



Belgique - België
PB
2600 Berchem 1-2
BC 9925

International Communist Current

3rd & 4th Quarters 2012

International Review

June 2012 Euro summit
**Behind the illusions, a new step
in the catastrophe**

**Mexico between crisis
and drug trafficking**

Debate in the revolutionary milieu
**The state in the period of transition
from capitalism to communism (ii)
Our response to the group Oposição
Operária (Workers' Opposition) - Brazil**

Book review:
Primitive communism is not what it was
Primitive communism

Revolutionary syndicalism in Germany (iv)
**The revolutionary syndicalist movement
in the German Revolution, 1918-19**

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

150

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

International Review 150 3rd & 4th Quarters 2012

Quarterly in French, English, Spanish, selections of articles in German, Italian, Dutch, Swedish

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June 2012 Euro summit

Behind the illusions, a new step in the catastrophe

On the morning of 29th June 2012, as if by magic, a gentle euphoria took hold of the politicians and leaders of the Eurozone. The bourgeois media and the economists soon joined them. Apparently, the Euro summit had taken some “historic decisions” - unlike the numerous decisions taken in the last few years, all of which have failed. But according to many commentators, this time it was different. The bourgeoisie of the Eurozone, for once united and solid, had taken the measures needed to get us through the tunnel of the crisis. For a moment you might have thought you had entered Alice’s Wonderland. But, once the morning mists had dissipated, and you looked a bit closer, the real questions came to light: what was the real content of this summit? What was its significance? Would it really bring a lasting solution to the crisis of the Eurozone and thus of the world economy?

The Euro summit: decisions that deceive the eye

If the June 2012 Euro summit was presented as “historic”, it is because it was supposed to be a turning point in the way that the authorities confront the euro crisis. To begin with, at the level of form, this summit, for the first time, did not, as far as the commentators were concerned, restrict itself to rubberstamping the decisions taken in advance by “Merkozy”, i.e. the Merkel-Sarkozy partnership (in reality the position of Merkel rubberstamped by Sarkozy).¹ It now took into account the demands of two other important countries of the zone, Spain and Italy, demands supported by the new French president, François Hollande. Secondly, this summit is supposed to inaugurate a new given in economic and budgetary policy inside the zone: after years in which the only policy followed by the leading authorities of the Eurozone was one of increasingly ruthless austerity, now criticisms of this policy are being taken into account. These criticisms, raised above all by the politicians and economists of the left, argue that without

1. We should note that since this article was written, the French government has gone back to cooperating more with the German chancellor. Perhaps it would be better to start talking about “Merkhollande”? In any case in September 2012, the new President Hollande and the leadership of the French Socialist Party waged a campaign to force parliament’s hand and get it to vote for the Stability Pact (the “Golden Rule”) which as a candidate Hollande has promised to renegotiate. As Charles Pasqua, an old Gaullist veteran known for his cynicism, put it: “electoral promises only apply to those who believe them”.

reviving economic activity, hyper-indebted states will be unable to find the fiscal resources to pay off their debts.

This is why the “left” president Hollande, who had come to call for a “pact for employment and growth”, took centre stage in the whole show, proud of his demands and the results obtained. In this satisfaction he was accompanied by two men of the right: Monti the Italian head of government and Rajoy, his Spanish equivalent, who also argued that their calculations had paid off and the financial noose around their country’s necks should be loosened. The real situation was much too serious for these men to assume such a triumphant air, but at least they had a sense of humour: “*we could hope to see the beginning of the end of leaving the tunnel of the crisis*”. These were the convoluted words of the head of the Italian government.

Before lifting the veil from these optimistic declarations, we need to go back in time a bit. Let’s recall: over the last six months, the Eurozone has twice been in a situation where its banks were in a state of collapse. The first time this gave rise to what was called the LTRO (Long Term Refinancing Operation): the European Central Bank (ECB) accorded them loans of around 1000 billion euros. In reality 500 billion had already been supplied to them to keep them afloat. A few months later the same banks were again appealing for help! Let’s now tell a little story which shows us what is really happening in the world of European finance. At the beginning of 2012 sovereign debts (i.e. debts of states) exploded. The financial markets themselves raised the rates at

which they were prepared to lend money to these states. Some of them, notably Spain, could no longer afford to look for loans on the market. It was all too expensive. At this point the Spanish banks gave up the ghost. What could be done? What could be done in Italy, Portugal and elsewhere? A brilliant idea began to germinate in the great minds of the ECB. We are going to make massive loans to the banks, who will themselves finance the sovereign debts of their national states and the “real” economy in the form of loans for investment or consumption. This is what happened last winter. The ECB declared “the bar is open and it’s drinks all round”. The result was that at the beginning of June everyone woke up with cirrhosis of the liver. The banks had not been lending out to the “real economy”. They had put the money in safe places, putting its equivalent away in the Central Bank for a small return of interest. What would they give to the Central Bank in exchange? State bonds which they had bought with the money they had got from the same Central Bank. A real conjuring trick which would soon be revealed as an absurd spectacle!

