase of the former president of the Ivory Coast, F Houphouët Boigny: *"We were at the edge of a precipice but we have taken a big step forward."*<sup>2</sup> This time round, no one would be laughing.

## The end of recovery plans and the return of the depression

The outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008 brought with it a fall in production in the major countries of the world (with a slow-down for China and India). To try to deal with this situation, the bourgeoisie in most countries was obliged to bring in recovery plans, the ones in China and the USA being by far the most significant. While these plans did permit a partial revival of global economic activity and a certain degree of stabilisation in the developed countries, their effects on demand, production and trade are now wearing off.

Despite all the propaganda about the so-called recovery, the bourgeoisie is now forced to admit that this is not how things have turned out. In the USA, growth was expected to reach 3.5% in 2010 but has been revised downwards to 2.7%; unemployment figures have grown week by week and the American economy has started destroying jobs;<sup>3</sup> in general, a

2. [www.dicocitations.com/citations/citation-7496.php](http://www.dicocitations.com/citations/citation-7496.php)

3. After 5 consecutive months in which jobs were being created, 125,000 were destroyed in June,

number of indicators created to measure economic activity in the US show that growth is tending to weaken. In the euro zone, growth was a mere 0.1% in the first quarter of 2010 and the European Central Bank predicts that the total for the year will be no more than 1%. Bad news keeps on coming: growth in manufacturing is less and less strong and unemployment is again on the rise, with the exception of Germany. It is predicted that the GNP of Spain will continue to diminish in 2010 (-0.3%). It is significant that, both in the USA and Europe, investments keep falling, which means that enterprises are not envisaging any real growth in production.

Above all, Asia, the region of the world that was supposed to become the new centre of gravity of the world economy, is now seeing its activity slowing down. In China, the Conference Board index, which was predicted to rise by 1.7% in April, only went up by 0.3%; this figure is corroborated by all of those which have been published recently. While the monthly figures published about a given country are not necessarily indicative of a general tendency, the fact that, in the major countries of the region, economic activity has taken the same turn at the same moment does signify something serious; thus, the index of economic activity in India shows a slow-down and, in Japan, the figures for industrial production and household consumption for the month of May are falling.

Finally, confirming this trend, which gives the lie to all the media fanfares about the recovery, the "Baltic Dry Index", which measures the evolution of world trade, is also heading downwards.

## The bankruptcy of states

While the evolution of different forms of economic activity testifies to a descent into depression, entire nation states are experiencing growing difficulty in repaying their debts. This can't fail to recall the sub-prime crisis which saw numerous

which is more than the analysts feared. See the article *"Après cinq mois de créations d'emplois, les États-Unis se remettent à en détruire"* ([www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2010/07/03/apres-cinq-mois-de-creations-d-emplois-les-etats-unis-se-remettent-a-en-detruire\\_1383703\\_3234.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2010/07/03/apres-cinq-mois-de-creations-d-emplois-les-etats-unis-se-remettent-a-en-detruire_1383703_3234.html))

American households unable to pay back the loans granted to them. A few months ago, it was the turn of the Greek state to be in the hot seat, and it was widely suspected that the state of its finances was much worse than had initially been announced. At the same time, the solvency of several other European states (gracefully given the acronym of PIIGS), Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Spain as well as Greece, was called into question by the debt-rating agencies. No doubt speculation on these economies worsened their difficulties, and the role played by these agencies (which were created by the big banks) is far from clear. It remains the case that what is basically at issue in the crisis of confidence affecting these countries is the scale of their budget deficits, which have reached levels unequalled since the Second World War, and of their public debt. The recovery plans put in place by the different states have made little impact on the situation. In fact they have led to a fall in the currency reserves of the different public treasuries, and consequently to increasing difficulties for the states concerned in repaying the interest on the loans extended to them. Now, the payment of the interest on their debts is the minimum condition for the great world banking organisms to continue loaning to them. But the PIIGS are not the only ones to see a very strong increase in their public deficits and thus in public debt. The debt-rating agencies have expressly insisted that Britain reduce its debt and warned that it will have to join the ranks of the PIIGS if it doesn't make a major effort to reduce its public deficit. We should add for good measure that Japan (which, in the 1990s was predicted to supplant the USA as the world's leading economy) has reached a public debt that corresponds to twice its GNP.<sup>4</sup> This list, which could easily be lengthened, leads us to the conclusion that the tendency of states to default on sovereign debt is a global one, because all states are being hit by the aggravation of the debt crisis since 2007, and all of them have suffered imbalances comparable to those of Greece and Portugal.

But it's not just states whose financial situation is nearing insolvency. The banking system is also in an increasingly grave situation, for the following reasons:

- all the specialists know and are saying that the banks have not been purified of the “toxic” products which resulted in the bankruptcy of numerous financial institutions at the end of 2008;
- the banks, faced with these difficulties,

4. Among other things, the fact that Japan currently holds the second largest currency reserves in the world allows it to be marked less severely by the debt-rating agencies than many countries who are actually less deeply in debt.

have still not stopped speculating on the world's financial markets by buying some very risky products. On the contrary, they have carried on playing the same game to try to make up for the massive losses they have incurred;

- the aggravation of the crisis since the end of 2007 has forced a number of companies to go bust, so that many households, hit by unemployment, can no longer, in contrast to previous years, repay the various loans they were given.

An illustration of this situation was provided recently, on 22 May, when a savings company in Spain called Caja Sur was placed under state control. But this event was just the tip of the iceberg as regards the difficulties facing banks in the last few months. Other banks in Europe have been downgraded by the debt-rating agencies (Caja Madrid in Spain, BNP in France); but above all, the European Central Bank has informed the financial world that the European banks will have to depreciate their shares by 195 billion euros in the next two years, and that their need for capital up until 2012 has risen to 800 billion euros. On another level, a recent event has been a striking verification of the present fragility of the banking system: the German company Siemens has decided to create its own bank, an institution which will be in its service and in the service of its clients. The reason for this is simple: having already lost the mere bagatelle of 140 billion euros at the time of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the company is afraid of a repeat phenomenon with the liquidities it has passed through the tills of the “classical” banks. And we have also learned that Siemens has not invented anything new here, since the Veolia company, which is allied with British American Tobacco and other less important enterprises, did the same thing in January 2010.<sup>5</sup> It's clear that, if companies whose solidity is not in question for the time being are no longer putting their funds in the vaults of the big banks, the situation of the latter is not going to get any better!

But what is particularly important to underline is that problems connected to the insolvency of states and banks can only pile up more and more: this is already the case, but it's going to increase considerably in the weeks and months ahead. It's now clear that if a state goes bust and is not rescued by other states, as has been the case with Greece, this will result in the collapse of the banks which have given it massive loans. The credit doled out by German and French banks to the states belonging to the

PIIGS group amounts to something like 1000 billion euros, so it is evident that if these countries default on their repayments this will have incalculable consequences on France and Germany, and thus for the world economy.

Today, it's Spain that is in the eye of the world financial storm. The European Central Bank has announced that Spanish banks that are not creditworthy enough to borrow on the money markets will be refinanced to the tune of 85.6 billion euros, just for the month of May. Moreover it is being said in the stock markets that the Spanish state has got to come up with a considerable sum by the end of July or the beginning of August.<sup>6</sup> Such sums have thus got to be found pretty soon and it's because the situation is so dramatic that the director of the IMF, D Strauss-Kahn, and the joint Secretary of State for the Treasury, C Collins, have both been to Madrid. A plan for salvaging Spain's sovereign debt, involving between 200 and 250 billion euros, is under review.

If there is such a strong focus on Spain at the moment, it's because the problems posed by the financial situation there could have very serious consequences:

- if Spain is not propped up and it goes bust, this would lead to a general discrediting of the euro and a loss of confidence in all payments in this currency; in other words, the euro zone as a whole will be in trouble;
- France and Germany, i.e. the strongest economies in the euro zone, would be unable to take up the slack if Spain defaults, and this would result in the destabilisation of their finances and, in the end, of their whole economy (see the analysis developed by the economist P Artus in *Le Monde*, 16 April 2010).

This means that any aid to the Spanish state to help it avoiding a default on its payments could only be the fruit of an agreement by all the western countries, and the price for this would be to make their own financial situation even more fragile than it is already. And given that, as we have seen, the majority of states are in a situation close to that of Spain, they would also have to come up with policies aimed at preventing them from becoming incapable of repaying a cascading sovereign debt.

From all this it follows that capitalism no longer has the means to reverse the aggravation of the crisis that we have seen

6. We are talking about 280 billion euros. Of course, because of their origin (the stock markets) such figures are disputable and have obviously been denied by the authorities, since in such circumstances, silence would be taken as a confirmation and could lead to all kinds of panic.

5. [http://lemonde.fr/economie/article/2010/06/29/siemens-cree-sa-banque-afin-de-s-affranchir-des-etablissements-traditionnels\\_1380459\\_3234.html](http://lemonde.fr/economie/article/2010/06/29/siemens-cree-sa-banque-afin-de-s-affranchir-des-etablissements-traditionnels_1380459_3234.html)

since 2007.

## States differ on what policy to adopt

“*Rigour or recovery: the persistent disagreement of the G8 leaders*” was a headline in *Le Monde*’s 27-28 June edition. Despite the diplomatic language used, it emerged clearly that the disagreement between the different countries was very deep. Rigour was called for by Britain and Germany, with the euro zone in its wake; recovery was wanted by the USA and to a lesser extent by China. What are the reasons behind this disagreement?

Recognising the grave implications for Europe and the world of the bankruptcy of the Greek state, the EU and the IMF finally organised the salvage of Greece’s sovereign debt, despite the disagreements between the states taking part in the salvage operation. But this event resulted in a major hardening of attitudes among the countries of the euro zone:

- first, all finally agreed on the necessity to take steps to shore up states in dire need, since any defaulting on payments would shake the whole European financial system, risking its complete collapse. This is why a 750 billion support fund was set up, two thirds of it supplied by the countries of the euro zone and one third by the IMF, which has the job of making sure that states in default of payments are able to meet their obligations. Similarly, given the situation of the banks in the euro zone, the European Central Bank agreed to take on the more or less dubious debts owed by the banks. This is what we have just seen with the Spanish banks.
- Secondly, to reduce the risk of defaulting on payments, the states decided to sanitise their own public finances and their own banking systems. To do this they launched austerity plans which mean bringing down working class living standards to a degree comparable to what happened in the 1930s. The number of attacks is so great that just enumerating them would be beyond the scope of this article. Let’s just take some significant examples. In Spain, civil servants’ wages were cut by 5% and 13,000 jobs were eliminated. In Germany, 14,000 public sector jobs will be cut between now and 2014, and payments to the long term unemployed will be reduced. In all countries public spending will be decreased.

The logic claimed for these measures is this: while we must save the financial system through support to banks in dif-

ficulty and states that risk defaulting on their payments, it is necessary to make public finances more healthy in order to be able to borrow again later on and thus launch a new phase of growth. In fact, behind the declared objective, there is first of all the determination of the German bourgeoisie to preserve its economic interests; for this national capital, which has staked so much on being able to sell its commodities—especially its machine-tools and its chemical products—to the rest of the world, it is out of the question to bear the costs of a recovery or of helping other ailing European states by raising its own production costs. This would mean its commodities becoming less competitive. And since this is the only country capable of supporting other European countries, it is imposing a policy of austerity on all of them, even if that doesn’t correspond to their interests.

The fact that Britain, which does not suffer from the constraints of the euro zone, is bringing in the same policy, is a significant expression of the depth of the crisis. For the UK, it’s not time to boost a recovery since its budget deficit for 2010 has reached 11.5% of GNP. The risk of defaulting on sovereign debt is too great—it would result in the collapse of sterling. We should also note that Japan—given the size of its public debt—has adopted the same austerity policy. More and more countries are thinking that their deficits and public debt have become too dangerous, that defaulting on payment of sovereign debt would mean a considerable weakening of the national capital. They are thus opting for an austerity policy that can only lead to deflation.<sup>7</sup>

Now it’s this deflationary dynamic which is so much feared by the US. They are accusing the Europeans of getting themselves into a “Hoover episode” (after the US President during the first part of the Depression in the 30s), which amounts to accusing the European states of pulling the world into a depression and a deflation as in 1929-32. According to the Americans, even if it is legitimate to want to reduce public deficits, this should be done later, when the “recovery” is really underway. By defending this position, the US is standing up for its own interests, since, as the holder of the world’s reserve currency, creating extra currency to feed the recovery only costs them the price of the printing. However, this doesn’t mean that they don’t have a real fear of seeing the world economy lurching into a deflationary course.

In the end, whatever options are taken

up, the policy changes carried out recently as well as the fears expressed by the various factions of the world bourgeoisie reveal the disarray in their ranks: there are no longer any good solutions!

## What perspectives?

The effects of the recovery plans are over and a new plunge into depression is underway. This will mean that companies will have growing difficulties in making adequate profits and many of them will go under. The austerity packages which a large number of countries are putting in place can only accelerate the fall into depression and will engender a process of deflation, some signs of which are already appearing.

There can be no doubt that the hope that austerity policies will restore health to public finances and pave the way for future borrowing is a pure illusion. According to the IMF’s calculations, the consequences of Greece’s austerity plan will be a loss of 8% of its GNP. A fall in Spain’s GNP is already predicted. Furthermore, austerity plans will lead to a fall in fiscal returns and this will serve to further widen the very deficits that the austerity plans are supposed to reduce! We can expect a fall in production in most countries of the world, and of world trade, by the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, with all the consequences this will have for the development of poverty and the degradation of working class living standards.

It’s not impossible that, given the danger that austerity policies will only speed up the depression, a change of policy will come about after a few months, and the position advocated by the USA will be adopted. The last six months have shown us how incapable the bourgeoisie is of seeing beyond the very short term, since it has so little margin for manoeuvre: only one year ago everyone was in favour of recovery plans! If a new policy of revival is adopted, it will mean resorting to the printing press in a big way (some say that the US is already getting ready to do this). But then we will see a general fall in the value of currencies, i.e. an explosion of inflation, and that will also mean new and dramatic attacks on workers’ living standards.

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7. This means a long term fall in prices, brought about in this case by a lack of demand, itself the consequence of austerity programmes.

## What are workers' councils? (iii)

# The revolution of 1917 (July to October): the renewal of the workers' councils and the seizure of power

In the series "What are workers' councils?" we want to answer the question by analysing the historical experience of the proletariat. It isn't a case of putting the soviets forward as a perfect model for others to copy; we want to understand both their mistakes as well as their achievements, so that current and future generations will be armed with this knowledge.

In the first article we saw how they emerged in the revolution of 1905 in Russia.<sup>1</sup> In the second we saw how they were the centrepiece of the revolution of February 1917 and how they entered a deep crisis in June-July 1917 until being taken hostage by the bourgeois counter-revolution.<sup>2</sup>

In this third article we will see how they were recaptured by the mass of workers and soldiers who would then seize power in October 1917.

### After the defeat of July, the bourgeoisie is intent on destroying the soviets

The process of evolution, both in nature and in human society, is never linear. Its course is full of contradictions, convulsions, dramatic setbacks, retreats and advances. This analysis can readily be applied to the struggle of the proletariat, a class that by definition is excluded from the ownership of the means of production and has no economic power. Its struggle is one of convulsions and contradictions, with retreats, with what seem like permanent acquisitions appearing to be lost, with long periods of apathy and despondency.

Following the February Revolution, the workers and soldiers seemed to skip from one victory to another. Bolshevism became more influential; the masses – especially in the region around Petrograd – were moving in the direction of revolution. It was like a fruit ripening.

However, in July there were moments of crisis and hesitancy that are typical of the proletarian struggle. "A direct defeat was experienced by the workers and soldiers of Petrograd, who in their urge forward had come up against the confusedness and contradictions of their own aims, on the one hand, and, on the other, the backwardness of the provinces and the front."<sup>3</sup>

1. *International Review* n° 140.

2. *International Review* n° 141.

3. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, volume 2, chapter 11 "The Masses Under Attack", p. 756 (Pluto Press).

The bourgeoisie seized the opportunity to launch a furious offensive: the Bolsheviks were vilified as German agents<sup>4</sup> and arrested en masse; paramilitary gangs were organised who attacked them in the street, imposed boycotts of their meetings, wrecked their premises and print shops. The fearsome Tsarist Black Hundreds, the monarchist circles, the government bodies regained the upper hand. The bourgeoisie – with the backing of British and French diplomats – was aiming to destroy the soviets and to impose a ferocious dictatorship.<sup>5</sup>

The revolution that began in February reached a point where the spectre of defeat became ever more likely: "Many thought that the revolution in general had exhausted itself. The February Revolution had indeed exhausted itself to the bottom. This inner crisis in the mass consciousness, combining with the slanders and measures of repression, caused confusion and retreat – in some cases panic. The enemy grew bolder. In the masses themselves all the backward and dubious elements rose to the surface, those impatient of disturbances and deprivations."<sup>6</sup>

4. See the very detailed refutation of this thesis in Trotsky op. cit., volume 2, chapter 4, "The Month of the Great Slander".

5. General Knox, head of the English military mission, said: "I'm not interested in the Kerensky government, it is too weak. What is wanted is a strong dictatorship. What is wanted is the Cossacks. This people need the whip! A dictatorship – that is just what it needs." So said the representative of the government of the oldest democracy", quoted in Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 9, "The Kornilov Insurrection", p.724.

6. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 11, "The Masses

### The Bolsheviks inspire the response of the masses

However, at this difficult time, the Bolsheviks proved to be an essential bastion of the proletarian forces. Pursued, slandered, shaken by violent debates in their own ranks and the resignation of many militants, they did not weaken or fall into disarray. They concentrated their efforts on drawing the lessons of the defeat and in particular the key lesson: how had the soviets been taken hostage by the bourgeoisie and their existence threatened?

From February to July there was a situation of dual power: The soviets were on the one side and on the other was the power of the bourgeois state, which had not been destroyed and still had enough in reserve to make a full recovery. The events of July had destroyed the impossible equilibrium that existed between soviets and state power:

*"The General Staff and the military leaders, with the deliberate or semi-deliberate assistance of Kerensky, whom even the most prominent Socialist-Revolutionaries now call a Cavaignac,<sup>7</sup> have seized actual state power and have proceeded to shoot down revolutionary units at the front, disarm the revolutionary troops and workers in Petrograd and Moscow, suppress unrest in Nizhni-Novgorod, arrest Bolsheviks and ban their papers, not only without trial, but even without a government order. [...] The true meaning of the policy of military dictatorship, which now reigns supreme and is supported by the Cadets and monarchists, is preparations for disbanding the Soviets."<sup>8</sup>*

Lenin also showed how the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries "have completely betrayed the cause of the revolution by putting it in the hands of the counter-revolutionaries and by turning themselves, their parties and the Soviets into mere fig-

Under Attack", p.764.

