



Belgique - België  
PB  
2600 Berchem 1-2  
BC 9925

# International Communist Current

3rd Quarter 2011

# International Review

The mobilisation of the Indignos (Indignants)  
in Spain and its repercussions  
across the world

**A movement that heralds the future**

**On the 140th anniversary  
of the Paris Commune**

Contribution to a history  
of the workers' movement in Africa (ii)  
**1914 - 1928: The first real confrontation  
between the two classes**

19th Congress of the ICC  
**Preparing for class confrontations  
Resolution on the international situation**

The decadence of capitalism (x)  
**For revolutionaries, the Great Depression  
confirms the obsolescence of capitalism**

£2.50 \$3 \$6Can \$7Aus 20Rupees 3Euros 650Yen 50.00PHP 12Rand

# 146

périodique trimestriel  
Supplément à INTERNATIONALISME.FR  
Bureau de Depot: B-2600 Berchem 1-2  
N° d'agrégation P408982

## Contents

The mobilisation of the Indignos (Indignants) In Spain  
and its repercussions across the world

### **1 A movement that heralds the future**

Capitalism's bleak future lies behind the 15M Movement

The assemblies: a vision of the future

The traps the movement has had to face

The June 19th demonstrations and the extension to the working class

The need for a reflective enthusiasm

The role of active minorities in preparing new struggles

### **8 On the 140th anniversary of the Paris Commune**

Contribution to a history of the workers' movement in Africa (ii)

### **9 1914 - 1928: The first real confrontations between the two classes**

General strike and uprising, Dakar 1914

1917 - 1918: Strike movements seriously concern the bourgeoisie

1919: A year of struggles and attempts to build up workers' organisations

Railworkers' strike in April 1919

Reaction of the authorities faced with the rail workers' claims

The postal strike

Threat of a new railworkers' strike and the political manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie

The revolt of the Senegalese sailors at Santos (Brazil) in 1920: strike and repression

1920: The re-launch of the railworkers' action ends in victory

19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC

### **15 Preparing for class confrontations**

The international situation

The intervention of the ICC in the development of the class struggle

Organisational questions

The discussion on "marxism and science"

The factory committees at the heart of working class organisation

### **20 Resolution on the international situation**

Decadence of capitalism (x)

### **24 For revolutionaries, the Great depression confirms the obsolescence of capitalism**

Response from the proletarian political movement: Trotskyism and anarchism

The Italian/Belgian communist left

The German/Dutch communist left

Mattick and epoch of permanent crisis

Pannekoek's critique of the "theory of collapse"

Contact the ICC:

<http://www.internationalism.org>

[usa@internationalism.org](mailto:usa@internationalism.org)

[india@internationalism.org](mailto:india@internationalism.org)

[philippines@internationalism.org](mailto:philippines@internationalism.org)

[venezuela@internationalism.org](mailto:venezuela@internationalism.org)

[international@internationalism.org](mailto:international@internationalism.org) (rest of world)

[uk@internationalism.org](mailto:uk@internationalism.org)

[oz@internationalism.org](mailto:oz@internationalism.org)

[korea@internationalism.org](mailto:korea@internationalism.org)

[brasil@internationalism.org](mailto:brasil@internationalism.org)

[turkiye@internationalism.org](mailto:turkiye@internationalism.org)

Responsible editor: MODICA Stive, Av  
Maurice Maeterlinck, 24, 1030 Bruxelles,  
Belgique

## The mobilisation of the Indignos (Indignants) in Spain and its repercussions across the world

# A movement that heralds the future

The “15M” Movement in Spain – it takes its name from the date it was created, May 15<sup>th</sup> – is highly important because of its unique characteristics. This article will recount the significant episodes and at each point draw lessons and perspectives for the future.

Providing an account of what actually happened is necessary for an understanding of the unfolding dynamic of the international class struggle towards mass working class mobilisations that will help the class regain confidence and provide it with the means of posing an alternative to this moribund society.<sup>1</sup>

### Capitalism’s bleak future lies behind the 15M Movement

The word “crisis” has a dramatic connotation for millions of people who are consumed by a tide of poverty produced by worsening living conditions, going from permanent unemployment and insecure employment where planning from one day to the next is difficult, to even worse situations that can mean hunger and destitution.<sup>2</sup>

But what is most distressing is the absence of any future. This was denounced by the Assembly of the Imprisoned in Madrid<sup>3</sup> in a statement which, as we shall see, was the spark that lit the fuse to the movement: “*We find ourselves looking ahead and see little hope on the horizon and no future that could allow us to live a quiet life and enjoy doing the things we want and like to do.*”<sup>4</sup> When the OECD tells us that it will take 15 years for Spain to return to the level of employment it had in 2007 – almost a whole generation deprived of work! – when similar figures can be extrapolated for the United States or Great Britain, we can see to what extent this society has fallen into a

vortex of endless poverty, unemployment and barbarism.

The movement was at first directed against the bipartite political system predominant in Spain (the two parties, the Popular Party, PP, on the right and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, PSOE, on the left, receive 86% of the votes).<sup>5</sup> This factor played a role, specifically in connection with the lack of any future, since in a country where the right plays on its deserved reputation of being authoritarian, arrogant and anti-working class, broad sectors of the population were concerned at how, with government attacks being carried out by its **false friends** – the PSOE –, its **declared enemies** – the PP – threatening to move back into power for a longer term, with no electoral alternative, this would amount to a general blockage of society.

This general feeling was reinforced by the unions’ involvement that began with them calling a “general strike” on September 29<sup>th</sup>, which had a demobilising affect, but ended with the signing of a social pact with the government in January 2011, which agreed to the brutal reform of pensions and closed the door to any possibility of mass mobilisations being called under the unions’ leadership.

To these factors was added a **deep sense of outrage**. One of the consequences of the crisis, as it was put in the assembly in Valencia, is that “*the people who own a lot are fewer, but they own much more*

*than they did, while those who own a little are numerically many more, but they own much less.*” The capitalists and their political representatives have become more and more arrogant, greedy and corrupt. They have no hesitation accumulating great wealth, while poverty and desolation grow all around them. This provides stark evidence for the existence of social classes and clearly demonstrates that we are not all “equal citizens”.

Faced with this situation, some groups emerged towards the end of 2010, affirming the need to unite in the streets, to act independently of the political parties and trade unions, to organise assemblies... The old mole conjured up by Marx was giving rise to a subterranean maturation within society which would burst out into the open in the month of May! The mobilisation of “Youth with no Future” in the month of April brought together 5,000 young people in Madrid. Moreover, the success of the demonstrations of young people in Portugal – “Geração à Rasca” (a generation adrift) – which assembled more than 200,000 young people, and the very popular example of Tahrir Square in Egypt, gave an impetus to the movement.

### The assemblies: a vision of the future

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, a coalition of more than 100 organisations – baptised Democracia Real Ya (DRY)<sup>6</sup> – called some demonstrations in major provincial towns “against the politicians”, calling for “real democracy”.

Small groups of young people (unemployed, temporary workers and students), in disagreement with the organisers who wanted the movement to act as a valve for social discontent, tried to set up camps in the main squares in Madrid, in Granada and other cities in an attempt to continue the movement. DRY disowned them and let police squads unleash a brutal repres-

1. See *International Review* n° 144, “France, Britain, Tunisia: The future lies in the development of the class struggle”, <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/144/editorial>

2. An official of Caritas, a church NGO in Spain that is concerned with poverty, reported that “*we are now talking about 8 million people in the process of exclusion and 10 million under the poverty line.*” That’s 18 million people, or one third of the population of Spain! This is obviously not a Spanish particularity; the standard of living of the Greeks has fallen 8% in one year.

3. See further on in the text for more detail.

4. Translated from our Spanish website.

5. Two slogans were very popular: “*PSOE-PP, it’s the same shit!*” and “*With roses or with seagulls, they take us for pancakes!*”, based on the fact that the rose is the symbol of the PSOE and the gull that of the PP.

6. To read about the movement and its methods, see our article “The citizens’ movement, ‘Democracia Real Ya!’ A dictatorship against the mass assemblies,” <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2011/special-report-15M-spain/real-democracy-now>

sion, perpetrated particularly in the police stations. However, those who were victims organised themselves into an Assembly of the Imprisoned in Madrid and quickly produced a statement clearly denouncing the degrading treatment dished out by the police. It made a big impression and encouraged many young people to join the camps.

On Tuesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, while DRY was trying to confine the camps to a symbolic protest role, the huge mass of people that flowed into them imposed the holding of mass meetings. On the Wednesday and Thursday, these large assemblies spread to over 73 cities. They expressed their worthwhile reflections and made some sound proposals dealing with all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life. Nothing human was alien to this immense improvised main square!

A protester in Madrid said: “*The assemblies are the best thing there is, everyone can speak, people understand each other, you can think out loud, thousands of strangers can come to an agreement. Isn't that wonderful?*” The assemblies were a different world, in contrast to the sombre atmosphere of the polling booths and far removed from involvement in electoral campaigns: “*Brotherly embraces, cries of delight and of enthusiasm, songs of freedom, merry laughter, humour and joy were seen and heard in the crowd of many thousands of persons which surged through the town from morning till evening. The mood was exalted: one could almost believe that a new and better life was beginning on the earth. A most solemn and at the same time an idyllic, moving spectacle.*”<sup>7</sup> Thousands of people were discussing passionately and listening attentively to each other in an atmosphere that was deeply respectful and surprisingly orderly. They shared the same outrage and concerns for the future but, more importantly, **the desire to understand its causes**; and out of this arose the effort to debate and to analyse a range of questions, the hundreds of meetings and the bookstalls... An effort with seemingly no concrete results, but which “blew everyone’s mind” and sowed the seeds of consciousness in the fields of the future.

Subjectively, the class struggle rests on two pillars: consciousness on the one hand and trust and solidarity on the other. Regarding the latter, the assemblies also contained the promise of the future: human ties, feelings of empathy flowing through the squares, widespread solidarity

7. This quotation of Rosa Luxemburg is from *The Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions* (Chapter 3, p.28, Merlin Press). It refers to the great strike in southern Russia in 1903 and fits like a glove the exalted atmosphere of the assemblies a century later.

and unity; these were at least as important as making decisions or agreeing to demands. The furious politicians and press demanded, with the immediatism and utilitarianism characteristic of bourgeois ideology, that the movement condense its demands into a “protocol”, which DRY should try to convert into a “Ten Commandments” containing all the ridiculous and tame democratic measures like open lists, popular legislative initiatives and reform of the electoral law.

The fierce resistance of the movement to these hasty measures shows how it points the way forward for the class struggle. In Madrid, people were shouting: “*We're not going slowly, we just have a long way to go*”. In an open letter to the assemblies, a group from Madrid said: “*The challenge is to synthesise what we want the demonstrations to achieve. We are convinced that it is not insubstantial, as the self-interested politicians would have it or all those who want nothing to change, or rather want to change some details so that everything remains the same. It's not by suddenly presenting a 'Grenelle of demands' that we will succeed in synthesising the reasons we are fighting; it's not by creating a shopping list of demands that our revolt will express itself and strengthen itself.*”<sup>8</sup>

The effort to understand the causes of a dramatic situation and an uncertain future, and to find the way to struggle accordingly, is what constitutes the basis of the assemblies. This gives them their deliberative character that disorients those looking for the struggle to be focused around precise demands. The work of reflecting on ethical, cultural, artistic and literary themes (there were interventions in the form of songs and poems), created a false sense of a petty-bourgeois movement of the “indignants”. We have to separate the wheat from the chaff. The latter is certainly present in the democratic and populist shell that has often enveloped these concerns. But the above things are wheat, because the revolutionary transformation of the world depends on and provides a stimulus for massive cultural and ethical change; “*by changing the world and changing our lives we transform ourselves*” is the revolutionary motto that Marx and Engels formulated in *The German Ideology* more than a century and a half ago: “*...Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration that can only take place in a practical movement, a revolu-*

8. Translated from our Spanish website. The phrase “Grenelle of demands” refers to the “Accords de Grenelle” (location of the French Ministry of Education) between the French government, workers and students at the end of the May '68 movement.

*tion; this revolution is necessary therefore not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.*”<sup>9</sup>

The mass assemblies were a first attempt to respond to a general problem in society that we highlighted more than 20 years ago: **the social decomposition of capitalism**. In the “Theses on decomposition” that we wrote at that time,<sup>10</sup> we pointed to the tendency for the decomposition of the ideology and the superstructures of capitalist society and, coupled with it, the increasing dislocation of the social relations both of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. The working class is not exempt from this because, among other things, it lives alongside the petty bourgeoisie. We give a warning in this text about the effects of this process: “*1) solidarity and collective action are faced with the atomisation of 'look after number one'; 2) the need for organisation confronts social decomposition, the disintegration of relationships which form the basis for all social life; 3) the proletariat's confidence in the future and in its own strength is constantly sapped by the all-pervasive despair and nihilism within society; 4) consciousness, lucidity, coherent and unified thought, the taste for theory, have a hard time making headway in the midst of the flight into illusions, drugs, sects, mysticism, the rejection or destruction of thought which are characteristic of our epoch.*”

However, what the massive assemblies in Spain show – as did those that appeared during the student movement in France in 2006<sup>11</sup> – is that the sectors most vulnerable to the effects of decomposition – the young and the unemployed, especially because of their lack of work experience – have been present at the forefront of the assemblies and in the effort to develop consciousness on the one hand and solidarity and empathy on the other.

For all these reasons, the mass assemblies provide a first indication of what lies ahead. This may not seem very much to those waiting for the proletariat to appear like a bolt from the blue and show that it

9. See *The German Ideology*, Part One, “Feuerbach - Opposition of the materialist and idealist,” D, “Proletarians and Communism”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm>

10. See *International Review* n°s 62, 107 “Decomposition, the final phase of the decadence of capitalism,” and online at [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/107\\_decomposition](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/107_decomposition)

11. “Theses on the 2006 spring students' movement in France” in *International Review* n°125, [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/125\\_france\\_students](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/125_france_students)

is clearly and unequivocally the revolutionary class of society. However, from a historical point of view, and taking into account the enormous difficulties that lie in its path, this is **a good start**, since it has begun a rigorous preparation of the subjective terrain.

Paradoxically, these characteristics have also been the Achilles heel of the “15M” movement in the first stage of its development. Not having set out with any specific objective, fatigue, a difficulty in coping with the first set of problems posed, and an absence of conditions favourable to workplace struggles, plunged the movement into a sort of vacuum that could not be sustained for very long, and which the DRY has tried to fill with its own so-called “simple” and “feasible” objectives for “democratic reform” that are utopian and reactionary.

### The traps that the movement has had to face

For almost two decades, the world proletariat has been in the wilderness and not participated in any large-scale struggles, and in particular has suffered a loss of confidence in itself and a loss of its own class identity.<sup>12</sup> Even if this atmosphere has progressively changed since 2003, with the appearance of significant struggles in many countries and a new generation of revolutionary minorities, the stereotypical image of the working class as “unresponsive” and “inactive” continues to predominate.

The large numbers of people suddenly appearing on the social stage are hindered by the weight of the past, and by the increasing problem that the movement contains social strata in the process of proletarianisation that are more vulnerable to democratic ideology. In addition, due to the fact that the movement did not emerge from a struggle against a specific measure, it has produced a paradox, something not uncommon in history,<sup>13</sup> as the two major classes of society – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie – appear to have avoided

12. In our opinion, the root cause of these problems lies in the events of 1989 that swept away the state regimes falsely identified as “socialist” and allowed the bourgeoisie to develop a crushing campaign on the “end of communism”, “the end of the class struggle”, “the failure of communism”, etc., which brutally affected several generations of workers. See *International Review* n° 60, “Collapse of stalinism: new difficulties for the proletariat,” [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/60/difficulties\\_for\\_the\\_proletariat](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/60/difficulties_for_the_proletariat)

13. Remember how, between February and June 1848 in France, this type of “celebration of all social classes” also took place, which ended with the June days when the armed Paris proletariat clashed with the Provisional Government. During the Russian Revolution of 1917 this same atmosphere of general union under the aegis of the “revolutionary democracy” also reigned between February and April.

open combat, giving the impression of a peaceful movement enjoying “everyone’s support.”<sup>14</sup>

But in reality, **the confrontation between the classes was present in the early days**. Didn’t the PSOE government retaliate immediately with brutal repression against a handful of young people? Wasn’t it the swift and passionate response of the Assembly of the Imprisoned in Madrid which unleashed the movement? Wasn’t it this denunciation that opened the eyes of many young people who subsequently chanted “*they call it democracy, but it isn’t!*”, an ambiguous slogan that was converted by a minority into “*they call it a dictatorship and it is one!*”?

For those who think the class struggle is a succession of “strong emotions”, the “dispassionate” approach adopted within the assemblies led them to believe that this was nothing more than an exercise in a “harmless constitutional legality”, and perhaps many participants even believed that their movement was limited to that.

However, the mass assemblies in the public squares, with the slogan “Seize the Square”, expressed a challenge to the democratic rule of order. What determines the social relations and legitimises the laws is that the exploited majority “minds its own business” and, if it wants to, “participates” in civic matters by using the voting system, and protests through the unions which atomise and individualise it even more. Uniting, building solidarity, discussing collectively, starting to act as an independent social force constitutes an overwhelming violence against bourgeois order.

The bourgeoisie has done its utmost to bring an end to the assemblies. By all appearances, with its usual sickening hypocrisy, it had only praise and sympathy for the Indignants, but the facts – which are what really matter – betrayed this apparent complacency.

As the day of the election – Sunday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> – approached, the Central Electoral Commission decided to ban assemblies across the country on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup>, designated as a “day of reflection”. From the early hours of Saturday morning, a huge deployment of police surrounded the Puerta del Sol camp, but in turn it was encircled by a huge crowd which obliged the Interior Minister himself to order a withdrawal. More than 20,000 people then occupied the square in a mood of euphoria. We see here another episode of class confrontation,

14. The exception to this is the extreme right who, driven by uncontrollable hatred of the working class, expresses out loud what other sections of the bourgeoisie only utter in private.

even if the explicit violence was restricted to only a few outbursts.

DRY proposed maintaining the camps while keeping silent to respect the “day of reflection”, so not holding the assemblies. But no one listened, and the assemblies on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup>, formally illegal, had the highest levels of support. In the assembly in Barcelona, signs, slogans repeated in chorus and placards sarcastically proclaimed in response to the Electoral Assembly: “*We are reflecting!*”

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>, election day, instead of another attempt to end the assemblies, DRY proclaimed that “*we’ve achieved our goals*” and that the movement must be ended. The response was unanimous: “*We are not here for the elections*”. On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> and Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup>, both in the number of participants and in the richness of the debates, the assemblies reached their peak. Interventions, slogans, placards proliferated demonstrating a deep reflection: “*Where is the Left? It’s behind the Right*”, “*The polls cannot hold back our dreams*”, “*600 euros per month, that’s some violence*”, “*If you don’t let us dream, we will prevent you from sleeping!*”, “*No work, no home, no fear*”, “*They deceived our grandparents, they deceived our children, they will not deceive our grandchildren*”. They also show an awareness of the perspectives: “*We are the future, capitalism is the past*”, “*All power to the assemblies*”, “*There is no evolution without revolution*”, “*The future starts now*”, “*Do you still believe this is a utopia?*”...

From this high point, the assemblies went into decline. Partly because of fatigue, but also from the constant bombardment from DRY about adopting its “Democratic Decalogue”. The points in the Decalogue are far from neutral, they directly attack the assemblies. The most “radical” demand, the “popular legislative initiative”,<sup>15</sup> in addition to entailing endless parliamentary procedures that would discourage the most ardent supporter, would above all replace open and widespread debate where everyone feels part of a collective body with some individual acts, ordinary citizenship, and protest confined to “my own four walls”.<sup>16</sup>

This sabotage from the inside was combined with repressive attacks from the

15. The possibility for citizens to collect a certain number of signatures to propose and pass laws and reforms in Parliament.

16. Democracy is based on the passivity and the atomisation of the vast majority reduced to a sum of individuals so vulnerable and defenceless that they think their “self” can be sovereign. By contrast, the assemblies are based on the opposite view: people are strong because they are supported by their “*wealth of social relations*” (Marx) by being integral to and part of a vast collective body.

outside; thereby demonstrating how hypocritical the bourgeoisie is when it claims that the assemblies constitute “a constitutional right of assembly.” On Friday 27<sup>th</sup>, the Catalan government – in coordination with the central government – launched an attack: the “mossos de esquadra” (regional police forces) invaded Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona and savagely cracked down, inflicting many injuries and making numerous arrests. The Barcelona Assembly – until then the most oriented towards class positions – fell into the trap of classical democratic demands: petitions to demand the resignation of the Interior Minister, opposition to the “disproportionate”<sup>17</sup> use of violence, calling for “democratic control of the police”. This volte-face was all the more obvious as it gave way to nationalist poison and included in its demands “the right to self-determination”.

The scenes of repression increased in the week of June 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>: Valencia, Saint-Jacques de Compostela, Salamanca ... The most brutal blow however was delivered on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> in Barcelona. The Catalan parliament was discussing a law known as Omnibus, which included brutal social cuts, especially in the education and health sectors (including 15,000 lay-offs in the latter). DRY, outside of any dynamic of discussion in the workers’ assemblies, called for a “peaceful demonstration” which was to surround the Parliament to “prevent the deputies passing an unjust law.” This typical, purely symbolic action, instead of waging a struggle against the law and the institutions that are behind it, appealed to the “conscience” of the deputies. For the demonstrators thus trapped, only a false choice remained: either the democratic terrain and the impotent and passive whining of the majority, or its counterpart, the “radical” violence of a minority.