In June the “economic doctors” again cried loud and strong: the patients are slipping towards death. Radical measures were needed immediately for all the hospitals of the Eurozone. We now come to the June summit. After a whole night of negotiations, a “historic” agreement seemed to have been found. The decisions taken were:

- the financial stabilisation funds (European Funds for Financial Stability and the European Stability Mechanism) would now be able to flow into the banks, after obtaining the ECB’s agreement, as well as being used to buy up public debts in order to reduce the rates at which states would have to borrow on the financial markets;
- the Europeans would confer on the ECB the job of supervising the banking system of the Eurozone;
- an extension of the rules for controlling the public deficits of states in the zone;

– finally, to the great satisfaction of the economists and politicians of the “left”, a plan of 100 billion euros for reviving economic activity was drawn up.

For several days the same speeches rang out. The Eurozone had finally taken some good decisions. While Germany had succeeded in sticking to its “Golden Rule” in the matter of public expenditure (which demands that states adopt as a fundamental law the necessity to reduce their budget deficits), it at the same time accepted going towards the mutualisation and the monetisation of these debts, i.e. the possibility of reimbursing them by printing money.

As always in this kind of agreement, reality is hidden in the timetable and the way the decisions are put into practice. However, already on this particular morning, there was something very striking. An essential question seems to have been avoided: the financial means and their real sources. There was an unspoken agreement that Germany would end up paying for it all because it's the only one that seems to have the means to do so. And then during the month of July, surprise surprise, everything was put into question. With the help of some legal manoeuvres, the application of the accords was put off until September at the earliest. There was a little problem. If you add up all of Germany's commitments in terms of disguised guarantees and lines of credit, the total amount it's being asked to hand out to its desperate European neighbours amounts to 1500 billion euros. Germany's GDP is 2650 billion euros and this is without taking into account the contraction in its activity over the last few months. This is a dizzying sum equivalent to half its GDP. The last figures announced for the debt of the Eurozone went up to around 8000 billion, a large part of which is made up of “toxic” debts (i.e. debts where it has been recognised that they will never be repaid). It's not hard to understand that Germany is incapable of assuring such a level of debt. Neither is it in a position, in the long term, to credibly shore up this wall of debt with its own signature alone on the financial markets. The proof of this can be seen in the paradox confronting an economy in disarray. In the short and middle term Germany is placing its debts at negative rates of interest. The buyers of this debt agree not to notice these ridiculous interests while losing capital through inflation. Germany's sovereign debt appears to be a mountain refuge capable of withstanding all the storms, but at the same time, the price of insuring this debt is squeezing them at the same level as Greece! In the end this refuge will be shown to be rather vulnerable. The markets know very well that if Germany continues to finance the debt of

the Eurozone, it will itself become insolvent and that is why all lenders are trying to get themselves insured as well as they can in case there is a brutal collapse.

There remains the temptation to use the ultimate weapon. That is, to say to the ECB that it should act like in the UK, Japan and the USA: “let's print more and more bank notes without any regard for their value”. The central banks could indeed become “rotten” banks, that's not the problem. The problem is to prevent everything coming to a halt. The problem is what happens tomorrow, next month, next year. This is the real advance made at the last European summit. But the ECB wasn't listening with this ear. It's true that this central bank doesn't have the same autonomy as the other central banks of the world. It is linked to the different central banks of each nation in the zone, But is that the basic problem? If the ECB could operate like the central banks of Britain or the US, for example, would this do away with the insolvency of the banks and states of the Eurozone? What was going on at the same time in other countries, for example the USA?

Central banks more fragile than ever

While storm clouds gather over the American economy, why has the USA not yet come up with a third revival plan, a new phase of monetising its debt?

We should recall that the Director of the US central bank, Ben Bernanke, was nicknamed “Mr Helicopter”. In the last four years the USA has already had two plans of massive money creation, the famous “quantitative easing”. Mr Bernanke seemed to be able to fly all over the USA, doling out money wherever he went. A tidal wave of liquidities got everyone drunk. And yet it just didn't seem to work. For the last few months a new phase of money-printing has become unavoidable. And yet it hasn't happened. Quantitative Easing 3 is vital, indispensable, and at the same time impossible, as is the mutualisation and monetisation of the overall debt in the Eurozone. Capitalism has come to a dead-end. Even the world's leading power can't go on creating money out of nothing. Every debt needs to be paid for at some point or other. Like any other central bank, the US Federal Bank has two sources of finance which are at one moment or another linked and interdependent. The first consists of using up savings, the money which exists inside or outside the country, either through borrowing at tolerable rates, or through an increase in taxation. The second resides in the fabrication of money as a counterpart to the recognition of debts, notably by buying

what is known as bonds representing public or state debt. The value of these bonds is in the last instance determined by the evaluation made by the financial markets. A used car is up for sale. Its price is displayed on the window-screen by the seller. Potential buyers verify the state of the vehicle. Offers are made and the seller chooses the least bad one for him. If the vehicle is too decrepit the price becomes derisory and the car is left to rot on the street. This little example shows the danger of a new money-creation in the US and elsewhere. For the last four years, hundreds of billions of dollars have been injected into the American economy without the slightest sign of recovery. Worse: the economic depression has been quietly advancing. Here we are at the heart of the problem. Assessing the real value of sovereign debt is connected to the solidity of the economy. Like the value of our car and its actual state. If a central bank (whether in the US, Japan, or the Eurozone) prints money to buy debts, or the recognition of debts, that can never be repaid (because the borrowers have become insolvent) it does nothing but inundate the market with bits of paper which don't correspond to any real value because they have no counterpart or guarantees in terms of savings or new wealth. In other words, they are manufacturing fake money.