7. Cavaignac: French general (1802-1857), executioner of the insurrection of Parisian workers in 1848.

8. Lenin, *The political situation (Four theses)*, 23 (10) July 1917.

leaves of the counter-revolution.”<sup>9</sup>

Under such conditions, “*All hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian revolution have vanished for good. This is the objective situation: either complete victory for the military dictatorship, or victory for the workers’ armed uprising [...] The slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets!’ was a slogan for peaceful development of the revolution which was possible in April, May, June, and up to July 5.*”<sup>10</sup>

In his book *The Soviets*, Anweiler<sup>11</sup> uses this analysis to try to show that “*This was the first barely veiled proclamation that the Bolsheviks aimed to win sole power. Lenin aimed to take power for his party with or against the soviets. [...] Plainly to him the soviets were only pawns and had no intrinsic value as a superior democratic form of government.*”<sup>12</sup>

Here is the now famous and often repeated charge that Lenin “used the soviets tactically to achieve absolute power”. However, an analysis of the article that Lenin wrote at a later date demonstrates that his concerns were radically different from those attributed to him by Anweiler: *he was trying to find a way to get the soviets out of the crisis they were in, to pull them back from the false path that was leading to their disappearance.*

In the article *On slogans*, Lenin was unequivocal: “*After the experience of July 1917, it is the revolutionary proletariat that must independently take over state power. Without that the victory of the revolution is impossible. [...] Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but not the present Soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the Soviets. It is not a question of Soviets in general, but of combating the present counter-revolution and the treachery of the present Soviets.*”<sup>13</sup> He specifically asserts: “*A new cycle is beginning, one that involves not the old classes, not the old parties, not the old Soviets, but classes, parties and Soviets rejuvenated in the fire of struggle, tempered, schooled and refashioned by the process of the struggle.*”<sup>14</sup>

The writings of Lenin contributed to a

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. See references in the previous article in this series.

12. *The Soviets, The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1917*; Chapter 4, “Bolshevism and the Councils of 1917”, p. 170 (Pantheon Books, 1974).

13. Lenin, *On slogans*, Mid- July 1917.

14. Ibid.

stormy debate in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party, which crystallised during the Sixth Party Congress. It was held from July 26<sup>th</sup> to August 3<sup>rd</sup> in the strictest secrecy and in the absence of Lenin and Trotsky, who were being pursued by police. In the Congress three positions were put forward: the first, reflecting the disorientation of the defeat in July and the drift of the soviets, openly proposed “abandoning them” (Stalin, Molotov, Sokolnikov); the second vehemently supported sticking with the old position of “All power to the soviets”; the third advocated entrusting the “grass roots” organisations (factory councils, local soviets, district soviets) with responsibility for reconstituting the collective power of workers.

### In mid-July, the masses are beginning to recover

It was the last that proved to be the correct position. From mid-July the “grass roots” soviet organisations had begun a fight for the renewal of the soviets.

In the second article of this series we saw how the masses were organised around the soviets in a huge network of soviet organisations of all sorts, that expressed their unity and strength.<sup>15</sup> The apex of the soviet system – the soviets in the towns – did not preside over an ocean of passivity of the masses; just the opposite, there was an intense collective life embodied in thousands of assemblies, factory councils, district soviets, inter-district assemblies, conferences, formal and informal meetings... In his *Memoires*, Sukhanov<sup>16</sup> gives us an idea of the atmosphere that prevailed at the Conference of the Petrograd Factory Councils: “*On May 30<sup>th</sup> in the White Hall, a conference of workshop and factory committees from the capital and surrounding areas was convened. The conference had been prepared from the ‘grass roots’; its planning had been conceived in the factories without the involvement of any government bodies concerned with labour issues, or even the soviets. [...] The conference was truly representative: the workers came from their workbenches, and they participated actively in its work in large numbers. For two days, this workers’ parliament discussed the economic crisis and the breakdown inside the country.*”<sup>17</sup>

15. See the previous article in this series in the section headed “March 1917: a gigantic network of soviets spreads throughout Russia”, *International Review* n° 141.

16. Sukhanov, a Menshevik Internationalist, split from the left wing of Menshevism where Martov was a militant. He published his *Memoires* in 7 volumes. An abridged version was published in French as *The Russian Revolution* (Editions Stock, 1965). All quotations below are our translations from this French edition.

17. Sukhanov, op. cit., “Triumph of the reaction;

Even in the worst moments following the July Days, the masses were able to maintain these organisations, which were less affected by the crisis than “the big soviet organs”: the Petrograd Soviet, the Congress of Soviets and its executive committee, the CEC (Central Executive Committee).

Two concomitant reasons explain this difference. First, the “grass roots” soviet organisations were directly convened under pressure from the masses who, realising the problems and the hazards, called for an assembly and saw it convened within the space of a few hours. The situation of the soviet organs “at the top level” was very different: “*However as the Soviet worked more efficiently, it lost proportionately its direct contact with the masses. The plenary sessions, almost daily during the early weeks, were less frequent and only sparsely attended by the deputies. The Soviet Executive became increasingly independent, even though it remained subject to certain controls of the deputies, who had the right to discharge it.*”<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries were concentrated in the bureaucratic nucleus of the large soviet organs. Sukhanov described the atmosphere of intrigue and manipulation that emanated from the Petrograd Soviet: “*The Presidium of the Soviet, which was originally an organ to manage internal procedure, tended to substitute itself for the Executive Committee in its functioning. In addition, it strengthened itself through a permanent and somewhat occult organisation that got the name ‘the Star Chamber’. It included members of the Presidium and a sort of clique made up from the devoted friends of Cheidze and Tsereteli. The latter, with the shame and the disgrace that went with it, was one of those accused of being dictatorial inside the Soviet.*”<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, the Bolsheviks conducted an active and daily intervention inside the soviets at the grass roots level. Their presence was very dynamic, they were often the first to propose meetings and debates and the adoption of resolutions that would give expression to the will and the advancement of the masses.

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, a demonstration of workers from the large factories in Petrograd massed in front of the building housing the soviet to denounce the slander against the Bolsheviks and to demand the release of prisoners. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, the assembly at the arms factory in Sestroretsk demanded

Around the coalition”, p.210.

18. Anweiler, op. cit. Chapter 3, “The Soviets and the Russian Revolution of 1917”, p.108.

19. Sukhanov, op. cit. “The Triumph of the reaction; In the depths”.

the payment of wages that had been withheld owing to workers' involvement in the July Days; they devoted the money they recovered to funding the anti-war press. Trotsky recounts how, on July 24<sup>th</sup>, "... a meeting of the workers of 27 plants in the Peterhoff District passed soon after that a resolution of protest against the irresponsible government and its counter-revolutionary policy."<sup>20</sup>

Trotsky also noted that on July 21<sup>st</sup> delegations of soldiers from the front arrived in Petrograd. They were tired of all the hardship they were suffering and the repression the officers inflicted on the most visible individuals. They spoke about it to the Executive Committee of the soviet, which didn't consider it of any significance. Then several militant Bolsheviks suggested contacting the factories and the soldiers' and sailors' regiments. The reception there was completely different: they were received like brothers, listened to, fed and housed.

*"At a conference that nobody summoned from above, which grew up spontaneously from below, representatives were present from 29 regiments at the front, from 90 Petrograd factories, from the Kronstadt sailors and from the surrounding garrisons. At the focus of the conference stood the trench delegates – among them a number of young officers. The Petrograd workers listened to the men from the front eagerly, trying not to let fall a word of their own. The latter told how the offensive and its consequences had devoured the revolution. Those grey soldiers – not in any sense agitators – painted in unstudied words the workaday life of the front. The details were disturbing – they demonstrated so nakedly how everything was crawling back to the old, hateful, pre-revolutionary regime",* says Trotsky, and he adds the following: *"Although Socialist-Revolutionaries obviously predominated among the men from the front, a drastic Bolshevik resolution was passed almost unanimously: only three men abstained from the voting. That resolution will not remain a dead letter. The dispersing delegates will tell the truth about how the Compromise leaders repulsed them and the workers received them."*<sup>21</sup>

The Kronstadt Soviet – one of the vanguard posts of the revolution – also got to hear: *"On 20<sup>th</sup> July a meeting in Yakorniy Square demanded the transfer of power to the soviets, the sending of the Cossacks to the front with the gendarmes and police, the abolition of the death penalty, the admission of the Kronstadt delegates to Tsarskoe Selo to make sure that Nicholas II*

*was adequately guarded, the disbandment of the 'Battalions of Death', the confiscation of the bourgeois newspapers, etc."*<sup>22</sup> In Moscow, the factory councils had agreed to hold joint meetings with the regimental committees, and in late July a conference of factory councils to which soldiers' representatives were invited adopted a resolution denouncing the government and demanding *"new soviets to replace the government."* In the elections on August 1<sup>st</sup>, six of the ten district councils in Moscow had a Bolshevik majority.

Faced with the price increases agreed by the Government and plant closures organised by the bosses, strikes and mass protests began to grow. Sectors of the working class hitherto considered to be "backward" (paper, leather, rubber, and janitors, etc.) also took part.

Sukhanov reported a significant development in the Workers' Section of the Petrograd Soviet: *"When the Workers' Section of the Soviet created a Presidium, which it did not have before, the Presidium was found to be made up of Bolsheviks."*<sup>23</sup>

In August a National Conference was held in Moscow whose objective was denounced by Sukhanov, as: *"suppressing 'all democratic' opinion to benefit 'nation-wide' opinion, thus freeing the government of 'the whole country' from the control of all kinds of organisations, of workers, peasants, Zimmerwaldians, half-Germans, half-Jews and other groups of hoodlums."*<sup>24</sup>

Workers recognised the danger and many assemblies voted motions calling for a general strike. The Moscow Soviet rejected them by 364 votes to 304 but the district soviets protested against this decision: *"The factories immediately demanded new elections to the Moscow Soviet, which was not only lagging behind the masses, but coming into sharp conflict with them. In the Zamoskvoretsky [Moscow suburb south of the Moskva] district soviet, which met jointly with the factory committees, a demand for the recall of those deputies who had 'gone against the will of the working class' received 175 votes with 4 against and 19 abstaining!"*<sup>25</sup> More than 400,000 workers went on strike, which spread to other towns like Kiev, Kostrava and Tsatarin.

## The mobilisation and self-organisation of the masses foils the Kornilov coup

These are only a few significant facts, the tip of the iceberg of a vast process that showed a turning point in the attitudes that predominated from February to June – more passive, still suffering many illusions, and with the protests more restricted in workplaces, districts or towns:

- numerous unitary assemblies of workers and soldiers were opened up to peasant delegates. The conference of factory and district soviets and factory districts invited soldiers' and sailors' delegates to work with them;
- there was growing confidence in the Bolsheviks: after being slandered in July, the indignation at the persecution they suffered fuelled increasing recognition of the validity of their analyses and their slogans;
- the multiplication of demands could only be met by the renewal the soviets and by taking power.

The bourgeoisie saw that the gains it had made in July were at risk of going up in smoke. The failure of the National Conference in Moscow was a big setback. English and French Embassies pushed for "decisive" action. This was the context of the "plan" for a military coup by General Kornilov.<sup>26</sup> Sukhanov emphasised that *"Miliukov Rodzianko and Kornilov themselves had conceived it! Dumbfounded, these valiant heroes of the revolution had begun urgently to prepare, in secret, their plan of action. To allay suspicion, they stirred up public opinion against what the Bolsheviks might do next."*<sup>27</sup>

We cannot analyse here all the details of the operation.<sup>28</sup> The important thing is that *the massive mobilisation of workers and soldiers managed to stop the military machine in its tracks.* And what is remarkable is that this response was made by developing an organisational effort that would provide the final impetus for the renewal of the Soviets and their march towards the seizure of power.

On the night of August 27<sup>th</sup>, the Petrograd Soviet proposed the formation of a Military Revolutionary Committee to organise the defence of the capital. The Bolshevik mi-

20. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 11, "The Masses Under Attack", p.767.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Sukhanov, op. cit. "Counter-revolution and disintegration of democracy; after July: the second and third coalitions".

24. Sukhanov, op. cit. "The Shame of Moscow".

25. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 6, "Kerensky and Kornilov", p.658.

26. Kornilov: fairly incompetent general who distinguished himself by his constant defeats at the front, was then praised by bourgeois parties and considered a "patriotic hero" after the July Days.

27. Sukhanov, op. cit. "The bourgeoisie unified in action".

28. See Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 5, "The Counter-Revolution Lifts its head"; chapter 6, "Kerensky and Kornilov"; chapter 8, "Kerensky's Plot" and chapter 9, "Kornilov's Insurrection".

nority accepted the proposal but added that such a body “*must be supported by the mass of workers and soldiers.*”<sup>29</sup> At the next session the Bolsheviks made a new proposal, accepted reluctantly by the Menshevik majority for, “*the sharing of weapons in the factories and working-class neighbourhoods*”.<sup>30</sup> When announced, there was a quick response: “*In the districts, according to the workers’ press, there immediately appeared ‘whole queues of people eager to join the ranks of the Red Guard’. Drilling began in marksmanship and the handling of weapons. Experienced soldiers were brought in as teachers. By the 29<sup>th</sup>, Guards had been formed in almost all districts. The Red Guard announced its readiness to put in the field a force of 40,000 rifles. [...] The giant Putilov factory became the centre of resistance in the Peterhoff district. Here fighting companies were hastily formed. The work of the factory continued night and day; there was a sorting out of new cannon for the formation of proletarian artillery divisions.*”<sup>31</sup>

In Petrograd, “*... the district soviets were drawing more closely together and passing resolutions: to declare the inter-district conferences continuous; to place their representatives in the staff organised by the Executive Committee; to form a workers’ militia; to establish control of the district soviets over the government commissars; to organise flying brigades for the detention of counter-revolutionary agitators.*”<sup>32</sup> These measures “*meant an appropriation not only of very considerable government functions, but also of the functions of the Petrograd Soviet. [...] The entrance of the Petrograd districts into the arena of the struggle instantly changed both its scope and its direction. Again the inexhaustible vitality of the soviet form of organisation was revealed. Although paralysed above by the leadership of the Compromisers, the soviets were reborn again from below at the critical moment under pressure from the masses.*”<sup>33</sup>

This generalisation of the self-organisation of the masses spread across the country. Trotsky cites the case of Helsingfors where “*a general congress of all the soviet organisations which sent its commissars to the offices of the governor general, the commandant, the Intelligence service, and other important institutions. Thenceforth, no order was valid without its signature. The telegraphs and telephones were taken*

*under control*”<sup>34</sup> and something happened that was very significant: “*On the second day, a rank-and-file Cossack appeared before the Committee with the announcement that the whole regiment is against Kornilov. Cossack representatives were for the first time introduced into the Soviet.*”<sup>35</sup>

### September 1917: the total renewal of the soviets

The suppression of the Kornilov coup provided a dramatic reversal of the balance of power between the classes: the Provisional Government of Kerensky was implicated in the whole thing. The masses took sole control over these events, by strengthening and revitalising their collective organs. Their response to Kornilov was “*the start of a radical transformation of the whole situation, a revenge for the July Days. The Soviet was reborn!*”<sup>36</sup>

The newspaper of the Cadet Party,<sup>37</sup> *Retch*, was not mistaken when it stated: “*The streets are already swarming with armed workers who terrorise peaceable inhabitants. In the soviets, the Bolsheviks firmly demanded their imprisoned comrades be set free. Everyone was convinced that once the action of General Kornilov was over, the Bolsheviks, opposed by the majority in the Soviet, would use all their energy to force it to adopt at least a part of their programme.*” *Retch* was however mistaken about one thing: it was not the Bolsheviks who forced the soviet to follow their programme; it was the masses who forced the soviets to adopt the Bolshevik programme.

The workers had gained enormous confidence in themselves and they wanted to apply this to the complete renewal of the soviets. Town after town, soviet after soviet, in a dizzying process, the old social traitors’ majorities were overthrown and new soviets with majorities for Bolsheviks and other revolutionary groups (Left Social Revolutionaries, Menshevik internationalists, anarchists) emerged after discussions and massive voting.

Sukhanov describes the state of mind of the workers and soldiers: “*Driven on by class instinct and, to some extent, class consciousness; with the theoretical input provided by the Bolsheviks, tired of war and the toll of suffering; disappointed by the sterility of the revolution that had given them nothing as yet; angry with the bosses and the government who were themselves*

*still living in comfort; wishing to exercise the power that was theirs at last, they were eager to go into battle.*”<sup>38</sup>

The episodes in this re-conquest and renewal of the soviets are legion. “*On the night of September 1<sup>st</sup>, while still under the presidency of Cheidze, the Soviet voted for a government of workers and peasants. The rank-and-file members of the compromisist factions almost solidly supported the resolution of the Bolsheviks. The rival proposal of Tsereteli got only 15 votes. The compromisist presidium could not believe their eyes. The Right demanded a roll call and this dragged on until three o’clock in the morning. To avoid openly voting against their parties, many of the delegates went home. But even so, and despite all the methods of pressure, the resolution of the Bolsheviks received in the final vote 279 votes against 115. It was a fact of great importance. It was the beginning of the end. The presidium, stunned, said they would resign.*”<sup>39</sup>

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, a conference of all the soviets in Finland adopted a resolution for power to be assumed by the soviets, by 700 votes for, 13 against, with 36 abstentions. The Regional Conference of Soviets in Siberia approved a similar resolution. The Moscow Soviet did the same on September 5<sup>th</sup> during a dramatic meeting in which it approved a motion of distrust in the Provisional Government and the Executive Committee. “*On the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Bolshevik resolution was adopted in the Kiev soviet of workers’ deputies by a majority of 130 votes to 66 – although there were only 95 deputies in the official Bolshevik faction.*”<sup>40</sup> For the first time, the Soviet of peasants’ representatives from the Petrograd region elected a Bolshevik as its delegate.