The insults and jostling of a few deputies provided the opportunity for a hysterical campaign that criminalised those engaged in violence (lumping them together with those who defend class positions) and called for “defence of the democratic institutions that are at risk”. We have come full circle. DRY sports its pacifism and asks demonstrators to exercise violence against the “violent” elements,<sup>18</sup> and goes even further in asking openly for the “violent” elements to be delivered to the police and for the demonstrators to applaud the latter for its “good and loyal service!”

## The June 19<sup>th</sup> demonstrations and the extension to the working class

From the beginning, the movement had two cores: a wide democratic core, fuelled by confusion and doubt, which was socially heterogeneous with a tendency to avoid direct confrontation. But it also had a proletarian core, expressed by the assemblies<sup>19</sup> and a constant tendency to “go to the working class.”

In the Barcelona assembly, workers from telecommunications, health, fire services as well as university students mobilised actively against the social attacks. They created a commission to spread the general strike, and the animated debates in this commission led to the organisation of a network of “the Indignants” of Barcelona which convened an assembly for Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup> for those workplaces involved in struggles, to be followed up with a meeting on Saturday July 3<sup>rd</sup>. On Friday June 3<sup>rd</sup> workers and unemployed demonstrated in Plaza Catalunya behind a banner with the words “*Down with the union bureaucracy! General strike!*” In Valencia, the assembly supported a demonstration by public transport workers and also a neighbourhood demonstration against cuts in education. In Zaragoza, public transport workers enthusiastically participated in the assembly.<sup>20</sup> The assemblies decided to form neighbourhood assemblies.<sup>21</sup>

The demonstration of June 19<sup>th</sup> saw a new surge from the proletarian core. The demonstration had been called by the assemblies of Barcelona, Valencia

19. Their origins go far back to the district meetings during Paris Commune, but become clearer with the revolutionary movement in Russia in 1905 and since then, they have appeared in every great movement of the class in different guises and designations: Russia 1917, Germany 1918, Hungary 1919 and 1956, Poland in 1980... in Vigo in Spain in 1972, there was a general assembly in the town, followed by one in Pamplona in 1973 and in Vitoria in 1976 and again in Vigo in 2006. We have written many articles on the origins of these workers’ assemblies. See in particular the series “What are workers’ councils?” starting in *International Review* n°140

20. In Cadiz, the general assembly held a debate on “Insecurity” which drew strong support. In Caceres a lack of information on the movement in Greece was criticised and in Almeria a meeting was held to discuss “the state of the workers’ movement”.

21. These are actually double-edged swords: they contain positive aspects, such as extending the broader debate into the deeper layers of the working population and the possibility – as was the case – of giving an impetus to fighting unemployment and insecurity in the assemblies, breaking with the atomisation and the shame that plagues many unemployed workers, breaking with the situation of total vulnerability and insecurity in which the workers in small firms find themselves. The downside is that they are also used to disperse the movement, to draw it away from its broader concerns, to lead it off into a concern for “citizenship” fostered by the fact that the neighbourhood – an entity where workers mix with the petty bourgeoisie and with bosses, etc., - lends itself more to such things.

and Malaga against the social cuts. DRY tried to undermine it by proposing solely democratic slogans. That provoked a spontaneous reaction in Madrid to go and demonstrate at the Congress against the cuts to social spending, which saw more than 5000 people attend. Moreover a co-ordination of neighbourhood assemblies in the south of Madrid, born out of the fiasco of the September 29<sup>th</sup> strike (with a very similar orientation to that of the inter-professional general assemblies created in France in the heat of the events of autumn 2010) launched an appeal: “*Let’s go to the Congress that cuts social spending without consulting us, the people and workers from the neighbourhoods of Madrid, and say: enough! [...] This initiative represents the view of a working class grass-roots assembly against those who take decisions behind workers’ backs without their approval. The struggle will be long, so we encourage you to organise in neighbourhood assemblies, and at your places of work or study.*”

The June 19<sup>th</sup> demonstrations were very successful, the reception was massive in more than 60 cities, but their content was even more important. It was a response to the brutal campaign against “the violent ones”. Expressing a maturation born out of the many discussions in the most active milieus,<sup>22</sup> the slogan heard the most, for example in Bilbao, is “*Violence is not being able to make ends meet each month!*” and in Valladolid: “*Violence is also unemployment and evictions*”.

However, it was the demonstration in Madrid in particular that provided a new focus coming from June 19<sup>th</sup> on perspectives for the future. It was convened by an organisation coming from the working class and its most active minorities.<sup>23</sup> The theme of this gathering was “*March and unite against the crisis and against capital.*” It declared: “*No to wage cuts and pension cuts; against unemployment: workers’ struggles; no to price rises, increase our wages, increase the taxes on those who earn the most, protect our public services, no to privatisation of health and education ... Long live working class unity.*”<sup>24</sup>

22. See, for example, “an anti-violence protocol” at: <http://esparevol.forumotion.net/t317-a-proposito-de-un-protocolo-anti-violencia#487>.

23. In the Coordination of the assemblies of the neighbourhoods and southern suburbs of Madrid, we find what are essentially workers’ assemblies from different sectors, even if some small radical unions are also involved. See <http://asambleautonomazonasur.blogspot.com/>

24. The privatisation of public services and savings banks is a response of capitalism to the worsening crisis and, more specifically, expresses the fact that the State, with its great burden of debt, is forced to cut its spending, even if it means harming unjustifiably the way essential services are provided. However, it is important to understand that the alternative to privatisation is not to fight for the services to be retained under state ownership. Firstly, because

17. As if punishment could be “proportionate”!

18. DRY asked the demonstrators to surround and publicly criticise the conduct of any element who was “violent” or “suspected of being violent” (sic).

A collective in Alicante adopted the same Manifesto. In Valencia, the Autonomous and Anti-capitalist bloc composed of various groups very active in the assemblies distributed a manifesto that read: “*We want an answer to unemployment. The unemployed, those in temporary employment, along with those working in the black economy have come together in the assemblies to collectively agree to demands and to press for their implementation. We want the withdrawal of the Law on Labour Reform, which authorises the reduction of redundancy payments to 20 days. We want the withdrawal of the Law on Pensions Reform since behind this is a life of privation and poverty and we do not want to sink any further into poverty and uncertainty. We demand an end to evictions. The need for people to be housed is more important than the blind laws of commerce and the profit motive. We say NO to the cuts in health and education, NO to the redundancies being prepared by the regional governments and in the town halls following the recent elections.*”<sup>25</sup>

The Madrid march was organised in several columns that started from seven different suburbs or neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city; these separate columns attracted crowds of people as they moved along. These mass mobilisations are part of the working class tradition as in the 1972-1976 strikes in Spain (and also the tradition of 1968 in France) where, starting from a big concentration of workers or from a factory that acts as a “beacon”, as happened at Standard in Madrid at that time, increasing numbers of workers, residents, unemployed and young people come out and join them, and this whole mass converges on the town centre. Evidence of this tradition was present in the struggles at Vigo in 2006 and 2009.<sup>26</sup>

In Madrid, the Manifesto read out to the assembled crowd called for the holding of “*Assemblies that will prepare a general*

---

“privatised” services often continue to be controlled organically by the institutions of the state which outsource the work to the private companies. And second, because the state and state ownership are not at all “social” or concerned with “citizens’ well-being”. The state is an organ exclusively serving the ruling class and state ownership is based on wage exploitation. This is an issue that has begun to be raised in some workers’ circles, notably in an assembly in Valencia against unemployment and job insecurity. <http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/cronica-libreunion-contra-paro-precariedad>.

25. See <http://infopunt-vlc.blogspot.com/2011/06/19-j-bloc-autonom-i-anticapitalista.html>

26. See “*Metalworkers’ strike in Spain: the proletarian method of struggle*”, [http://en.internationalism.org/wr/295\\_vigo](http://en.internationalism.org/wr/295_vigo) and also “*A Vigo, en Espagne : les méthodes syndicales mènent tout droit à la défaite*”, [http://fr.internationalism.org/icconline/2009/a\\_vigo\\_en\\_espagne\\_les\\_methodes\\_syndicales\\_menent\\_tout\\_droit\\_a\\_la\\_defaite.html](http://fr.internationalism.org/icconline/2009/a_vigo_en_espagne_les_methodes_syndicales_menent_tout_droit_a_la_defaite.html)

*strike*” and was greeted with widespread cries of “*Long live the working class*”.

### The need for a reflective enthusiasm

The demonstrations of June 19<sup>th</sup> gave rise to a sense of excitement; according to a demonstrator in Madrid: “*The atmosphere was that of a real festival. All kinds of people and all ages: young people around 20 years old, the retired, families with children, and all kinds of other people too, walked together... and at the same time people came out onto their balconies to applaud us. I came home exhausted, but with a broad smile on my face. Not only had I the feeling of having been fighting for a just cause, but in addition, I had a really fantastic time.*” Another said: “*It’s really important seeing all these people gathered in one place, talking politics and fighting for their rights. Don’t you have the feeling that we’re taking back the streets?*”

After the initial explosions typical of assemblies seeking a way forward, the movement began to look at how to develop the struggle, began to see that solidarity, unity and building collective strength could be achieved.<sup>27</sup> The idea began to spread around that “*We can stand up to Capital and the State*”, and that the key to this strength would be the working class renewing its struggle. In the assemblies in the neighbourhoods of Madrid, one topic of debate has been that of calling a general strike in October to “*oppose the cuts in social spending.*” There was an outcry from the CCOO and UGT unions saying that such a call would be “illegal” and they alone had the authority to do it, to which many sectors answered loud and clear by saying: “*only the mass assemblies can take this decision.*”

But we shouldn’t let ourselves get carried away, because the process through which the working class revives its struggle will not be easy. There is a heavy burden of illusions and confusions about democracy, the ideology of “citizenship” and “reforms”, reinforced by the pressure of DRY, the politicians and the media who exploit doubts and immediatism (wanting to see “quick and tangible results”). There is also a lot of fear because there are so many unanswered questions. It is particularly important today to see how difficult it is for work-

27. This does not mean we underestimate the obstacles that capitalism by its intrinsic nature, based on deadly competition and everyone mistrusting everyone else, puts in the way of the unification process. It can only be achieved after a period of huge and complicated effort based on the united and massive struggle of the working class, a class which produces collectively and by way of associated labour the essential wealth of society and which, as such, contains within it the reconstruction of the social being of humanity.

ers to mobilise in the workplace because there is a big risk of losing their jobs and finding themselves with no income, which for many would cross the line between a poor quality but bearable life and a life in extreme poverty.

In democratic and union terms, the struggle is a sum of individual decisions. Aren’t you discontented? Don’t you feel downtrodden? Yes, you are! So why aren’t you rebelling? It would be so simple if it was a case of the worker choosing between being “brave” or “cowardly”, alone with his conscience, as in a polling station! The class struggle does not follow this kind of idealistic and phoney schema. It is the result of a collective strength and consciousness that comes not only from the discontent that has resulted in an untenable situation, but also from the perception that it is possible to fight together and that a sufficient degree of solidarity and determination exists to carry it through.

Such a situation is the product of a subterranean process that depends on three elements: organisation in open assemblies that provides an understanding of the forces available and the steps to take to increase them; consciousness in deciding what we want and how to get it; combativity faced with the sabotage of the trade unions and all the organs of mystification.

This process is under way, but it remains unclear when and how it will succeed. A comparison can possibly help us. During the great mass strike in May 1968,<sup>28</sup> there was a demonstration on May 13<sup>th</sup> in Paris in support of the students that was brutally repressed. The sense of power that it brought out was expressed the next day in the outbreak of a series of spontaneous strikes, like that at Renault in Cleon and then Paris. This did not happen after the big demonstrations on June 19<sup>th</sup> in Spain. Why is that?

In May 1968 the bourgeoisie was politically unprepared to confront the working class and the repression only threw oil on the fire; now it can rely in many countries on a super-sophisticated apparatus of unions and parties, and can use ideological campaigns specifically based around democracy, and which also provide for a very effective political use of selective repression. Today, the upsurge of struggle requires a much greater effort of consciousness and solidarity than was the case in the past.

In May 1968, the crisis was only just beginning; today it has clearly plunged capitalism into an impasse. The situation

28. See the series “*May 68 and the revolutionary perspective*” in *International Review* n°133.

is so daunting that it makes going out on strike difficult even for as “simple” a reason as a wage increase. In such a serious situation strikes will break out from a feeling that “enough is enough”, but the conclusion must then follow that “*the proletariat has only its chains to lose and a world to win.*”

### This movement has no frontiers

If the road seems longer and more painful than in May 1968, the foundations being laid are much more solid. One of these, which is critical, is the recognition of being part of an international movement. After a “trial period” with some massive movements (the student movement in France in 2006 and the revolt of the youth in Greece in 2008<sup>29</sup>), we have now seen a succession of movements on a broader scale over the last nine months that has opened up the possibility of paralysing the barbaric hand of capitalism: France in the autumn of 2010, Britain in November and December 2010, Egypt, Tunisia, Spain and Greece in 2011.

The consciousness that the “15M” movement is part of this international chain has begun to develop in embryo. The slogan “*This movement has no frontiers*” was taken up by a demonstration in Valencia. Various camps have organised demonstrations “*for a European Revolution*”; on June 15<sup>th</sup> there were demonstrations in support of the struggle in Greece, and they were repeated the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, there were a small number of internationalist slogans: one sign saying “*A happy world union*” and another in English: “*World Revolution*”.

For years, what is called “economic globalisation” served as a pretext for the left wing of the bourgeoisie to arouse nationalist sentiments, favouring “national sovereignty” over “stateless markets.” It proposed nothing less than workers being more nationalistic than the bourgeoisie! With the development of the crisis, but also thanks to the popularity of the Internet and social networking, young workers began to turn these campaigns back against their promoters. The idea gained ground that “*faced with economic globalisation, it was necessary to respond with the international globalisation of the struggles*”, that faced with worldwide poverty the only possible response is a worldwide struggle.

The “15M” has had repercussions internationally. The mobilisations in Greece over two weeks followed the same “model”

29. See *International Review* n° 125, “Theses on the spring 2006 students' movement in France”, [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/125\\_france\\_students](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/125_france_students) and *International Review* n° 136, “The youth revolts in Greece confirm the development of the class struggle”, <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/2009/136/intro>

of mass assemblies in the main squares; they were consciously inspired by the events in Spain.<sup>30</sup>

According Kaosenlared on June 19<sup>th</sup>, “*this is the fourth consecutive Sunday that thousands of people of all ages have demonstrated in Syntagma Square in front of the Greek Parliament, in response to the call of the pan-European movement of the ‘Indignants’, to protest against the austerity measures.*”

In France, Belgium, Mexico and Portugal regular assemblies on a smaller scale have expressed solidarity with the ‘Indignants’ and tried to stimulate discussion. In Portugal, “*About 300 people, the majority of them young, marched on Sunday afternoon in central Lisbon in response to the call of Real Democracia Ya, inspired by the Spanish ‘Indignants’. The Portuguese demonstrators marched calmly behind a banner which read: ‘Spain, Greece, Ireland, Portugal: our struggle is international.*”<sup>31</sup>

### The role of active minorities in preparing new struggles

The world debt crisis is demonstrating that capitalism has no way out. In Spain as in other countries, frontal attacks are raining down and there is no respite in sight, just further blows against our living conditions. The working class has to respond and this means taking off from the impetus given by the May assemblies and the demonstrations of 19<sup>th</sup> June.

To prepare this response, the working class gives rise to active minorities, comrades who seek to understand what’s going on, become politicised, animate debates, actions, meetings, assemblies, trying to convince those who still have doubts, bringing arguments to those who are looking for answers. As we saw at the beginning, these minorities contributed to the emergence of the 15M movement.

With its modest forces, the ICC has participated in the movement and tried to put forward orientations: “*In any trial of strength between the classes, there are rapid, important fluctuations, and you have to know how to orientate yourself, to use your principles and analyses as a guide without getting swept away. You have to know how to join the flow of a movement, how to make the ‘general goals’ more concrete, how to respond to the real*

30. There has been complete censorship of the events in Greece and the mass movements unfolding there, which prevents us from including this in our analysis.

31. Taken from Kaosenlared : <http://www.kaosenlared.net/>

*preoccupations of a struggle, how to be able to support and stimulate its positive tendencies.*”<sup>32</sup> We have written numerous articles trying to understand the phases that the movement has gone through while making concrete and realisable proposals: the emergence of assemblies and their vitality, the offensive against them by DRY, the trap of repression, the turning point of the 19 June demonstrations.<sup>33</sup>

Since one of the necessities of the movement is debate, we opened a heading on our web page in Spanish ‘Debates del 15M’ where comrades with different analyses and positions could express themselves.

Working with other collectives and active minorities was one of our priorities. We took part in common initiatives with the Circulo Obrero de Debate in Barcelona, the Red de Solidaridad de Alicante and various assemblyist collectives in Valencia.

In the assemblies, our militants intervened on concrete points: defence of the assemblies, the need to orient the struggle towards the working class, the need for mass assemblies in workplaces and education centres, the rejection of democratic demands and the need to frame demands within the struggle against social attacks, the impossibility of reforming or democratising capitalism, the only realistic possibility being its destruction.<sup>34</sup> As far as possible, we also participated actively in the neighbourhood assemblies.

Following the 15M, the minority favourable to a class orientation has got bigger and become more dynamic and influential. It needs now to keep itself together, to co-ordinate itself at a national and international level. Towards the working class as a whole, it needs to put forward positions which express its deepest needs and aspirations: against the democratic lie, showing what lies behind the slogan “*All power to the assemblies!*”; against the demands for democratic reform, showing the need to fight against the attacks on living conditions; against illusory “reforms” of capitalism, affirming the need for a tenacious, persevering struggle which has the perspective of destroying capitalism.

The important thing is that debate and struggle develops within this milieu. A debate around the many questions posed over the last few months: reform or revolution? Democracy or assemblies? Citizens’

32. “On the intervention of revolutionaries: reply to our critics”, *International Review* n° 20, <http://en.internationalism.org/node/2748>

33. see the various articles marking each of these moments in our press

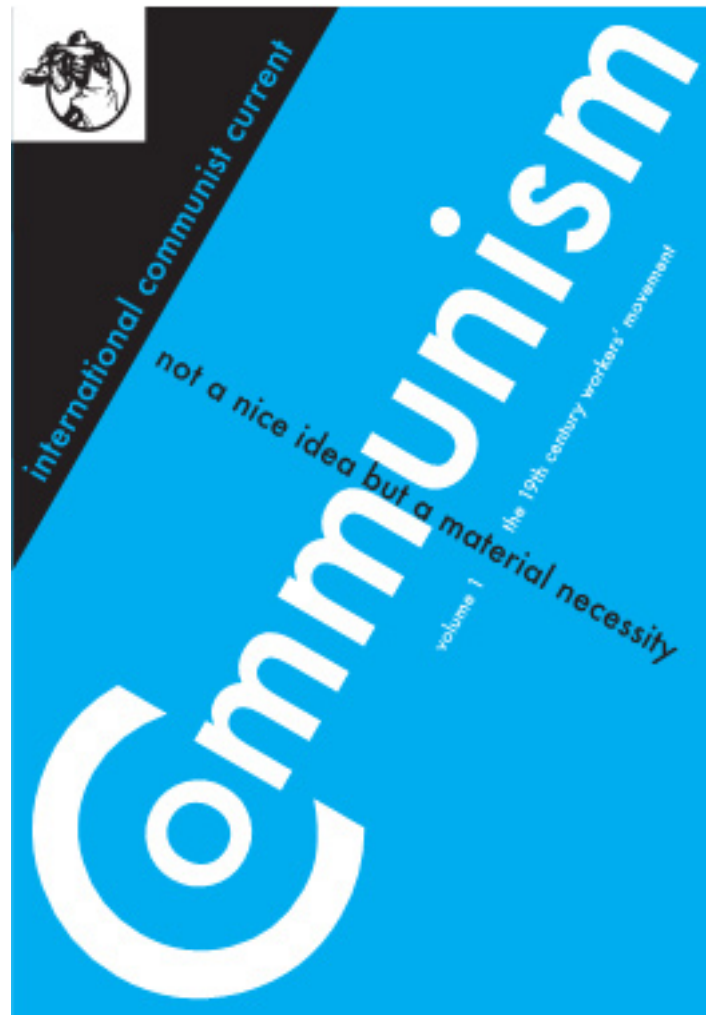
34. This wasn’t something specific to the ICC: a rather popular slogan was “*to be realistic, be anti-capitalist!*”. One banner proclaimed “*The system is inhuman, be anti-system!*”



movement or class movement? Democratic demands or demands against the social attacks? General strike or mass strike? Trade unions or assemblies? A struggle to push forward self-organisation and the independent struggle but above all to unmask and overcome the many traps that will certainly be put in our path.