On the road to generalised recession

Such an assertion might still seem a bit exaggerated. And yet, this is what's written in the Global Europe Anticipation Bulletin for January 2012: “*To generate another dollar's worth of growth, the USA will now have to borrow around 8 dollars. Or, if you prefer it the other way round: each dollar borrowed only generates 0.12. dollars of growth. This illustrates the absurdity of the medium term policies of the US FED and Treasury in the last few years. It's like a war where you have to kill more and more soldiers to win less and less ground*”. The proportion is no doubt not exactly the same for all the countries of the world. But the general tendency is the same. This is why the 100 billion euros set aside by the 29 June summit to finance growth is nothing but sticking plaster on a wooden leg. The profits obtained are increasingly pitiful compared to the growth in the wall of debt.

The title of a celebrated film comedy was “Is there a pilot on the plane?”. As far as the world economy is concerned, we'd have to add “and the engine doesn't work either”. That's a plane and its passengers in a very bad situation.

In the face of this general debacle of the most developed countries, some, hoping

to minimise the gravity of capitalism's situation, point to the example of China and the "emerging" countries. Only a few months ago China was sold to us as the next locomotive of the world economy, with a little help from India and Brazil. What's the reality here? These "motors" are also having some serious problems. On 13th July China officially announced a growth rate of 7.6%, which is the lowest figure for this country since the beginning of the current phase of the crisis. The times of double-digit growth are over. And even 7% doesn't convince the specialists. They all know that it's false. These experts prefer to look at other figures which they feel are more reliable. This is what was said that same day by a radio that specialises in economics (BFM): "*by looking at the evolution of electricity consumption, you can deduce that China's growth is actually around 2 or 3%. Or less than half the official figure*". At the beginning of this summer all the growth figures were at half-mast.

Everywhere they are diminishing. The motor is more or less running on empty. The plane is about to sink to the earth, and the world economy with it.

Capitalism is entering a period of major storms

Faced with the world recession and the financial state of the banks and states, there is open economic war between different sectors of the bourgeoisie. Boosting the economy with classic Keynesian policies (which require further state debt) can no longer be really effective. In the context of recession, the money collected by the states can only diminish and, despite the generalised austerity, their sovereign debts can only continue to explode, like in Greece or now Spain. The question that is tearing the bourgeoisie apart is this: "Do we risk once again raising the ceiling of debt?" More and more, money is not going towards production, investment or consumption.

It's no longer profitable. But the interest on debt and the need to repay it don't go away. Capital will have to create more money to put off a generalised cessation of payment. Bernanke, head of the US central bank, and his counterpart Mario Draghi in the Eurozone, like all their cohorts across the planet, are hostages to the capitalist economy. Either they do nothing, in which case depression and bankruptcy will soon take the form of a cataclysm. Or they again inject massive amounts of money and that will very soon destroy the value of money. One thing is for sure: even if it can now see the danger, the bourgeoisie, hopelessly divided over these issues, will only react in situations of absolute emergency, at the last minute, and on an increasingly inadequate level. The crisis of capitalism which we have seen so openly since 2008 is only just beginning.

Tino 30/7/12

Non-appearance of the summer *International Review*

Our readers will certainly have noticed that the summer issue of the *International Review* didn't appear. We apologise to them for this, and especially to our subscribers, who will see their subscription extended in compensation. How to explain this when we argue that the necessities of the class struggle demand an increased effort of intervention by revolutionaries on the historical and theoretical level? The fact is that our limited forces don't allow us to carry out, at one and the same time, a number of tasks of publication – not only the *International Review* but books and pamphlets which require

a good deal of work to complete. We have not yet decided on the exact frequency of the *International Review* in future, all the more so because we are currently giving a lot of thought to the need to improve our website, given its central role in propagating our ideas. This reflection also has to take into account the balance between the virtual press and the printed publications (which, for us, remain an indispensable tool of intervention). Our readers will be kept informed about the orientation the ICC adopts on this question.

Mexico between crisis and drug trafficking

The press and television news around the world regularly send images of Mexico in which fighting, corruption and murder resulting from the “war against drug trafficking” are brought to the fore. But all this appears as a phenomenon alien to capitalism or abnormal, whereas in fact all the barbaric reality that goes with it is deeply rooted in the dynamics of the current system of exploitation. It is, in its full extent, the behaviour of the ruling class that is revealed, through competition and heightened political rivalries between its various fractions. Today, such a process of plunging into barbarism and the decomposition of capitalism is effectively dominant in certain regions of Mexico.

At the beginning of the 1990s, we said that “*Amongst the major characteristics of capitalist society’s decomposition, we should emphasise the bourgeoisie’s growing difficulty in controlling the evolution of the political situation.*”¹ This phenomenon appeared more clearly in the last decade of the 20th century when it became a major trend.