The culminating point of this process was the historic session of the Petrograd Soviet, on September 9<sup>th</sup>. Preparations were made through countless meetings in factories, neighbourhoods and in the regiments. Around 1,000 delegates attended a meeting where the Bureau had proposed to cancel the vote of August 31<sup>st</sup>. The new vote gave a result that signified the definitive rejection of the social traitors’ policy: 519 votes against cancellation and for the soviets taking power; 414 votes for the presidium and 67 abstentions.

One might think, from a superficial standpoint, that the renewal of the soviets was merely a *change of majority*, passing from the social- traitors to the Bolsheviks.

29. Sukhanov, op. cit., “The bourgeoisie unified in action”.

30. Ibid.

31. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 10, “The Bourgeoisie Measures Strength with the Democracy”, p.735.

32. Ibid, p.734.

33. Ibid, our emphasis.

34. Ibid, p.737.

35. Ibid.

36. Sukhanov, op. cit., “The bourgeoisie unified in action”.

37. Cadet Party: Constitutional Democratic Party, the main bourgeois party of the time.

38. Sukhanov, op. cit., “The Disintegration of Democracy after the Kornilov Uprising”.

39. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 12, “The Rising Tide”, p.803.

40. Ibid.

It is certain – and we'll deal with it at greater length in the next article in this series – that the working class and therefore its parties too, were still burdened by a vision strongly influenced by parliamentarism in which the class chooses “representatives to act in its name”, but it is important to understand that this was not the basis for the renewal of the soviets.

- 1) The renewal was built on the vast network of meetings of grass roots soviets (factory and district councils, committees from the regiments, joint meetings). After the Kornilov coup, the occurrence of these meetings multiplied dramatically. Each soviet session adopted a unified and clear position derived from an infinite number of preliminary meetings.
- 2) This self-organisation of the masses was consciously and actively driven by the renewal by the soviets. While previous soviets were autonomous and called only a few massive gatherings, the new soviets called for open meetings on a daily basis. While the former soviets feared and even disapproved of the assemblies in the factories and neighbourhoods, the new ones continually summoned them. The soviet called for meetings “of the grass roots” around each significant or substantial debate so it could adopt a position. The fourth coalition Provisional Government (on September 25<sup>th</sup>) met a reaction: “Close upon the resolution of the St. Petersburg Soviet refusing to support the new coalition, a wave of meetings swept through the two capitals and the province. Hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers, protesting against the formation of the new bourgeois government, pledged to carry out a determined struggle against it and demanded power to the Soviets.”<sup>41</sup>
- 3) The proliferation of regional congresses of soviets – which spread like wildfire across all Russian territories from mid-September – was spectacular. “During these weeks the numerous regional soviet congresses meeting reflected the mood of the masses. The Moscow regional congress held in early October demonstrated a typically rapid Bolshevisation and polarisation. At the beginning of the deliberations the Social Revolutionaries offered a resolution opposing the transfer of power to the soviets, which carried 159 votes against 132. But in another vote, three days later, the Bolshevik fraction won 116 votes with 97 opposed. [...] At many later soviet congresses Bolshevik resolutions were also passed, all calling for the assumption of power by the all-Russian Soviet Congress and for

41. Sukhanov, op. cit., “The Artillery Preparation”.

*removal of the Provisional Government. In Ekaterinburg, 120 delegates from 56 Ural soviets met on October 13<sup>th</sup>; 86 of them were Bolsheviks. [...] In Saratov, the Volga regional congress rejected a Menshevik-Social Revolutionary resolution and adopted a Bolshevik one...*<sup>42</sup>

But it is important to clarify two issues that are fundamental for us.

The first is the fact that the Bolsheviks' resolutions winning a majority meant much more than a simple delegation voting for a party. The Bolshevik Party was the only party clearly in favour not only of the seizure of power but of putting forward a concrete way of doing it: *an insurrection with a comprehensive plan which would overthrow the Provisional Government and dismantle the power of the state*. While the social-traitor parties announced their intention to force the soviets to commit hara-kiri, while other revolutionary parties made unrealistic or vague proposals, only the Bolsheviks were convinced that “...*the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies is a reality only as an organ of insurrection, as an organ of revolutionary power. Apart from this, the Soviets are a meaningless plaything that can only produce apathy, indifference and disillusion among the masses, who are legitimately disgusted at the endless repetition of resolutions and protests.*”<sup>43</sup>

It was therefore natural that the masses of workers put their trust in the Bolsheviks not by giving them a blank cheque, but by seeing them as an instrument of their own struggle that was approaching its high point: the insurrection and taking power. “*The camp of the bourgeoisie now had reason to be alarmed. The crisis was clear to everyone. The movement of the masses was visibly overflowing; the excitement in the working class neighbourhoods of St. Petersburg was evident. We only listened to the Bolsheviks. At the famous Modern Amphitheatre, where Trotsky, Volodarsky and Lunacharsky came to speak, we saw endless queues and crowds that the huge building was unable to hold. The agitators encouraged the move from rhetoric to action and promised power to the Soviet in the immediate future.*” This was how Sukhanov, despite being an opponent of the Bolsheviks, described the atmosphere that prevailed in mid-October.<sup>44</sup>

42. Anweiler, op. cit., chapter 4, “Bolshevism and the Councils, 1917,” p.182. In the appendices there is a list of the many regional conferences that virtually covered the whole empire, and through their votes decided on the seizure of power.

43. Lenin, *Theses for the report to the conference of 8th October on the organisation of Petersburg*. “On the slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets’”, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

44. Sukhanov, op. cit., “The Artillery Preparation”.

Secondly, the accumulated evidence of September and October pointed to a significant change in the mentality of the masses. As we saw in the previous article in this series, the slogan “All power to the soviets” raised tentatively in March, defended forcefully by Lenin in April, proclaimed massively in demonstrations in June and July, had until then been more *an aspiration* than a consciously adopted programme of action.

One reason for the failure of the movement in July was that the majority was demanding that the soviets “force” the Provisional Government to appoint some “socialist ministers”.

This division between Soviet and Government showed a clear misunderstanding of the work of the proletarian revolution, which is certainly not “to choose its own government” and so preserve the structure of the old state, but to destroy the state apparatus and assume power directly. Although, as we will see in the next article, the multitude of new problems and confusions would affect the consciousness of the masses, they were beginning to see the slogan “All power to the soviets” in more concrete and accurate terms.

Trotsky shows how, having lost control of the Petrograd Soviet, the social traitors used every means at their disposal, concentrating on their last bastion, the CEC: “*The Executive Committee had in good season taken away from the Petrograd Soviet the two newspapers established by it, all the administrative offices, all funds and all technical equipment, including the typewriters and inkwells. The innumerable automobiles that had been at the disposal of the Soviet since February, had every last one of them been transferred into the keeping of the compromiser Olympus. The new leaders had nothing – no treasury, no newspapers, no secretarial apparatus, no means of transport, no pen or pencil. Nothing but bare walls and the burning confidence of the workers and soldiers. That, however, proved sufficient.*”<sup>45</sup>

### **The Military-Revolutionary Committee, soviet organ of the insurrection**

In early October, a flood of resolutions from soviets throughout the country called for the Congress of Soviets, continually postponed by the social-traitors, to be held so that practical measures could begin for the seizure of power.

This orientation was a response both to the situation in Russia and to the interna-

45. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 2, chapter 12, “The Rising Tide, p.807.

tional situation. In Russia, the peasant revolts were spreading into almost all regions and there were widespread seizures of the land; soldiers were deserting their barracks and returning to their villages, exhibiting growing fatigue faced with an inextricable war; workers in the factories were having to deal with production being sabotaged by some bosses and managers; the whole of society was threatened with famine due to the total breakdown of supplies and the increasing cost of living. On the international frontline, desertions, insubordination and fraternisation between soldiers of both sides multiplied; a wave of strikes swept across Germany, a general strike broke out in August 1917 in Spain. The Russian proletariat had to seize power, not only to respond to the intractable problems facing the country but, more importantly, to open a breach through which the world revolution could develop against the terrible suffering caused by three years of war.

Against the revolutionary upsurge of the masses, the bourgeoisie used its own weapons. In September, it attempted to hold a democratic conference which failed once again, like that in Moscow. For their part, the social-traitors did everything possible to delay the Congress of Soviets, with the goal of keeping the soviets throughout the country dispersed and disorganised and thus preventing their unification for the purpose of seizing power.

But the most formidable weapon, and one still taking shape, was the attempt to sabotage the defence of Petrograd so that the German Army could crush the most advanced bastion of the revolution. Kornilov, the “patriot”, had already tried out this coup in August when he abandoned revolutionary Riga<sup>46</sup> to German troops who “restored order” in a bloodbath. The bourgeoisie that makes national defence its credo, using it as a poison against the proletariat, does not hesitate to ally itself with its fiercest imperialist rivals when it sees its power threatened by the class enemy.

This issue, the defence of Petrograd, led the discussions in the Soviet to the formation of a Military-Revolutionary Committee, composed of elected delegates from the Petrograd Soviet, from the soldiers’ section of this Soviet, from the Soviet delegates from the Baltic Fleet, from the Red Guard, from the Regional Committee of Soviets in Finland, from the Conference of the factory councils, from the railway union and from the military organisation of the Bolshevik Party. A young and combative member of the Left Social Revolutionaries, Lazimir, was appointed head of this committee. The objectives of the committee were both to

defend Petrograd and to prepare the armed uprising, two objectives which “*heretofore mutually exclusive, were now in fact growing into one. Having seized the power, the Soviet would be compelled to undertake the military defence of Petrograd.*”<sup>47</sup>

The next day a Standing Conference of the whole garrison of Petrograd and the region was summoned. With these two organs, the proletariat was equipping itself with the means for the insurrection, the essential and indispensable means for the seizure of power.

In a previous article in the *International Review*, we demonstrated how – contrary to the fairy tales woven by the bourgeoisie that present October as a “Bolshevik coup d’etat” – *the insurrection was the work of the soviets and more specifically the Petrograd Soviet.*<sup>48</sup> The organs that had meticulously prepared, step by step, the military defeat of the Provisional Government, the last bastion of the bourgeois state, were the Military-Revolutionary Committee and the Standing Conference of the garrisons. The MRC forced the Army headquarters to submit for approval any order and any decision, no matter how trivial, thus completely paralysing it. On October 22<sup>nd</sup> during a dramatic meeting, the last recalcitrant regiment – that of the Peter and Paul – agreed to submit to the MRC. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, on a momentous day, thousands of assemblies of workers and soldiers were involved in the final seizure of power. The checkmate executed by the insurrection of October 25<sup>th</sup>, which occupied the headquarters and the seat of the Provisional Government, confronted the last battalions that were faithful to it, arrested ministers and generals, occupied the centres of communication and thereby laid the conditions so that the next day the Congress of Soviets of all the Russias took power.<sup>49</sup>

In the next article in this series, we see the enormous problems that the soviets had to face after taking power.

C. Mir 6-6-10

47. Trotsky, op. cit., volume 3, “The Military-Revolutionary Committee”, p.945.

48. See our article “The Russian Revolution, part 2, The Soviets take power” in *International Review* n°72.

49. In our article “October 1917, A Victory of the Working Masses” (*International Review* n°. 91), we develop a detailed analysis on how the insurrection of the proletariat had nothing to do with a revolt or a conspiracy, what rules it followed, and the indispensable role played in it by the party of the proletariat.

46. Capital of Estonia, then part of the Russian Empire.

## Decadence of capitalism (vii)

# Rosa Luxemburg and the limits to capitalist expansion

As we saw in the last article in this series, the central target of the revisionist attack on the revolutionary core of marxism was the latter's theory of the inevitable decline of capitalism, resulting from the irresolvable contradictions built into its relations of production. Eduard Bernstein's brand of revisionism, which Rosa Luxemburg refuted so lucidly in *Social Reform or Revolution*, was to a large extent based on a series of empirical observations derived from the unprecedented period of expansion and prosperity the most powerful capitalist nations lived through in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was little pretence of founding the critique of Marx's "catastrophic" view on any profound theoretical investigation of Marx's economic theories. In many ways Bernstein's arguments were similar to those favoured by many bourgeois experts during the phase of economic boom that followed the Second World War, and even during the even more precarious "growth" in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: capitalism is delivering the goods, ergo it will always be able to deliver the goods.

Other economists, however, not yet completely divorced from the workers' movement, sought to base their reformist strategies on a "marxist" approach. One such case was the Russian Tugan Baronowski, who in 1901 published a book entitled *Studies in the Theory and History of Commercial Crises in England*. Following the work of Struve and Bulgakov a few years before, Tugan Baranowski's study was part of the "legalist Marxist" response to the Russian populists, who tried to argue that capitalism would face insuperable difficulties in establishing itself in Russia; one of these was the problem of finding sufficient markets for its production. Like Bulgakov, Tugan tried to take Marx's schemes for expanded reproduction in Volume 2 of *Capital* as proof that there was no fundamental problem of realisation of surplus value in the capitalist system, that it was possible for it to accumulate indefinitely in a harmonious manner as a "closed system". As Rosa Luxemburg summed it up:

"There can be no doubt that the 'legalist' Russian Marxists achieved a victory over their opponents, the 'populists', but that victory was rather too thorough. In the heat of battle, all three – Struve, Bulgakov and Tugan Baranovski – overstated their case. The question was whether capitalism in general, and Russian capitalism in particular, is capable of development; these Marxists, however, proved this capacity to the extent of even offering theoretical proof that capitalism can go on forever."<sup>1</sup>

Tugan's thesis brought a swift response from those who still adhered to the marxist

1. *The Accumulation of Capital*, Chapter 24.

theory of crisis, in particular the spokesman of "marxist orthodoxy", Karl Kautsky, who insisted in particular that because neither capitalists nor workers could consume the whole of the surplus value produced by the system, it was constantly driven to conquer new markets outside itself:

"Although capitalists increase their wealth and the number of exploited workers grows, they cannot themselves form a sufficient market for capitalist-produced commodities, as accumulation of capital and productivity grow even faster. They must find a market in those strata and nations which are still non-capitalist. They find this market, and expand it, but still not fast enough, since this additional market hardly has the flexibility and ability to expand the capitalist process of production. Once capitalist production has developed large-scale industry, as was already the case in England in the nineteenth century, it has the possibility of expanding by such leaps and bounds that it soon overtakes any expansion of the market. Thus, any prosperity which results from a substantial expansion in the market is doomed from the beginning to a short life, and will necessarily end in a crisis.

This, in short, is the theory of crises which, as far as we can see, is generally accepted by 'orthodox' Marxists and which was set up by Marx"<sup>2</sup>.

At more or less the same time, a member of the left wing of the American Socialist Party, Louis Boudin, weighed into the debate with a similar, though actually more

2. *Neue Zeit*, 1902, n° 5 (31), p.140.

developed analysis, in *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx*.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Kautsky, as Luxemburg pointed out in *The Accumulation of Capital, an Anticritique* (1915), had posed the problem of the crisis in terms of "underconsumption" and in the somewhat imprecise framework of the relative speeds of accumulation and expansion of the market,<sup>4</sup> Boudin situated it more exactly in the unique character of the capitalist mode of production and the contradictions which led to the phenomenon of **overproduction**:

"Under the old slave and feudal systems there never was such a problem as overpro-

3. First published in book form by Charles Kerr (Chicago) in 1915, this study was based on a series of articles in the *International Socialist Review* between May 1905 and October 1906.

4. "Let us forget that Kautsky calls this theory by the dubious name of an explanation of crises caused 'by under-consumption'. Marx ridicules this in the second volume of *Capital* (p.414). Let us forget that Kautsky sees only the problem of crises, without noticing that capitalist production poses a problem apart from ups and downs in the state of business. Finally, let us forget that Kautsky's explanation – that the consumption of capitalists and workers does not grow 'fast enough' for accumulation, which therefore needs an 'additional market' – is rather vague and makes no attempt to understand the problem of accumulation in its exact terms". (*Anticritique*, chapter 2) Interesting that so many of Luxemburg's critics – not least the "marxist" ones – accuse her of being an underconsumptionist when she so explicitly rejects this idea! It is of course perfectly true that Marx argued on several occasions that the "the last cause of all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses" (*Capital*, vol. III, chap XXX, p 484), but Marx is careful to explain that he is not referring to "the absolute consuming power", but to "the consuming power based on antagonistic conditions of distribution, which reduces the consumption of the great mass of the population to a variable minimum within more or less narrow limits. The consuming power is furthermore restricted by the tendency to accumulate, the greed for an expansion of capital and a production of surplus-value on an enlarged scale" (*ibid*, chap XV, p 244). In other words: crises are not the result of society's reluctance to consume as much as is physically possible, nor – more to the point, given the numerous mystifications about this, especially those emanating from the left wing of capital – are they caused by wages being "too low". If this were the case, then crises would be eliminated simply by raising wages, and this is precisely what Marx ridicules in *Capital* Volume II. The problem rather lies in the existence of the "antagonistic relations of distribution", that is, in the wage labour relationship itself, which must always give rise to a "surplus" value above what the capitalist pays to his workers.

duction, for the reason that production being for home consumption the only question that ever presented itself was: how much of the product produced shall be given to the slave or serf and how much of it should go to the slave-holder or feudal baron. When, however, the respective shares of the two classes were determined upon, each proceeded to consume its share without encountering any further trouble. In other words, the question always was, how the products should be divided, and there never was any question of overproduction, for the reason that the product was not to be sold in the market but was to be consumed by the persons immediately concerned in its production, either as master or slave.... Not so, however, with our modern capitalistic industry. It is true that all of the product with the exception of that portion which goes to the workingman goes, now as before, to the master, now the capitalist. This, however, does not settle the matter finally, the reason is that the capitalist does not produce for himself but for the market. He does not want the things that the workingman produced, but he wants to sell them, and unless he is able to sell them, they are absolutely of no value to him. Saleable goods in the hands of the capitalist are his fortune, his capital, but when these goods become unsalable they are worthless, and his whole fortune contained in the stores of goods which he keeps melts away the moment the goods cease to be marketable.