C Mir July 2011

## ICC publications



Since 1990 and the collapse of the communist bloc - in reality a form of state capitalism - the International Communist Current has been publishing a series of articles in its theoretical journal, the *International Review*, around the theme "Communism is not a nice idea, but a material necessity". The first volume of the series, which has now been published in book form, begins with "primitive" communism and goes on to explore the conception of communism in the writings of Marx, Engels and other revolutionaries during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second volume of the series deals with the period from the mass strikes of 1905 to the end of the first great revolutionary wave that followed the First World War. A third volume is now underway.

**£7.50, \$14.00, 10 Euros**

**[www.internationalism.org](http://www.internationalism.org)**

# On the 140th anniversary of the Paris Commune

With the dramatic events of the Paris Commune between March and June 1871 we have the first example in history of the working class taking political power into its own hands. The Commune meant the dismantling of the old bourgeois state and the formation of a power directly controlled from below: the delegates of the Commune, elected by popular assemblies in the neighbourhoods of Paris, were subject to immediate recall and were paid no more than the average worker's wage. The Commune called for its example to be taken up throughout France, demolished the Vendôme Column as a symbol of French national chauvinism, and proclaimed that its red flag was the flag of the Universal Republic.

Naturally, this crime against the natural order had to be mercilessly punished. The liberal British newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian*, published at the time a very critical report on the bloody revenge of the French ruling class:

*“Civil government is temporarily suspended in Paris. The city is divided into four military districts, under General's LADMIRAULT, CISSKY, DOUAY, and VINOY. ‘All powers of the civil authorities for the maintenance of order are transferred to the military’. Summary executions continue, and military deserters, incendiaries, and members of the Commune are shot without mercy. The marquis DE GALIFLET has given some slight*

*dissatisfaction by shooting, it is said, a number of innocent persons near the Arc de Triomphe. It will be remembered that the Marquis (who was with BAZAINE in Mexico) ordered upwards of 80 men, selected from a large convoy of prisoners, to be shot near the Arch. It is now said that some of these men were innocent. The Marquis would probably, if he were appealed to, express a polite regret that such an untoward circumstance should have occurred; and what more could a true ‘friend of order’ require?”<sup>1</sup>*

In a mere eight days, 30,000 Communards were massacred. And those who played their part in this Calgary were not

merely the Galiflets and their French superiors. The Prussian junkers, whose war with France had sparked off the uprising in Paris, patched up their differences with the French bourgeoisie to enable the latter to crush the Commune: the first clear



evidence that, no matter how savage the national rivalries that pit different ruling classes against each other, they will stand shoulder to shoulder when they face a threat from the proletariat.

The Commune was utterly defeated, but it has been a source of inestimable political lessons for the workers' movement. Marx and Engels revised their view of the proletarian revolution as a result of it, concluding that the working class could not take control of the old bourgeois state but had to destroy it and replace it with a new form of political power. The Bolsheviks and Spartacists of the Russian and German revolutions in 1917-19 took inspiration from it and saw the workers' councils or soviets which emerged from those revolu-

tions as a continuation and a development of the principles of the Commune. The communist left of the 1930s and 40s, in trying to understand the reasons for the defeat of the revolution in Russia, went back to the experience of the Commune to see what light it shed on the problem of the state in the period of transition between capitalism and communism. In line with this tradition, our Current has also published a certain number of articles on the Commune. The first volume of our series *Communism is not just a nice idea but a material necessity*, which looks at the evolution of the communist programme in the 19<sup>th</sup> century workers' movement, devotes a chapter

to the Commune, examining how the experience of Paris 1871 has clarified the attitude that the working class must adopt towards both the bourgeois state and the post-revolutionary 'semi-state'; towards the other non-exploiting classes in society; towards the political, social and economic measures needed to advance in the direction of a society without classes and without a state. This article can be found here: <http://en.internationalism.org/node/3596>, as

well as in the book containing the whole of the first series, which can be bought directly from the ICC or on Amazon (see: <http://en.internationalism.org/wr/305/commypresentation>). We are also re-publishing in our territorial press an article originally written for the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commune in 1991. This article denounces the latter-day efforts of the bourgeoisie to recuperate the memory of the Commune and hide its internationalist and revolutionary essence by presenting it as a chapter in the patriotic struggle for democratic freedoms (<http://en.internationalism.org/wr/346/paris-comune>).

1. Manchester, Thursday June 1 1871: Summary of News. Foreign.

## Contribution to a history of the workers' movement in Africa (ii)

# 1914 - 1928: the first real confrontations between the two classes

Between 1855 and 1914, the proletariat that emerged in the colony of French West Africa (FWA) underwent its class struggle apprenticeship by trying to come together and organise with the aim of defending itself against its capitalist exploiters. Despite its extreme numerical weakness, it demonstrated its will to struggle and a consciousness of its strength as an exploited class. We can also note that, on the eve of World War One, the development of the productive forces in the colony was sufficient to give rise to a frontal collision between the bourgeoisie and working class.

### General strike and uprising, Dakar 1914

At the beginning of 1914, the discontent and anxiety of the population, which had been building up since the preceding year, didn't immediately express itself in the form of a strike or demonstration. But by May the anger exploded and the working class unleashed an insurrectionary general strike.

This strike was first of all a response to the crass provocations of the colonial power towards the population of Dakar during the legislative elections of May, when big business<sup>1</sup> and the Mayor threatened to cut credits, water and electricity to all those who wanted to vote for the local candidate (a certain Blaise Diagne, of whom more below). At the same time an epidemic of plague broke out in the town and, under the pretext of preventing its spread to the residential quarters (of Europeans), Mayor Masson of Dakar (a colonist) quite simply ordered the burning down of all the dwellings (of the local population) suspected of being infected.

This fanned the flames, resulting in a general strike and a riot against the criminal procedures of the colonial authorities. In order to respond, a group of youths called the "Young Senegalese" called for an economic boycott and filled the streets, putting up posters throughout Dakar with the slogan: "Let's starve those that starve us", taking up the slogan of the candidate and future black deputy.

Barely concealing its own disquiet, big business launched a violent campaign through the newspaper *L'AOF* (in its pocket) against the strikers: "*Here our stevedores, carters and other workers are*

*deprived of their wages... How are they going to eat? ...your strikes which have affected the life of the port will only make the problem much more cruel to the unfortunate than it will to those well off: they will paralyse the development of Dakar by discouraging those that want to come here from doing so.*"<sup>2</sup>

But it didn't work and the strike couldn't be prevented. On the contrary, it spread, affecting all sectors, notably the port and the railway, the lungs of the colony's economy, as well as trade and services, both private and public. The following is related in the secret memoirs of the Governor of the colony, William Ponty: "*The strike (added the Governor General), by the abstention fomented from below, was perfectly organised and a complete success. It was... the first event of its kind that I had seen so unanimous in these regions.*"<sup>3</sup>

The strike lasted 5 days (between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of May) and the workers ended up by forcing the colonial authorities to put out the fire that they themselves had lit. In fact the strike was exemplary! The struggle marked a major turning point in the confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the working class of FWA. It was the first time that a strike spread beyond occupational categories and brought together workers with the population of Dakar and the region in the same combat against the dominant power.

This was clearly a struggle that abruptly changed the balance of forces in favour of the oppressed, compelling the Governor (with the approval of Paris) to cede to the claims of the striking population, expressed in these terms: "*The cessation of the incineration of dwellings, the restitution of*

*bodies, reconstruction of the buildings and dwellings destroyed using solid materials, the complete removal from the entire town of all the dwellings built in sub-standard wood or straw and their replacement by buildings in cement for low-priced habitation.*"<sup>4</sup>

However, this same Governor said nothing about the number of victims burnt inside their dwellings or cut down under a hail of bullets from the forces of order. At best, the local authorities of the colony only raised the question of "the restitution of the bodies" and said not a word about the killings and their extent.

But, despite the censorship of the words and actions of the working class at that time, one can imagine that the workers who saw their homes burnt down and those of their families, did not remain inert and put up a fierce fight. Clearly, although few in number, the working class was without doubt a decisive element in the confrontations that made the forces of colonial capital give ground. But above all the strike had a very political character:

*"Certainly it was an economic strike, but it was also political, a strike of protest, a strike of sanction, a strike of reprisals, decided upon and put into effect by all the population of Cape Verde... The strike thus had a very clear political character and the reaction of the authorities was something quite different... The administration was both surprised and disarmed. Surprised because it had never had to face up to a manifestation of this nature, disarmed because there was no presence at all of a classical union organisation with offices, rules, but a general movement taken in hand by the whole population and whose leadership was invisible."*<sup>5</sup>

In accord with the author above, one must conclude that it was indeed an eminently political strike expressing a high degree of proletarian consciousness. An even more remarkable phenomenon given the unfavourable context for the class struggle: one dominated from the outside by the sound of marching boots and, from the inside, by struggles for power and the settling of

1. This term designates trade other than local at the time, essentially the import/export business controlled by a few families.

2. Quoted in Iba Der Thiam, *Histoire du mouvement syndical africain 1790-1929*, Editions L'Harmattan, 1991.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

accounts within the bourgeoisie through the legislative elections, whose main issue, for the first time, was the election of a deputy from the black continent. This was a mortal trap that the working class turned against the dominant class by unleashing, along with the rest of the oppressed population, a victorious strike.

### 1917-1918: strike movements seriously concern the bourgeoisie

As we know, the period 1914 to 1916 was marked, in the world in general and Africa in particular, by a feeling of terror and dejection following the outbreak of the first global butchery. Certainly, just before the conflagration, we saw a formidable class combat in Dakar in 1914; similarly there was a tough strike in Guinea in 1916.<sup>6</sup> But on the whole a general state of impotence dominated the working class even though its living conditions deteriorated on every level. In fact, it wasn't until 1917 (by chance?) that we saw new expressions of struggle in the colony:

*“The accumulated effects of galloping inflation, the screwing down of wages, all types of worries, at the same time as they threw light on the tight links of dependence between the colony and the Metropole and the increasing integration of Senegal into the capitalist world system, all provoked a rupture of social equilibrium in which the consciousness of the workers and their will to struggle was clearly affirmed. From 1917, political relations were signalling that in a situation of crisis, stagnation of business, crushing taxation, the growing pauperisation of the masses, more and more workers were incapable of making ends meet and were demanding increases in wages.”*<sup>7</sup>

Strikes broke out between December 1917 and February 1918 against the misery and degradation of the conditions of life of the working class, and this despite the installation of a state of siege throughout the colony, accompanied by an implacable censorship. Nevertheless, even with little detail on the strikes and their outcomes at this time, we can see here, through some confidential notes, the existence of real class confrontations. Thus, in regard to the strike movement of coal miners working for the Italian company *Le Senegal*, one can read this in a note sent from the Governor William Ponty to his minister: *“...Satisfaction having been given to them immediately, work was resumed the following day...”* Or again: *“A small strike of two days occurred during the quarter on the*

*sites of the firms Bouquereau and Leblanc. Most of the strikers have been replaced by Portuguese.”*<sup>8</sup>

But without knowing what the reaction of the workers replaced by the “blacklegs” was, the Governor General indicated that: *“The workers of all occupations are due to strike on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January”*. Further, he informed his minister that the builders, spread out over a dozen worksites, struck on February 20<sup>th</sup> claiming an increase in wages of 6 to 8 francs per day, and that *“satisfaction [of the claim] put an end to the strike”*.

As we can clearly see, between 1917 and 1918, workers' militancy was such that confrontations between the bourgeoisie and proletariat often ended up with victories for the latter, as is attested in quotes from diverse secret reports or observations from the colonial authorities. Similarly, workers' struggles of this time couldn't be separated from the historic context of the revolution in Russia in particular and in Europe in general:

*“The concentration of wage-earners in the ports, on the railways, created the conditions for the first manifestations of the workers' movement... Finally, the suffering of the war – the war effort, the hardships suffered by the combatants – created the need for a respite and hope for a change. The echoes of the October revolution in Russia had reached Africa; there were Senegalese troops stationed in Romania who refused to march against the Soviets: there were black marines in the naval units who mutinied in the Mediterranean; some of those who took part in the mutinies of 1917 experienced the revolutionary strides of the years at the end of the war and of the period immediately after the war in France.”*<sup>9</sup>

So the Russian revolution of 1917 did have echoes in Africa, particularly amongst the youth, a great part of who were enlisted and sent to Europe by French imperialism as cannon fodder for the war of 1914-18. In this context, we can understand the well-founded concerns of the French bourgeoisie at that time; they were to become even more worried as the wave of struggle continued.

### 1919: a year of struggles and attempts to build up workers' organisations

1919, a year of intense workers' struggles, was also the year of the emergence of many associations of an occupational character, despite the fact that the colonial authority

continued to ban any union organisation or any coalition of more than twenty workers within FWA. However, there were many workers who took the initiative to create occupational associations (“friendly societies”) that had the potential for taking up the defence of their interests. But as the prohibition was particularly aimed at native workers, it fell to their European comrades – as it happened the rail workers – to take the initiative of creating the first “occupational friendly society” in 1918; in fact the rail workers had already been the origin of the first (public) attempt in this area in 1907.

These occupational friendly societies were the first union organisations recognised in the colony: *“Little by little, coming out of the narrow framework of the company, the coalition of the workers was growing, going first of all through a Union at the level of a town like Saint-Louis or Dakar, then a regroupment at the level of the colony, of all those whose occupational obligations subjected them to the same servitude. We find examples of them among teachers, postal workers, women typists, trade employees. ... Through these means, the nascent union movement strengthened its class position. It enlarged the field of its framework and action and it disposed of a powerful striking force, which showed itself to be particularly effective faced with the boss. Thus, the spirit of solidarity between workers little by little gained flesh. Convincing indications even show that the most advanced elements were engaged in becoming conscious of the limits of corporatism and laid the basis of an inter-occupational union of workers from the same sector, covering a wider geographical space.”*<sup>10</sup>

In fact, in this context we learn later, in a police report taken from the archives, of the existence of a federation of associations of colonial state workers of FWA.

10. Ibid. It's worth recalling here what we said at the time of the publication of the first part of this article in *International Review* n° 145: *“...if we largely recognise the seriousness of the researchers who provide these reference sources, we do not necessarily share some of their interpretations of historic events. It's the same for certain ideas, for example when they talk about 'union consciousness' instead of 'class consciousness' (of workers), or again 'union movement' (instead of workers' movement). Otherwise, up to another order, we have confidence in their scientific rigour as long as their theses don't come up against historical facts and don't prevent other interpretations.”* In a more general way we want to underline again that during a period of the life of capitalism, the unions effectively constituted real organs of struggle of the working class in defence of its immediate interests within capitalism. They were then integrated into the capitalist state and with that lost any possibility of being used by the working class in its combat against exploitation. [NB. Part of the section quoted above was omitted from the version of the article published in the English language edition of *International Review* n° 145.]

6. See *Afrique noire, l'Ere coloniale 1900-1945*, Jean Suret-Canale, Editions Sociales, Paris 1961.

7. Thiam, op.cit.

8. Ibid.

9. Suret-Canale, op. cit.

But, becoming aware of the size of the danger from the appearance of federated workers' groups, the Governor ordered an enquiry into the activities of the emerging unions. Subsequently, he instructed his Secretary General to break the organisations and their responsible leaders in the following terms: "1) see if it's possible to get rid of all the natives reported; 2) look into the conditions under which they were taken on; 3) don't let the joint note go into circulation and keep it in your drawer; I'll personally put my memo with it."<sup>11</sup>

What vocabulary, and what a cynic is this Monsieur le Governor! With total logic he carried out his dirty "mission" through massive dismissals and by hunting down any worker who might be belonging to one union organisation or another. Clearly the attitude of the Governor was that of a state police chief in his most criminal works and, in this sense, he also carried out the segregation between European and "native" workers, as this archive document shows:

*"That the metropolitan civil laws extend to citizens living in the colonies is understandable, since they are members of an evolved society or else natives who have been habituated for a long time to our customs and our civic life; but to extend these to races still in a state bordering on barbarity, who are almost completely foreign to our civilisation, is often an impossibility, if not a regrettable error."*<sup>12</sup>

We have here a Governor who is contemptuously about to carry out his policy of apartheid. In fact, not content with deciding to "liquidate" the indigenous workers, he goes one better in justifying his actions through overtly racist theories.

Despite this anti-proletarian political criminality, the working class of this time (European and African) refused to capitulate and pursued the best possible struggle for the defence of its class interests.

### Railworkers' strike in April 1919

1919 was a year of strong social agitation. Several sectors came into struggle around diverse demands, whether wages or concerning the right to set up organisations for the defence of workers' interests. But it was the rail workers who were the first to strike this year, between April 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, first of all sending a warning to their employer: "April 8<sup>th</sup> 1919, or hardly seven months after the end of hostilities, a movement of demands broke out in the rail services of Dakar-Saint-Louis (DSL) on the initiative of European and local workers in the form of an anonymous

telegram drawn up and addressed to the Inspector General of Public Works: 'rail workers of Dakar-Saint Louis, are unanimously agreed in presenting the following demands: raising of pay for European and indigenous personnel, regular increases and maintenance allowances, improved sick pay and allowances ... we will stop all work for one hundred and twenty hours, from this day, 12<sup>th</sup> April if there's no favourable response on all points: signed, Rail workers of Dakar-Saint Louis.'<sup>13</sup>

This is the particularly strong and combative tone with which rail workers announced their intention to strike if their demands weren't met by the employers. Similarly, we should note the unitary character of the strike. For the first time, in a conscious fashion, European and African workers decided to draw up their list of demands together. Here we are dealing with a gesture of the internationalism which only the working class is the bearer of. This is the giant step taken by the rail workers – knowingly striving to overcome the ethnic barriers that the class enemy regularly sets up in order to divide the proletariat and lead it to defeat.

### Reaction of the authorities faced with the rail workers' demands

On receiving the telegram from the workers, the Governor General summoned the members of his administration and army chiefs to decide at once on the total requisitioning of personnel and administration of the Dakar-Saint Louis line, placing it under military authority. The decree of the Governor even states: "Troops will first of all use their rifle butts. An attack by small weapons will be met with the use of bayonets ... It will be indispensable for troops to shoot in order to assure the security of personnel of the administration is not put in danger..." And the French authorities concluded that the laws and rules governing the army became immediately applicable.

However, neither this terrible decision for a decidedly repressive response, nor the arrogant uproar accompanying its implementation, succeeded in preventing the strike from taking place: "At 18h 30, Lachere (civil chief of the network) cabled the boss of the Federation that, 'odd number trains not leaving today; trains four and six have left, the second stopped at Rusfrique...' and urgently insisted on advisability of giving in to the demand of the workers. Rail traffic was almost completely paralysed. It was the same thing at Dakar, Saint Louis, Rusfrique. The entire network was on strike, Europeans and Africans... ; arrests were made here and there, attempts to oppose

the workers on racial grounds came to nothing. Otherwise, some personnel went to the stations without working, others purely and simply defected. In the morning of April 15<sup>th</sup>, there was a total strike in Rusfrique. No European or African worker was present. Consequently the order was given to close the station. The centre of the strike was found here. Never has Senegal known a movement of such breadth. For the first time a strike has been undertaken by Europeans and Africans and has succeeded so vividly, and at the level of the territory. Members of the ruling elite were going mad. Giraud, President of the Chamber of Commerce, has made contact with the rail workers and tried to conciliate. Maison Maurel and Prom warned its management in Bordeaux. Maison Vielles sent its Marseille headquarters this alarmist telegram: 'Situation untenable, act!' Giraud went on the offensive, going directly to the President of the Syndicate for the Defence of Senegalese Interests (i.e. the bosses) in Bordeaux, criticising the nonchalance of the authorities."<sup>14</sup>

Panic gripped the leadership of the colonial administration faced with the flames of the workers' struggle. Following pressure from the economic leadership of the colony, both on the bosses in France and on central government, the authorities in Paris had to give the green light to negotiations with the strikers. Following this, the Governor General convened a meeting with representatives of the latter (on the second day of the strike) with proposals favouring the demands of the strikers. And when the Governor expressed his wish to meet railway worker delegates made up solely of Europeans, the workers replied by refusing to agree to the plan without the presence of African workers on the same equitable footing as their white comrades. In fact, the workers on strike distrusted their interlocutors and not without reason, because after giving satisfaction to the rail workers on the main points of their demands, the authorities continued their manoeuvres and hesitations regarding some demands of the native workers. But that only increased the combativity of the railway workers, who quickly decided to go back on strike, giving rise to new pressures from the representatives of the French bourgeoisie in Dakar on the central government in Paris. This is what's shown in the following telegrams:

*"It is urgent that satisfaction is given immediately to the personnel of DSL and the decision is notified without delay otherwise we risk a new strike"* (the representative of big business);

*"I ask you straightaway... to give ap-*

11. Quoted *ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

proval to arbitration by the Governor General transmitted in my cable of the 16<sup>th</sup>... very urgent before May 1<sup>st</sup>, if (as seems probable) we are going to have a new work stoppage on this date" (Director of the Railways);

"Despite my counsels, the strike will resume if the company doesn't give satisfaction" (the Governor General).<sup>15</sup>

Visibly, there was general panic among the colonial authorities at all levels. In brief, in the end, the French government gave its approval to the arbitration of its Governor by validating the agreement negotiated with the strikers. Work restarted on April 16<sup>th</sup>. Once again, the working class pulled off a great victory over the forces of capital thanks notably to its class unity and above all to the development of its class consciousness.