It is not only the ruling class that is affected by decomposition; the proletariat and other exploited classes also suffer its most pernicious effects. In Mexico, mafia groups and the actual government enrol, for the war in which they are engaged, elements belonging to the most impoverished sectors of the population. The clashes between these groups, which indiscriminately hit the population, leaving hundreds of victims on the casualty list, the government and mafias call “collateral damage.” The result is a climate of fear that the ruling class has used to prevent and contain social reactions to the continuous attacks on the living conditions of the population.

Drug trafficking and the economy

In capitalism, drugs are nothing more than a commodity whose production and distribution necessarily requires labour, even if it is not always voluntary or waged. Slavery is common in this environment, which not only employs the voluntary and paid labour of a lumpen milieu for criminal activities, but also of labourers and others like carpenters (for example, for the construction of houses and shops) who are forced, in order to survive in the misery offered by capitalism, to serve the capitalist producers of illegal goods.

What is experienced today in Mexico has already existed (and still exists) in other parts of the world: the mafias profit from this misery, and their collusion with the state structures allows them to “protect

their investment” and their activities in general. In Colombia, in the 1990s, the investigator H. Tovar-Pinzón gave a number of factors to explain why poor peasants became the first accomplices of the drug trafficking mafias: “*A property produced, for example, ten cargoes of corn per year which permitted a gross receipt of 12,000 Colombian pesos. This same property could produce a hundred arrobas of coca, which represented for the owner a gross revenue of 350,000 pesos per year. Why not change the crop when one can gain thirty times more?*”²

What happened in Colombia has expanded across the whole of Latin America, drawing into drug trafficking, not only the peasant proprietors, but also the great mass of landless labourers who sell their labour power to them. This great mass of workers becomes easy prey to the mafia, because of the extremely low wages granted by the legal economy. In Mexico, for example, a labourer employed to cut sugar cane receives little more than two dollars per ton (27 pesos) and will see his wage increased when he produces an illegal commodity. In doing so, a large portion of workers employed in this activity loses its class condition. These workers are increasingly implicated in the world of organised crime and in direct contact with the gunmen and drug carriers with whom they share directly a daily life in a context of the trivialisation of murder and crime. Closely involved in this atmosphere, the contagion leads them progressively towards lumpenisation. This is one of the harmful effects of advanced decomposition directly affecting the working class.

There are estimates that the drug trafficking mafias in Mexico employ 25% more people than McDonald’s worldwide.³ It should also be added that beyond the use of farmers, mafia activity involves racketeer-

ing and prostitution imposed on hundreds of young people. Today, drugs are an additional branch of the capitalist economy, that is to say that exploitation is present in it as in any other economic activity but, in addition, the conditions of illegality push competition and the war for markets to take much more violent forms.

The violence to gain markets and increase profits is all the fiercer with the importance of the gain. Ramón Martínez Escamilla, member of the Economic Research Institute of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, believes that “*the phenomenon of drug trafficking represents between 7 and 8 % of Mexico’s GDP*”.⁴ These figures, compared to the 6% of Mexico’s GDP which represents the fortune of Carlos Slim, the biggest tycoon in the world, give an indication of the growing importance of the drug trade in the economy, permitting us to deduce the barbarity that it engenders. Like any capitalist, the drug trafficker has no other objective than profit. To explain this process, it is enough to recall the words of the trade unionist Thomas Dunning (1799-1873), quoted by Marx:

“*With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent certain will produce eagerness; 50 per cent, positive audacity; 100 per cent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both.*”⁵

Based on contempt for human life and on exploitation, these vast fortunes certainly find refuge in tax havens but are also used directly by the legal capitalists who are responsible for the task of laundering them. Examples abound to illustrate this, such as the entrepreneur Zhenli Ye Gon, or more recently, the financial institution HSBC. In these two examples, it was revealed that the individual or institution was laundering the vast fortunes of the drug cartels, whether it was for the promotion of political projects (in Mexico and elsewhere) or for “honourable” investments.

4. *La Jornada*, 25 June 2010 (our translation).

5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, “The development of capitalist production”; Section VIII: “Primitive accumulation”, Chapter XXXI, “Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm>

1. See *International Review* n° 62, “Decomposition, final phase of the decadence of capitalism” point 9.

2. *Nueva sociedad* no. 130, Columbia, 1994, “The economy of coca in Latin America. The Colombian paradigm” (our translation).