“Who then, will buy the goods from our capitalists who introduced new machinery into their production, thereby largely increasing their output? Of course, there are other capitalists who may want these things, but when the production of society as a whole is considered, what is the capitalist class going to do with the increased output which cannot be taken up by the workingman? The capitalists themselves cannot use them, either by each keeping his own manufacture or by buying them from each other. And for a very simple reason, the capitalist class cannot itself use all the surplus products which its workingmen produce and which they take to themselves as their profits of production. This is already excluded by the very premise of capitalistic production on a large scale, and the accumulation of capital. Capitalistic production on a large scale implies the existence of large amounts of crystallised labour in the shape of great railroads, steamships, factories, machinery and other such manufactured products which have not been consumed by the capitalists, to whom they have fallen as their share or profit in the production of former years. As was already stated before, all the great fortunes of our modern capitalist kings, princes, barons, and other dignitaries of

industry, titled or untitled, consist of tools and machinery in one form or another, that is to say, in an unconsumable form. It is that share of the capitalist profits which the capitalists have ‘saved’ and therefore left unconsumed. If the capitalists would consume all their profits there would be no capitalists in the modern sense of the word, there would be no accumulation of capital. In order that capital should accumulate the capitalist must not, under any circumstances, consume all his profits. The capitalist who does, ceases to be a capitalist and succumbs in the competition with his fellow capitalists. In other words, modern capitalism presupposes the saving habit of capitalists, that is to say, that part of profits of the individual capitalists must not be consumed but saved in order to increase the already existing capital... He cannot, therefore, consume all of his share in the manufactured product, it is evident, therefore, that neither the workingman nor the capitalist can consume of the whole of the increased product of manufacture? Who, then, will buy it up?”<sup>5</sup>

Boudin then attempts to answer how capitalism deals with this problem, in a passage which Luxemburg quotes at length in a footnote to *The Accumulation of Capital* and which she presents as a “brilliant review” of Tugan’s book:<sup>6</sup>

“With a single exception to be considered below, the existence of surplus product in capitalist countries does not put a spoke in the wheel of production, not because production will be distributed more efficiently among the various spheres, or because the manufacture of machinery will replace that of cotton goods. The reason is rather that, capitalist development having begun sooner in some countries than in others, and because even to-day there are still some countries that have no developed capitalism, the capitalist countries in truth have at their disposal an outside market in which they can get rid of their products which they cannot consume themselves, no matter whether these are cotton or iron goods. We would by no means deny that it

5. Boudin, p 167-9.

6. *Accumulation*, chapter 23, footnote. Luxemburg’s main criticism of Boudin was his apparently prescient idea that arms expenditure was a form of waste or “reckless expenditure”, which seemed to go against her notion of “militarism as a province of accumulation” elaborated in the chapter with the same name in *The Accumulation of Capital*. But militarism could only be a province of accumulation in an epoch in which there was a real possibility that war – colonial conquests to be exact – could open up substantive new markets for capitalist expansion. With the shrinking of such outlets, militarism does indeed become a pure waste for global capitalism: even if the war economy appears to provide a “solution” to the crisis of overproduction by getting the economic machine in motion (most evidently in Hitler’s Germany and during the Second World War for example). In reality it expresses an immense destruction of value.

is significant if iron goods replace cotton goods as the main products of the principal capitalist countries. On the contrary, this change is of paramount importance, but its implications are rather different from those ascribed to it by Tugan Baranovski. It indicates the beginning of the end of capitalism. So long as the capitalist countries exported commodities for the purpose of consumption, there was still a hope for capitalism in these countries, and the question did not arise how much and how long the non-capitalist outside world would be able to absorb capitalist commodities. The growing share of machinery at the cost of consumer goods in what is exported from the main capitalist countries shows that areas which were formerly free of capitalism, and therefore served as a dumping-ground for its surplus products, are now drawn into the whirlpool of capitalism. It shows that, since they are developing a capitalism of their own, they can by themselves produce the consumer goods they need. At present they still require machinery produced by capitalist methods since they are only in the initial stages of capitalist development. But all too soon they will need them no longer. Just as they now make their own cotton and other consumer goods they will in future produce their own iron ware. Then they will not only cease to absorb the surplus produce of the essentially capitalist countries, but they will themselves produce surplus products which they can place only with difficulty.”<sup>7</sup>

Boudin thus goes further than Kautsky in insisting that the approaching completion of capitalism’s conquest of the globe also signifies the “beginning of the end of capitalism”.

### Luxemburg examines the accumulation problem

At the same time as these responses were being written, Luxemburg was teaching at the party school in Berlin. In outlining the historical evolution of capitalism as a world system, she was led to return in greater depth to the writings of Marx, both because of her integrity as a teacher and a militant (she had a horror of simply churning out received wisdom in new packages and considered the task of every marxist was to develop and enrich marxist theory) and because of the increasingly urgent need to understand the perspectives facing world capitalism. In re-examining Marx, she would have found much to support

7. Quoted here directly from the English translation of *The Accumulation*, chapter 23, whose reference to Boudin is *Die Neue Zeit*, vol. xxv, part 1, “Mathematische Formeln gegen Karl Marx”, p.604. A slightly different rendition of this passage in Boudin appears on p243-4 of the book.

her view that the problem of overproduction in relation to the market was a key to understanding the transient nature of the capitalist mode of production (see “The mortal contradictions of bourgeois society” in *IR* n° 139). Nevertheless, it seemed to her that Marx’s schemes of expanded reproduction in Volume Two, however much they were intended by Marx to operate as a purely abstract, theoretical model for approaching the problem, implied that capitalism, which for the sake of argument Marx reduced to a society composed entirely of capitalists and workers, could accumulate in an essentially harmonious way as a closed system, disposing entirely of the surplus value it produced through the mutual interaction of the two main branches of production (the producer goods and consumer goods sectors). To her this seemed to be in contradiction with other passages in Marx (for example in Volume Three) which insist on the necessity for a constant expansion of the market and which at the same time posit an inherent limit to this expansion. If capitalism could operate as a self-regulating system, there may be temporary imbalances between the branches of production but there would be no inexorable tendency to produce an indigestible mass of commodities, no irresolvable crisis of overproduction; if simply the capitalist drive to accumulate in itself generated the constantly expanding demand needed to realise the whole of the surplus value, then how could marxists argue against the revisionists that capitalism was indeed fated to enter a phase of catastrophic crisis that would provide the objective foundations of the socialist revolution?

Luxemburg’s answer was that it was necessary to move away from abstract schemes and situate capitalism’s ascent in its real historical context. The whole history of capitalist accumulation could only be grasped as a constant process of inter-action with the non-capitalist economies that surrounded it. The most primitive communities which lived by hunting and gathering and had not yet generated a marketable social surplus were useless to capitalism and had to be swept aside through policies of direct destruction and genocide (even the human resources in these communities tended to be unsuitable for slave labour). But the economies which had developed a marketable surplus and in particular where commodity production was already internally developed (such as the great civilisations of India and China) provided not only raw materials but enormous markets for the production of the capitalist metropolises, enabling capitalism in the heartlands to overcome its periodic glut of commodities (this process is eloquently

described in the *Communist Manifesto*). But as the *Manifesto* also insisted, even when the established capitalist powers tried to restrict the capitalist development of their colonies, these regions of the world inevitably became part of the bourgeois world, ruining pre-capitalist economies and converting them to the delights of wage labour – and thus displacing the problem of the additional demand required for accumulation onto another level. Thus, as Marx himself had put it, the more capitalism tended to become a universal system, the more it was fated to break down: “*The universality towards which it irresistibly strives encounters barriers in its own nature, which will, at a certain stage of its development, allow it to be recognized as being itself the greatest barrier to this tendency, and hence will drive towards its own suspension.*”<sup>8</sup>

This approach enabled Luxemburg to understand the problem of imperialism. *Capital* had only begun to deal with the question of imperialism and its economic foundations, which in the period the book was written had not yet become such a central focus of concern for marxists. Now they were confronted with imperialism as a drive not only towards the conquest of the non-capitalist world, but also towards sharpening inter-imperialist rivalries between the major capitalist nations for the domination of the world market. Was imperialism an option, a convenience for world capital, as many of its liberal and reformist critics contended, or was it an inherent necessity of capitalist accumulation at a certain stage of its maturity? Here again the implications were far-reaching, since if imperialism was no more than an optional extra for capital, then it might be feasible to argue in favour of more reasonable and pacific policies. Luxemburg however concluded that imperialism was a necessity for capital – a means of prolonging its reign, which was equally pulling it inexorably towards its ruin.

“*Imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open of the non-capitalist environment. Still the largest part of the world in terms of geography, this remaining field for the expansion of capital is yet insignificant as against the high level of development already attained by the productive forces of capital; witness the immense masses of capital accumulated in the old countries which seek an outlet for their surplus product and strive to capitalise their surplus value, and the rapid change-over to capitalism of the pre-capitalist civilisations. On*

8. *Grundrisse*, Notebook IV, “Circulation Process of Capital”, p 410 in the Penguin and Marxist.org version.

*the international stage, then, capital must take appropriate measures. With the high development of the capitalist countries and their increasingly severe competition in acquiring non-capitalist areas, imperialism grows in lawlessness and violence, both in aggression against the non-capitalist world and in ever more serious conflicts among the competing capitalist countries. But the more violently, ruthlessly and thoroughly imperialism brings about the decline of non-capitalist civilisations, the more rapidly it cuts the very ground from under the feet of capitalist accumulation. Though imperialism is the historical method for prolonging the career of capitalism, it is also a sure means of bringing it to a swift conclusion. This is not to say that capitalist development must be actually driven to this extreme: the mere tendency towards imperialism of itself takes forms which make the final phase of capitalism a period of catastrophe.”*

The essential conclusion of *The Accumulation of Capital* was, therefore, that capitalism was entering a “*period of catastrophe*”. It is important to note that she did not, as has often been falsely claimed, consider that capitalism was about to come to dead halt. She makes it quite clear that the non-capitalist milieu remains “the largest part of the world in terms of geography” and that non-capitalist economies still existed not only in the colonies but also in large parts of Europe itself.<sup>9</sup> Certainly the scale of these economic zones in value terms was diminishing relative to the growing capacity of capital to generate new value. But the world was still a long way off from becoming a system of pure capitalism as envisioned in Marx’s schemas of reproduction:

“*Marx’s model of accumulation – when properly understood – is precisely in its insolubility the exact prognosis of the economically unavoidable downfall of capitalism as a result of the imperialist process of expansion whose specific task it is to realize Marx’s assumption: the general and undivided rule of capital. Can this ever really happen? That is, of course,*

9. “*In reality, there are in all capitalist countries, even in those with the most developed large-scale industry, numerous artisan and peasant enterprises which are engaged in simple commodity production. In reality, alongside the old capitalist countries there are still those even in Europe where peasant and artisan production is still strongly predominant, like Russia, the Balkans, Scandinavia and Spain. And finally, there are huge continents besides capitalist Europe and North America, where capitalist production has only scattered roots, and apart from that the people of these continents have all sorts of economic systems, from the primitive Communist to the feudal, peasantry and artisan”* (*Anticritique*, chapter 1). See the article “Overproduction, an unavoidable fetter on capitalist accumulation” for a contribution to understanding the role played by extra-capitalist markets during the period of capitalist decadence (ICC online)

*theoretical fiction, precisely because capitalist accumulation is not just an economic but also a political process.*"<sup>10</sup>

For Luxemburg, a world of just capitalists and workers was a theoretical fiction, but the more this point was reached, the more difficult and disastrous the process of accumulation would become, unleashing calamities that were not "merely" economic, but also military and political. The world war, which broke out not long after *Accumulation* was published, was a stunning confirmation of this prognosis. For Luxemburg, there is no purely economic collapse of capitalism, and still less an automatic, guaranteed link between capitalist breakdown and socialist revolution. What she announced in her theoretical work was precisely what was to be confirmed by the catastrophic history of the ensuing century: the growing manifestation of capitalism's decline as a mode of production, posing humanity with the alternative between socialism and barbarism, and calling on the working class specifically to develop the organisation and consciousness needed for the overthrow of the system and its replacement by a higher social order.

### A storm of criticism

Luxemburg considered that her thesis was not particularly controversial, precisely because she had based it firmly on the writings of Marx and subsequent followers of his method. And yet it was greeted with a huge storm of criticism – not only from revisionists and reformists, but also from revolutionaries like Pannekoek and Lenin, who in this debate found himself on the same side not only as the legal Marxists in Russia but also the Austro-marxists who were part of the semi-reformist camp within social democracy.

*"I have read Rosa's new book **Die Akkumulation des Kapital**. She has got into a shocking muddle. She has distorted Marx. I am very glad that Pannekoek and Eckstein and O. Bauer have all with one accord condemned her, and said against her what I said in 1899 against the Narodniks."*<sup>11</sup>

10. *Anticritique*, chapter 6.

11. In *The Making of Marx's Capital* (Pluto Press, 1977) Roman Rosdolsky makes an excellent critique of Lenin's error in siding with Russian legalists and Austro-reformists against Luxemburg (see p. 472f). Although he also has his criticisms of Luxemburg, he recognises the profound value of her work and insists that marxism is of necessity a "break down" theory, pointing in particular to the tendency towards overproduction, as identified by Marx, as a key to understanding this. In fact, some of his criticisms of Luxemburg are actually quite hard to decipher. He insists that her main error was in not understanding that the reproduction schema were merely a "heuristic device", and yet Luxemburg's entire argument against her critics is that the schema can **only** be taken as a heuristic device and not as a real picture of the

The consensus was that Luxemburg had simply misread Marx and invented a problem where none existed: the schemas of expanded reproduction show that capitalism can indeed accumulate without any inherent limit in a world consisting purely of workers and capitalists. Marx's sums add up after all, so it must be true. Bauer was a little more nuanced: he did recognise that accumulation could only proceed if it was fuelled by a growing effective demand, but he came up with a simple answer: the population grows and therefore there are more workers, and therefore an expanding demand, a solution which takes the problem back to point zero because these new workers can still only consume the variable capital transferred to them from the capitalists. The essential view – maintained by nearly all of Luxemburg's critics to this day – is that the reproduction schemes do indeed show that there is no insoluble problem of realisation for capitalism.

Luxemburg was well aware that arguments put forward by Kautsky (or Boudin, although he was obviously a much less known figure in the movement) in defence of essentially the same thesis had not provoked such outrage:

*"So far one thing is certain: in 1902, when attacking Tugan-Baranovsky, Kautsky refuted the same assertions which the 'experts' use to oppose my Accumulation, and the 'experts' attack as a horrible deviation from the true faith the same assertions, only this time dealing with the problem of accumulation in an exact manner, which Kautsky used in opposition to the revisionist Tugan-Baranovsky as the theory of crises 'generally accepted' by orthodox Marxists."*<sup>12</sup>

Why this outrage? It is easy to understand coming from the reformists and revisionists, because they are concerned above all to reject any possibility of a breakdown of the capitalist system. From the revolutionaries it is harder to grasp. We can certainly point to the fact – and this is very significant as regards the hysterical response – that Kautsky did not seek to relate his argument to the schema of reproduction<sup>13</sup> and thus did not appear as a "critic" of Marx. Perhaps this conservative spirit lies at the

historical evolution of capital, not as a mathematical proof of the possibility of unlimited accumulation. (see p. 490 of Rosdolsky's book).

12. *Anticritique*, chapter 2.

13. In fact later on Kautsky himself lined up with the Austro-marxists: "In his magnum opus he strongly criticises Rosa Luxemburg's 'hypothesis' that capitalism must break down for economic reasons; he asserts that Luxemburg 'finds herself in opposition to Marx, who proved the opposite in the second volume of Capital, i.e. in the schemes of reproduction'" (Rosdolsky, *op cit*, p 451, citing Kautsky, *Die Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*, vol. II, pp 546-47).

heart of many of Luxemburg's critics: a view that *Capital* is a kind of bible that supplies all the answers to our understanding of the rise and fall of the capitalist mode of production – a closed system in fact! Luxemburg, by contrast, argued forcefully that marxists had to recognise *Capital* for what it was – a work of genius, but still an unfinished work, particularly in its second and third volumes; and one which in any case could not have encompassed all subsequent developments in the evolution of the capitalist system.

However, amidst all the scandalised responses, there was at least one very clear defence of Luxemburg's theory written during that period of war and revolutionary upheaval: "The marxism of Rosa Luxemburg" by the Hungarian George Lukacs, who at that point was a representative of the left wing of the communist movement.

Lukacs' essay, published in the collection *History and Class Consciousness* (1922) begins by outlining the principal methodological consideration in the debate about Luxemburg's theory. He argues that what fundamentally distinguishes the proletarian from the bourgeois world-outlook is that while the bourgeoisie is condemned by its social position to regard society from the point of view of an atomised, competing unit, the proletariat alone can develop a vision of reality as a totality:

*"It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. The capitalist separation of the producer from the total process of production, the division of the process of labour into parts at the cost of the individual humanity of the worker, the atomisation of society into individuals who simply go on producing without rhyme or reason, must all have a profound influence on the thought, the science and the philosophy of capitalism. Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of its revolutionary ideas which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science"*.