But in addition to the satisfaction of the demands of the rail workers, this movement had positive consequences for other workers; in fact the 8-hour day was extended throughout the colony following the strike. What's more, faced with the bosses' resistance in accepting it and faced with the dynamic of struggle created by the rail workers, workers from other branches also went into struggle to make themselves heard.

### The postal strike

After this, in order to obtain increases in wages and better conditions of work, workers of the PTT (postal service) of Saint-Louis went on strike May 1<sup>st</sup> 1919. It lasted for 12 hours and ended up with the postal services almost paralysed. Faced with the breadth of the movement, the colonial authority requisitioned the army to provide a specialised force for ensuring the continuity of public services. But this military body was far from being able to effectively play the role of blackleg. The administrative authority thus had to agree to negotiate with the postal strike committee, which was offered a wage increase of 100%. In fact: "The duplicity of the colonial authorities soon restarted the strike movement which took off with renewed vigour, braced without doubt by the enticing perspectives that it had glimpsed for a moment. It lasted up to May 12<sup>th</sup> and ended in total success."<sup>16</sup>

Once again, here was a victory gained by the PTT workers thanks to their militant stance. Decidedly, the workers showed themselves more and more conscious of their strength and their class affiliation.

In fact all public services were more and

more affected by the movement. Numerous occupational categories were able to benefit from the fall-out of the struggle unleashed by the workers of the PTT: after they had obtained substantial wage increases, it was the turn of workers in the public sector, farm workers, teachers, health workers, etc. But the success of the movement didn't stop there: again the representatives of capital refused to surrender.

### Threat of a new railworkers' strike and the political manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie

Following the movement of the postal workers and six months after the victorious end of their movement, the indigenous rail workers decided to strike without their European comrades by addressing the authorities with new demands: "In this letter, we ask for an improvement of pay and modifications of the rules regarding indigenous personnel... We take the liberty of saying to you that we can no longer lead the life of the galley and we hope that you will avoid it by taking measures of which you alone will be responsible... and we would like, just like the fixed personnel (formed almost exclusively of Europeans), to be recompensed. Act on our regard as you would act on their regard and everything will be for the best."<sup>17</sup>

The indigenous workers wanted to benefit from the material advantages that some workers had acquired following the strike of PTT workers. But above all they wanted to be treated the same as the European workers, the key being the threat of a new strike.

"The initiative of the indigenous workers of the DSL had, quite naturally, aroused the lively interest of the bosses. Given that the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> April movement had been a crowning success because of the unity of the action, it was necessary to do everything to ensure that this new trench opening up between European and African workers would be reinforced. The best way to weaken the movement of workers would be to let them exhaust themselves in fratricidal rivalries, which would undermine any future coalition.

"The network's administration thus worked to accentuate the disparities in order to increase the frustration of the indigenous workers' milieu in the hope of rendering definitive the rupture that was opening up."<sup>18</sup>

Consequently the colonial authorities moved cynically into action, deciding not to adjust the income of the natives in relation

to those of the Europeans, but, on the contrary to noisily increase the earnings of the latter while holding back on the demands of the local rail workers. The evident aim was to deepen the gap between the two groups, setting one against the other to neutralise both.

But fortunately, sensing the trap being laid by the colonial authorities, the indigenous rail workers avoided a strike in these conditions, deciding to wait for better days. We can also note that while they gave the impression of having forgotten the importance of the class unity they had previously shown in allying with their European comrades, the indigenous rail workers were still able to decide to widen their movement to other categories of workers (public and private services, European as well as African). In any case, they were able to recognise the uneven character of class unity, to see that class consciousness develops slowly in ups and downs. Let's also remember that the colonial power institutionalised racial and ethnic divisions from the first contacts between Europeans and Africans. This did not mean there would be no other attempts at unity between African and European workers.

### The revolt of Senegalese sailors at Santos (Brazil) in 1920: strike and repression

We learn from the recollections of a French consul of the existence of a struggle undertaken by some sailors on the *Vapeur Provence* (enlisted in Marseille) at Santos around May 1920. This was an example of workers' solidarity followed by fierce police repression. Here's how this diplomat relates the event: "Undisciplined acts occurred on board the *Vapeur Provence*... I went to Santos and, after enquiries, I punished the main guilty parties... 4 days in prison and I led them to the town's prison in the interest of the security of the navy... All the Senegalese stokers showing solidarity with their comrades took a threatening attitude despite my formal defence... And the Senegalese tried to release their comrades, following the police agents and making threats and insults, and the local authority finally had to proceed with their arrest."<sup>19</sup>

In fact, these were worker-sailors (stokers, greasers, seamen) some of whom were registered in Dakar, others at Marseille, employed by big business to ensure the transport of goods between the three continents. The problem is that the diplomat's notes say nothing about the cause of the revolt. It seems however that this movement had links with another that happened

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

in 1919 when Senegalese sailors, following a struggle, were disembarked and replaced by some Europeans (according to police sources). Following that, after the strike, many of the Senegalese union members decided to quit the CGT, which had approved this decision, and join the CGTU (the latter being a split from the former).

In any case, this event seems to have seriously concerned the colonial authorities as is shown in the following account:

*“The consul, fulminating more than ever, vehemently demanded that when they arrived at Dakar, the guilty were handed over to the competent tribunal, and showed his surprise and indignation in these terms: ‘The attitude of these individuals is such that it constitutes a real danger for the ships on which they will sail in the future and for the general security of the general staff and crew. They are animated by the worst spirit, have lost, or never had, the least respect for discipline and believe they have the right to give orders to the commandant’.*

*“They discovered, without a doubt and for the first time, the state of spirit of the Senegalese after the First World War and were evidently scandalised by the mood of contestation and their determination not to accept without reacting what they considered as an attempt on their rights and liberties. The working class was developing politically and on the trade union level.”*<sup>20</sup>

This was a magnificent class combat by the maritime workers who, despite an unfavourable balance of forces, were able to show the enemy their determination, achieving self-respect by showing solidarity in the struggle.

## 1920: the re-launch of the rail workers' action ends in victory

We've already seen that, following the victorious movement of workers of the PTT (in 1919), the indigenous rail workers wanted to rush into this breach by going on strike, before finally deciding to cancel their action due to the lack of favourable conditions.

Six months after this episode, they decided to re-launch their protest action in earnest. The movement of the rail workers was first of all motivated by the general degradation of living conditions due to the disastrous conditions of the Great War, which accentuated the discontent of the workers and of the population in general. The cost of living in the main towns underwent dizzying increases. Thus, the price of a kilo of millet, which in December 1919

20. Ibid.

was 0.75F, tripled in the space of four months. And a kilo of meat went from 5F to 7F, chicken 6F to 10F, etc.

A note from the Inspector General of Public Works of April 13<sup>th</sup>, in which he asked his superiors not to apply the law on the 8-hour day in the colony, was the last straw. It immediately revived the latent discontent smouldering among the rail workers since their protest movement of December 1919. The workers on the railway went into action on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1920: *“It was the first strike movement undertaken at the ethnic level by the workers on the railways, which explains the rapidity and unanimity with which the business community received the event and decided to remedy it... From the first of June, they called on the States General of Colonial Trade in Senegal, addressing their concerns to the Federation Chief, and inviting him not to stand by during the deterioration in the social climate.”*<sup>21</sup>

The indigenous rail workers thus decided to launch a new showdown with the colonial authorities in order to achieve the same demands. But this time the African rail workers seemed to have drawn the lessons of the aborted action by enlarging the social base of the movement with several delegates representing each trade, fully entrusting them to negotiate collectively with the political and economic authorities. As a matter of fact, from the second day of the strike, unease grew among the main colonial authorities. Thus alerted by the Dakar economic decision-makers, the Minister of the Colonies sent a cable to the Governor in the following terms: *“It has been pointed out to me that following the strike 35,000 tonnes of uncovered grain awaiting delivery is held up in different stations of Dakar-Saint Louis”.* From here, pressure mounted on the Director of the Rail Network, pushing him to respond to the demands of the wage earners. And this “station master” responded to his superiors in the following way: *“We fear that if a new increase in wages, so high and so little justified, was granted, it could have a general impact on the demands of all personnel and encourage them to present us with new demands.”*

Straightaway, the network's management tried hard to break the strike by playing black against white (which had previously succeeded). Thus, on the third day of the movement, it managed to get together a train of goods and passengers, thanks to the co-operation of a European engine driver and stokers from the navy under escort from the forces of order. But when the management tried to play this card again, it couldn't find any worker

21. Ibid.

ready to play its game because this time, following strong pressure exerted on them by the indigenous strikers, the European rail workers decided to remain “neutral”. Afterwards, we find in a report of the Deputy Governor of Senegal:<sup>22</sup> *“The workers of Dakar-Saint Louis have declared that if they have no satisfaction at the end of the month, they will leave Dakar to work on farming in the lougans<sup>23</sup> in the colony's interior.”*

At this point (the sixth day of the strike), the Governor of Senegal convened a meeting of all his social partners to notify them of a series of measures, elaborated by his own services, to meet the strikers' demands; at the end of the day, the strikers got what they were asking for. Clearly the workers gained a new victory thanks to their combativity and a better organisation of the strike, and it is this that enabled them to impose a balance of force over the representatives of the bourgeoisie: *“What appears certain however is that the workers' mentality, grew stronger through these tests and more refined about the stakes involved, with more widespread forms of struggle and attempts at union co-ordination in a sort of broad class front faced with combative bosses.”*<sup>24</sup>

But even more significant in this development of a class front was June 1<sup>st</sup> 1920, the day the rail workers started their strike: *“the tugboat crews stopped work a few hours later, despite the promise they had given, noted the Deputy Governor, to await the outcome of the talks that Martin, Chief of the Maritime Inspection Service, had been responsible for leading. We have here the first deliberate attempt to co-ordinate strike movements simultaneously unleashed by... rail workers and port workers, that is, personnel of the two sectors that constituted the lungs of the colony whose concerted paralysis blocked all economic and commercial activity, in and out... The situation appeared even more worrying (for the Administration), since the bakers of Dakar had also threatened to strike on the same day, and would certainly have done so if immediate increases in their wages had not been granted.”*<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, at the same time, other strike movements broke out at the Han/Thiaroye yards and yards on the Dakar-Rufisque route. Police sources reporting this event say nothing about the origin of the simultaneous explosion of these different movements. However, by putting together several pieces of information from this

22. The Governor of Senegal was subordinate to the Governor General of FWA.

23. Cultivation areas created by burning down forests.

24. Thiam, op. cit.

25. Ibid.

same colonial police source, we can conclude that the extension of this struggle movement was not unconnected with the Governor's attempt to break the maritime transport strike. Without saying so openly, the colonial state representative first of all called in the navy with some European civilian teams to provide transport services between Dakar and Goree<sup>26</sup> and this seems to have provoked solidarity action by workers in other sectors: "*Did this intervention of the state on the side of the bosses arouse the solidarity of other occupational branches? Without being able to decisively confirm it we can note that the strike broke out almost simultaneously with the attempts to break the movement of the crews in public works.*"<sup>27</sup>

In fact, we know that after five days the movement was crumbling under the double impact of state repression and rumours of the bosses' decision to replace the strikers with blacklegs.

*"The workers, feeling that the length of their action and the intervention of the military could change the balance of forces and jeopardise the successful conclusion of their action, had, on the seventh day of their strike softened their initial demands by formulating their platform based on the following... The Administration and the bosses were united in rejecting these new proposals, forcing the strikers to continue their movement in desperation or else end it on the local authorities' conditions. They opted for the latter solution."*<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the strikers had to return to work effectively on their old salary plus the "ration", with the balance of forces squarely in the bourgeoisie's favour and recognising the dangers of pursuing their movement in isolation. We can say here that the working class suffered a defeat but the fact of having retreated in good order meant that it wasn't so profound, nor did it wipe out the workers' understanding of the more numerous and important victories that it had gained.

To sum up, the period from 1914 to 1920 was strongly marked by intense class confrontations between the colonial bourgeoisie and the working class emerging in the colony of French West Africa; and this in a revolutionary context at the world level. French capital was fully conscious of this because it felt the full force of the proletarian struggle.

*"The activities of the world communist movement, during the same period, underwent an uninterrupted development,*

*marked notably by the entry onto the scene of the first expression of African marxism;<sup>29</sup> breaking with the utopian approach that his brothers had adopted towards colonial problems, he developed the first native explanation of this question we know, the first serious and profound critique of colonialism as a system of exploitation and domination."*<sup>30</sup>

Among the workers who were at the front of the strike movements in Senegal in the period from 1914 to 1920, some were close to the former "young infantrymen" demobilised or survivors from the First World War. For example, the same sources tell us of the existence at that time of a handful of Senegalese unionists, one of whom, a certain Louis Ndiaye (a young sailor of 13) was a militant of the CGT from 1905 and the representative of this organisation in the colonies between 1914 and 1930. In this respect, like many other "young infantrymen", he was mobilised in 1914-18 into the navy where he managed to survive. Both he and another young Senegalese, Lamine Senghor, who was close to the PCF in the 1920s, were clearly influenced by the ideas of the Communist International. In this sense, and along with other figures of the 1920s, we can consider that they played a major and dynamic role in the process of politicisation and the development of class-consciousness in the ranks of the workers of the first colony of French West Africa.

Lassou (to be continued).

26. A Senegalese island situated in the Bay of Dakar.

27. Thiam, op. cit.

28. Ibid.

29. This reference is to Lamine Senghor, see below.

30. Thiam, op.cit.



## 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC

# Preparing for class confrontations

The ICC held its 19<sup>th</sup> Congress last May. In general a congress is the most important moment in the life of revolutionary organisations, and since the latter are an integral part of the working class, they have a responsibility to draw out the main lessons of their congresses and make them accessible to a wider audience within the class. This is the aim of the present article. We should point out right away that the Congress put into practice this concern to open out beyond the confines of the organisation since, as well as delegations from ICC sections, the Congress was attended not only by sympathisers of the organisation or members of discussion circles in which our militants participate, but also delegations from other groups which the ICC is in contact and discussion with: two groups from Korea and Opop from Brazil.<sup>1</sup> Other groups had been invited and accepted the invitation but were unable to come because of the increasingly severe barriers the European bourgeoisie has set up with regard to non-European countries.

Following the statutes of our organisation:

*“the Congress is the sovereign organ of the ICC. As such it has the tasks:*

- *of elaborating the general analyses and orientations of the organisation, particularly with regard to the international situation;*
- *of examining and drawing a balance sheet of the activities of the organisation since the preceding congress;*
- *of defining the perspectives for future work.”*

On the basis of these elements we can draw out the lessons of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress.

### The international situation

The first point that needs to be dealt with is our analyses and discussions of the international situation. If an organisation is unable to elaborate a clear understanding of the international situation, it will not be

able to intervene appropriately within it. History has taught us how catastrophic an erroneous evaluation of the international situation can be for revolutionary organisations. We can cite the most dramatic cases, such as the underestimation of the danger of war by the majority of the Second International on the very eve of the first world imperialist slaughter, even though, in the period leading up to the war, under the impetus of the left within the International, its congresses had correctly warned of the danger and called on the proletariat to mobilise against it.

Another example is the analysis put forward by Trotsky during the 1930s, when he saw the workers' strikes in France in 1936 or the civil war in Spain as the premises for a new international revolutionary wave. This analysis led him to found the 4<sup>th</sup> International in 1938. Faced with the “conservative policies of the Communist and Socialist parties”, the new organisation was supposed to put itself at the head of “the masses of millions of men who were ceaselessly advancing along the road to revolution.” This error greatly contributed to the sections of the 4<sup>th</sup> International going over to the bourgeois camp during the Second World War: seeking at any cost to “be with the masses”, they were engulfed in the politics of the “Resistance” carried out by the Socialist and Communist parties, i.e. in support for the Allied imperialist bloc.

More recently, we saw how certain groups coming from the communist left missed out on the generalised strike in May 1968 in France and the whole international wave of struggles that followed, seeing it as no more than a “student movement”. We can equally see the cruel fate of other groups who thought that May 68 was already the revolution and fell into despair and disappeared from the scene when it didn't quite fulfil their hopes.

Today it is of the greatest importance for revolutionaries to develop an accurate analysis of what's at stake in the international situation, above all because in the recent period the stakes have been getting higher than ever.

In this issue of the *International Review*, we are publishing the resolution adopted

by the Congress and it is therefore not necessary to go over all its points here. We only want to underline the most important aspects.

The first aspect, the most fundamental one, is the decisive step taken by the crisis of capitalism with the sovereign debt crisis of certain European states such as Greece:

*“In fact, the potential bankruptcy of a growing number of states constitutes a new stage in capitalism's plunge into insurmountable crisis. It highlights the limits of the policies through which the bourgeoisie has managed to hold back the evolution of the capitalist crisis for several decades... The measures adopted by the G20 of March 2009 to avoid a new Great Depression are significant expressions of the policy which the ruling class has been carrying out for several decades. They boil down to the injection of a considerable mass of credit into the economy. Such measures are not new. In fact for over 35 years they have been at the heart of the policies carried out by the ruling class aimed at escaping the major contradiction of the capitalist mode of production: its inability to find solvent markets that can absorb its production... The potential bankruptcy of the banking system and the onset of the recession have obliged all states to inject considerable sums into their economies, even though their revenues were in free fall because of the downturn in production. As a result of this, public deficits in most countries went through a considerable increase. For the most exposed ones such as Ireland, Greece or Portugal this meant a situation of potential bankruptcy, an inability to pay their public employees and to reimburse their debts. From then on the banks refused to grant them new loans, except at the most exorbitant rates, because they could not be at all sure they were going to be repaid. The ‘rescue plans’ which they benefited from thanks to the European Bank and the IMF constitute new debts which were simply piled up on top of preceding ones. This is no longer a vicious circle; it is an infernal spiral.... The crisis of sovereign debts in the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) is only a small part of the earthquake threatening the world economy. It is not because they have been rated AAA in the index of*

1. Opop had already been present at the two previous congresses of the ICC. See the articles on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> congresses in *International Reviews* n°s 130 and 138.

*confidence by the rating agencies... that the big industrial powers are holding out much better...the world's first power runs the risk of seeing a withdrawal in 'official' confidence in its capacity to reimburse its debts; there is also a growing concern that any repayments will come in the shape of a strongly devalued dollar... And since then in all countries the situation has only got worse with all the various recovery plans. Thus the bankruptcy of the PIIGS is just the tip of the iceberg of the bankruptcy of world economy, which for decades has owed its survival to a desperate headlong flight into debt... By tipping over from the banking sphere to the level of states, the debt crisis marks the entry of the capitalist mode of production into a new phase of its acute crisis that will considerably aggravate the violence and extent of its convulsions. There is no light at the end of the tunnel of capitalism. This system can only lead society into an ever increasing barbarism."*

The period that followed the Congress has confirmed this analysis. On the one hand, the sovereign debt crisis of the European countries, which now clearly threatens not only the PIIGS but the entire Euro Zone, has increasingly dominated current events. And the so-called "success" of the 22<sup>nd</sup> July European summit on Greece won't change much. All the previous summits were supposed to have come up with long-lasting solutions to Greece's problems and we can see how effective they were!

And at the same time, with Obama's difficulties in getting his budget policies accepted, the media "discovered" that the USA is also burdened with a colossal sovereign debt, whose level (130% of GNP) is up there with that of the PIIGS. This confirmation of the analyses that came out of the Congress doesn't derive from any particular merit of our organisation. The only "merit" it can claim is being faithful to the classic analyses of the workers' movement which, since the development of marxist theory, has always argued that the capitalist mode of production, like the ones that came before it, cannot in the long run overcome its economic contradictions. And it was in this framework of marxist analysis that the discussions at the Congress took place. Different points of view were put forward, notably on the ultimate causes of the contradictions of capitalism (which to a large extent correspond to our debate on the "Thirty Glorious Years"<sup>2</sup>), or on whether or not the world economy is likely to sink into hyperinflation because of the frenzied resort to printing banknotes, especially in the USA. But there was a real homogeneity in underlining the gravity of the current

situation, as expressed in the resolution which was unanimously adopted.

The Congress also looked at the evolution of imperialist conflicts, as can be seen from the resolution. At this level, the two years since our last Congress have not brought any fundamentally new elements, but rather a confirmation of the fact that, despite all its military efforts, the world's leading power has shown itself incapable of re-establishing the "leadership" it had during the Cold War, and that its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan have not succeeded in establishing a "Pax Americana" across the world, on the contrary: **"The 'New World Order' predicted 20 years ago by George Bush Senior, which he dreamed about being under the guidance of the US, can only more and more present itself as a world chaos, which the convulsions of the capitalist economy can only aggravate more and more"** (point 8 of the resolution).

It was important for the Congress to pay particular attention to the current evolution of the class struggle since, aside from the particular importance this question always has for revolutionaries, the proletariat today is facing unprecedented attacks on its living conditions. These attacks have been especially brutal in the countries under the whip of the European Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as is the case with Greece. But they are raining down in all countries, with the explosion of unemployment and above all the necessity for all governments to reduce their budget deficits.