3. Cf. See on www.cnnexpansion.com.

Edgar Buscaglia⁶ states that companies of all kinds have been “designated as dubious by intelligence agencies in Europe and the United States, including the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Treasury Department, but nobody has wanted to undermine Mexico, basically because many of them fund election campaigns.”⁷

There are other marginal processes (but no less significant) that enable the integration of the mafia in the economy, such as the violent depopulation of properties and of vast territories, to the extent that some areas of the country are now “ghost towns”. Some figures suggest the displacement, in recent years, of a million and a half people fleeing “the war between the army and the narcos.”⁸

It is essential to point out the impossibility, for the plans of the drug mafias, of existing outside the realm of the states. These are the structures that protect and help them move their money towards the financial giants, but are also the seat of the government teams of the bourgeoisie who mix their interests with those of drug cartels. It is obvious that the mafia could hardly have as much business if they did not receive the support of sectors of the bourgeoisie involved in the governments. As we have argued in the “Theses on Decomposition”, “it is more and more difficult to distinguish the government apparatus from gangland.”⁹

Mexico, an example of advanced capitalist decomposition

Since 2006, almost sixty thousand people have been killed, either by the bullets of the mafia units or those of the official army; a majority of those killed were victims of the war between drug cartels, but this does not diminish the responsibility of the state, whatever the government says. It is impossible to blame one or the other, because of the links between the mafia groups and the state itself. If difficulties have been growing at this level, it is precisely because the fractures and divisions within the bour-

geoisie are amplified and, at any time, any place, can become a battleground between fractions of the bourgeoisie; of course, the state structure itself is also a place to where these conflicts are expressed. Each mafia group emerges under the leadership of a fraction of the bourgeoisie, and so the economic competition that these political quarrels create makes these conflicts grow and multiply day by day.

In the 19th century, during the ascendant period of capitalism, the drugs trade (opium for example) was already the cause of political difficulties leading to wars, revealing the barbaric essence of this system in the states’ direct involvement in the production and distribution of goods such as drugs. However, such a situation was still inseparable from the strict vigilance and the maintenance of a framework of firm discipline on this business by the state and the dominant class, allowing it to reach political agreements and avoiding anything that that would weaken the cohesion of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ Thus, even if the “Opium War” - declared principally by the British state - illustrated a behavioural trait of capital, we can understand why the drug trade was not, however, a dominant phenomenon of the 19th century.

The importance of drugs and the formation of mafia groups become increasingly important during the decadent phase of capitalism. While the bourgeoisie tried to limit and adjust by laws and regulations the cultivation, preparation and trafficking of certain drugs during the first decades of the 20th century, this was only in order to properly control the trade of this commodity.

The historical evidence shows that “drug industry” is not an activity divorced from the bourgeoisie and its state. Rather, it is this same class that is responsible for expanding its use and profiting from the benefits it provides, and at the same time expanding its devastating effects in humans. States in the 20th century have massively distributed drugs to armies. The United States gives the best example of such use to “stimulate” the soldiers during the war: Vietnam was a huge laboratory and it is not surprising that it was effectively Uncle Sam who encouraged the demand for drugs in the 1970s, and responded by boosting their production in the countries of the periphery.

At the beginning of the second half of the 20th century in Mexico, the importance of the production and distribution of drugs was still far from being significant

and remained under the strict control of government authorities. The market was also tightly controlled by the army and the police. From the 1980s, the American government encouraged the development of the production and consumption of drugs in Mexico and throughout Latin America.

The “Iran-Contra” affair (1986) revealed that the government of Ronald Reagan, to overcome reductions in the budget to support armed bands opposed to the Nicaraguan government (the “contras”), used funds from the sale of arms to Iran and, especially, from drug trafficking via the CIA and the DEA. The government of the United States pushed the Colombian mafias to increase production, even deploying, to this end, military and logistical support to the governments of Panama, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia and Guatemala, to facilitate the passage of this coveted commodity. To “expand the market”, the American bourgeoisie began to produce cocaine derivatives much more cheaply and therefore easier to sell massively, despite being more devastating.

These same practices, used by the American ‘godfather’ to raise funds to enable it to carry out its putchist adventures, have also been used in Latin America to fight against the guerrillas. In Mexico, the so-called “dirty war” waged by the state in the 1970s and 80s against the guerrillas was financed by the money coming from drugs. The army and paramilitary groups (such as the White Brigade or the Jaguar Group) then had carte blanche to murder, kidnap and torture. Some military projects like “Operation Condor” (which supposedly targeted drug production), were actually directed against the guerrillas and served at the same time to protect poppy and marijuana crops.

At that time, the discipline and cohesion of the Mexican bourgeoisie permitted it to keep the drug market under control. Recent journalistic enquiries say that there was absolutely no drug shipment that was beyond the control and supervision of the army and federal police.¹¹ The state assured, under a cloak of steel, the unity of all sectors of the bourgeoisie, and when a group or individual capitalist showed disagreements, it was settled peacefully through privileges or power sharing. Thus was unity maintained in the so-called “revolutionary family”.¹²

With the collapse of the Eastern impe-

11. See Anabel Hernández, *Los del narco Señores* (“Drug Lords”), Edition Grijalbo, Mexico 2010.

12. This is the so-called unity that the bourgeoisie had achieved with the creation of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR, 1929), which was consolidated by transforming it into the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that remained in power until 2000.

6. International Programme Coordinator for Justice and Development at the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico (ITAM).

7. *La Jornada*, 24 March, 2010 (our translation).

8. In the northern states of the country such as Durango, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, some areas are considered “ghost towns” after being abandoned by the population. Villagers who were engaged in agriculture have been obliged to flee, liquidating their property at low prices in the best case or abandoning it altogether. The plight of workers is even more serious because their mobility is limited due to lack of means, and when they manage to flee to other areas, they are forced to live in the worst conditions of insecurity, in addition to continuing to repay loans for housing they were forced to abandon.