He then goes on to show that their lack of such a proletarian method prevented Luxemburg's critics from grasping the problem she had posed in *The Accumulation of Capital*:

*"The debate as conducted by Bauer;*

*Eckstein and Co. did not turn on the truth or falsity of the solution Rosa Luxemburg proposed to the problem of the accumulation of capital. On the contrary, discussion centred on whether there was a real problem at all and in the event its existence was denied flatly and with the utmost vehemence. Seen from the standpoint of vulgar economics this is quite understandable, and even inevitable. For if it is treated as an isolated problem in economics and from the point of view of the individual capitalist it is easy to argue that no real problem exists.*

*“Logically enough the critics who dismissed the whole problem also ignored the decisive chapter of her book (‘The historical determinants of Accumulation’). This can be seen from the way they formulated their key question. The question they posed was this: Marx’s formulae were arrived at on the basis of a hypothetical society (posited for reasons of method) which consisted only of capitalists and workers. Were these formulae correct? How were they to be interpreted? The critics completely overlooked the fact that Marx posited this society for the sake of argument, i.e. to see the problem more clearly, before pressing forward to the larger question of the place of this problem within society as a whole. They overlooked the fact that Marx himself took this step with reference to so-called primitive accumulation, in Volume I of Capital. Consciously or unconsciously they suppressed the fact that on this issue Capital is an incomplete fragment which stops short at the point where this problem should be opened up. In this sense what Rosa Luxemburg has done is precisely to take up the thread where Marx left off and to solve the problem in his spirit.*

*“By ignoring these factors the opportunists acted quite consistently. The problem is indeed superfluous from the standpoint of the individual capitalist and vulgar economics. As far as the former is concerned, economic reality has the appearance of a world governed by the eternal laws of nature, laws to which he has to adjust his activities. For him the production of surplus value very often (though not always, it is true) takes the form of an exchange with other individual capitalists. And the whole problem of accumulation resolves itself into a question of the manifold permutations of the formulae M-C-M and C-M-C in the course of production and circulation, etc. It thus becomes an isolated question for the vulgar economists, a question unconnected with the ultimate fate of capitalism as a whole. The solution to the problem is officially guaranteed by the Marxist ‘formulae’ which are correct in themselves and need only to be ‘brought up to date’—a task performed e.g. by Otto Bauer. However, we must insist that economic reality can never*

*be understood solely on the basis of these formulae because they are based on an abstraction (viz. the working hypothesis that society consists only of capitalists and workers). Hence they can serve only for clarification and as a springboard for an assault on the real problem. Bauer and his confreres misunderstood this just as surely as the disciples of Ricardo misunderstood the problematics of Marx in their day”.*

A passage in the *Grundrisse*, which Lukacs would not yet have had access to, confirms this approach: the idea that the working class is a sufficient market for the capitalists is an illusion typical of the limited vision of the bourgeoisie:

*“The relation of one capitalist to the workers of another capitalist is none of our concern here. It only shows every capitalist’s illusion, but alters nothing in the relation of capital in general to labour. Every capitalist knows this about his worker, that he does not relate to him as producer to consumer, and he therefore wishes to restrict his consumption, i.e. his ability to exchange, his wage, as much as possible. Of course he would like the workers of other capitalists to be the greatest consumers possible of his own commodity. But the relation of every capitalist to his own workers is the relation as such of capital and labour; the essential relation. But this is just how the illusion arises - true for the individual capitalist as distinct from all the others - that apart from his workers the whole remaining working class confronts him as consumer and participant in exchange, as money spender, and not as worker. It is forgotten that, as Malthus says, ‘the very existence of a profit upon any commodity pre-supposes a demand exterior to that of the labourer who has produced it’, and hence the demand of the labourer himself can never be an adequate demand. Since one production sets the other into motion and hence creates consumers for itself in the alien capital’s workers, it seems to each individual capital that the demand of the working class posited by production itself is an ‘adequate demand’. On one side, this demand which production itself posits drives it forward, and must drive it forward beyond the proportion in which it would have to produce with regard to the workers; on the other side, if the demand exterior to the demand of the labourer himself disappears or shrinks up, then the collapse occurs.”<sup>14</sup>*

14. *Grundrisse*, the Chapter on Capital, Notebook 4. Marx also explains elsewhere that the idea that the capitalists themselves can constitute the market for expanded reproduction is based on a failure to understand the nature of capitalism: “Since the aim of capital is not to minister to certain wants, but to produce profit, and since it accomplishes this purpose by methods which adapt the mass of production to the scale of production, not vice versa, a rift must

In questioning the letter of Marx, Luxemburg more than any other had been faithful to his spirit; but there are many more words by Marx which could be cited to support the central importance of the problem she posed.

In the next articles in this series, we will look at how the revolutionary movement tried to understand the process of capitalism’s decline as it unfolded in front of their eyes in the tumultuous decades between 1914 and 1945.

Gerrard

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*continually ensue between the limited dimensions of consumption under capitalism and a production which forever tends to exceed this immanent barrier. Furthermore, capital consists of commodities, and therefore over-production of capital implies over-production of commodities. Hence the peculiar phenomenon of economists who deny over-production of commodities, admitting over-production of capital. To say that there is no general over-production, but rather a disproportion within the various branches of production, is no more than to say that under capitalist production the proportionality of the individual branches of production springs as a continual process from disproportionality, because the cohesion of the aggregate production imposes itself as a blind law upon the agents of production, and not as a law which, being understood and hence controlled by their common mind, brings the productive process under their joint control. It amounts furthermore to demanding that countries in which capitalist production is not developed, should consume and produce at a rate which suits the countries with capitalist production. If it is said that over-production is only relative, this is quite correct; but the entire capitalist mode of production is only a relative one, whose barriers are not absolute. They are absolute only for this mode, i.e., on its basis. How could there otherwise be a shortage of demand for the very commodities which the mass of the people lack, and how would it be possible for this demand to be sought abroad, in foreign markets, to pay the labourers at home the average amount of necessities of life? This is possible only because in this specific capitalist interrelation the surplus-product assumes a form in which its owner cannot offer it for consumption, unless it first reconverts itself into capital for him. **If it is finally said that the capitalists have only to exchange and consume their commodities among themselves, then the entire nature of the capitalist mode of production is lost sight of; and also forgotten is the fact that it is a matter of expanding the value of the capital, not consuming it.** In short, all these objections to the obvious phenomena of over-production (phenomena which pay no heed to these objections) amount to the contention that the barriers of capitalist production are not barriers of production generally, and therefore not barriers of this specific, capitalist mode of production. The contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, however, lies precisely in its tendency towards an absolute development of the productive forces, which continually come into conflict with the specific conditions of production in which capital moves, and alone can move” (*Capital*, Vol. 3, chapter 15, part III, our emphasis).*

# The *Manifesto* of the Workers' Group of the Russian Communist Party

We are publishing below the *Manifesto* of the Workers' Group of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), often called, from the name of one of its most visible leaders, the "Miasnikov Group" (see note 1 at end of article). This group formed part of what is called the Communist Left,<sup>1</sup> on the same basis as other groups in Russia itself and in other parts of the world, particularly in Europe. The different expressions of this current found their origin in the reaction to the opportunist degeneration of the parties of the Third International and of soviet power in Russia. They represented a proletarian response in the form of left currents, like those that had existed previously faced with the development of opportunism in the Second International.

## Our introduction

In Russia itself, from 1918, left fractions appeared within the Bolshevik Party,<sup>2</sup> expressions of different disagreements with its politics.<sup>3</sup> This is in itself proof of the proletarian character of Bolshevism. Because it was a living expression of the working class, the only class that can make a radical and continuous critique of its own practice, the Bolshevik Party perpetually generated revolutionary fractions out of its own body. At every step in its degeneration voices were raised inside the party in protest, groupings were formed inside the party, or split from it, to denounce the betrayals of Bolshevism's original programme. Only when the party had been buried by its Stalinist gravediggers did these fractions no longer spring from it. The Russian left communists were all Bolsheviks; it was they who defended a continuity with the Bolshevism of the heroic years of the revolution, while those who slandered, persecuted and exterminated them, no matter how exalted their names, were the ones who were breaking with the essence of Bolshevism.

1. Read our article "The Communist Left and the continuity of marxism" <http://en.internationalism.org/the-communist-left>.

2. The ICC has already published in English and in Russian a pamphlet, *The Russian Communist Left*, dedicated to the study of the different expressions of the communist left in Russia. A version is also under preparation in French. The English version included the *Manifesto* of the Workers' Group but, since its publication, a new more complete version of this *Manifesto* has been unearthed in Russia. It is this latest version (originally in French) that we publish today and which will be incorporated into the future French edition.

3. Read our article "The Communist Left in Russia" in the *International Review* n°s. 8 and 9, also included in the book on the Russian left.

Lenin's withdrawal from political life was one of the factors which precipitated an open crisis in the Bolshevik Party. On the one hand, the bureaucratic faction consolidated its grip on the party, initially in the form of the "triumvirate" formed by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, an unstable bloc whose main cement was the will to isolate Trotsky. The latter, meanwhile, although with considerable hesitation, was compelled to move towards an overtly oppositional stance within the party.

At the same time, the Bolshevik regime was faced with new difficulties on the economic and social front. In the summer of 1923, the first clear crisis of the "market economy" installed by the NEP menaced the equilibrium of the whole economy. Just as the NEP had been introduced to counter the excessive state centralisation of war communism, which had resulted in the crisis of 1921, so now it became evident that the liberalisation of the economy had exposed Russia to some of the more classic difficulties of capitalist production. These economic difficulties, and above all the government's response to them – a policy of wage and job-cuts, like in any "normal" capitalist state – in turn aggravated the condition of the working class, which was already at the limits of impoverishment. By August-September 1923 a rash of spontaneous strikes had begun to spread through the main industrial centres.

The triumvirate, which was above all interested in preserving the status quo, had begun to see the NEP as the royal road to socialism in Russia; this view was theorised especially by Bukharin, who had moved

from the extreme left to the right wing of the party, and who preceded Stalin in working out a theory of socialism in one country, albeit "at a snail's pace" thanks to the development of a "socialist" market economy. Trotsky on the other hand had already begun to call for more state centralisation and planning in response to the country's economic difficulties. But the first definite statement of opposition from within the leading circles of the party was the *Platform of the 46*, submitted to the Politburo in October 1923. The 46 was made up both of those who were close to Trotsky, such as Piatakov and Preobrazhinsky, and elements of the Democratic Centralism group like Sapranov, V Smirnov and Ossinski. It is not insignificant that Trotsky's signature was not on the document: the fear of being considered part of a faction (factions having been banned in 1921) certainly played a part in this. Nevertheless, his open letter to the Central Committee, published in *Pravda* in December 1923, and his pamphlet *The New Course*, expressed very similar concerns, and definitively placed him in the opposition's ranks.

The *Platform of the 46* was initially a response to the economic problems facing the regime. It took up the cudgels for greater state planning against the pragmatism of the dominant apparatus and its tendency to elevate the NEP into an immutable principle. This was to be a constant theme of the left opposition around Trotsky – and as we shall see, not one of its strengths. More important was the urgent warning it issued about the stifling of the party's internal life.<sup>4</sup>

4. "Members of the party who are dissatisfied with this or that decision of the central committee, who have this or that doubt on their minds, who privately note this or that error, irregularity or disorder, are afraid to speak about it at party meetings, and are even afraid to talk about it in conversation... Nowadays it is not the party, not its broad masses, who promote and choose members of the provincial committees and of the central committee of the RCP. On the contrary the secretarial hierarchy of the party to an ever greater extent recruits the membership of conferences and congresses which are becoming to an ever greater extent the executive assemblies of this hierarchy... The position which has been created is explained by the fact that the regime is the dictatorship of a faction inside the party... The factional regime must be abolished, and this must be done in the first instance by those who have created it; it must be replaced by a regime of comradesly unity and internal

At the same time, the *Platform* distanced itself from what it referred to as “morbid” opposition groups, even if it saw the latter as expressions of the crisis within the party. This was undoubtedly a reference to currents like the Workers’ Group around Miasnikov and Bogdanov’s *Workers’ Truth* which had emerged around the same time. Shortly afterwards, Trotsky took a similar view: a rejection of their analyses as too extreme, while at the same time seeing them as manifestations of the unhealthy state of the party. Trotsky was also unwilling to collaborate in the methods of repression aimed at eliminating these groups.

In fact, these groups can by no means be dismissed as “morbid” phenomena. It is true that the *Workers’ Truth* group expressed a certain trend towards defeatism and even Menshevism: as with most of the currents within the German and Dutch left, its insights into the rise of state capitalism in Russia were weakened by a tendency to put into question the October revolution itself, seeing it as a more or less progressive bourgeois revolution.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the case at all with the Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), led by long-standing worker-Bolsheviks like Miasnikov, Kuznetsov and Moiseev. The group first came to prominence by distributing its *Manifesto* in April-May 1923, just after to the 13th Congress of the Bolshevik party. An examination of this text confirms the seriousness of the group, its political depth and perceptiveness.

The text is not devoid of weaknesses. In particular, it is drawn towards the “theory of the offensive”, which failed to see the retreat in the international revolution and the consequent necessity for a defensive struggle by the working class; this was the reverse of the coin to the analysis of the Communist International, which saw the retreat in 1921 but which drew largely opportunist conclusions from it. By the same token, the *Manifesto* adopts the erroneous view that in the epoch of the proletarian revolution, struggles for higher wages no longer have any positive role.

Despite this, the strengths of the document far outweigh its weaknesses:

- its resolute internationalism. In contrast to Kollontai’s Workers’ Opposition group, there is not a trace of Russian localism in its analysis. The whole introductory part of the *Manifesto* deals with the international situation, clearly

party democracy.”

5. Read the article “The Communist Left in Russia” in the *International Review* n°s. 8 and 9, already cited.

locating the difficulties of the Russian revolution in the delay of the world revolution, and insisting that the only salvation for the former lies in the revival of the latter: “*The Russian worker has learned to see himself as a soldier in the world army of the international proletariat and to see his class organisations as the regiments of this army. Every time the disquieting question of the destiny of the October revolution is raised, he turns his gaze beyond the frontiers of Russia, to where the conditions for revolution are ripe, but where the revolution does not come*”;

- its searing critique of the opportunist policy of the United Front and the slogan of the Workers’ Government; the priority accorded to this question is a further confirmation of the group’s internationalism, since this was above all a critique of the politics of the Communist International. Nor was the group’s position tainted with sectarianism: it affirmed the need for revolutionary unity between the different communist organisations (such as the KPD and the KAPD in Germany), but completely rejected the CI’s call for a bloc with the social democratic traitors, its spurious new argument that the Russian revolution had succeeded precisely through the Bolsheviks’ clever use of the United Front tactic: “*...the tactic that will lead the insurgent proletariat to victory is not that of the United Front, but the bloody, uncompromising fight against these bourgeois fractions with their confused socialist terminology. Only this combat can lead to victory: the Russian proletariat won not by allying with the Socialist Revolutionaries, the populists and the Mensheviks, but by struggling against them. It is necessary to abandon the tactic of the United Front and warn the proletariat that these bourgeois fractions – in today’s period, the parties of the Second International – will at the decisive moment take up arms for the defence of the capitalist system*”;

- its interpretation of the dangers facing the Soviet state - the threat of “*the replacement of the proletarian dictatorship by a capitalist oligarchy*”. The *Manifesto* charts the rise of a bureaucratic elite and the political disenfranchisement of the working class, and demands the restoration of the factory committees and above all of the soviets to take over the direction of the economy and the state.<sup>6</sup> For the Workers’ Group, the

6. However, the *Manifesto* seems also to defend the position that the unions must become the organs of the centralisation of economic direction – the old position of the Workers’ Opposition that Miasnikov had criticised in 1921.

revival of workers’ democracy was the only means to counter the rise of the bureaucracy, and it explicitly rejected Lenin’s idea that the way forward lay through a shake out of the Workers’ Inspection, since this was merely an attempt to control the bureaucracy through bureaucratic means;

- its profound sense of responsibility. In contrast to the critical notes appended by the KAPD when it published the *Manifesto* in Germany (Berlin 1924), and which expressed the German left’s premature pronouncement of the death of the Russian revolution and the Communist International, the Workers’ Group is very cautious about proclaiming the definite triumph of the counter-revolution in Russia or the final death of the International. During the “Curzon crisis” of 1923, when it seemed that Britain might declare war on Russia, the members of the Workers’ Group committed themselves to defending the Soviet republic in event of war; and above all, there is not the least hint of any repudiation of the October revolution and of the Bolshevik experience. In fact, the group’s stated attitude to its own role corresponds very closely to the notion of the left fraction as later elaborated by the Italian left in exile. It recognised the necessity to organise itself independently and even clandestinely, but both the group’s title (Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist Party - Bolshevik), and the content of its *Manifesto*, demonstrate that it saw itself being in full continuity with the programme and statutes of the Bolshevik Party. It therefore appealed to all healthy elements within the party, both in the leadership and in the different opposition groupings like the *Workers’ Truth*, the Workers’ Opposition, and the Democratic Centralists, to regroup and wage a determined struggle for the regeneration of the party and the revolution. And in many ways this was a far more realistic policy than the hope of the “46” that the factional regime in the party would be abolished “in the first instance” by the dominant faction itself.

In sum, there was nothing morbid in the project of the Workers’ Group, and neither was this a mere sect with no influence in the class. Estimates put its membership in Moscow at 200 or so, and it was thoroughly consistent in its advocacy of taking the side of the proletariat in its struggle against the bureaucracy. It thus sought to make an active political intervention in the wildcat strikes of summer-autumn 1923. Indeed it was for this very reason, coupled with the growing political influence of the group within the ranks of the party, that the appa-

ratus unleashed the full force of repression against it. As he had predicted, there was even an attempt to shoot Miasnikov “while trying to escape”. Miasnikov survived and though imprisoned and then forced into exile, continued his revolutionary activity abroad for two decades. The group in Rus-

sia was more or less crippled by mass arrests, although it is clear from *The Russian Enigma*, Ante Ciliga’s precious account of the opposition groups in prison in the late 20s, that it by no means disappeared completely and continued to influence the “extreme left” of the opposition movement.

Nonetheless, this initial repression was a truly ominous moment: it was the first time that an avowedly communist group had suffered direct state violence under the Bolshevik regime.

## **Manifesto of the Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist Party**

### **By way of a preface**

Every conscious worker, who cannot remain indifferent to the suffering and torment of his class nor to the titanic struggle that it is undertaking, has certainly reflected more than once on the destiny of our revolution at all stages of its development. Each one understands that his fate is very closely linked to that of the movement of the world proletariat.

We still read in the old Social-Democratic programme that “the development of commerce created a close link between the countries of the civilised world” and that “the movement of the proletariat must become international, and that it has already become such”.

The Russian worker has learned to see himself as a soldier in the world army of the international proletariat and to see his class organisations as the regiments of this army. Every time the disquieting question of the destiny of the October revolution is raised, he turns his gaze beyond the frontiers of Russia, to where the conditions for revolution are ripe, but where the revolution does not come.

But the proletarian must not complain, nor lower his head because the revolution doesn’t present itself at a given moment. On the contrary, he must pose the question: what is it necessary to do in order for the revolution to happen?

When the Russian worker looks at his own country, he sees a working class which has accomplished the socialist revolution, taken on the hardest trials of the NEP (New Economic Policy), while in front of him stand the increasingly well fed heroes of the NEP. Comparing their situation to his, he asks himself with disquiet: where are we going exactly?

Then come the bitterest thoughts. The worker has shouldered the entire weight of imperialist and civil war; he is feted in the Russian newspapers as a hero who has

spilt his blood in this struggle. But he leads a miserable bread and water existence. On the other hand, those who eat their fill on the torment and misery of others, of those workers who have laid down their arms, live in luxury and magnificence. Where are we going then, and what will come of it? Is it really possible that the “New Economic Policy” is being transformed into the New Exploitation of the Proletariat? What is to be done to avoid this danger?

When these questions are posed on the spot to the worker, he automatically looks backward so as to establish a link between past and present, to understand how we have arrived at such a situation. However bitter and instructive these experiences, the worker finds his bearings in the inextricable network of historic events which have unfolded in front of his eyes.