The resolution adopted by the previous congress argued that *"the main form this attack is taking today, that of massive lay-offs, does not initially favour the emergence of such movements (i.e massive struggles)... It is in a second period, when it is less vulnerable to the bourgeoisie's blackmail, that workers will tend to turn to the idea that a united and solid struggle can push back the attacks of the ruling class, especially when the latter tries to make the whole working class pay for the huge budget deficits accumulating today with all the plans for saving the banks and stimulating the economy. This is when we are more likely to see the development of broad struggles by the workers."*

The 19<sup>th</sup> Congress observed that *"The two years since the last congress have amply confirmed this prediction. This period has not seen wide-scale struggles against the massive lay-offs and rising unemployment being inflicted on the working class in the most developed countries."* However the Congress did note that *"significant struggles have begun to take place against the 'necessary cuts in public spending'. This response is still very timid, notably where*

*these austerity plans have taken the most violent forms, in countries like Greece or Spain for example, even though the working class there had recently shown evidence of a rather important level of militancy. In a way it seems that the very brutality of the attacks provoke a feeling of powerlessness in the workers' ranks, all the more because they are being carried out by 'left' governments."* Since then, the working class in these countries has given proof that it is not just lying down. This is especially the case in Spain where the movement of the "indignant" has for several months acted a sort of beacon for other countries in Europe and other continents.

This movement began at the very moment the Congress was being held and so it was obviously not possible to discuss it at that point. However, the Congress was led to examine the social movements which had been hitting the Arab countries from the beginning of the year. There was not a total homogeneity in the discussions on this subject, not least because they are something we have not seen before, but the whole Congress did rally to the analysis contained in the resolution:

*"...the most massive movements we have seen in the recent period have not taken place in the most industrialised countries but in countries on the peripheries of capitalism, notably in a number of countries in the Arab world, particularly Tunisia and Egypt where, in the end, after trying to meet the movements with ferocious repression, the bourgeoisie was forced to get rid of the local dictators. These movements were not classic workers' struggles like the ones these countries had seen in the recent past (for example the struggles in Gafsa in Tunisia in 2008 or the massive strikes in the textile industry in Egypt in the summer of 2007, which encountered the solidarity of a number of other sectors). They often took the form of social revolts in which all different sectors of society were involved: workers from public and private sectors, the unemployed, but also small shopkeepers, artisans, the liberal professions, educated young people etc. This is why the proletariat only rarely appeared directly in a distinct way (for example in the strikes in Egypt towards the end of the revolt there); still less did it assume the role of a leading force. However, at the origin of these movements, reflected in many of the demands that were raised, we find fundamentally the same causes as those at the origin of the workers' struggles in other countries: the considerable aggravation of the crisis, the growing misery it provokes within the entire non-exploiting population. And while the proletariat did not in general appear directly as a class in these movements, its imprint was still there*

2. See *International Review* n°s 133, 135, 136, 138 and 141.

*in countries where the working class has a significant weight, especially through the deep solidarity expressed in the revolts, their ability to avoid being drawn into acts of blind and desperate violence despite the terrible repression they had to face. In the end, if the bourgeoisie in Tunisia and Egypt finally resolved, on the good advice of the American bourgeoisie, to get rid of the old dictators, it was to a large extent because of the presence of the working class in these movements.”*

This upsurge of the working class in the countries on the periphery of capitalism led the Congress to go back to the analysis elaborated by our organisation in the wake of the mass strikes in Poland in 1980:

*“At this point the ICC had argued, on the basis of the positions elaborated by Marx and Engels, that it was from the central countries of capitalism, above all the old industrial countries of Europe, that the signal for the world proletarian revolution would be sent out, owing to the concentrated nature of the proletariat in these countries, and even more because of its historic experience, which will provide it with the best weapons to finally spring the most sophisticated ideological traps laid by the bourgeoisie for a very long time. Thus, one of the most fundamental steps to be taken by the world working class in the future is not only the development of massive struggles in the central countries of western Europe but also its capacity to break out of the democratic and trade union traps, above all by taking charge of its own struggles. These movements will constitute a beacon for the world working class, including the class in the main capitalist power, the USA, whose dive into growing poverty, already hitting tens of millions of workers, is going to turn the ‘American Dream’ into a real nightmare.”*

This analysis is starting to be verified by the recent movement of the “indignant” in Spain. Whereas the demonstrators in Tunis or Cairo waved the national flag as the emblem of their struggle, national flags have been more or less absent in the movements in the big European cities (notably in Spain). Of course the “indignant” movement is still heavily impregnated with democratic illusions but it has the merit of highlighting the fact that every state, even the most democratic and left wing, is the ferocious enemy of the exploited.

### **The intervention of the ICC in the development of the class struggle**

As we saw above, the capacity of revolutionary organisations to analyse correctly the historic situation in which they find themselves, as well as knowing how to

question analyses which have been found wanting in the reality of the facts, precondition the form and content of their intervention within the working class; in other words, their ability to live up to the responsibilities which the class engendered them to carry out.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC, on the basis of an examination of the economic crisis, of the terrible attacks which have been imposed on the working class, and of the first responses of the class to these attacks, concluded that we are entering into a period of class conflicts much more intense and massive than in the period between 2003 and now. At this level, even more than with the evolution of the crisis which will play a big part in determining these movements, it is difficult to make any short term predictions. It would be illusory to try and fix where and when the next major class combats will break out. What is important to do, however, is to draw out the general tendency and to be extremely vigilant towards the evolution of the situation in order to be able to react rapidly and appropriately when this is required, both in taking up positions and intervening directly in the struggles.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Congress felt that the balance sheet of the ICC’s intervention since the previous congress was definitely a positive one. Whenever it was necessary, and sometimes very rapidly, statements of position were published in numerous languages on our website and in our territorial paper press. Within the limits of our very weak forces, the press was widely distributed in the demonstrations which accompanied the social movements of the recent period, in particular during the movement against the reform of pensions in France in autumn 2010 or the mobilisations of educated youth against attacks that were aimed especially at students coming from the working class (such as the major increase in tuition fees in the UK at the end of 2010). Parallel to this, the ICC held public meetings in a lot of countries and on several continents, dealing with the emerging social movements. At the same time, whenever possible, militants of the ICC spoke up in assemblies, struggle committees, discussion circles and internet forums to support the positions and analyses of the organisation and participate in the international debate generated by these movements.

This balance sheet is in no way a public relations exercise aimed at consoling our militants or bluffing those who read this article. It can be verified, and challenged, by all those who follow the activities of organisation since by definition we are talking about public activities.

Similarly, the Congress drew a posi-

tive balance sheet of our work towards elements and groups who defend communist positions or who are heading in that direction.

The perspective of a significant development of workers’ struggles carries with it the potential for the emergence of revolutionary minorities. Even before the world proletariat began to engage in massive struggles, this could already be discerned in outline (and was already noted in the resolution adopted at the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress<sup>3</sup>), to a large extent because, since 2003, the working class had begun to recover from the retreat that followed the collapse of the “socialist” bloc in 1989 and the huge campaigns about the “death of communism” and the “end of the class struggle”. Since then, even if in a hesitant way, this tendency has been confirmed, leading to the establishment of contacts with elements and groups in a significant number of countries. *“This phenomenon of the development of contacts involves both countries where the ICC doesn’t have a section and those where it is already present. However, the influx of contacts has been much less palpable in countries where the ICC already exists. We can say that its open obvious expressions are still reserved to a minority of ICC sections”* (from the presentation to the Congress of the report on contacts).

Very often, the new contacts have appeared in countries where there is no section of the organisation, or not yet. We could see this for example at the “Pan-American” conference held in November 2010, which as well as Opop and other comrades from Brazil, was attended by comrades from Peru, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador.<sup>4</sup> Because of the development of this milieu of contacts, *“our intervention towards it has been through a major acceleration, demanding a militant and financial investment greater than the ICC has ever made in this area of its activity, making it possible to hold the richest and most numerous encounters and discussions in our history”* (Report on contacts).

This report *“stresses the novelty of the situation regarding contacts, in particular our collaboration with anarchists. On certain occasions we succeeded in making common cause in the struggle with elements and groups who are in the same camp as us, the camp of internationalism”* (presentation of the contacts report). This

3. *“Today, as in 1968, the recovery of class combats is accompanied by a deep reflection, and the appearance of new elements who are turning towards the positions of the communist left is just the tip of the iceberg.”*

4. See “5<sup>a</sup> Conferencia Panamericana de la Corriente Comunista Internacional - Un paso importante hacia la unidad de la clase obrera”. <http://es.internationalism.org/RM120-panamericana>

cooperation with elements and groups who identify with anarchism has stimulated a number of rich discussions within our organisation, enabling us to get a better grasp of the various facets of this current and in particular to get a clearer understanding of its heterogeneous nature, since it ranges from pure leftists ready to support all sorts of bourgeois movements or ideologies, such as nationalism, to clearly proletarian elements whose internationalism is beyond reproach.

*“Another novelty is our cooperation, in Paris, with elements who identify with Trotskyism...these elements were very active during the mobilisation against pension reform, aiming to facilitate the workers taking charge of their own struggles, outside the union framework, while at the same time encouraging the development of discussion within the class, just as the ICC tried to do. We therefore had every reason to associate ourselves with this effort. If their attitude is in contradiction with the classic practices of Trotskyism, so much the better”* (presentation of the report).

Thus, the Congress was also able to draw a positive balance sheet of our organisation’s work towards elements defending revolutionary positions or moving towards them. This is a very important part of our intervention within the working class, part of the process that will lead to the constitution of a revolutionary party, which is indispensable to the victory of the communist revolution.<sup>5</sup>

## Organisational questions

Any discussion on the activities of a revolutionary organisation has to consider the assessment of its functioning. And in this area the Congress, on the basis of a different report, noted the biggest weaknesses of the organisation. In our press or even in public meetings, we have already dealt publicly with the organisational difficulties the ICC has encountered in the past. This has nothing to do with exhibitionism but is a classic practice of the workers’

5. The Congress discussed and took up a criticism contained in the report on contacts concerning the following formulation in the resolution on the international situation from the 16<sup>th</sup> ICC Congress: *“The ICC is already the skeleton of the future party”*. As the report said, *“it is not possible at this juncture to define what form the organisational participation of the ICC in the future party will take because this will depend on the general situation and the configuration of the milieu, but also on the development of our own organisation”*. This said, the ICC has the responsibility of keeping alive and enriching its inheritance from the communist left in order to allow present and future generations of revolutionaries, and thus the future party, to draw the maximum benefit from it. In other words, it has the responsibility of acting as a bridge between the revolutionary wave of 1917-23 and the future revolutionary wave.

movement. The Congress examined these difficulties at some length, in particular the often degraded state of the organisational tissue and of collective work, which can weigh heavily on some sections. We don’t think that the ICC is today going through a crisis like the ones in 1981, 1993 or 2001. In 1981 we saw a significant part of the organisation abandon the political and organisational principles on which it had been founded, leading to some very serious convulsions and in particular the loss of half our section in Britain. In 1993 and 2001, the ICC had to face problems with clans within the organisation, resulting in a rejection of loyalty to the organisation and the departure of numbers of militants (in particular members of the Paris section in 1995 and of the central organ in 2001<sup>6</sup>). Among the causes of these last two crises, the ICC identified the consequences of the collapse of the “socialist” bloc which provoked a very profound retreat in the consciousness of the world proletariat; more generally, we looked at the impact of the social decomposition affecting capitalist society. The causes of the present difficulties are partly of the same order but they are not leading to the phenomena of a loss of conviction or disloyalty. All the militants of the sections where these problems have arisen are fully convinced of the validity of the ICC’s fight, and continue to show their loyalty and dedication towards the organisation. When the ICC had to face up to the most sombre period suffered by the working class since the end of the counter-revolution whose end was marked by the movement of May 1968 – a period of general retreat in militancy and consciousness which began at the start of the 1990s – these militants “stayed at their post”. Very often, these are comrades who have known each other and militated together for more than 30 years. There are thus many solid links of friendship and confidence between them. But the minor faults, the small weaknesses, the character differences which everyone has to accept in others have often led to the development of tensions or a growing difficulty to work together over a period of many years in small sections which have not been refreshed by the “new blood” of new militants, precisely because of the retreat experienced by the working class.

6. The elements who rejected loyalty towards the organisation often fell into an approach which we define as “parasitic”: while continuing to claim that they were defending the real positions of the organisation, they devoted most of their efforts towards denigrating the organisation and trying to discredit it. We have dedicated a document to the phenomenon of political parasitism (“Theses on Parasitism” in *International Review* n° 94). It should be noted that some comrades in the ICC, while recognising that such behaviour exists and the necessity to firmly defend the organisation against it, don’t agree with this concept of parasitism, a disagreement that was expressed at the Congress

Today this “new blood” is beginning to arrive in certain sections of the ICC, but it is clear that the new members can only be properly integrated if the organisational tissue of the ICC improves. The Congress discussed these issues with a lot of frankness, and this led some of the invited groups to speak up about their own organisational difficulties. However, there could be no miracle solution to the problems, which had already been noted at the previous congress. The activities resolution which it adopted reminds us of the approach already adopted by the organisation and calls on all the militants and sections to take this up in a more systematic way:

*“Since 2001 the ICC has embarked on an ambitious theoretical project that was designed, amongst other things, to explain and develop what communist militancy (and thus the party spirit) is. It has been a creative effort to understand at the deepest level:*

- *the roots of proletarian solidarity and confidence;*
- *morality and the ethical dimension of marxism;*
- *democracy and democratism and its hostility to communist militancy;*
- *psychology and anthropology and its connection to the communist project;*
- *centralism and collective work;*
- *the culture of proletarian debate;*
- *marxism and science.*

*“In short the ICC has been engaged in an effort to restore a wider understanding of the human dimension of the communist goal and the communist organisation, to rediscover the breadth of vision of militancy that was almost lost during the counter-revolution and therefore arm itself against the reappearance of circles, clans and parasitism that thrive in an atmosphere of ignorance or denial of these wider questions of organisation and militancy”* (point 10).

*“The realisation of the unitary principle of organisation – collective work – demands the development of all the human qualities connected to the theoretical effort to comprehend communist militancy in a positive way that we referred to in point 10. This means the growth of mutual respect and support, cooperative reflexes, a warm spirit of understanding and sympathy for others, sociability, and generosity”* (point 15).

## The discussion on “marxism and science”

One of the points stressed in the discussions and in the resolution adopted by the Congress is the need to go deeper into the theoretical aspects of the questions

we face. This is why, as at the preceding congress, this one devoted an item on its agenda to a theoretical question, “marxism and science”. This discussion will, as have other theoretical issues discussed in our organisation, lead to the publication of various documents. We are not going to report here the elements raised in the discussion, which followed on from numerous discussions which had been held in the sections. What we want to say here is that the delegations to the Congress were very pleased with this debate, and that this owed a great deal to the contributions of a scientist, Chris Knight,<sup>7</sup> who we had invited to take part in our Congress.

This was not the first time that the ICC had invited a scientist to its congress. Two years ago, Jean-Louis Dessalles came to present his reflections on the origin of language, which gave rise to some very lively discussions.<sup>8</sup> We want to thank Chris Knight for accepting our invitation and we salute the quality of interventions, which were both very lively and accessible for non-specialists, which includes the majority of ICC militants. Chris Knight intervened on three occasions.<sup>9</sup> He spoke during the general debate and all the participants were impressed not only by the quality of his arguments but also his remarkable discipline, not only strictly respecting the time given and the framework of the debate (a discipline that is often not so well respected by members of the ICC). He then presented, in a very imaginative manner, a summary of his theory of the origins of human civilisation and language,

7. Chris Knight is a British university teacher who up until 2009 taught anthropology at the University of East London. He is the author of the book *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture*, which we have reviewed on our website in English (<http://en.internationalism.org/2008/10/Chris-Knight>), and which is based in a very faithful manner on Darwin's theory of evolution and the works of Marx and above all Engels (especially in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*). He says he is “100% marxist” in the domain of anthropology. He is also a political militant who animates the Radical Anthropology Group and other groupings whose main mode of intervention is the organisation of street theatre that denounces and ridicules capitalist institutions. He was sacked from the University for having organised an event linked to the demonstrations against the G20 in London in March 2009. He was accused of “calling for murder” for having hanged an effigy of a banker and carrying a placard saying “Eat the bankers!”. We don't agree with some of Chris Knight's political positions or forms of action, but from having discussed with him for some time now, we are convinced of his total sincerity, his real dedication to the cause of the emancipation of the proletariat and his fierce conviction that science and a knowledge of science are fundamental weapons of that cause. In this sense we want to express our warmest solidarity with him against the repressive measures he has been subjected to (sacking and arrest).

8. See our article on the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress in *International Review* n° 138.

9. We will publish extracts from these interventions on our website.

talking about the first of the “revolutions” experienced by humanity, in which women acted as the driving force (an idea taken from Engels). This revolution was followed by several others, each time allowing society to progress. He sees the communist revolution as the culminating point in this series of revolutions and considers that, as with the previous ones, humanity has the means to succeed in making it.

Chris Knight's third intervention was a very sympathetic greeting to the Congress.

At the end of the Congress, the delegations felt that the discussion on marxism and science, and the participation of Chris Knight within it, had been one of the most interesting and satisfactory parts of the Congress, a moment which will encourage all the sections to pursue and develop an interest in theoretical questions.

Before concluding this article, we want to say that the participants at the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC (delegations, groups and comrades invited), which was held almost to the day 140 years after the bloody week that put an end to the Paris Commune, honoured the memory of the fighters of this first revolutionary attempt by the proletariat.<sup>10</sup>

We are not drawing a triumphalist balance sheet of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC, not least because it had to recognise the organisational difficulties we are facing, difficulties the ICC will have to overcome if it is to continue being present at the rendezvous which history is giving to revolutionary organisations. A long and difficult struggle awaits our organisation. But this perspective should not discourage us. After all, the struggle of the working class as a whole is also long and difficult, full of pitfalls and defeats. This is a

perspective that should inspire militants to carry on the struggle; a fundamental characteristic of every communist militant is to be a fighter.

ICC 31.7.2011

10. *"The participants at the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC dedicate this Congress to the memory of the fighters of the Commune who fell, exactly 140 years ago, at the hands of a bourgeoisie which was determined to make them pay dearly for their 'assault on the heavens'.*

*"In May 1917, for the first time in history, the proletariat made the ruling class tremble. It was the bourgeoisie's fear of the gravedigger of capitalism that explains the fury and barbarity of the repression meted out to the Commune insurgents.*

*"The experience of the Paris Commune has provided fundamental lessons to the ensuing generations of the working class. Lessons which enabled them to carry out the Russian evolution in 1917.*

*"The fighters of the Paris Commune, fallen under the bullets of Capital, will not have given their blood for nothing if, in its future combats, the working class is able to be inspired by the example of the Commune and to overturn capitalism.*

*"Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priest will not avail to redeem them" (Karl Marx, The Civil War in France)."*

19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC

## Resolution on the international situation

1) The resolution adopted by the previous ICC Congress pointed out right away how reality **had categorically refuted the optimistic predictions of the leaders of the capitalist class at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, particularly after the fall of the “Evil Empire”, the imperialist bloc which called itself “socialist”**. It cited the now famous declaration of **George Bush Senior in March 1991** announcing the birth of a “New World Order” based on respect for “international law”, underlining how surreal this declaration now seemed when confronted with the growing chaos engulfing capitalist society. Twenty years after this prophetic speech, and especially since the beginning of the last decade, the world has never been such a picture of chaos. In the space of a few weeks we have seen a new war in Libya, joining the list of bloody conflicts which have affected the planet in this period, new massacres in the Ivory Coast, and the tragedy which has hit one of the most powerful and modern countries in the world, Japan. The earthquake which ravaged part of the country underlined once again that these are not natural catastrophes but the catastrophic consequences of natural phenomena. It showed that society already has the means to construct buildings that resist earthquakes and which would make it possible to avoid tragedies like the one in Haiti last year. It also showed how even an advanced state like Japan is incapable of planning ahead: the earthquake in itself left few victims but the ensuing tsunami killed nearly 30,000 people in a few minutes. And by provoking a new Chernobyl it brought to light not only the lack of preparedness of the ruling class, but also its role as a sorcerer’s apprentice, unable to master the forces which it has set in motion. It was not the Tepco company running the Fukushima nuclear power station that was the first or the only one responsible for this disaster. It was the capitalist system as a whole, a system based on the frenzied hunt for profit by competing national units and not on the satisfaction of the needs of humanity, which fundamentally bears responsibility for the present and future catastrophes suffered by humanity. In the final analysis, the Japanese Chernobyl is a new illustration of the ultimate bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production, a

system whose survival constitutes a threat to humanity’s very survival.