9. See *International Review* no. 62, *op. cit.*, point 8.

10. Even today, for some countries such as the United States, despite being the largest consumers of drugs, the armed clashes and the casualties they cause are mainly concentrated outside their borders.

rialist bloc the unity of the opposing bloc led by the United States also disappeared, which in turn provoked a growth of “every man for himself” among the different national fractions of certain countries. In Mexico, this breakdown showed itself in the dispute in broad daylight between fractions of the bourgeoisie at all levels: parties, clergy, regional governments, federal governments... Each fraction was trying to gain a greater share of power, without any of them taking the risk of putting into question the historic discipline behind the United States.

In the context of this general brawl, opposing bourgeois forces have fought over the distribution of power. These internal pressures have led to attempts to replace the ruling party and “decentralise” the responsibilities of law enforcement. Thus local authorities, represented by the state governments and the municipal presidents have declared their regional control. This, in turn, has added to the chaos: the federal government and each municipality or region, in order to reinforce its political and economic control, has associated itself with a particular mafia band. Each ruling fraction protects and strengthens this or that cartel according to its interests, thus ensuring impunity, which explains the violent arrogance of the mafias.

The magnitude of this conflict can be seen in the settling of accounts between political figures. It is estimated for example that in the last five years, twenty-three mayors and eight municipal presidents have been assassinated, and the threats made to secretaries of state and candidates are innumerable. The bourgeois press tries to pass off the people murdered as victims who, in the majority of cases, have been the subjects of a settling of scores between rival gangs or within these bands, for treachery.

By analysing these events we can understand that the drug problem cannot be resolved within capitalism. To limit the excesses of barbarism, the only solution for the bourgeoisie is to unify its interests and to regroup around a single mafia band, thus isolating the other bands to keep them in a marginal existence.

The peaceful resolution of this situation is very unlikely, especially because of the acute division between bourgeois factions in Mexico, making it difficult and unlikely to achieve even a temporary cohesion permitting a pacification. The dominant trend seems to be the advance of barbarism... In an interview dated June 2011, Buscaglia estimated the magnitude of drug trafficking in the life of the bourgeoisie: “*Nearly 65% of electoral campaigns in Mexico are contaminated by money from organised*

crime, mainly drug trafficking”.¹³

Workers are the direct victims of the advance of capitalist decomposition expressed through phenomena such as “the war against drugs” and they are also the target of the economic attacks imposed by the bourgeoisie faced with the deepening of the crisis; this is undoubtedly a class that suffers from great poverty, but it is not a contemplative class, it is a body capable of reflecting, of becoming conscious of its historical condition and reacting collectively.

Decay and crisis ... capitalism is a system in putrefaction

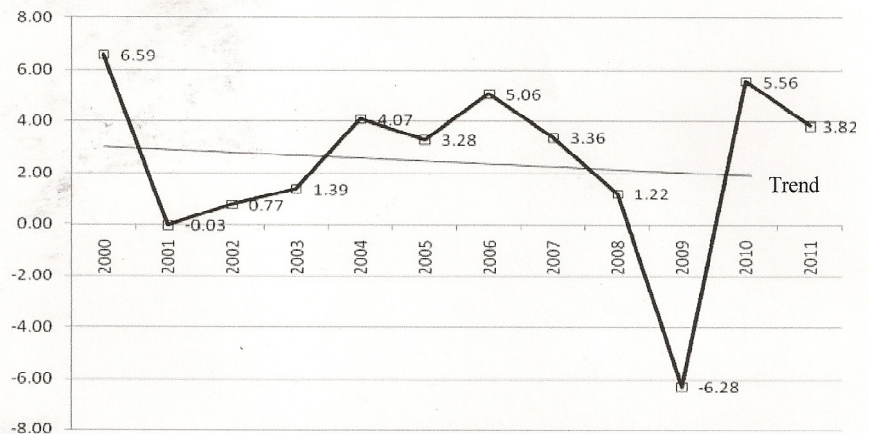
Drugs and murder are major news items both inside and outside the country, and if the bourgeoisie gives them such importance it is also because this allows it to disguise the effects of the economic crisis.

of Mexico, sovereign debt has increased by 60% to reach 36.4% of GDP at the end 2012 according to forecasts. This amount is obviously modest when compared to the level of debt of countries like Greece (where it has reached 170% of GDP), but does this imply that Mexico is not exposed to the deepening crisis? The answer of course is no.

Firstly, the fact that indebtedness is not as important in Mexico than in other countries does not mean that it will not become so.