We want to help him, as far as our forces permit, to understand the facts and if possible show him the road to victory. We don’t pretend to be magicians or prophets whose words are sacred or infallible; on the contrary we want all we say submitted to the sharpest criticisms and necessary corrections.

### **To the communist comrades of every country!**

The present state of the productive forces in the advanced countries and particularly in those where capitalism is highly developed gives the proletarian movement of these countries the character of a struggle for the communist revolution, for power to be held by calloused hands, for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Either humanity will be involved in unceasing bourgeois and national wars, engulfed in barbarism and drowning in its own blood; or the proletariat will accomplish its historic mission: to conquer power and to put an end once and for all to the exploitation of man by man, to war between classes, peoples, nations; to plant the flag of peace, of labour and of fraternity.

The armaments race, the precipitous reinforcement of the aerial fleets of Britain, France, America, Japan, etc., threaten us with war of a severity unknown up to now and in which millions of men will perish; the wealth of the towns, factories, enterprises, all that the workers have created through exhausting work, will be destroyed.

It is the task of the proletariat to overthrow its own bourgeoisie. The more quickly that it does so in each country, the more quickly the world proletariat will realise its historic mission.

In order to finish with exploitation, oppression and wars, the proletariat must not struggle for an increase in wages or a reduction in its hours of work. This was necessary in the past, but today it must struggle for power.

The bourgeoisie and oppressors of all types and hues are very satisfied with the Socialists of all countries, precisely because they divert the proletariat away from its essential task which is the struggle against the bourgeoisie and against its regime of exploitation: they continually propose petty demands without showing the least resistance to subjection and violence. In this way, they become, at a certain moment, the sole saviours of the bourgeoisie faced with the proletarian revolution. The great mass of workers gives a distrustful reception to what its oppressors directly propose to it; but if the same thing is presented to it as conforming to their interests and clothed in socialist phrases, then the working class, confused by this language, is confident in the traitors and wastes its force in a useless combat. The bourgeoisie thus hasn’t, and never will have, better advocates than the Socialists.

The communist avant-garde must before everything expel from the heads of its class comrades all crass bourgeois ideology and conquer the consciousness of the proletariat in order to lead it to a victorious struggle. But to burn off all this bourgeois debris, it must be with them, the proletarians, sharing

all their troubles and labour. When these proletarians, who until now have followed the accomplices of the bourgeoisie, begin to struggle, to go on strike, it should not stand outside blaming them scornfully – it must, on the contrary, stay with them in their struggle, explaining relentlessly that this struggle only serves the bourgeoisie. Similarly, to say a word of truth, one is sometimes forced to stand on a pile of shit (to stand for elections) even when it means soiling honest revolutionary shoes.

Certainly, everything depends on the balance of forces in each country. And in some situations it may not be necessary to stand for elections, or to participate in strikes, but to go into battle directly. One cannot put all countries in the same bag. One must naturally look at all ways to conquer the sympathy of the proletariat; but not at the price of concessions, forgetfulness or renouncing fundamental solutions. All this must be rejected because a mere concern for immediate success leads us to abandon the real solutions, prevents us from guiding the masses, so that instead of trying to lead them, we end up copying them; not winning them over, but being towed by them.

One must never wait for others, remain immobile, because the revolution will not break out simultaneously in every country. One must not excuse one's own indecision by invoking the immaturity of the proletarian movement and still less adopt the following language: *"We are ready for the revolution and even quite strong; but the others are not ready yet; and if we overthrow our own bourgeoisie without the others doing the same, what will happen then?"*

Let's suppose that the German proletariat chases out the bourgeoisie and all those who serve it. What will happen? The bourgeoisie and the social traitors will flee far from proletarian anger, turn towards France and Belgium and will entreat Poincaré and co. to settle accounts with the German proletariat. They will go as far as promising France to respect the Treaty of Versailles, perhaps offering them the Rhineland and the Ruhr to boot. That's to say that they will act as the Russian bourgeoisie and its Social Democratic allies did and will do again. Naturally Poincaré will rejoice in such good business: saving Germany from its proletariat and saving, at the same time, Soviet Russia for the thieves of the entire world. Unfortunately for Poincaré and co., as soon as the workers and peasants who compose the army understand that it is a question of helping the German bourgeoisie and its allies against the German proletariat, then they will turn their arms against their own masters, against Poincaré himself.

The latter, in order to save his own skin and that of the French bourgeoisie, will recall his troops, abandon the poor German bourgeoisie with its Socialist allies to their fate, and do so even if the German proletariat tear up the Treaty of Versailles. Poincaré, chased from the Rhine and the Ruhr, will proclaim a peace without annexation or indemnity on the principle of self-determination of the peoples. It will not be difficult for Poincaré to come to an understanding with Cuno and the fascists; but a Germany run by workers' councils will break their backs. When you have force at your disposal, you have to use it and not go round in circles.

Another danger threatens the German revolution; it is the dispersal of its forces. In the interests of the proletarian world revolution, the whole revolutionary proletariat must unite its efforts. If the victory of the proletariat is unthinkable without a decisive rupture and merciless combat against the enemies of the working class, the social traitors of the Second International who militarily repress the proletarian revolutionary movement in their - so-called free - country, this same victory is unthinkable without the joining of all the forces which have the aim of the communist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is why we, the Workers' Group of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) whom we count, organisationally and ideologically, among the parties adhering to the 3<sup>rd</sup> International, look towards honest revolutionary communist proletarians by appealing to them to unite their forces for the last and decisive battle. We address ourselves to all the parties of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International as to those of the 4<sup>th</sup> Communist Workers' International,<sup>1</sup> as well as particular organisations which do not belong to any of these Internationals but who pursue our common aim in order to appeal to them to constitute a united front for the combat and victory.

The initial phase has drawn to a close. The Russian proletariat, by basing itself on the rules of the communist and proletarian revolutionary art, has brought down the bourgeoisie and its lackeys of every type and nuance (socialist-revolutionaries, Mensheviks, etc.) who defended it with so much zeal. And, although much weaker than the German proletariat, it has, as we see, repelled all the attacks that the world bourgeoisie led against it, attacks incited by the bourgeoisie, landlords and Socialists of Russia.

It is now incumbent on the proletariat of the West to act, to bring together its own

forces and begin the struggle for power. It would evidently be dangerous to close one's eyes to the dangers from within which threaten Soviet Russia, the October revolution and the world revolution. At this time the Soviet Union is going through its most difficult moments: it faces so many deficiencies, and of such a gravity, that they could become fatal for the Russian proletariat and the entire world proletariat. These deficiencies derive from the weaknesses of the Russian working class and those of the world workers' movement. The Russian proletariat is not yet up to opposing the tendencies which, on one side lead to the bureaucratic degeneration of the NEP and, on the other, put in great danger, as much from the inside as from the outside, the conquests of the Russian proletarian revolution.

The proletariat of the entire world is directly and immediately interested in the conquests of the October revolution being defended against all threats. The existence of a country like Russia as the base of the world communist revolution already signifies a guarantee of victory, and as a consequence the avant-garde of the international proletarian army - the communists of every country - must firmly express the still largely mute opinion of the proletariat on the deficiencies and the harm suffered by Soviet Russia and its army of communist proletarians, the RCP (Bolshevik).

The Workers' Group of the RCP (B), which is the best informed of the Russian situation, means to start this work.

We are not of the opinion that we, communist proletarians, cannot talk about our faults because there are in the world social traitors and scoundrels who, as we've seen, could use what we say against Soviet Russia and communism. All these fears are without foundation. Whether our enemies are open or hidden doesn't matter at all: they remain artisans of calamity who cannot live without being harmful to us, the proletarians and communists who want to liberate ourselves from the capitalist yoke. What will follow from this? Must we because of that keep our troubles and faults quiet, not discuss them nor take measures to eradicate them? What will occur if we let ourselves be terrorised by the social traitors and if we keep quiet? In this case things could go so far that there would no longer be the conquests of the October revolution as we remember it. This would be of great use to the social traitors and a mortal blow for the international proletarian communist movement. It is precisely in the interest of the world proletarian revolution and of the working class that we, the Workers' Group of the RCP (Bolshevik), are beginning, without trembling in front of the opinion of

1. This is the KAI (Communist Workers' International, 1921-22), founded on the initiative of the KAPD, not to be confused with the Trotskyist IVth International.

the social traitors, to pose the decisive question for the international and proletarian movement in its totality. We have already observed that its faults can be explained by the weaknesses of the international and Russian movement. The best help that the proletariat of other countries can give to the Russian proletariat is a revolution in their own country, or at least in one or two of the advanced countries. Even if at the present time forces are not sufficient to realise such an aim, they would, in any case, be up to helping the Russian working class to conserve the positions conquered by the October revolution, up to the point when the proletariat of other countries rise up and vanquish the enemy.

The Russian working class, weakened by the imperialist world war, the civil war and the famine, is not powerful. But, in front of the dangers which threaten it at present, it can prepare to struggle precisely because it has already gone through these dangers. It will make every effort possible to surmount them and it will succeed thanks to the help of the proletariat of other countries.

The Workers' Group of the RCP (Bolshevik) has sounded the alarm and its appeal finds a great echo in all of Soviet Russia. All those in the RCP who think along proletarian and honest lines are coming together and beginning to struggle. We will certainly succeed in awakening in the heads of all the conscious proletarians a preoccupation about the fate which awaits the conquests of the October revolution. The struggle is difficult; we are constrained to a clandestine activity: we are operating in illegality. Our *Manifesto* cannot be published in Russia: we have copied and distributed it illegally. The comrades who are suspected of belonging to our group are excluded from the party and the unions and are arrested, deported, liquidated.

At the Twelfth Conference of the RCP (Bolshevik), comrade Zinoviev announced, with the approval of the party and the Soviet bureaucrats, a new formula for stifling any criticism from the working class by saying: "*all criticism against the leadership of the RCP whether from the right or the left, is Menshevism*" (Cf. his speech at the Twelfth Conference). That means that if the fundamental lines of the leadership do not appear correct to whatever communist worker and, in his proletarian simplicity, he begins to criticise them, he will be excluded from the party and the unions and handed over to the GPU (Cheka). The centre of the RCP doesn't want any criticism because it considers itself as infallible as the Roman Pope. Our concerns, the concerns of Russian workers about the destiny of the conquests of the October revolution - all that is declared counter-revolutionary. We,

the Workers' Group of the RCP (Bolshevik), declare, in front of the entire world proletariat, that the Soviet Union is one of the greatest conquests of the international proletarian movement. It is precisely because of that that we raise the alarm, because the power of the soviets, the power of the proletariat, the victory of October of the Russian working class, is threatened with being transformed into a capitalist oligarchy. We declare that we will prevent with all our might the attempt to overturn the power of the soviets. We will do so even if, in the name of the power of the soviets, they arrest us and send us to prison. If the leading group of the RCP declares that our concerns about the October revolution are illegal and counter-revolutionary, you can, revolutionary proletarians of every country, and above all those of you who adhere to the 3<sup>rd</sup> International, express your decisive opinion on the basis of your knowledge of our *Manifesto*. Comrades, all the proletarians of Russia who are worried about these dangers which threaten the great October revolution look to you. At your meetings we want you to discuss our *Manifesto* and insist that your delegates to the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International raise the question of fractions inside the parties and of the policy of the RCP towards the soviets. Comrades, discuss our *Manifesto* and make resolutions. Understand, comrades, that in this way you will help the exhausted and martyred working class of Russia to save the conquests of the October revolution. Our October revolution is a part of the world revolution.

**To work comrades!**

**Long live the conquests of the October revolution of the Russian proletariat!**

**Long live the world revolution!**

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The first two parts of the *Manifesto* are entitled "The character of the proletariat's class struggle" and "Dialectic of the class struggle". We have decided not to publish these here (although they are of course included in our book) insofar as they recall the vision of history and the role of the class struggle as set out by Marx, notably in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. It seems to us preferable to go directly to the part of the document which sets out the analysis elaborated by the Workers' Group of the historic period confronted by the world proletariat at that moment.

### **Sauls and Pauls in the Russian revolution**

Any conscious worker who has learned the lessons of the revolution, saw for himself

how different classes are "miraculously" transformed from Saul into Paul, from propagandists of peace into propagandists of civil war and vice versa. If one remembers the events of the last 15-20 years, they quite clearly show these transformations.

Look at the bourgeoisie, the landowners, the priests, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. Who among the priests and landowners advocated civil war before 1917? None of them. Even better, all those who advocated universal peace and the state of grace, they threw people in jail, had them shot and hanged for daring to make such propaganda. And after October? Who championed and advocated civil war with such passion? These same faithful children of Christianity: priests, landowners, and officers.

And was the bourgeoisie, represented by the Constitutional Democrats, not formerly the partisan of the civil war against the autocracy? Remember the revolt at Vyborg. Didn't Miluikov, from the high tribune of the Provisional Government, say: "We take up the red flag in our hands, and it will only be taken away from us when it is prised from our corpses"? True, he also pronounced very different words before the State Duma: "This red rag that hurts all our eyes". But we can say with certainty that prior to 1905, the bourgeoisie was favourable to the civil war. And in 1917, under the Provisional Government which proclaimed with so much virulence "peace, peace, union between all the classes of society: this is the salvation of the nation!?" It was they, the bourgeoisie, the Cadets. But after October? Who continues today to scream like a fanatic: "down with the soviets, down with Bolsheviks, war, civil war: this is the salvation of the nation!?" It is these same good masters and "revolutionary" snivellers, who now have the air of titans.

And the Socialist-Revolutionaries? Did they not in their time assassinate Plehve, the Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich, Bogdanovich and other pillars of the old regime? And did these violent revolutionaries not call for unity and civil peace in 1917, under the same Provisional Government? Yes, they called for it, and how! And after October? Did they remain lovers of peace? No! They turned once again into men of violence...but r-r-reactionaries this time, and fired on Lenin. They advocate civil war.

And the Mensheviks? They were supporters of armed insurrection before 1908, of an 8 hour working day, of the requisition of landed properties, of a democratic republic and, from 1908 to 1917, joined in a sort of "class collaboration" for the freedom to organise and for legal forms of

struggle against the autocracy. They were not opposed to the overthrow of the latter, but certainly not during the war, because they are patriots, even “internationalists”; before October 1917, they advocated civil peace and after October, civil war, just like the monarchists, the Cadets and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Is this phenomenon limited to us, the Russians? No. Before the overthrow of feudalism, the English, French, German bourgeoisies, etc, advocated and led civil war. After feudalism fell into dust and the bourgeoisie had seized power, it became the advocate for civil peace, especially with the emergence of a new contender for power, the working class, which fought it tooth and nail.

Look now where the bourgeoisie is favourable to civil war. Nowhere! Everywhere, except in Soviet Russia, it promotes peace and love. And what will its attitude be when the proletariat has taken power? Will it remain the advocate of civil peace? Will it call for unity and peace? No, it will turn into a violent propagandist for civil war and will wage this war to the limit, to the end.

And we Russian proletarians, are we an exception to this rule?

Not at all.

If you take the same year 1917, did our councils of workers’ deputies become organs of civil war? Yes. Moreover, they took power. Did they want the bourgeoisie, the landowners, priests and other persons hostile to the councils to revolt against them? No. Did they want the bourgeoisie and all its big and small allies to submit without resistance? Yes, they wanted that. The proletariat was therefore for civil war before taking power, and against after its victory, for civil peace.

It’s true that in all these transformations, there is plenty of historic inertia. Even in the epoch where everyone (from monarchists to Mensheviks, including the Socialist-Revolutionaries) was leading the civil war against Soviet power, this was under the slogan of “civil peace”. In reality the proletariat wanted peace, but had to call again for war. Even in 1921, or in one of the circulars of the Central Committee of the RCP, one can glimpse this incomprehension of the situation: the slogan of civil war was considered even in 1921 as an indicator of a strong revolutionary spirit. But one can see this only as an historic case which does not shake at all our point of view.

If currently in Russia, in consolidating proletarian power conquered by the revolution of October, we advocate civil peace, all

honest proletarian elements must however have to unite firmly under the slogan of civil war, bloody and violent, against the world bourgeoisie.

The working class actually sees with what hysteria the exploiting layers of the population in the bourgeois countries calls for civil and universal peace, a state of grace.

We must therefore understand now that if, tomorrow, the proletariat of these bourgeois countries takes power, all today’s pacifists, from the landowners to the II and II½ Internationals, will lead the civil war against the proletariat.

With all the force and energy we are capable of, we must call the proletariat of all nations to civil war, bloody and ruthless; we will sow the wind, because we want the storm. But with even more force we will make propaganda for civil and universal peace, for a state of grace, everywhere where the proletariat has triumphed and taken power.

As for the landowners, Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries of all countries, they will advocate civil peace in every country where capitalist oppression reigns, and even more cruel and bloody civil war everywhere that the proletariat has taken power.

### The principal tasks for today

The development of the productive forces in all countries has reached a phase in which capitalism is itself a factor of destruction of these same forces. World War and the events that ensued, the peace of Versailles, the question of reparations, Genoa, the Hague, Lausanne, Paris and finally the occupation of the Ruhr by France, in addition to massive unemployment and the never ending wave of strikes, explicitly show that the last hour of capitalist exploitation has already arrived and the expropriators must themselves be expropriated.

The historical mission of the proletariat is to save humanity from the barbarism it has been plunged into by capitalism. And it is impossible to accomplish this by struggling for pennies, for the 8-hour working day, for the partial concessions that capitalism can grant. No, the proletariat must organise itself firmly with the aim of a decisive struggle for power.

In such a time, all propaganda in favour of strikes to improve the material conditions of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries is a malicious propaganda that keeps the proletariat in illusions, in the hope of a real improvement in its standard of living in capitalist society.

Advanced workers must take part in strikes and, if circumstances permit, *direct them*. They must propose practical demands where the proletarian mass still hopes to be able to improve its conditions by following this path; such an attitude will increase their influence within the proletariat. But they should state firmly that this is not a path to salvation, to improving conditions of life of the working class. If it is possible to organise the proletariat with a view to the decisive struggle by supporting all its conflicts with capital, this should not be rejected. It is better to get to the head of this movement and propose demands that are bold and categorical, practical and understandable to the proletariat, while explaining to it that if it does not take power, it will not be able to change its conditions of existence. Thus, for the proletariat, each strike, each conflict will be a lesson that will prove the necessity for the conquest of political power and the expropriation of the expropriators

Here the communists from all countries must adopt the same attitude as towards parliaments - they do not go there to make a positive work for legislation, but with a view to make propaganda, to work towards the destruction of these parliaments by the organised proletariat

Similarly, where there is the need to strike for a penny, for an hour, we must participate, but not to maintain hope of a real improvement in the workers’ economic conditions. Instead, we must dispel these illusions, use each conflict to organise the forces of the proletariat while preparing its consciousness for the final struggle. Once, the demand for an 8 hour working day was revolutionary, now it has ceased to be in all countries where the social revolution is on the agenda.