2) The crisis which world capitalism is currently going through is the most direct and obvious expression of the historic bankruptcy of this mode of production. Two years ago the bourgeoisie in all countries was seized by an **almighty panic** faced with the gravity of the economic situation. The OECD didn’t hesitate to say that *“The world economy is in the midst of its deepest and most synchronised recession in our lifetimes”*.<sup>1</sup> When we know how **cautiously** this venerable institution usually expresses itself, we can get an idea of how scared the ruling class has been when faced with the potential collapse of its international financial system, the brutal fall in world trade (more than 13% in 2009), the depth of the recession in the main economies, the wave of bankruptcies hitting or threatening emblematic industrial enterprises like General Motors or Chrysler. This fear on the **bourgeoisie’s part led it to convene a number of G20 summits such as the one in March 2009, which decided to double the reserves of the International Monetary Fund and agreed that states should make massive investments of liquidities into the economy in order to save the banking system from perdition and get production going again.** The spectre of the Great Depression of the 1930s **was haunting them** and led the OECD to try to **shoo away such demons by writing that** *“While some have dubbed this severe global downturn a ‘great recession’, it will remain far from turning into a repeat of the 1930s Great Depression thanks to the quality and intensity of government policies that are currently being undertaken”*.<sup>2</sup> But as the resolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress said *“it is typical of the ruling class in its speeches of today to forget the speeches it made yesterday”*. The OECD’s *World Economic Outlook Interim Report* of spring 2011 expressed a real relief at the restoration of the banking system and the economic recovery. **The ruling class cannot act in any other way. It is incapable of giving a lucid, global and historic view of the difficulties encountered by capital, since such a view would lead it to discover the definitive impasse faced**

1. OECD, *World Economic Outlook Interim Report*, March 2009). English language version, p.5.

2. Ibid, p. 7.

by its system. **It is reduced to commenting on a day-to-day basis on the fluctuations of the immediate situation and thus to trying to find reasons for consoling itself.** In doing so it is led to underestimate the significance of the major phenomenon of the last two years: **the crisis of sovereign debt in a certain number of European states.** This is so even if the media sometimes adopt an alarmist tone about it. In fact, the potential bankruptcy of a growing number of states constitutes a new stage in capitalism’s plunge into insurmountable crisis. It highlights the limits of the policies through which the bourgeoisie has managed to hold back the evolution of the capitalist crisis for several decades.

3) The capitalist system has now been facing the current crisis for 40 years. May ‘68 in France, and all the proletarian struggles that followed it internationally, only took on such a breadth because they were fuelled by the world-wide deterioration of the living conditions of the working class, resulting from the first effects of the capitalist crisis, notably an increase in unemployment. This crisis went through a brutal acceleration in 1973-75 with the first big international recession of the post war period. Since then new recessions, each time deeper and more extensive, have hit the world economy, culminating in the one in 2008-9 which has revived the spectre of the 1930s. The measures adopted by the G20 of March 2009 to avoid a new Great Depression are significant expressions of the policy that the ruling class has been carrying out for several decades. **They boil down to the injection of a considerable mass of credit into the economy.** Such measures are not new. In fact for over 35 years they have been at the heart of the policies carried out by the ruling class aimed at escaping the major contradiction of the capitalist mode of production: **its inability to find solvent markets that can absorb its production.** The recession of 1973-5 was surmounted through the massive credits handed out to the third world countries, but since the beginning of the 1980s, with the debt crisis in these countries, the bourgeoisie of the most developed countries has had to give up this lung for its economy. It was then the states of the most advanced countries, and in the first place the USA,

which came forward as the “locomotives” of the world economy. The neo-liberal “Reaganomics” of the beginning of the 1980s, which permitted a significant recovery of the US economy, was based on an unprecedented development of budget deficits, even though Ronald Reagan also declared that *“the state is not the solution, it is the problem”*. At the same time the considerable trade deficit of the USA enabled the commodities produced by other countries to find outlets there. During the 1990s the Asiatic “tigers” and “dragons” (Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, etc) for a while accompanied the USA in its role as “locomotives”; **their spectacular rates of growth** became an important destination for the commodities of the most industrialised countries. But this “success story” was built at the price of a considerable indebtedness, which pushed these countries into major convulsions in 1997 along with the “new” and “democratic” Russia which found itself in default of payment, cruelly disappointing those who had banked on the “end of communism” to re-launch the world economy on a lasting basis. At the beginning of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there was a new acceleration of debt, particularly through the runaway development of housing mortgages in a number of countries, notably the USA. The latter thus accentuated its role as the locomotive of the world economy, but at the price of a colossal growth in debt, especially within the US population, based on all sorts of financial products aimed at reducing the risk of being in default of payment. In reality, this proliferation of dubious loans in no way prevented them from acting as a **Sword of Damocles** hanging over the American and world economy. On the contrary they could only accumulate the toxic debts in the capital of the banks, which was at the root of their collapse in 2007 and of the brutal world recession of 2008-9.

4) Thus as the resolution adopted at the last congress put it *“it is not the financial crisis which is at the origin of the current recession. On the contrary, the financial crisis merely illustrates the fact that the flight into debt, which made it possible to overcome overproduction, could not carry on indefinitely. Sooner or later, the ‘real economy’ would take its revenge. In other words, what was at the basis of the contradictions of capitalism, overproduction, the incapacity of the markets to absorb the totality of the commodities produced, had come back onto the scene”*. **And** the same resolution after the G20 summit of 2009 wrote that *“The only ‘solution’ the bourgeoisie can come up with is... a new flight into debt. The G20 could not invent a solution to the crisis for the good reason that there is no solution”*.

The crisis of sovereign debt that is spreading today, the fact that states are incapable of honouring their debts, is a spectacular illustration of this reality. The potential bankruptcy of the banking system and the **onset of the recession** have obliged all states to inject considerable sums into their economies, even though their revenues were in free fall because of the downturn in production. As a result of this, public deficits in most countries went through a considerable increase. For the most exposed ones such as Ireland, Greece or Portugal this meant a situation of potential bankruptcy, an inability to pay their public employees and to reimburse their debts. From then on the banks refused to grant them new loans, except at the most exorbitant rates, because they could not be at all sure they were **going to be repaid**. The “rescue plans” which they benefited from thanks to the European Bank and the IMF constitute new debts that were simply piled up on top of preceding ones. This is no longer a vicious circle; it is an infernal spiral. The only “effectiveness” of these plans consists of an unprecedented attack against the workers, against the public employees whose wages and jobs have been drastically reduced, but also against the whole of the working class through overt cuts in education, health and retirement pensions, and major tax increases. But all these anti-working class attacks, by massively amputating purchasing power, can only contribute further to a new recession.

5) The crisis of sovereign debts in the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) is only a small part of the earthquake threatening the world economy. It is not because they have been rated AAA in the index of confidence by the rating agencies (the same agencies which up until the eve of the debacle of the banks in 2008 gave the same banks the maximum rating) that the big industrial powers are holding out much better. In April, Standard and Poors gave a negative opinion about the perspective of a **Quantitative Easing** no 3, i.e. a 3<sup>rd</sup> recovery plan by the US Federal State, aimed at supporting the economy. **In other words the world’s first power** runs the risk of seeing a withdrawal in “official” confidence in its capacity to reimburse its debts; there is also a growing concern that any repayments will come in the shape of a strongly devalued dollar. In fact this confidence is already beginning to wear thin with the decision of China and Japan last autumn to buy massive quantities of gold and raw materials instead of American Treasury **Bonds, which led the Federal Bank** to buy between 70 and 90 percent of them. This lack of confidence is perfectly justified when we note the

incredible level of debt of the American economy: **in January 2010 public debt** (Federal State, States, municipalities) already represented nearly 100 percent of GNP, and this only constituted a part of the country’s **total debt, which also includes** the debts of households and non-financial enterprises. **This amounts to 300 per cent of GNP**. And the situation was no better in the other big countries, where on the same day total debts represented 280 percent of GNP for Germany, 320 percent for France, 470 percent for the UK and Japan. And **in the last country, the public debt alone reached 200 percent of GNP**. And since then in all countries the situation has only got worse with all the various recovery plans.

Thus the bankruptcy of the PIIGS is just the tip of the iceberg of the bankruptcy of world economy, which for decades has owed its survival to a desperate headlong flight into debt. States which have their own currency, such as the UK, Japan and obviously the US, have been able to hide this bankruptcy by printing money (unlike the countries of the Euro zone like Greece, Portugal or Ireland, which don’t have this possibility). But this permanent cheating by states, which have become **real counterfeiters, with the US state at the head of the gang**, cannot go on indefinitely, any more than **the trickery in the financial system**, as demonstrated by the financial crisis in 2008, which almost led to the explosion of the whole financial apparatus. One of the visible signs of this is the current acceleration of inflation on a world scale. By tipping over from the banking sphere to the level of states, **the debt crisis marks the entry of the capitalist mode of production into a new phase of its acute crisis**, which will considerably aggravate the violence, and extent of its convulsions. There is no light at the end of the tunnel of capitalism. This system can only lead society into an ever-increasing barbarism.

6) **Imperialist war constitutes the major expression of the barbarism into which decadent capitalism is dragging human society**. The tragic history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the most obvious expression of this: **faced with** the historic impasse of its mode of production, faced with the exacerbation of trade rivalries between states, the ruling class is forced to **rush towards military policies and conflicts**. For the majority of historians, including those who do not claim to be marxists, it is clear that the Second World War was born out of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Similarly the aggravation of **imperialist tensions at the end of the 1970s** and beginning of the 1980s, between the two blocs of the day, America and Russia (invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR in 1979, crusade against the “Evil Empire” by the Reagan administration) flowed to

a large extent from the return of the open crisis of the capitalist economy at the end of the 1960s. However, history has shown that this link between the aggravation of imperialist conflicts and the economic crisis of capitalism is not direct or immediate. The intensification of the Cold War ended up with the victory of the Western bloc through the implosion of the rival bloc, which in turn resulted in the break-up of the **Western bloc. While it escaped from the threat of a new generalised war** which could have led to the disappearance of the human species, the world has not been spared an explosion of military tensions and confrontations. **The end of the rival blocs** meant the end of the discipline that they were able to impose in their respective territories. Since then **the planetary imperialist arena has been dominated by the efforts of the world's leading power to maintain its world leadership, above all over its former allies.** The first Gulf war in 1991 already had this objective, but the history of the 1990s, particularly the war in Yugoslavia, has shown the failure of this ambition. The war against terrorism declared by the USA after the September 11 2001 attacks was a new attempt to reaffirm their leadership, but the fact that they simply got bogged down in Afghanistan and in Iraq underlined once again their inability to re-establish this leadership.

7) These failures of the USA have not discouraged Washington from pursuing the offensive policy that it has been carrying out since the beginning of the 1990s and which has made it the main factor of instability on the world scene. As the resolution from the last congress put it: *"Faced with this situation, Obama and his administration will not be able to avoid continuing the warlike policies of their predecessors.... if Obama has envisaged a US withdrawal from Iraq, it is in order to reinforce its involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan"*. This was illustrated recently with the execution of Bin Laden by an American commando raid on Pakistan territory. This "heroic" operation obviously had an electoral element as we are now a year and a half away from the US elections. In particular it was aimed at countering the criticism of the Republicans, who have reproached Obama with being soft in affirming US hegemony on the military level; these criticisms had been stepped up during the intervention in Libya where the leadership of the operation was left to the Franco-British tandem. It also meant that after using Bin Laden in the role of **Bad Guy for nearly ten years it was time to get rid of him in order not to appear completely impotent.** In doing so the USA proved that it is the only power with the military, technological and logistical means to carry out this kind of operation, precisely at the

time when France and Britain are having difficulty in carrying out their anti-Gaddafi operation. It notified the world that the US would not hesitate to violate the national "sovereignty" of an "ally", that it intends to fix the rules of the game wherever it judges it necessary. Finally it succeeded in obliging the governments of the world to salute the value of this exploit, often with considerable reluctance.

8) Having said this, the striking coup carried out by Obama in Pakistan will in no way make it possible to stabilise the situation in the region. In Pakistan itself this slap in the face to its national pride runs the risk of sharpening old conflicts between various sectors of the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus. Similarly, the death of Bin Laden will not allow the US and other countries engaged in Afghanistan to regain control of the country and back up the authority of the **Karzai government**, which is completely undermined by corruption and tribalism. More generally it will in no way make it possible to hold back the tendencies towards every man for himself and the growing challenge to the authority of the world's first power, which have continued to express themselves as we have seen recently with the constitution of a series of surprising temporary alliances: rapprochement between Turkey and Iran, alliance between Iran, Brazil and Venezuela (strategic and anti-US), between India and Israel (military and aimed at breaking out of isolation), between China and Saudi Arabia (military and strategic). In particular it will not be able to discourage China from pushing forward the imperialist ambitions which its recent status as a big industrial power enables it to have. It is clear that this country, despite its demographic and economic importance, does not have, and is unlikely to have, the military or technological means to constitute itself as the new head of a bloc. However, it does have the means to further perturb American ambitions, whether in Africa, Iran, North Korea or Burma, and to throw a further stone into the pond of instability which characterises imperialist relations. The **"New World Order" predicted 20 years ago** by George Bush Senior, which he dreamed about being under the guidance of the US, can only more and more present itself as a world chaos, which the convulsions of the capitalist economy can only aggravate more and more.

9) Faced with this chaos affecting bourgeois society at all levels – economic, military, and also environmental, as we saw recently in Japan – only the proletariat can bring a solution, its solution: the communist revolution. The insoluble crisis of the capitalist economy, the growing convulsions it is going through, constitute the

objective conditions for it. On the one hand by obliging the working class to develop its struggles against the growing attacks imposed by the exploiting class; on the other hand by enabling it to understand that these struggles take on all their significance as moments of preparation for its decisive confrontation with a capitalist mode of production condemned by history.

However, as the resolution from the last international congress put it: *"The road towards revolutionary struggles and the overthrow of capitalism is a long one... For consciousness of the possibility of the communist revolution to gain a significant echo within the working class, the latter has to gain confidence in its own strength, and this takes place through the development of massive struggles."* In a much more immediate sense, the resolution made it clear that *"the main form this attack is taking today, that of massive lay-offs, does not initially favour the emergence of such movements... It is in a second period, when it is less vulnerable to the bourgeoisie's blackmail, that workers will tend to turn to the idea that a united and solid struggle can push back the attacks of the ruling class, especially when the latter tries to make the whole working class pay for the huge budget deficits accumulating today with all the plans for saving the banks and stimulating the economy. This is when we are more likely to see the development of broad struggles by the workers"*.

10) The two years since the last congress have amply confirmed this prediction. This period has not seen wide-scale struggles against the massive lay-offs and rising unemployment being inflicted on the working class in the most developed countries. At the same time, significant struggles have begun to take place against the "necessary cuts in public spending". This response is still very timid, notably where these austerity plans have taken the most violent forms, in countries like Greece or Spain for example, even though the working class there had recently shown evidence of a rather important level of militancy. In a way it seems that the very brutality of the attacks provoke a feeling of powerlessness in the workers' ranks, all the more because they are being carried out by "left" governments. Paradoxically, it is where the attacks seem the least violent, in France for example, where workers' combativity has been expressed in the most massive way, with the movement against the pension reforms in the autumn of 2010.

11) At the same time, the most massive movements we have seen in the recent period have not taken place in the most industrialised countries but in countries on the peripheries of capitalism, notably



in a number of countries in the Arab world, particularly Tunisia and Egypt where, in the end, after trying to meet the movements with ferocious repression, the bourgeoisie was forced to get rid of the local dictators. These movements were not classic workers' struggles like the ones these countries had seen in the recent past (for example the struggles in Gafsa in Tunisia in 2008 or the massive strikes in the textile industry in Egypt in the summer of 2007, which encountered the solidarity of a number of other sectors). They often took the form of social revolts in which all different sectors of society were involved: workers from public and private sectors, the unemployed, but also small shopkeepers, artisans, the liberal professions, educated young people etc. This is why the proletariat only rarely appeared directly in a distinct way (for example in the strikes in Egypt towards the end of the revolt there); still less did it assume the role of a leading force. However, at the origin of these movements, reflected in many of the demands that were raised, we find fundamentally the same causes as those at the origin of the workers' struggles in other countries: the considerable aggravation of the crisis, the growing misery it provokes within the entire non-exploiting population. And while the proletariat did not in general appear directly as a class in these movements, its imprint was still there in countries where the working class has a significant weight, especially through the deep solidarity expressed in the revolts, their ability to avoid being drawn into acts of blind and desperate violence despite the terrible repression they had to face. In the end, if the bourgeoisie in Tunisia and Egypt finally resolved, on the good advice of the American bourgeoisie, to get rid of the old dictators, it was to a large extent because of the presence of the working class in these movements. One of the proofs of this was the outcome of the movement in Libya: not the overthrow of the old dictator Gaddafi but military confrontation between bourgeois cliques in which the exploited were enrolled as cannon fodder. In this country, a large part of the working class was made up of immigrant workers (Egyptian, Tunisian, Chinese, Sub-Saharan, Bangladeshi) whose main reaction was to flee the repression which was unleashed in a ferocious manner in the first few days.

**12)** The military outcome of the movement in Libya, with the entry of NATO forces into the conflict, enables the bourgeoisie to promote campaigns of mystification aimed at the workers of the advanced countries, whose spontaneous reaction was to feel solidarity with the demonstrators of Tunis and Cairo and to salute their courage and determination. In particular, the massive presence of the educated youth,

who face a future of unemployment and poverty, echoed the recent movements of educated youth in a number of western European countries in the recent period: the movement against the CPE in France in the spring of 2006, revolts and strikes in Greece at the end of 2008, demonstrations and strikes by high school and university students in the UK at the end of 2010, the student movements in the USA and Italy in 2008 and 2010, etc. The bourgeois campaigns aimed at distorting the significance of the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt were obviously facilitated by the illusions which weighed heavily on the working class in these countries: nationalist, democratic and trade unionist illusions in particular, as had been the case in 1980-81 with the struggle of the Polish proletariat.

**13)** 30 years ago this movement enabled the ICC to put forward its critical analysis of the theory of the "weak link" developed in particular by Lenin at the time of the revolution in Russia. At this point the ICC had argued, on the basis of the positions elaborated by Marx and Engels, that it was from the central countries of capitalism, above all the old industrial countries of Europe, that the signal for the world proletarian revolution would be sent out, owing to the concentrated nature of the proletariat in these countries, and even more because of its historic experience, which will provide it with the best weapons to finally spring the most sophisticated ideological traps laid by the bourgeoisie for a very long time. Thus, one of the most fundamental steps to be taken by the world working class in the future is not only the development of massive struggles in the central countries of western Europe but also its capacity to break out of the democratic and trade union traps, above all by taking charge of its own struggles. These movement will constitute a beacon for the world working class, including the class in the main capitalist power, the USA, whose dive into growing poverty, already hitting tens of millions of workers, is going to turn the "American Dream" into a real nightmare.

**14)** The movement of autumn 2010 against the pension reforms in France, a country whose proletariat, since May 1968, constitutes a kind of reference point for many workers of other European countries, put into relief the fact that the working class is still far from attaining the capacity to overcome the grip of the unions and take control of its struggles, a reality expressed all the more clearly during the massive "mobilisation" organised by the British trade unions in March 2011 against the austerity plans of the Cameron government. However, the fact that within this movement against the pension reforms in France, despite the overall grip of the

Intersyndicale, a number of "inter-professional assemblies" were formed in different towns, expressing the will to react against this grip, to take direct control of struggles through assemblies open to all, to overcome professional divisions, is an indication that the working class is beginning to take the road towards this essential step.

Similarly, the fact that during the recent period we have seen numerous struggles in the countries of the periphery shows that the conditions are beginning to come together for the future decisive struggles in the central countries to give the signal for the world-wide extension of class movements.

The crisis is going to hit the world working class with increasing cruelty. But whatever the traps laid by the bourgeoisie, whatever the proletariat's hesitations faced with the immensity of the task before it, the class will be obliged to struggle in an increasingly massive and conscious manner. It's the task of revolutionaries to play a full part in these coming combats, so that the proletariat can accomplish the mission conferred on it by history: the overthrow of capitalism with all its barbarity, the edification of a communist society, the passage of humanity from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom.

## Decadence of Capitalism (x)

# For revolutionaries, the Great Depression confirms the obsolescence of capitalism

There was no real recovery of world capitalism after the devastation of the First World War. Most of the economies of Europe stagnated, never really solving the problems posed by the disruption of war and revolution, by outdated plant and massive unemployment. The plight of the once powerful British economy was typified by the situation in 1926 when it resorted to direct wage cuts in a vain attempt to restore its competitive edge on the world market, provoking the 10-day General Strike in solidarity with the miners whose wages and conditions were the central target of the attack. The only real boom was in the USA, which benefited both from the sorrows of its former rivals and the accelerated development of mass production symbolised by the Detroit assembly lines churning out the Model T Ford. America's coronation as the world's leading economic power also made it possible to pull German capital from the floor thanks to the injection of massive loans. But all the din of the "Roaring Twenties" in the US and in pockets elsewhere could not hide the fact that this recovery was not founded on any substantial extension of the world market, in marked contrast to the massive growth in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The boom, already largely fuelled by speculation and bad debts, was laying the ground for the shattering crisis of overproduction which broke out in 1929, rapidly engulfed the world economy and buried it in the deepest depression it had ever known (see first article in the series, in *International Review* n° 132).

This was not a return to the "boom and bust" cycle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but an entirely new disease: the first major economic crisis of a new era in the life of capitalism. It was a confirmation of what the vast majority of revolutionaries had concluded in response to the war of 1914: the bourgeois mode of production had become obsolete, a system in decay. The Great Depression of the 1930s was interpreted by nearly all the political expressions of the working class as a further confirmation of this diagnosis, not least because as the years passed it became increasingly evident that there would be no spontaneous recovery and that the crisis was pushing the system closer and closer to a second imperialist carve-up.

But this new crisis did not give rise to a new wave of revolutionary struggles, even if there were important class movements in a number of countries. The working class had suffered a historic defeat following the strangling of revolutionary attempts in Germany, Hungary, Italy and elsewhere, and the agonising death of the revolution in Russia. With the triumph of Stalinism in the Communist parties, the surviving revolutionary currents had shrunk to small minorities struggling to clarify the reasons

for this defeat and unable to exert any major influence within the working class. Nevertheless, understanding the historical trajectory of capitalism's crisis was a crucial element in guiding these groups through this gloomy period.