The difficulties of the Mexican bourgeoisie in reviving capital accumulation are illustrated particularly in the stagnation of economic activity. GDP is not even able to reach its 2006 levels (see Figure 1) and, moreover, the recent fleeting embellishment has concerned the service sector, especially trade (as explained by the state institution in charge of statistics,

Figure 1
% Rate of variation in GDP
Mexico 2000-2012



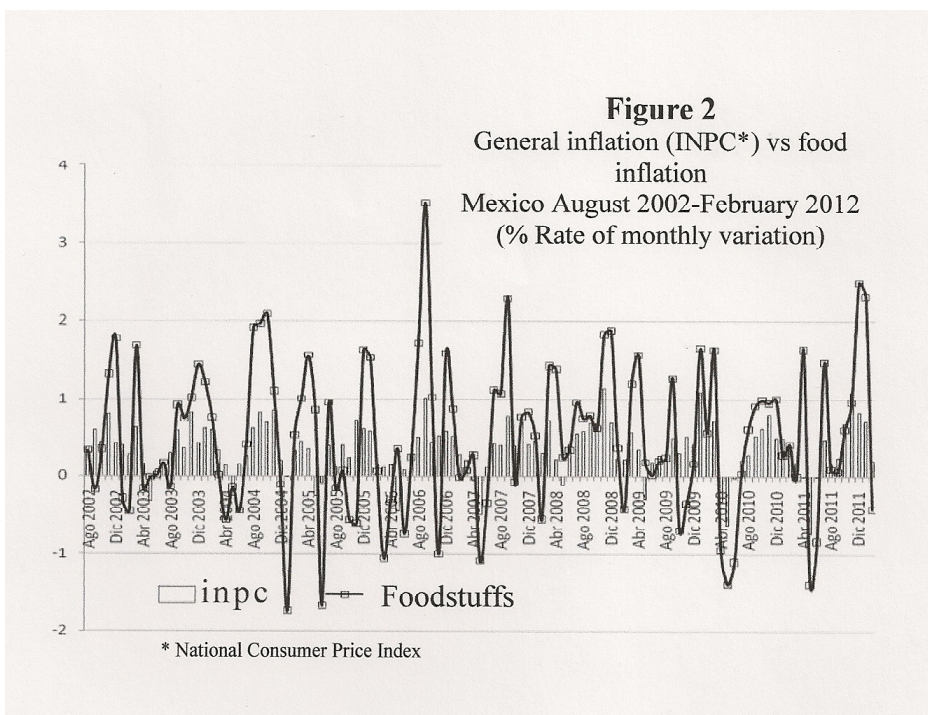
The crisis of capitalism did not originate in the financial sector, as claimed by the bourgeois “experts”. It is a profound and general crisis of the system that spares no country. The active presence of mafias in Mexico, although it weighs heavily on the exploited, does not erase the effects on them of the crisis; quite the contrary, it makes them worse.

The main cause of the tendencies towards recession affecting global capitalism is widespread insolvency, but it would be a mistake to believe that the weight of sovereign debt is the only indicator to measure the advance of the crisis. In some countries, such as Mexico, the weight of indebtedness does not create major problems yet, though in the last decade, according to the Bank

the INEGI). Furthermore, it must also be taken into consideration that if this sector boosts domestic trade (and permits GDP to grow), this is because consumer credit has increased (at the end of 2011 the use of credit cards increased by 20 % compared to the previous year).

The mechanisms used by the ruling class to confront the crisis are neither new nor unique to Mexico: increasing levels of exploitation and boosting the economy through credit. The application of such measures helped the United States in the 1990s to give the illusion of growth. Anwar Shaikh, a specialist in the American economy, explains: “*The main impetus for the boom came the dramatic fall in the rate of interest and the spectacular collapse of real wages in relation to productivity (growth*

13. See on nuestraparenterendicion.com



of the rate of exploitation), which together raised significantly the rate of profit of the company. Both variables played different roles in different places...¹⁴

Such measures are repeated at the pace of the advance of the crisis, even though their effects are more and more limited, because there is no alternative but to continue to use them, further attacking the living conditions of the workers. Official figures, for what they're worth, attest to the precariousness of these solutions. It is not surprising that the health of Mexican workers is based on the cheapest available calories in sugar (the country is the second largest consumer of soft drinks after the United States, every Mexican consuming some 150 litres on average per year) or cereals.

It is therefore not surprising that Mexico is a country whose adult population is more prone to problems of obesity which culminate in chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. Degradation of living conditions has reached such extremes that more children between 12 and 17 are forced to work (according to CEPALC, 25% in rural areas and 15% in the city). By compressing wages, the bourgeoisie has managed to claw back financial resources destined for consumption by the workers, seeking to increase the mass of surplus value appropriated by the capital. This situation is even more serious for the living conditions of the working class, as shown in Figure 2, because food prices are rising faster than the general price index used by the state to assert that the problem of inflation is under control.

Spokespersons for Latin American governments start from the principle that if economic conflicts affect the central countries (the United States and Europe), the rest of the world is untouched by this dynamic, especially as the IMF and the ECB are supplied with liquidity by the governments of these regions, including Mexico. But this does not mean at all that these economies are not threatened by the crisis. These same insolvency processes that spread throughout Europe today were the lot of Latin America during the 1980s and, with them, the severe measures arising from draconian austerity plans (which gave rise to what was called the Washington Consensus).

The depth and breadth of the crisis can be manifested differently in different countries, but the bourgeoisie uses the same strategies in all countries, even those who are not strangled by increasing sovereign debt.