We now turn to the issue of the united front.

To follow:

The rest of the *Manifesto*, which will be published in future issues of the *International Review*, comprises the following chapter headings:

- The socialist united front;
- The question of the united front in countries where the proletariat is in power (workers’ democracy);
- The national question;
- The New Economic Policy (NEP);
- The NEP and the countryside;
- The NEP and politics;
- The NEP and the management of industry.

## Note

1. Gabriel Miasnikov, a worker from the Urals, had leapt to prominence in the Bolshevik Party in 1921 when, immediately after the crucial Tenth Congress, he had called for “freedom of the press from monarchists to anarchists inclusive” (quoted in Carr, *The Interregnum*). Despite Lenin’s attempts to dissuade him from this agitation, he refused to climb down and was expelled from the party in early 1922. In March 1923 he joined with other militants to found the Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), and they published their *Manifesto*, which was distributed at the Twelfth Congress of the RCP. The group began to do illegal work amongst party and non-party workers, and seems to have had an important presence in the strike wave of summer 1923, calling for mass demonstrations and trying to politicize an essentially defensive class movement. Their activities in these strikes were enough to convince the GPU that they were a real threat; a wave of arrests of their leading militants dealt a severe blow to the group. Nevertheless they carried on their underground work, if on a reduced scale, until the beginning of the 1930. Miasnikov’s subsequent history is as follows: from 1923 to 1927 he spent most of his time in prison or exile for underground activities. Escaping from Russia in 1927 he fled to Persia and Turkey (where he was also imprisoned), eventually settling in France in 1930. During this period he was still trying to organize his group in Russia. At the end of the war, he petitioned Stalin to permit him to return to the USSR. From the day when he returned to his country, there was no further news of him. And with reason! After a secret judgement by a military tribunal, he was shot in a Moscow prison on 16 November 1945.

## ICC publications

# History of the working class



The Dutch communist left is one of the major components of the revolutionary current which broke away from the degenerating Communist International in the 1920s. Well before Trotsky’s Left Opposition, and in a more profound way, the communist left had been able to expose the opportunist dangers which threatened the International and its parties and which eventually led to their demise. In the struggle for the intransigent defence of revolutionary principles, this current, represented in particular by the KAPD in Germany, the KAPN in Holland, and the left of the Communist Party of Italy animated by Bordiga, came out against the International’s policies on questions like participation in elections and trade unions, the formation of ‘united fronts’ with social democracy, and support for national liberation struggles. It was against the positions of the communist left that Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, and this text drew a response in *Reply to Lenin*, written by one of the main figures of the Dutch left, Herman Gorter.

In fact, the Dutch left, like the Italian left, had been formed well before the first world war, as part of the same struggle waged by Luxemburg and Lenin against the opportunism and reformism which was gaining hold of the parties of the Second International. It was no accident that Lenin himself, before reverting to centrist positions at the head of the Communist International, had, in his book *State and Revolution*, leaned heavily on the analyses of Anton Pannekoek, who was the main theoretician of the Dutch left. This document is an indispensable complement to *The Italian Communist Left*, already published by the ICC, for all those who want to know the real history of the communist movement behind all the falsifications which Stalinism and Trotskyism have erected around it.

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## History of the workers' movement

# The left wing of the Communist Party of Turkey

## (ICC Pamphlet - Introduction to the second English edition)

The purpose of this article is to introduce the new English edition of our pamphlet on the Left Wing of the Turkish Communist Party (Türkiye Komünist Partisi, TKP), which will be serialised in the following issues of the *Review*. The first edition of the pamphlet was published in 2008 by the Turkish group Enternasyonalist Komünist Sol (Internationalist Communist Left, EKS), which had already at the time adopted the ICC's basic positions as a statement of principle, and had begun to discuss the ICC's Platform. In 2009, EKS joined the ICC to form our organisation's section in Turkey, publishing *Dünya Devrimi* ("World Revolution").

This new edition of the English translation follows the publication of a new Turkish edition, which clarified some aspects of the original pamphlet with further references to original Turkish material. It also added as an appendix (for the first time in both modern Turkish and English), the 1920 founding declaration of the TKP in Ankara.

The body of the pamphlet still presents a certain difficulty for the non-Turkish reader, in that it refers to historical events which are common knowledge for any Turkish schoolchild, but are little known or not at all outside Turkey. Rather than weigh down the body of the text with explanations which would be unnecessary for the Turkish reader, we have chosen to add some explanatory notes in the English version, and to give, in this article, a general overview of the historical context which, we hope, will make it easier for the reader to find his way through a complex period.<sup>1</sup>

Our historical overview will itself be divided into two parts: in the first, we will concentrate on the actual events leading up to the creation of the Turkish state, and the formation of the TKP; in the second, we will examine the debates surrounding the theoretical basis of the Comintern's policy towards national movements in the

East, in particular as these are expressed in the adoption of the "Theses on the National Question" at the Comintern's Second Congress.

### The fall of the Ottoman Empire

The Turkish Republic founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the years following World War I was born out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> The Empire (also known as the Sublime Porte) was not a national state, but the result of a series of dynastic conquests, which – at its greatest extent in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century – spread along the North African coast as far as Algiers, across present-day Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon, and much of coastal Saudi Arabia, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina; on the European continent, the Ottomans conquered Greece, the Balkans and much of Hungary. Ever since the reign of Selim the Excellent in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Sultan had also assumed the title of Caliph, that is to say the leader of the whole *Ummah*, or community of Islam. Insofar as one can make an analogy with European history, the Ottoman

Sultans thus combined the spiritual and temporal attributes of the Roman Emperor and the Pope.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, the Ottoman Empire was coming under growing pressure from the expansionism of modern European capitalist states, leading to its gradual disintegration. Egypt broke away *de facto* after Napoleon invaded in 1798 and was driven out by an alliance of British and local troops; it became a British protectorate in 1882. French troops conquered Algeria in a series of bloody conflicts between 1830 and 1872, while Tunisia was made a French protectorate in 1881. Greece won its independence in 1830, after a war fought with the help of the British, French, and Russians.

This process of disintegration continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1908 Bulgaria declared its independence and Austria-Hungary formalised its annexation of Bosnia; in 1911 Italy invaded Libya, while in 1912 the Ottoman army was badly mauled during the First Balkan War by the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Greeks. Indeed the Sublime Porte's survival was due in part to the rivalries of the European powers, none of which could allow its rivals to profit from the Empire's collapse at their own expense. Thus France and Britain – perfectly capable, as we have seen, of despoiling the Empire for their own profit – united to protect the Ottomans against Russian advances during the Crimean War of 1853-56.

Internally, the Ottoman Empire was a hodgepodge of ethnic units whose only cohesion derived from the Sultanate and the Ottoman state itself. The Caliphate was of limited application, since the Empire included large Jewish and Christian populations, not to mention a variety of Muslim sects. Even in Anatolia – the geographical area which roughly corresponds to modern Turkey – national or ethnic unity was lacking. The majority Turkish population, largely made up of peasants farming in extremely backward conditions, lived side by

1. In doing so, we have relied extensively on Andrew Mango's recent biography of Kemal Atatürk, and on EH Carr's history of the Russian Revolution (1950 edition), in particular the chapter in Volume I on "Self-Determination in practice". The French speaking reader can usefully consult the long critical article published in *Programme Communiste* n°100 (December 2009, [http://www.pcint.org/04\\_PC/100/100\\_notes-turkish-p-c.htm](http://www.pcint.org/04_PC/100/100_notes-turkish-p-c.htm)), which, despite its inevitable Bordigist blind spots, contains some useful historical material.

2. The fact that Turkey as such did not exist for much of the period covered by the pamphlet goes some way to explain why the EKS' original Preface describes Turkey as an "obscure Middle Eastern country"; for the rest, the undoubted ignorance of Turkish affairs by the vast majority of the population in the English speaking world thoroughly justifies the expression. Amusingly, *Programme Communiste* prefers to attribute it to "the prejudices of a citizen of one of the 'great powers' that dominates the world" on the wholly unfounded assumption that the Preface is written by the ICC. Should we conclude that the PCI's own prejudices leave it unable to imagine that an uncompromisingly internationalist position should be adopted by a member of what they like to call the "olive-skinned peoples"?

side with Armenians, Kurds, Azeris, Greeks and Jews. Moreover, while some Turkish capital did exist, the great majority of the rising industrial/commercial bourgeoisie was not Turkish but Armenian, Jewish and Greek while other major economic actors were owned by French or German capital. The situation in Turkey is thus comparable to that in Tsarist Russia, where an outdated despotic state structure overlaid a civil society which, for all its backward aspects, was nonetheless integrated into world capitalism as a whole. Unlike Russia, however, the Ottoman state structure was not based on the economically dominant national bourgeoisie.

Although the Sultanate had made some attempts at reform, the experiments with limited parliamentary democracy were short-lived. More concrete results came from collaboration with Germany in the construction of railways linking Anatolia with Baghdad and the Hejaz (Mecca and Medina); these were of particular concern to the British in the years leading up to the war, since they promised to allow both Ottomans and Germans to pose a threat to the Persian oilfields (critical for supplying the British navy) on the one hand, and to Egypt and the Suez Canal (the lifeline to India) on the other. Nor was Britain any more enthusiastic about the Sultan's request for German officers to train the Ottoman army in modern strategy and tactics.

To the rising generation of nationalist revolutionaries who were to form the "Young Turk" movement, it was obvious that the Sultanate was incapable of responding to the pressure imposed by foreign imperialist powers, and building a modern, industrial state. However, the minority status (both national and religious) of the industrial and merchant classes meant that the Young Turk national revolutionary movement which founded the "Committee of Union and Progress" (CUP, in Turkish the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) in 1906 was largely made up, not from a rising industrial class, but from frustrated Turkish army officers and state officials; in its early years the CUP also received considerable support from national minorities (including from the Armenian Dashnak Party, and from the population around Salonika in what is now Greece) and, initially at least, from Avraam Benaroya's Workers' Socialist Federation. Although it was inspired by the ideas of the French revolution and the efficiency of German military organisation, it cannot properly be called nationalist since its aim was to transform and strengthen the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. In doing so, it inevitably came into conflict with emerging nationalist movements in the Balkan states, and with Greece in particular.

Support for the CUP grew rapidly in the army, to the point where its members felt able, in 1908, to launch a successful military putsch, forcing Sultan Abdulhamit to call a parliament and accept CUP ministers into his government, which they quickly dominated. The CUP's popular base was so narrow, however, that it was rapidly forced out of power and was only able to re-establish its authority by the military occupation of the capital Istanbul; Sultan Abdulhamit was forced to abdicate and was replaced by his younger brother Mehmet V. In theory at least, the Ottoman Empire had become a constitutional monarchy, which the Young Turks hoped would open the way to the Empire's conversion into a modern capitalist state. However, the fiasco of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) was to demonstrate all too clearly how backward the Ottoman Empire was in comparison to the more modern powers.

The "Young Turk revolution", as it became known, thus set the pattern for the creation of the Turkish Republic and indeed for states that were to emerge later from the collapse of the colonial empires: a capitalist state established by the army, as the only force in society with sufficient cohesion to prevent the country from falling apart.

It is unnecessary to give an account of the Ottoman Empire's misadventures following its entry into World War I on Germany's side;<sup>3</sup> suffice it to say that by 1919 the Empire was defeated and dismembered: its Arabian possessions had been divided between the British and the French, while the capital itself was occupied by Allied troops. The Greek ruling class, which had entered the war on the Allied side, now saw an opportunity to realise their *Megali Idea*: a "Greater Greece" which would incorporate into the Greek state those parts of Anatolia which had been Greek in the days of Alexander – essentially the Aegean coast including the major port of Izmir and the Black Sea coastal area known as Pontus.<sup>4</sup> Since these areas were also largely occupied by Turks, such a policy could only be carried out by a programme of pogroms and ethnic cleansing. In May 1919, with tacit British support, the Greek army occupied Izmir. The enfeebled Ottoman government, entirely dependent on the unreliable and rapacious goodwill of the victorious British and French, was incapable of resisting. Resistance was to

3. Amid all the crimes perpetrated during World War I, the massacre of the Armenians nonetheless deserves special mention. Out of fear that the Christian Armenian population would collaborate with the Russians, the CUP government and its War Minister Enver Pasha undertook a programme of mass deportations and killings leading to the extermination of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

4. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megali\\_Idea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megali_Idea)

come, not from the discredited Sultanate in Istanbul, but from the central Anatolian plateau. It is here that "Kemalism" entered the historical stage.

Almost simultaneously with the Greek occupation of Izmir, Mustafa Kemal Pasha – better known to history as Kemal Atatürk – left Istanbul for Samsun on the Black Sea coast. As Inspector of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army, his official duties were to maintain order and to oversee the dismantlement of the Ottoman armies in accordance with the ceasefire agreement with the Allies. His real purpose was to galvanise national resistance to the occupying powers, and in the years to follow Mustafa Kemal was to become the leading figure in Turkey's first truly national movement which led, by 1922, to the abolition of the Sultanate and the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire, the expulsion of Greek armies from Western Anatolia and the creation of today's Turkish Republic.

The year 1920 saw the opening of Turkey's first Grand National Assembly in Ankara. It can also be seen as the moment that events in Russia began once again to play an important role in Turkish history, and vice versa.

The two years following the October Revolution had been desperate ones for the new revolutionary power: the Red Army had had to fight off direct intervention by the capitalist powers, and to wage a bloody civil war against the White armies of Kolchak in Siberia, Denikin on the Don (the north-eastern Black Sea region), and Wrangel in the Crimea. By 1920, the situation was beginning to appear more stable: "Soviet Republics" had been or were about to be created, in Tashkent, Bokhara, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. British troops had been forced to evacuate Baku (the heart of the Caspian Sea oil industry and the region's only real proletarian centre), but remained an ever-present threat in Persia and India. In these circumstances, the national question was of immediate and pressing importance to the Soviet power and to the workers' movement which found its highest political expression in the Communist International (CI): were the national movements a force for reaction or a potential aid to the revolutionary power, as the peasants had been in Russia? How should the workers' movement behave in regions where the workers were still in the minority? What could be expected of nationalist movements like the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, which at least seemed to share a common enemy with the RSFSR<sup>5</sup> in British and French imperialism?

5. Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics.

## The debate on the national question

In 1920, these questions lay at the heart of the debates both at the CI's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, which adopted "Theses on the National Question", and at the "First Congress of the Peoples of the East", better known as the Baku Congress. These events formed, so to speak, the theoretical context for events in Turkey, and it is to these that we will now turn our attention.

Presenting the "Theses on the National Question" to the CI Congress, Lenin declared that "*the most important, the fundamental idea underlying our theses [...] is the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations [...] In this age of imperialism, it is particularly important for the proletariat and the Communist International to establish the concrete economic facts and to proceed from concrete realities, not from abstract postulates, in all colonial and national problems*".<sup>6</sup> Lenin's insistence that the national question could only be understood in the context of the "age of imperialism" (what we would call the epoch of capitalism's decadence) was shared by all the participants in the debates that followed. Many however, did not share Lenin's conclusions and tended to pose the national question in terms similar to those used by Rosa Luxemburg:<sup>7</sup> "*In the*

6. *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, Vol. 1, New Park, p.109. Also to be found on the marxists.org web site.

7. In its critique of the EKS pamphlet, *Programme Communiste* tries to use Lenin against Luxemburg, even going so far as to claim that Luxemburg, under the name of "Junius" "*puts forward... a national programme of the defence of the fatherland!*" It is true that Luxemburg, like most of her contemporaries including Lenin, was not always free of ambiguities and outmoded references to the national question as it had been treated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Marx and Engels, and by the Social-Democracy more generally. We have already pointed out these ambiguities in *International Review* n°12 (1978), where we defended Lenin's critique of them in his article on the Junius pamphlet. It is also true that a correct economic analysis does not lead automatically to correct political positions (any more than an inadequate economic analysis invalidates correct positions of political principle). *Programme Communiste*, however, fails miserably to come up to Lenin's standard when they shamelessly truncate Luxemburg's words in order to avoid putting before their readers what her so-called "national programme" actually consisted of: "*Yes, socialists should defend their country in great historical crises, and here lies the great fault of the German social democratic Reichstag group. When it announced on the fourth of August, "in this hour of danger; we will not desert our fatherland," it denied its own words in the same breath. For truly it has deserted its fatherland in its hour of greatest danger. The highest duty of the social democracy toward its fatherland demanded that it expose the real background of this imperialist war, that it rend the net of imperialist and diplomatic lies that covers the eyes of the people. It was their duty to speak loudly and clearly, to proclaim to the people of Germany that in this war victory and defeat would be equally fatal, to oppose the gagging of the fatherland by a state of siege, to demand that the*

*era of [...] unrestrained imperialism there can be no more national wars. National interests serve only as a means of deceiving, making the working masses serviceable to their mortal enemy, imperialism [...] No suppressed nation can reap freedom and independence from the politics of imperialist states [...] Small nations, whose ruling classes are appendages of their class comrades in the large powers, are merely pawns in the imperialist game of the major powers and are abused as tools during the war, just like the working masses, only to be sacrificed to capitalist interests after the war*".<sup>8</sup>

If we look at the debates on the national question in the CI, we can see three different positions emerging.

### Lenin's position and the "Theses on the National Question"

Lenin's position is necessarily profoundly influenced by the situation of Soviet Russia on the world arena: "*in the current world situation, after the imperialist war, the mutual relations between states, the world system of states, is determined by the struggle of the smaller number of imperialist nations against the Soviet movement and the Soviet powers with Soviet Russia at their head [...] It is only from this standpoint that the political questions of the Communist Parties, not only in the civilised but also in the backward countries, can be posed and answered correctly*".<sup>9</sup> At times, this position could come dangerously close to making the proletarian revolution dependent on the national revolution in the East: "*The socialist revolution will not be merely, or mainly, the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat of each country against its own bourgeoisie – no, it will be the struggle of all colonies and countries oppressed by imperialism, of all dependent countries, against imperialism*".<sup>10</sup>

*people alone decide on war and peace, to demand a permanent session of parliament for the period of the war, to assume a watchful control over the government by parliament, and over parliament by the people, to demand the immediate removal of all political inequalities, since only a free people can adequately govern its country, and finally, to oppose to the imperialist war, based as it was upon the most reactionary forces in Europe, the program of Marx, of Engels, and Lassalle.*" (<http://marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/ch07.htm>)

8. "Either/Or", in Rosa Luxemburg's *Selected Political Writings* edited by D Howard, p.349. This is not to say that those delegates who echoed some of Luxemburg's positions could be described as "Luxemburgist", especially since there is no clear evidence that Luxemburg's writings were known to them.