### Responses from the proletarian political movement: Trotskyism and anarchism

The left opposition current around Trotsky, regrouping itself into a new Fourth International, published its programme in 1938, with the title *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the 4<sup>th</sup> International*. In continuity with the Third International, it affirmed that capitalism was in irremediable decay. "*The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate... All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet 'ripened' for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only 'ripened'; they have begun to get somewhat*

*rotten.*" This is not the place for a detailed critique of the "transitional programme" as it has come to be known. Despite its marxist starting point, it presents a view of the relationship between objective and subjective conditions which veer off into both vulgar materialism and idealism: on the one hand, it tends to present the decadence of the system as an absolute halt to the development of the productive forces; on the other, the reaching of this objective dead-end means that only the correct leadership is required to transform the crisis into revolution. The opening words of the document state that "*The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat*". Hence the voluntarist attempt to form a new International in a period of counter-revolution. Indeed for Trotsky, the defeat of the proletariat is precisely why the proclamation of the new International is required: "*Sceptics ask: But has the moment for the creation of the Fourth International yet arrived? It is impossible, they say, to create an International 'artificially'; it can arise only out of great events, etc etc.... The Fourth International has already arisen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history*". In all these calculations, the actual level of class consciousness in the proletariat, its capacity to affirm itself as an independent force, is more or less placed in the margins. This approach is not unrelated to the semi-reformist and state capitalist content of many of the "transitional demands" contained in the programme, since they are viewed less as real solutions to the constriction of the productive forces than as a sophisticated means of enticing the proletariat from the pen of its present, corrupt leadership and shepherding it towards the correct one. The transitional programme is thus built on a complete disjuncture between the analysis of capitalist decay and its programmatic consequences.

Anarchists have often disagreed with marxists about the latter's insistence on

basing the prospects of revolution on the objective conditions attained by capitalist development. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism's epoch of ascent, anarchists like Bakunin tended to argue that the uprising of the masses was possible at any moment, accusing the marxists of postponing the revolutionary struggle to some distant future. Consequently, in the period that followed the First World War there was little attempt by the anarchist currents to draw out the consequences of capitalism's entrance into its decadent phase, since for many of them nothing much had changed. Nevertheless, the sheer scale of the economic crisis in the 1930s also convinced some of its best elements that capitalism had indeed reached its epoch of decline. The exiled Russian anarchist Maximoff, in *My Social Credo*, published in 1933, asserts that "this process of decline dates from the time just after the First World War, and it has assumed the form of increasingly acute and growing economic crises, which during recent years, have sprung up simultaneously in the countries of the victors and the vanquished. At the time of writing (1933-1934) the crisis has attacked nearly every country in a veritable world crisis of the capitalist system. Its prolonged nature and its universal scope can in no way be accounted for by the theory of periodical political crises". He goes on to show how capitalism's efforts to pull itself out of the crisis through protectionist measures, wage cuts and state planning are only deepening the contradictions of the system: "capitalism, which has given birth to a new social scourge, is unable to get rid of its own evil offspring without killing itself in the process. The logical development of this trend must unavoidably bring about the following dilemma: either a complete disintegration of society, or the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a new, more progressive social system. There can be no other alternative. The modern form of social organisation has run its course and is proving, in our times, an obstacle to human advance, as well as a source of social decay. This outworn system is therefore due to be relegated to the museum of social evolutionary relics". Maximoff, it is true, sounds very much like a marxist in this text, as he does when he argues that capitalism's inability to extend itself will prevent the crisis from resolving itself in the old way: "In the past, capitalism would have saved itself from deadly crisis by seizing colonial markets and those of the agrarian nations. Nowadays, most of the colonies are themselves competing in the world market with the metropolitan countries, while the agrarian lands are proceeding in the direction of intensive industrialisation". Similar clarity on the characteristics of the new period can be

found in the writings of the British group, the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, although here the influence of the marxists of the German/Dutch communist left was much more direct.<sup>1</sup>

### The Italian/Belgian communist left

This was no accident: it was the communist left which was the most rigorous in analysing the historic significance of the economic depression as an expression of the decadence of capitalism and in seeking to locate the roots of the crisis in the marxist theory of accumulation. The Italian and Belgian Fractions of the Communist Left, in particular, consistently founded all of their programmatic positions on the recognition that the crisis of capitalism was historic and not merely cyclical: for example the rejection of national struggles, and of democratic demands, which clearly distinguished this current from the Trotskyists, was based not on any abstract sectarianism but on an insistence that the changed conditions of world capitalism had rendered these aspects of the proletariat's programme obsolete. This same search for coherence prompted the comrades of the Italian and Belgian left to plunge into a profound study of the inner dynamics of the capitalist crisis. Inspired also by the recent translation into French of Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital*, this study gave rise to the articles penned by Mitchell, "Crises and cycles of capitalism in agony", published in *Bilan* n°s 10 and 11 in 1934 (republished in *International Reviews* n°s 102 and 103).

Mitchell's articles go back to Marx to examine the nature of value and the commodity, the process of exploitation of labour, and the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system that reside in the production of surplus value itself. For Mitchell, there was a clear continuity between Marx and Rosa Luxemburg in recognising the inability of the entirety of the surplus value to be realised by the combined consumption of workers and capitalists. Regarding Marx's schemas of reproduction, which are at the heart of the controversy sparked by Luxemburg's book,

1. For example: the APCF paper *Advance*, in May 1936, published an article by Willie McDougall, entitled "Capitalism must go", explaining the economic crisis in terms of overproduction, the article concludes that: "[Capitalism's] historic mission - the superseding of feudalism - has been accomplished. It has raised the level of production to heights undreamed of by its own pioneers, but its peak point has been reached and decline set in. "Whenever a system becomes a fetter to the expansion or proper functioning of the forces of production, a revolution is immanent and it is doomed to make way for a successor. Just as feudalism had to give way to the more productive system of capitalism, so must the latter be swept from the path of progress to make way for socialism."

Mitchell has this to say:

"it seems to us that if Marx, in his schemas of enlarged reproduction, hypothesised an entirely capitalist society where the only opposition was between capitalists and proletarians, this was precisely in order to demonstrate the absurdity of a capitalist society one day achieving an equilibrium and harmonious with the needs of humanity. This would mean that the surplus value available for accumulation, thanks to the expansion of production, could be realised directly, on the one hand by the purchases of new means of production, on the other by the demand of the extra workers (and where would they be found?) and that the capitalists would have been transformed from wolves into peaceful progressives.

"Had Marx been able to continue the development of his schemas, he would have ended with this opposing conclusion: that a capitalist market which can no longer be extended by the incorporation of non-capitalist milieus - which is impossible historically - would mean an end to the process of accumulation and the end of capitalism itself. Consequently, to present these schemas (as some 'marxists' have done) as the image of capitalist production able to continue without imbalance, without overproduction, without crises, is consciously to falsify marxism".<sup>2</sup>

But Mitchell's text does not remain at the abstract level. It takes us through the main phases of the ascent and decline of the whole capitalist system, from the cyclical crises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which he attempts to show the interaction between the problem of realisation and the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, the development of imperialism and monopoly, and the end of the cycle of national wars after the 1870s. While highlighting the growing role of finance capital, he criticises Bukharin's tendency to see imperialism as a product of finance capital rather than a response of capital to its inner contradictions. He analyses the hunt for colonies and the growing competition between the major imperialist powers as the immediate factors behind the First World War, which marks the entry of the system into its crisis of senility. He then identifies some of the main features of capitalism's mode of life in this new era: the increasing recourse to debt and fictitious capital, the massive interference of the state in economic life, typified by fascism but expressing a more general tendency, the growing divorce between money and real value symbolised by the abandoning of the gold standard. Capitalism's short-lived recovery after the first world war is explained with reference to a number of factors: the destruction of

2. *Bilan* n° 10.

hypertrophied capital, the demand generated by the need to reconstruct shattered economies, the unique position of the USA as the new powerhouse of the world economy – but above all to the “fictitious prosperity” created by credit: this post-war growth was not based on a real expansion of the global market and was therefore very different from the recoveries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the same token, the world crisis that broke out in 1929 was not like the cyclical crises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: not simply in scale but because of its irresolvable nature, which guaranteed that there would be no automatic or spontaneous shift from bust to boom. Capitalism would henceforward survive by increasingly flouting its own laws: “If we consider the determining factors of capitalism’s general crisis, we can understand why the world crisis cannot be absorbed by the ‘natural’ action of capitalism’s economic laws, and why on the contrary these laws have been emptied out by the combined power of finance capital and the capitalist state, which have compressed all manifestations of particular capitalist interests”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, if the manipulations of the state permitted an increase in production, this was devoted largely to the military sector and preparations for a new war. “wherever it turns, however it tries to escape the grip of the crisis, capitalism is pushed irresistibly towards its destiny of war. Where and how the war will break out is impossible to determine today. What is important to say and to state clearly is that it will explode over the division of Asia and that it will be world wide”.<sup>4</sup>

Without going further into the strengths, and some of the weaker points, of Mitchell’s analysis,<sup>5</sup> this text is a remarkable one by any standards, one of the communist left’s first attempts to provide a coherent, unified and historical analysis of the process of capitalism’s rise and descent.

### The German/Dutch communist left

In the tradition of the German-Dutch left, which had been severely decimated by counter-revolutionary repression in Germany itself, the “Luxemburgist” analysis was still adhered to by a number of groups. But there was also a major trend in another direction, in particular within the Dutch left and the US group around Paul Mattick. In 1929 Henryk Grossman published a major work on the theory of crisis: *The*

*Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*. The Groep van Internationale Communisten (GIC) in Holland declared it to be “remarkable”,<sup>6</sup> while in 1934 Paul Mattick published a summary (and development) of Grossman’s ideas in “The Permanent Crisis – Henryk Grossman’s Interpretation of Marx’s Theory of Capitalist Accumulation” in *International Council Correspondence*, Volume 1, n° 2. This text explicitly acknowledged Grossman’s contribution while developing his thesis on certain points. Despite Grossman’s status as a sympathiser of the KPD and other Stalinist parties, and despite his assessment of Mattick as a “sectarian” politically speaking,<sup>7</sup> he and Mattick maintained a correspondence for some time, largely around the issues posed by Grossman’s book.

Grossman’s book was therefore published in advance of the outbreak of the world crisis, but it certainly inspired a number of revolutionaries to apply his thesis to the concrete reality of the Great Depression. At the heart of Grossman’s book was his insistence that the theory of capitalist breakdown is absolutely central to Marx’s *Capital*, even if Marx was not able to draw it to a conclusion. The revisers of marxism – Bernstein, Kautsky, Tugan Baranowski, Otto Bauer and others – had all rejected the notion of capitalist collapse and this was entirely consistent with their reformist politics. For Grossman, it was axiomatic that socialism would come about not simply because capitalism was an immoral system but because the historical evolution of capitalism itself would plunge it into insurmountable contradictions, turning into a fetter on the further growth of the productive forces: “At a certain point in its historical development capitalism fails to encourage the expansion of the productive forces any further. From this point on, the downfall of capitalism becomes economically inevitable. To provide an exact description of this process and to grasp its causes through a scientific analysis of capitalism was the real task Marx posed for himself in *Capital*.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, “if there is no economic reason why capitalism must necessarily fail, then socialism can replace capitalism on purely extra-economic – political or psychological or moral – grounds. But in that case we abandon the materialist basis of a scientific argument for the necessity of

socialism, the deduction of this necessity from the economic movement”.<sup>9</sup>

Thus far Grossman agreed with Luxemburg who had led the way in reaffirming the centrality of the notion of collapse, and on this point he sided with her against the revisionists. However, Grossman considered that Luxemburg’s theory of crisis was deeply flawed, based on a misunderstanding of the method Marx had tried to develop in his use of the reproduction schema: “instead of testing Marx’s reproduction scheme within the framework of his total system and especially of his theory of accumulation, instead of asking what role it plays methodologically in the structure of his theory, instead of analysing the schema of accumulation down to its ultimate conclusion, Luxemburg was unconsciously influenced by them (the revisionist epigones). She came around to believing that Marx’s schemes really do allow for unlimited accumulation”.<sup>10</sup> As a result, he argued, she shifted the problem from the primary sphere of the production of surplus value to the secondary sphere of circulation. Grossman re-examined the scheme of reproduction that Otto Bauer had adapted from Marx in his critique of *The Accumulation of Capital*.<sup>11</sup> Bauer’s aim here had been to disprove Luxemburg’s contention that capitalism would be faced with an irresolvable problem in the realisation of surplus value once it had eliminated all “external” markets; for Bauer, the demographic growth of the proletariat would be sufficient to absorb all the surplus value needed to maintain accumulation. It should be emphasised (because this accusation has been made, particularly by Pannekoek, whose critique of Grossman we shall come back to) that Grossman did not make the mistake of regarding Bauer’s schema as a real description of capitalist accumulation:

“I shall show that Bauer’s scheme reflects and can reflect only the value side of the reproduction process. In this sense it cannot describe the real process of accumulation in terms of value and use value. Secondly, Bauer’s mistake lies in his supposing that the scheme is somehow an illustration of the actual processes in capitalism, and in forgetting the simplifications that go together with it. But these shortcomings do not reduce the value of Bauer’s scheme”.<sup>12</sup> Grossman’s intention in following up Bauer’s schema to their “mathematical” conclusion was to show that even without a problem of realisa-

3. *Bilan* n° 11.

4. *Ibid.*

5. In particular the paragraphs dealing with the destruction of capital and labour in war. See the introduction to the debate on the factors behind the “Thirty Glorious Years” in *IR* n° 133 and footnote 2 to the second part of the Mitchell article in *IR* n° 103.

6. PIC, Persdinst van de Groep van Internationale Communisten no. 1, January 1930 “Een marwaardog boek”, cited in the ICC’s *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, 2001, p 271.

7. Rick Kuhn, *Henryk Grossman and the Recovery of Marxism*, Chicago 2007, p 184.

8. *The law of accumulation and breakdown of the capitalist system*, 1992 abridged English edition, Pluto Press, p36.

9. *Ibid.* p56.

10. *Ibid.* p125.

11. Bauer, “The accumulation of capital”, *Die Neue Zeit*, 1913. An English translation was published in *History of Political Economy*, n°18:1, 1986.

12. Grossman, *op. cit.*, p.69.

tion, capitalism would inevitably run up against insuperable barriers. Taking into account the rising organic composition of capital and the resulting tendency for the rate of profit to fall, the global enlargement of capital would culminate in a point where the absolute mass of profit would be insufficient to fund further accumulation, and the system would be faced with collapse. In Grossman's hypothetical treatment of Bauer's schema, this point is reached after 35 years: from this point on, "any further accumulation of capital under the conditions postulated would be quite meaningless. The capitalist would be wasting effort over the management of a productive system whose fruits are entirely absorbed by the share of workers. If this state persisted it would mean a destruction of the capitalist mechanism, its economic end. For the class of entrepreneurs, accumulation would not only be meaningless, it would be objectively impossible because the over-accumulated capital would lie idle, would not be able to function, would fail to yield any profits".<sup>13</sup>

This led some of Grossman's critics to argue that he thought he could predict with absolute certainty the point when capitalism would become impossible. However, this was never his aim. Grossman was simply trying to re-appropriate Marx's theory of collapse by explaining why Marx considered the tendency towards the fall in the rate of profit to be the central contradiction in the accumulation process. "This fall in the rate of profit at the stage of over-accumulation is different from the fall at earlier stages of the accumulation of capital. A falling rate of profit is a permanent symptom of the progress of accumulation through all of its stages, but at the initial stages of accumulation it goes together with an expanding mass of profits and expanded capitalist consumption. Beyond certain limits however the falling rate of profit is accompanied by a fall in the surplus value earmarked for capitalist consumption and soon afterwards of the portion of surplus value destined for accumulation. 'The fall in the rate of profit would then be accompanied by an absolute decrease in the mass of profit' Marx, *Capital* Vol. 3, chap XV, p 252."<sup>14</sup>

For Grossman the crisis came about not, as Rosa Luxemburg argued, because capitalism was faced with "too much" surplus value, but because it would end up with too little value extracted from the exploitation of the workers to make further investment in accumulation profitable for the capitalists. Overproduction crises did occur but they were fundamentally a result of the over-accumulation of constant

capital: "The ensuing overproduction of commodities is a consequence of imperfect valorisation due to over-accumulation. The crisis is not caused by disproportionality between expansion of production and lack of purchasing power—that is, by a shortage of consumers. The crisis intervenes because no use is made of the purchasing power that exists. This is because it does not pay to expand production any further since the scale of production makes no difference to the amount of surplus value now obtainable. So on the one hand purchasing power remains idle. On the other, the elements of production lie unsold."<sup>15</sup>

Grossman's book is very much a return to Marx and he does not hesitate to criticise "eminent" marxists like Lenin and Bukharin for failing to analyse capitalism's crises or its imperialist drives as expressions of its inner contradictions, for focusing instead on outward manifestations (in Lenin's case, for example, the existence of monopolies as a "cause" of imperialism). In the Introduction to his book, Grossman explains the methodological premise underlying this criticism: "I have tried to show how the empirically ascertainable tendencies of the world economy which are regarded as defining characteristics of the latest stage of capitalism (monopolistic organisations, export of capital, the struggle to divide up the sources of raw materials, etc) are only secondary surface appearances that stem from the essence of capital accumulation as their primary basis. Through this inner connection it is possible to use a single principle, the Marxian law of value, to explain clearly all the appearances of capitalism without recourse to any *ad hoc* theories, and to throw light on its latest stage – imperialism. I do not labour the point that this is the only form in which the tremendous consistency of Marx's economic system can be clearly drawn out".

Continuing in the same vein, Grossman then defends himself in advance from the charge of "pure economism":

"Because I deliberately confine myself to describing only the economic presuppositions of the breakdown of capitalism in this study, let me dispel any suspicion of 'pure economism' from the start. It is unnecessary to waste paper over the connection between economics and politics; that there is a connection is obvious. However, whilst Marxists have written extensively on the political revolution, they have neglected to deal theoretically with the economic aspect of the question and have failed to appreciate the true content of Marx's theory of breakdown. My sole concern here is to fill

in this gap in the Marxist tradition".<sup>16</sup>

This should be kept in mind when Grossman is charged with portraying the final crisis of the system as a simple inability of the economic machine to function any longer. However, leaving aside the impression created by many of his abstract formulations about capitalist collapse, there is a more fundamental problem about Grossman's attempt to "throw light on (capitalism's) latest stage – imperialism". Unlike Mitchell, for example, he does not explicitly argue that his work is aimed at clarifying the conclusions reached by the Third International, i.e. that the First World War had ushered in the epoch of capitalist decline, the epoch of "wars and revolutions". In some passages, for example in taking Bukharin to task for seeing (world) war as proof that the epoch of breakdown has arrived, he tends to downplay the significance of world war as an unmistakeable sign of the senility of the capitalist mode of production. It's true that he accepts that it "might very well be the case" that the epoch of breakdown has arrived, and that his main objection to Bukharin's argument is the suggestion that war is the "cause" of the decline and not its symptom; but Grossman also argues that "far from being a threat to capitalism, wars are a means of prolonging the existence of the capitalist system as whole. The facts show precisely that after every war capitalism has entered on a period of new upsurge."<sup>17</sup> This represents a serious underestimation of the menace that capitalist war holds for the survival of humanity and does strengthen the idea that for Grossman the "final crisis" will be a purely economic one. Furthermore, although Grossman's book contains a number of efforts to concretise his economic analysis – showing the inevitable increase in inter-imperialist competition brought about by the tendency towards breakdown – his emphasis on the inevitability of a future "final crisis" that would compel the working class to overthrow the system leaves it unclear whether the historical epoch of proletarian revolution has already arrived.

### Mattick and the epoch of permanent crisis

In this sense, Mattick's text is more explicit than Grossman's book in locating the crisis of capitalism in the general context of historical materialism and thus against the background of the rise and fall of different modes of production. Thus the starting point in the document is the affirmation that "Capitalism as an economic system had the historical mission of developing the productive forces of society to a much

13. Ibid. p.76.

14. Ibid. p.76-77.

15. Ibid. p.132.

16. Ibid. p.32-33.

17. Ibid. pp. 49-50.

greater extent than was possible under any previous system. The motive force in the development of the productive forces in capitalism is the race for profit. But for that very reason this process of development can continue only as long as it is profitable. From this point of view capital becomes a barrier to the continuous development of the productive forces as soon as that development comes into conflict with the necessity for profit". For Mattick there is no doubt that the epoch of capitalist decline has arrived and that we are now in a phase of "permanent crisis" as the title argues – even though there can be temporary booms brought about by capitalist counter-measures, such as the increase in absolute exploitation, this is a "boom in the death crisis, a gain that does not indicate development but decay". Again, perhaps more plainly than Grossman, Mattick does not argue for an "automatic" collapse once the rate of profit has declined beyond a certain level: he shows capitalism's reaction to its historic impasse by increasing the exploitation of the working class, to wring out the last drops of surplus value needed for accumulation, and by marching towards world war to appropriate cheaper raw materials, conquer markets and annex new sources of labour power; at the same time wars, like the economic crisis itself, are seen as "gigantic devaluations of constant capital by violent destruction of value as well as of use value forming its material base". These twin drives towards increased exploitation and world war will in Mattick's view provoke a reaction from the working class that will open up the perspective of proletarian revolution. Already the Great Depression is "the greatest crisis in capitalist history" but "whether it will be the last for capitalism, as well as for the workers, depends on the action of the latter".

Mattick's work is thus clearly in continuity with prior attempts by the Communist International and the communist left to understand the decadence of the system. And while Grossman had already looked into the limits of the counter-tendencies to the fall in the rate of profit, Mattick again made these more concrete by looking at the actual unfolding of the world capitalist crisis in the period opened up by the 1929 crash.

In our view, despite Mattick's concretisations of Grossman's theory, there remains an area of abstraction in this general approach. We are baffled by Grossman's view that there is "no trace in Marx" of a problem of insufficient market outlets.<sup>18</sup> It is certainly not the case that the problem of realisation or "circulation" lies outside the accumulation process but is an indis-

pensable part of it. By the same token, Grossman's seems to dismiss the problem of overproduction as a mere by-product of the fall in the rate of profit, ignoring those passages in Marx which clearly root it in the fundamental relationship between wage labour and capital.<sup>19</sup> And while Luxemburg, developing on these elements, provides a coherent framework for understanding why the very triumph of capitalism as a global system should propel it into its era of decline, it is harder to grasp at what point the rising organic composition of capital reaches a level where the counter-tendencies are used up and decline sets in. Indeed, in explaining foreign trade as one of these counter-tendencies, Mattick himself sounds a little Luxemburgist when he argues that the conversion of the colonies into capitalist countries removes this vital option: "Foreign trade as a counter-tendency eliminates itself by turning capital-importing countries into capital exporting countries, by forcing their industrial development through a hot house growth. As the force of the counter-tendencies is stopped, the tendency of capitalist collapse is left in control. Then we have the permanent crisis, or the death-crisis of capitalism. The only means left for the continued existence of capitalism is then the permanent, absolute and general pauperisation of the proletariat". In our opinion this is an indication that the problem of realisation – the necessity for the permanent extension of the global market to offset the inner contradictions of capital – cannot be removed from the equation so easily.<sup>20</sup>

However, the aim of this chapter is not to delve again into the arguments for or against Luxemburg's theory, but to show that the "alternative" explanation for the crisis contained in the Grossman-Mattick theory is also entirely framed in an understanding of the decline of capitalism. This however is not the case for the principal criticism of the Grossman-Mattick thesis made within the communist left in the 1930s – Pannekoek's "The theory of capitalist

19. See a previous article in this series, "The mortal contradictions of bourgeois society", in *International Review* n° 139

20. In a later work, *Economic Crises and Crisis Theory* (1974), Mattick returns to this problem, and recognises that Marx did effectively see the problem of overproduction as being not merely a consequence of the falling rate of profit, but a contradiction in its own right, deriving in particular from the restricted "consuming power" of the working class. In fact his intellectual honesty leads him to pose an uncomfortable question: "Here we find ourselves facing the question raised earlier, whether Marx had two crisis theories, one deriving crisis from the theory of value as the falling rate of profit, and the other deriving it from the insufficient consumption of the workers" (from chapter 3, "The Epigones". The answer he puts forward, in fact, is that Marx's "underconsumptionist" formulations must be imputed to "either an error of judgement or unclear writing" (chapter 2. "Marx's Crisis Theory").

collapse", first published in. *Ratekorrespondenz* in June 1934.<sup>21</sup>

### Pannekoek's critique of the "theory of collapse"

In the 1930s Pannekoek was working very closely with the Groep van Internationale Communisten, and his text was no doubt written in response to the growing popularity of Grossman's theories inside the council communist current: it mentions the fact that the theory had already been integrated into the manifesto of Mattick's United Workers Party. The opening paragraphs of the text hint at what may have been a perfectly justified concern – to avoid the mistakes made by a number of German communists at the time of the revolutionary wave, when the idea of a "death crisis" was taken to imply that capitalism had already exhausted all options and only needed the slightest push to topple it utterly, a standpoint that was often mixed up with voluntarist and adventurist actions. However, as we have argued elsewhere,<sup>22</sup> the essential flaw in the argument of those who put forward the notion of the death crisis in the post-war period was not the notion of capitalist collapse – which is better understood as a process that may last for many decades than as a sudden crash apparently coming from nowhere – but the conflation of two distinct phenomena: the historic decline of capitalism as a mode of production and the conjunctural economic crisis – however profound – that the system may pass through at a given moment. In polemicising against the idea of capitalist collapse as something immediate and expressed purely on the economic level, Pannekoek fell into the trap of repudiating the notion of capitalist decline altogether – a view consistent with other positions he adhered to at the time, such as the possibility of capitalist revolutions in the colonial regions and the "bourgeois role of Bolshevism" in Russia.

Pannekoek begins by criticising Rosa Luxemburg's theory of collapse. He repeats familiar criticisms of her theories – that they were based on a non-problem and that the mathematics of Marx's reproduction schemas shows that there is no fundamental problem of realisation for capitalism. However, the main target of Pannekoek's text was Grossman's theory.

Pannekoek takes Grossman to task on two main levels: the lack of congruence between Marx's crisis theory and Grossman's; and the tendency to see the

21. English translation by Adam Buick in *Capital and Class*, Spring 1977 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1934/collapse.htm>

22. "The Age of Catastrophes" in *International Review* n° 143

crisis as an automatic factor in the advent of socialism which will require little in the way of self-conscious action by the working class. A number of Pannekoek's detailed criticisms of the use of Bauer's tables suffer from a flawed starting point – i.e. that he accuses Grossman of taking Bauer's tables literally. We have shown this to be false. More serious is his accusation that Grossman misunderstands and even consciously “rewrites” Marx on the relation between the fall in the rate of profit and the rise in the mass of profit. Pannekoek insists that since an increase in the mass of profit always accompanied the fall in the rate, Marx never envisioned a situation where there would be an absolute dearth of surplus value: “*Marx speaks of over-accumulation precipitating a crisis, of there being too much accumulated surplus value which is not invested and which depresses profits. But Grossman's collapse comes about through there being too little accumulated surplus value.*”

These criticisms are difficult to follow: there is no contradiction between talking about overaccumulation and a dearth of surplus value: if “overaccumulation” is another way of saying that there is an excess of constant capital, this will necessarily mean that the commodities produced will contain less surplus value and thus less potential profit for the capitalists. It's true that Marx considered that a fall in the rate of profit would be compensated by a rise in the mass of profit: this depends in particular on the possibility of selling an ever greater amount of commodities and thus takes us back to the problem of the realisation of surplus value, but we don't intend to examine this further here.

However, the main issue here is the basic notion of capitalist collapse and not the specific theoretical explanations for it. The idea of a purely economic collapse – even if it is far from clear that Grossman and Mattick actually adhered to such a view – would indeed reflect a very mechanical approach to historical materialism, one in which human action plays little or no role; and for Pannekoek, Marx always saw the end of capitalism as being brought about by the conscious action of the working class. This question was central to Pannekoek's critique of theories of collapse, because he felt that all such theories tended to underestimate the necessity for the working class to arm itself in struggle, to develop the consciousness and organisation needed for the immense task of overthrowing capitalism, which would certainly not fall like a ripe fruit into its hands. Pannekoek accepts that Grossman did consider that the advent of the “final crisis” would provoke the class struggle, but he says that he saw this struggle in purely

economist terms. Whereas, for Pannekoek, “*Socialism comes not because capitalism collapses economically and men, workers and others, are forced by necessity to create a new organisation, but because capitalism, as it lives and grows, becomes more and more unbearable for the workers and repeatedly pushes them to struggle until the will and strength to overthrow the domination of capitalism and establish a new organisation grows in them, and then capitalism collapses. The working class is not pushed to act because the unbearable-ness of capitalism is demonstrated to them from the outside, but because they feel it generated within them.*”

Actually, a passage from Grossman already anticipates many of Pannekoek's criticisms: “*The idea of breakdown, necessary on objective grounds, definitely does not contradict the class struggle. Rather, the breakdown, despite its objectively given necessity, can be influenced by the living forces of the struggling classes to a large extent and leaves a certain scope for active class intervention... Only now is it possible to understand why, at a high level of capital accumulation, every serious rise in wages encounters greater and greater difficulties, why every major economic struggle necessarily becomes a question of the existence of capitalism, a question of political power... The struggle of the working class over everyday demands is thus bound up with its struggle over the final goal. The final goal for which the working class fights is not an ideal brought into the workers' movement 'from outside' by speculative means, whose realisation, independent of the struggles of the present, is reserved for the distant future. It is, on the contrary, as the law of capitalism's breakdown presented here shows. A result of immediate everyday struggles and its realisation can be accelerated by these struggles.*”<sup>23</sup>

But for Pannekoek, Grossman was a “*bourgeois economist who has never had practical experience of the struggle of the proletariat and who is consequently not in a position to understand the essence of Marxism*”. And although Grossman admittedly criticised aspects of the “old workers” movement (social democracy and “party communism”), he really had nothing in common with what the council communists called the “new workers’ movement”, which was genuinely independent from the old. Pannekoek thus insists that if for Grossman there is a political dimension to the class struggle, this essentially comes from the action of a “Bolshevik” type party. Grossman remained an advocate of the planned economy, and the transition from

23. Kuhn, op. cit., p. 135-6, quoting from the full German edition of *The law of accumulation*, 601-3.

the more traditional and anarchic form of capital to the state-run variety could happily dispense with any intervention by a self-organised proletariat; all it required was the firm hand of a “revolutionary vanguard” at the moment of final crisis.

It is not altogether accurate to accuse Grossman of being nothing but a bourgeois economist with no practical experience of the workers' struggle: prior to the war he had been deeply involved in the Jewish workers' movement in Poland, and although in the wake of the revolutionary wave he remained a sympathiser of the Stalinist parties (and was in later years, shortly before his death, employed by the university of Leipzig in Stalinist East Germany) he always retained an independence of mind, so that his theories cannot be dismissed as a mere apologia for Stalinism. As we have seen, he did not hesitate to criticise Lenin; he maintained a correspondence with Mattick; and for a brief period in the early 30s he had been attracted to the Trotskyist opposition. It is certainly true that he did not spend the best part of his life, as Rosa, Mattick or Pannekoek had done, as a revolutionary communist but it is reductionist to see the whole of Grossman's theory as a direct reflection of his politics.<sup>24</sup>

Pannekoek sums up the argument in “Theories of capitalist collapse” as follows: “*The workers' movement has not to expect a final catastrophe, but many catastrophes, political — like wars, and economic — like the crises which repeatedly break out, sometimes regularly, sometimes irregularly, but which on the whole, with the growing size of capitalism, become more and more devastating. So the illusions and tendencies to tranquillity of the proletariat will repeatedly collapse, and sharp and deep class struggles will break out. It appears to be a contradiction that the present crisis, deeper and more devastating than any previous one, has not shown signs of the awakening of the proletarian revolution. But the removal of old illusions is its first great task: on the other hand, the illusion of making capitalism bearable by means of reforms obtained through Social Democratic parliamentary politics and trade union action and, on the other, the illusion that capitalism can be overthrown in assault under the leadership of a revolution-bringing Communist Party. The working class itself, as a whole, must conduct the struggle, but, while the bourgeoisie is already building up its power more and more solidly, the working class*

24. This is a somewhat similar error to the one Pannekoek made when he argued in *Lenin as Philosopher* that the bourgeois influences on Lenin's philosophical writings demonstrated the bourgeois class nature of Bolshevism and the October revolution.

*has yet to make itself familiar with the new forms of struggle. Severe struggles are bound to take place. And should the present crisis abate, new crises and new struggles will arise. In these struggles the working class will develop its strength to struggle, will discover its aims, will train itself, will make itself independent and learn to take into its hands its own destiny, viz., social production itself. In this process the destruction of capitalism is achieved. The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism.”*

There is much in this view that is correct, above all the necessity for the class as a whole to develop its autonomy from all the capitalist forces that pose as its saviours. Pannekoek does not however explain why the crises should become more and more devastating – he merely offers capitalism’s size as a factor.<sup>25</sup> But he also fails to ask the question: how many devastating catastrophes can capitalism go through before it actually destroys itself and the possibility of a new society? In other words, what’s missing here is the sense of that capitalism is a system limited historically by its own contradictions and that it was already confronting humanity with the choice between socialism and barbarism. Pannekoek was perfectly correct in his insistence that economic collapse would by no means lead automatically to socialism. But he tended to forget that a declining system that was not overthrown by the revolutionary working class could and would destroy itself and all possibilities for socialism. The very opening lines of the Communist Manifesto hold open the possibility that if the oppressed class is not able to carry through its transformation of society, the advancing contradictions of the mode of production can end up simply in the mutual ruin of the contending classes. In this sense, capitalism is indeed

condemned to deteriorate to the point of its “final crisis”, and there is no guarantee that communism lies on the further shore of this debacle. This realisation, however, does not diminish the importance of the working class acting decisively to bring about its own solution to capitalism’s collapse. On the contrary, it makes the conscious struggle of the proletariat, and the activity of revolutionary minorities within it, all the more urgent and indispensable.

Gerrard

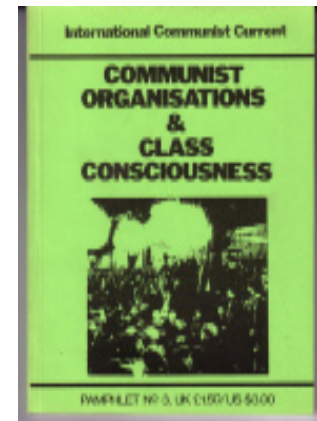
25. See our book on the German/Dutch left, p 273, where a similar point is made about the position of the GIC as a whole: “*in rejecting the somewhat fatalistic conceptions of Grossman and Mattick, the GIC abandoned the entire heritage of the German left’s crisis theory. The crisis of 1929 was seen, not as a generalised crisis expressing the decline of the capitalist system, but as a cyclical crisis. In a pamphlet published in 1933, the GIC asserted that the Great Crisis was ‘chronic’ rather than permanent, even since 1914. Capitalism was like the legendary phoenix, endlessly reborn from its ashes. After each ‘regeneration’ by the crisis, capitalism reappeared ‘greater and more powerful than ever’ But this ‘regeneration’ wasn’t eternal, since ‘the flames threaten the whole of social life with an increasingly violent death’ Finally, only the proletariat could give the capitalist phoenix the ‘death blow’, and transform a cycle of crisis into a final crisis. This theory was thus contradictory, since, on the one hand, it was a vision of cyclical crises as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with capitalism constantly expanding, in permanent ascendancy; on the other hand, it described a cycle of increasingly lethal destructions and reconstructions”* The pamphlet in question was *De beweging van het kapitalistisch bedrijfsleven*.



# Publications of the ICC

Cheques or money orders in **sterling** should be made out to "International Review" and sent to **London**.

Cheques or money orders in **dollars** should be made out to "Internationalism" and sent to **New York**.



How does class consciousness develop and what is the role of communist organisations in this process?

Why is the consciousness of the class that will make the communist revolution different from that of other revolutionary classes in history?

What are the implications for the revolutionary process?

Subscriptions	POSTAL ZONES			
	A	B	C	D
World Revolution	£10.00	£13.00/\$18.00	£13.00/\$18.00	
International Review	£12.00	£12.00/\$17.50	£15.00/\$22.50	
Internationalism	£5.50	£5.50/\$9.25	£5.50/\$9.25	\$6.50
Airmail postage supplement (WR)			£6.00/\$8.00	\$8.00
<b>COMBINED SUBSCRIPTIONS</b>				
WR/International Review	£22.00	£21.00/\$33.50	£28.00/\$40.50	\$40.50
Internationalism/Int. Review		£15.00/\$24.00	£16.00/\$25.50	\$31.50
Inter/Int Rev/WR	£27.50	£26.00/\$41.50	£33.50/\$49.00	\$47.00
Airmail postage supplement (WR)			£6.00/\$8.00	\$8.00
<b>SUBSCRIBER/DISTRIBUTORS</b>			<b>Postal Zones</b>	
World Revolution	£32.50 (6 months)		<b>A) United Kingdom</b> <b>B) Europe (Air Mail)</b> <b>C) Outside Europe</b> <b>D) USA/Canada (orders to New York only)</b>	
International Review	£20.00 (6 months)			
<b>SUBSCRIBER/DISTRIBUTORS receive 5 copies of each publication per month, by air mail outside the UK.</b>				

ICC Pamphlets	PRICES		POSTAGE		
	£	\$	A/B	C	D
The Italian Communist Left	10.00	9.00	£2.00	£8.00	\$2.00
The Dutch and German Communist Lefts	14.95	21.00	postage/packing included		
Unions against the working class	1.25	2.00	£0.30	£0.75	\$1.75
Nation or Class	1.25	2.00	£0.30	£0.75	\$1.75
Platform of the ICC	0.50	1.00	£0.30	£0.60	\$1.75
The Decadence of Capitalism	3.00	4.50	£0.30	£1.20	\$2.50
Russia 1917: Start of the World Revolution	1.00	1.50	£0.30	£1.00	\$2.00
Communist Organisations and Class Consciousness	1.75	2.50	£0.50	£1.40	\$2.00
The Period of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism	2.00	3.00	£0.50	£1.80	\$2.00
2nd Conference of Groups of the Communist Left, Vol I	1.50	2.25	£0.50	£2.10	\$4.50
2nd Conference of Groups of the Communist Left, Vol II	1.50	2.25	£0.50	£2.30	\$4.50
* Prices in dollars applicable only to orders from the USA/Canada. Prices can be obtained from INTERNATIONALISM, in New York. <b>POSTAL ZONES</b> <b>A= United Kingdom B= Europe C= Outside Europe</b> <b>D= USA &amp; Canada for orders placed in New- York</b>					

## Previous issues of the International Review

### International Review 142

**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

**The Manifesto of the Workers' Group  
of the Russian Communist Party (i)**

History of the workers' movement

**The left wing of the Communist Party of Turkey**

### International Review 144

France, Britain, Tunisia

**The future lies in the international  
development of the class struggle**

**Capitalism has no way out of its crisis**

**The economic crisis in Britain**

The Hungarian Revolution of 1919 (ii)

**The example of Russia 1917 inspires the  
workers in Hungary**

The Communist Left in Russia

**The *Manifesto* of the Workers' Group  
of the Russian Communist Party (iii)**

### International Review 143

Economic debacle, "natural catastrophes, imperialist  
chaos...

**Capitalism is a bankrupt system that must be  
overthrown**

Hot Autumn in Italy 1969 (ii)

**An episode in the historic resurgence of the class  
struggle**

What are workers councils? (iv)

**1917 - 1921: The soviets attempt to wield power**

Decadence of capitalism (viii)

**The are of catastrophes**

The Communist Left in Russia

**The *Manifesto* of the Workers' Group of the Rus-  
sian Communist Party (ii)**

### International Review 145

Social revolts in North Africa and the Middle East.

Nuclear catastrophe in Japan, war in Libya

**Only the proletarian revolution can save humanity  
from the disaster of capitalism**

**What is happening in the Middle East?**

**Contribution to a history of the workers'  
movement in Africa**

What are workers councils? (v)

**1917-1921: The soviets and the question of the  
state**

Decadence of capitalism (ix)

**The Comintern and the virus of "Luxemburgism"  
in 1924**

The Communist Left in Russia

**The *Manifesto* of the Workers Group of the  
Russian Communist Party (iv)**



# 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 satiated 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.

## OUR ACTIVITY

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*.

## ICC Press

Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:

### **Accion Proletaria**

Apartado Correos 258, Valencia, **Spain**

### **Dunya Devrimi, Turkey**

Because of the political situation, there is no PO Box. Write to the address in Switzerland or to: [turkiye@internationalism.org](mailto:turkiye@internationalism.org)

### **Communist Internationalist**

(published in Hindi)  
POB 25, NIT, Faridabad, 121001 Haryana, **India** [india@internationalism.org](mailto:india@internationalism.org)

### **Internacionalismo, Venezuela**

Because of the political situation, the PO Box is suspended. Write to the address in Spain, or to: [venezuela@internationalism.org](mailto:venezuela@internationalism.org)

### **Internationalism**

320 7th Avenue #211, Brooklyn NY 11215, **USA**

### **Internationalisme**

BP 94, 2600 Berchem **Belgium**

### **Internationell Revolution**

Box 21 106, 100 31 Stockholm, **Sweden**

### **Internasyonalismo, Phillipines**

Because of the political situation, there is no PO Box. Write to the address in India or to: [philippines@internationalism.org](mailto:philippines@internationalism.org)

### **Revolucion Mundial**

Apdo. Post. 15-024 C.P. 02600, Distrito Federal Mexico, **Mexico**

### **Révolution Internationale**

RI, Mail Boxes 153, 108 Rue Damremont, 75018, Paris, **France**

### **Rivoluzione Internazionale**

CP 469, 80100 Napoli, **Italy**

### **Revolucao Internacional, Brazil**

To contact the ICC in Brazil, write to: [brasil@internationalism.org](mailto:brasil@internationalism.org)

### **Weltrevolution**

Postfach 410308, 50863 Köln, **Germany**

### **Weltrevolution**

Postfach 2216  
CH-8026, Zürich, **Switzerland**

### **Wereldrevolutie**

Postbus 339,  
2800 AH Gouda, **Holland**

### **World Revolution**

BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX **Great Britain**