9. Lenin, in *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit.

10. Lenin's report to the Second Congress of the Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 1918, cited in *Marxism and Asia*, Carrère d'Encausse and Schram.

The danger of this position is precisely that it tends to make the workers' movement in any one country, and the Comintern's attitude to that movement, dependent not on the interests of the international working class and the relations between workers of different countries but on the state interests of Soviet Russia.<sup>11</sup> It leaves unanswered the question of what to do when the two conflict. To take one very concrete example: what should be the attitude of Turkish workers and communists in the war between Mustafa Kemal's nationalist movement and the Greek occupying forces? Should it be the revolutionary defeatism adopted by the left wing in both the Greek and Turkish communist parties, or should it be Soviet Russia's military and diplomatic help to the nascent Turkish state, with a view to defeating Greece on the grounds that the latter is a tool of British imperialism?

### Manabendra Nath Roy's position

During the Comintern's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, MN Roy<sup>12</sup> presented his "Supplementary Theses on the national question" which were debated in committee and presented together with Lenin's Theses, for adoption by the Congress. For Roy, capitalism's continued survival depended on "super-profits" from the colonies: "*European capitalism draws its strength in the main not so much from the industrial countries of Europe as from its colonial possessions. Its existence depends on the control of extensive colonial markets and a broad field of opportunities for exploitation [...] The super-profits made in the colonies forms one of the main sources of the resources of contemporary capitalism. The European working class will only succeed in overthrowing the capitalist order once this source has finally been stopped up*".<sup>13</sup> This pushed Roy towards a view of the world revolution as dependent

11. A striking example of the dominance of Russian state interests can be seen in the Soviet power's attitude to the movement in Guilan (Persia). A study of these events is outside the scope of the present article, but interested readers can find some of the details in Vladimir Genis' study *Les Bolcheviks au Guilan*, published in *Cahiers du Monde russe*, July-September 1999.

12. Manabendra Nath Roy (1887 – 1954), born Narendra Nath Bhattacharya and popularly known as M. N. Roy, was a Bengali Indian revolutionary, internationally known political theorist and activist. He was a founder of the Communist Parties in India and in Mexico. He began his political activity on the extreme wing of Indian nationalism, but moved towards communist positions during a stay in New York during World War I. He fled to Mexico to avoid the attentions of the British secret service and took part in the formation of the Communist Party there. He was invited to attend the Comintern's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress and collaborated with Lenin in formulating the Theses on the National Question. See the Wikipedia entry on Roy at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manabendra\\_Nath\\_Roy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manabendra_Nath_Roy)

13. Roy's "Supplementary Theses" in *2<sup>nd</sup> Congress*, op. cit.

on the revolution of the working masses of Asia: *“The East is awakening: and who knows if the formidable tide, that will sweep away the capitalist structure of Western Europe, may not come from there. This is not idle fancy, nor is it mere sentimental brooding. That the final success of the Social Revolution in Europe will depend greatly, if not entirely, on a simultaneous upheaval of the labouring masses of the Orient, can be proved scientifically”*.<sup>14</sup> In Roy’s view, however, the revolution in Asia depended on the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry. This he saw as being incompatible with support for the democratic nationalist movement: *“The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not therefore mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies [...] Two movements can be discerned which are growing further and further apart with every day that passes. One of them is the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, which pursues the aim of political liberation with the conservation of the capitalist order; the other is the struggle of the propertyless peasants for their liberation from every kind of exploitation”*.<sup>15</sup> Roy’s objections led to the removal from Lenin’s draft theses of the idea of support for “bourgeois-democratic” movements; it was replaced by support for “national-revolutionary” movements. The rub lay, however, in the fact that the distinction between the two remained extremely unclear in practice. What exactly was a “national revolutionary” movement that was not also “bourgeois-democratic”? In what way exactly was it “revolutionary” and how could such a movement’s “national” characteristics be reconciled with the demands of an international proletarian revolution? These questions were never clarified by the Comintern and their inherent contradictions remained unresolved.

### Sultanzade’s position

A third, left, position was perhaps expressed most clearly by Sultanzade,<sup>16</sup> the

14. “The awakening of the East”, 1920: <http://marxists.org/archive/roy/1920/07/15.htm>

15. “Supplementary Theses”.

16. Sultanzade was in fact of Armenian origin: his real name was Avetis Mikailian. He was born in 1890 into a poor peasant family in Marageh (North-West Persia). He joined the Bolsheviks in 1912, probably in St Petersburg. He worked for the CI in Baku and Turkestan, and was one of the main organisers of the Persian CP’s first congress in Anzali in June 1920. He was present at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Comintern as delegate of the Persian party. He remained on the left of the CI, and opposed to the “nationalist leaders” of the East (such as Kemal); he was also profoundly critical of the Comintern’s so-called “experts” on Persia and the East. He died in Stalin’s purges some time between 1936 and 1938. See Cosroe Chaqeri’s

delegate from the newly-founded Persian CP. Sultanzade rejected both the idea that national revolutions could free themselves from dependence on imperialism, and that the world revolution depended on events in the East: *“Does [...] the fate of communism throughout the world depend on the victory of the social revolution in the East, as comrade Roy assures you? Certainly not. Many comrades in Turkestan are caught up in this error [...] Let us assume that the communist revolution has begun in India. Would the workers of that country be able to withstand the attack by the bourgeoisie of the entire world without the help of a big revolutionary movement in England and Europe? Of course not. The suppression of the revolution in China and Persia is clear proof of the fact [...] If one were to try to proceed according to the Theses in countries which already have ten or more years of experience [...] it would mean driving the masses into the arms of counter-revolution. The task is to create and maintain a purely communist movement in opposition to the bourgeois-democratic one. Any other judgment of the facts could lead to regrettable results”*.<sup>17</sup> That Sultanzade’s voice was not an isolated one can be seen from the fact that similar views were being expressed elsewhere. In his report to the Baku Congress, Pavlovitch (who according to some sources<sup>18</sup> worked on the report together with Sultanzade) declares that if *“the Irish separatists succeed in their aim and realise their cherished ideal of an independent Irish people. The very next day, independent Ireland would fall under the yoke of American capital or of the French Bourse, and, perhaps, within a year or two Ireland would be fighting against Britain or some other states in alliance with one of the world predators, for markets, for coal-mines, for iron-mines, for bits of territory in Africa, and once again hundreds of thousands of British, Irish, American and other workers would die in this war [...] The example [...] of bourgeois Poland, which is now behaving as a hangman towards the national minorities on its own territory, and serving as the gendarme of international capitalism for struggle against the workers and peasants of Russia; or the example of the Balkan states — Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro,*

study on Sultanzade in *Iranian Studies*, spring-summer 1984.

17. 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, op. cit., pp.135-6.

18. See Cosroe Chaqeri, op.cit. In *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 40/3, July-September 1999, Vladimir Genis mentions a report drawn up jointly by Pavlovitch and Sultanzade, at Lenin’s request following the Comintern’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, on “the objectives of the communist party in Persia”. The report proposes to undertake massive propaganda “for the complete elimination of private property and for the transfer of land to the peasants, since the landlord class cannot support the revolution either against the Shah, or even against the British”.

*Greece — squabbling amongst themselves over the division of the booty and over their desire to annex to their own territory some nation which was only yesterday under the Turkish yoke; and a whole number of other facts of the same sort show that the formation of national states in the East, in which power has passed from the foreign rulers who have been driven out into the hands of the local capitalists and landlords, does not in itself constitute a great step forward in the matter of improving the position of the popular masses.*

*“Within the framework of the capitalist system, any newly-formed state which does not express the interests of the toiling masses but serves the interests of the bourgeoisie is a new instrument of oppression and coercion, a new factor of war and violence. [...] If the struggle in Persia, India and Turkey were to lead merely to the capitalists and landlords of those countries, with their national parliaments and senates, coming to power, the masses of the people would have gained nothing. Every newly-formed state would be rapidly drawn, by the very course of events and the iron logic of the laws of capitalist economy, into the vicious circle of militarism and imperialist politics, and after a few decades we should witness another world war [...] for the interests of the French, German, British, Indian, Chinese, Persian and Turkish bankers and factory-owners [...] Only the dictatorship of the proletariat and, in general, of the working masses, liberated from foreign oppression and having overthrown capital completely, will provide the backward countries with a guarantee that these countries will not, like the states formed from fragments of the Austro-Hungarian empire and Tsarist Russia Poland, White Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Georgia, Armenia — or formed from fragments of Turkey — Venizelist Greece and the rest be new instruments for war, plunder and coercion.”*<sup>19</sup>

Grigori Safarov (who was to play an important part in the development of the TKP) put the problem more clearly in his *Problemy Vostoka*: *“...it must be emphasized that only the development of proletarian revolution in Europe makes the victory of agrarian-peasant revolution in the East possible [...] The imperialist system of states has no place for peasant republics. Numerically insignificant cadres of local proletarians and semi-proletarian rural and urban elements can carry with them broad peasant masses into the battle against imperialism and feudal elements, but this requires an international revolutionary situation which would enable them*

19. It is significant that he poses things in these terms. See <http://marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/ch05.htm>

to ally themselves with the proletariat of the advanced countries”<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, Pavlovitch’s report, which we have cited, is not a model of clarity and contains a number of contradictory ideas. Elsewhere in the report, for example, he refers to “revolutionary Turkey” (“*The Greek occupation of Thrace and Adrianople is aimed at isolating revolutionary Turkey and Soviet Russia from the revolutionary Balkans*”). He even goes so far as to take up a suggestion from “the Turkish comrades” (presumably the group around Mustafa Suphi) “*that the question of the Dardanelles should be decided by the states bordering on the Black Sea, excluding participation by Wrangel<sup>21</sup> and the Entente*”, and continues that “*We warmly welcome this idea, the realisation of which would be a first and decisive step towards a federation of all the peoples and countries whose territories adjoin the Black Sea*”<sup>22</sup> This only goes to show that the revolutionaries of the day were confronting, in practice and in conditions of extreme difficulty, new problems which had no easy solutions. In such a situation, a certain degree of confusion was probably inevitable. Let us remark in passing, though, that the “left” positions are being put forward, not by Western intellectuals or armchair revolutionaries, but precisely by those who, on the ground, would have to put the Comintern’s policy into practice.

### The national question in practice

It should be emphasized that the positions we have outlined here, rather schematically, were not set in stone. The Comintern was confronted with problems and questions that were wholly new: capitalism as a whole was still at the watershed between its period of triumphant ascendancy and the “epoch of wars and revolutions” (to use the CI’s expression); the opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariat was finding expression in an opposition between the Soviet power and capitalist states; and communists in the East were having to “*adapt [themselves] to specific conditions of a sort not met with in European countries*”<sup>23</sup>

It has to be said that in confronting these new questions, the Comintern’s leaders could sometimes reveal a surprising naivety. Here is Zinoviev, speaking

at the Baku Congress: “*We can support a democratic policy such as has now taken shape in Turkey and such as will perhaps tomorrow make its appearance in other countries. We support and will support national movements like those in Turkey, Persia, India and China [...] the task of this [current national] movement is to help the East free itself from British imperialism. But we have a task of our own to carry out, no less great — to help the toilers of the East in their struggle against the rich, and here and now to help them build their own Communist organisations, [...] to prepare them for a real labour revolution.*”<sup>24</sup> Zinoviev was doing no more than echoing Lenin’s report on the national question to the Comintern’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress: “*as communists we will only support the bourgeois freedom movements in the colonial countries if these movements are really revolutionary and if their representatives are not opposed to us training and organising the peasantry in a revolutionary way.*”<sup>25</sup>

In effect, the policy that Zinoviev is putting forth – and which the Soviet power at first tried to put into effect – assumes that the national movements will accept the Soviet power as an ally, while at the same time allowing the communists a free hand in organising the workers to overthrow them. But nationalist leaders like Mustafa Kemal were not idiots, nor were they blind to their own interests. Kemal – to take the Turkish example – was prepared to let the communists organise only insofar as he needed the support of Soviet Russia against the British and the Greeks. Kemal’s determination to keep the popular enthusiasm for communism – which certainly existed and was gaining ground however confusedly – firmly under control, even led to the bizarre creation of an “official” Communist Party whose central committee included the leading generals of the Turkish army! This CP was at least perfectly clear (indeed a good deal clearer than the Comintern) on the radical incompatibility between nationalism and communism, and on the implications of this incompatibility. As the “official” CP’s organ *Anadoluda Yeni Gün* put it: “*At the present moment, the program of communist ideas is not only harmful, but even ruinous, for the country. When a soldier realizes that there does not have to be a fatherland, he will not have to go out to defend it; hearing that there does not have to be hatred of nations, he will not go out and fight the Greeks*”<sup>26</sup> The Party ideologue Mahmud Esat Bozkurt declared unambiguously that “*Communism is not an ideal, but a means for the Turks.*”

24. <http://marxists.org/history/international/comintern/baku/ch01.htm>

25. Op. cit.

26. Cited in George S Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey*, p.82.

*The ideal for the Turks is the unity of the Turkish nation*”<sup>27</sup>

In short, the Soviet power would be an acceptable ally for the nationalists only insofar as it acted as an expression, not of proletarian internationalist but of Russian national interests.

The consequences of the Comintern’s policy towards Turkey were spelled out by Agis Stinas in his Memoirs published in 1976: “*The Russian government and the Communist International had characterised the war led by Kemal as a war of national liberation and had ‘in consequence’ judged it as progressive, and for that reason supported it politically and diplomatically and sent him advisors, arms and money. If we consider that Kemal was fighting a foreign invasion to liberate the Turkish soil, his struggle had a character of national liberation. But was there anything progressive about it? We believed this and supported it then. But how can we defend the same thesis today? For something to be progressive in our era and to be considered as progressive it must contribute to the raising of the class consciousness of the worker masses, to developing their capacity to struggle for their own emancipation. What has the creation of the modern Turkish state contributed to this? Kemal (...) threw the Turkish Communists into the jails where he hanged them, and then finally turned his back on Russia, establishing cordial relations with the imperialists and giving himself the job of protecting their interests. **The correct policy, in line with the interests of the proletarian revolution, would have been to call on the Greek and Turkish soldiers to fraternise, and the popular masses to struggle together, without letting themselves be stopped by national, racial and religious differences, for the republic of workers’ and peasants’ councils in Asia Minor. Independently of the policy of Russia and the objectives of Kemal, the duty of Greek Communists was definitely one of intransigent struggle against the war.***”<sup>28</sup>

The importance of the Turkish Left’s experience lies not in its theoretical heritage but in the fact that the struggle between nationalism and communism in the East was played out in Turkey to the bitter end, not in debate but on the ground, in the class struggle.<sup>29</sup> The Turkish Left’s fight against

27. Ibid.

28. Stinas, [http://www.reocities.com/antagonism1/stinas/StChap2.html#\\_Toc52960176](http://www.reocities.com/antagonism1/stinas/StChap2.html#_Toc52960176) (our emphasis). For a brief summary of Stinas’ memoirs (unfortunately not available in full in English), see our article in *International Review* n°72 ([http://en.internationalism.org/specialtexts/IR072\\_stinas.htm](http://en.internationalism.org/specialtexts/IR072_stinas.htm)).

29. As the pamphlet puts it, “*The left wing of the TKP was a movement shaped around opposition to the national liberation movement for practical reasons because of its terrible consequences for*

20. Cited in *Marxism and Asia*, op.cit. Emphasis in the original.

21. Wrangel was one of the counter-revolutionary generals whose military campaigns against the revolution were financed by the major powers – in Wrangel’s case in particular by the French.

22. Op. cit.

23. Lenin, speaking to the Congress of Communist Organisations of Peoples of the East. Cited in *Marxism and Asia*, p.168.

opportunism within the Party, and against the repression of the Kemalist state, which dipped its hands in workers' blood from its very birth, mercilessly exposed the failings and ambiguities of the Comintern's Theses on the National Question. The struggle of Manatov, Haçioğlu and their comrades, belongs to the internationalist heritage of the workers' movement.

Jens

## ICC publications



*the workers, bringing them only pain and death*". Both EKS when the pamphlet was written, and the ICC, were and are well aware that the Turkish Left does not occupy the same place in the theoretical and organisational development of the Communist Left as the Italian Left, for example. This is why the pamphlet is titled "The left wing of the TKP" rather than "The Turkish Communist Left". Apparently this distinction is not clear to *Programme Communiste*. But then *Programme Communiste* tends to treat the Communist Left as their personal property, claiming that only the Italian Left "*placed itself on the basis of orthodox marxism*" ("orthodox marxism" is itself a ludicrous notion which is entirely – dare we say so – unmarxist). *Programme Communiste* then goes into a long discussion about all the different currents, right and left, in the "*young communist movement*" and very learnedly informs us that they could be "right" or "left" depending on the changes in political line in the Comintern, citing Zinoviev's characterisation of Bordiga in 1924. But why is no mention made of Lenin's pamphlet written against "Left-Wing Communism", specifically in Italy, Germany, Holland, and Britain? Unlike *Programme Communiste*, Lenin at least had no difficulty in seeing that there was something in common among the "Left Wing Communists" - even if, of course, we do not agree with his description of Left Communism as a "childhood illness"!

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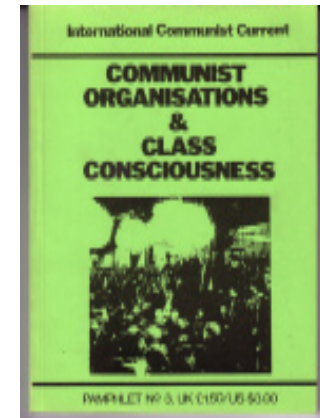
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# BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

The **International Communist Current** defends the following political positions:

\* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

\* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

\* The stultified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

\* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

\* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

\* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

\* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the

proletariat.

\* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

\* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

\* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

\* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

\* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

\* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

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Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

## OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1889-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.

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