The plans to reduce costs that the bourgeoisie applies less and less discreetly, the layoffs and increased exploitation, cannot in any way promote any recovery.

The rates of unemployment and impoverishment achieved by Mexico help us to understand how the crisis extends and deepens elsewhere. Coparmex, the employers' organisation, recognises that in Mexico 48% of the economically active population is in "underemployment",¹⁵ which in more straightforward language means in a precarious situation: low wages, temporary contracts, days getting longer and longer

without any medical insurance. This mass of the unemployed and precarious is the product of "labour flexibility" imposed by the bourgeoisie to increase exploitation and to push the main effects of the crisis onto our shoulders.

Misery and exploitation are the drivers of discontent

Many regions, mainly in rural areas, which are subject to curfew and constant supervision by armed patrols, whether military, police or mafia (if not both), and who murder under the slightest pretext, make life a nightmare for the exploited. To this are added the permanent attacks on the economic level. In early 2012, the Mexican bourgeoisie announced a "labour reform" which, as elsewhere in the world, will bring the cost of the labour force down to a more attractive level for capital, thus reducing production costs and further increasing the rate of exploitation.

The "labour reform" aims to increase the rates and hours of work, but also to lower wages (reduction of direct wages and elimination of substantial parts of the indirect wage), the project also providing for increases in the number of years of service required to qualify for retirement.

This threat began to materialise in the education sector. The state has chosen this area to make an initial attack that will be a warning to others elsewhere. It can afford to do this because although the workers are numerous and have a great tradition of militancy, they are very tightly controlled by the trade union structure, both formal (National Union of Education Workers – SNTE) and "democratic" (National Coordination of Education Workers – CNTE). Thus the government was able to deploy the following strategy: first causing discontent by announcing a "universal assessment"¹⁶, and then staging a series of manoeuvres (interminable demonstrations, negotiations separated by region...), relying on the unions to exhaust, isolate and thus defeat the strikers, convincing them of the futility of the "struggle" and so demoralising and intimidating all workers.

Although teachers have been the subject of special treatment, the "reforms" apply nevertheless gradually and unobtrusively to all workers. The miners, for example, are already experiencing these attacks which reduce the cost of the labour force and make their working conditions more precarious.

16. "The universal assessment" is part of the "Alliance for Education Quality" (ACE). This is not only to impose an evaluation system to make workers compete with each other and reduce the number of positions, but also to increase the workload, compress wages, facilitate rapid redundancy protocols and low-cost pensions...

14. In "The first great depression of the 21st century" 2010.

15. The official institution (INEGI) for its part calculates that the rate of "informal" workers is 29.3%.

The bourgeoisie considers it normal that, for a pittance (the maximum salary a miner can claim is \$455 per month), workers spend in the pits and galleries long and intensive working days which often well exceed eight hours, in unspeakable safety conditions worthy of those that prevailed in the 19th century. It is this that explains, on the one hand, why the profit rate of mining companies in Mexico is among the highest, and on the other, the dramatic increase in “accidents” in the mines, with their growing tally of wounded and dead. Since 2000, in the one state of Coahuila, the most active mining area in the country, more than 207 workers have died as a result of collapsing galleries or firedamp explosions.

This misery, to which is added the criminal activities of the governments and the mafias, provokes a growing discontent among the exploited and oppressed which begins to express itself, even if it is still with great difficulties. In other countries such as Spain, Britain, Chile, Canada, the streets have been overrun with demonstrations expressing the courage to fight against the reality of capitalism, even though this was not yet clearly the force of a class in society, the working class.

In Mexico, the mass protests called by students of the “#yo soy 132” (“I am 132”) movement, although they have been framed from the outset by the electoral campaign of the bourgeoisie for the presidential elections, are nevertheless the product of a social unrest which is smouldering. It is not to console ourselves that we affirm this; we don’t delude ourselves with the illusion of a working class advancing unabated in a process of struggle and clarification, we are just trying to understand reality. We need to take into account that the development of mobilisations throughout the world is not homogeneous and that within them, the working class as such does not assume a dominant position. Because of its difficulty to recognise itself as a class in society with the capacity to constitute a force within it, the working class lacks confidence in itself, is afraid to launch itself in the struggle and to lead that struggle. Such a situation promotes, within these movements, the influence of bourgeois mystifications which put forward reformist “solutions” as possible alternatives to the crisis of the system. This general trend is also present in Mexico.

It is only by recognising the difficulties faced by the working class that we can understand that the movement animating the creation of the group “# yo soy 132” also expresses the disgust with governments and parties of the ruling class. The latter was able to react very quickly to the threat by linking the group to the false hopes

raised by the elections and democracy, and converting it into a hollow organ, useless to the struggle of the exploited (who were coming closer to this group believing that it had found a way to fight), but very useful to the bourgeoisie which continues to use “#yo soy 132” to divert the combativity of young workers outraged by the reality of capitalism.

The ruling class knows perfectly well that increasing attacks will inevitably provoke a response from the exploited. José A Gurria, Secretary-General of the OECD, expressed this in these terms on February 24: “*What can happen when you mix the decline in growth, high unemployment and growing inequality? The result can only be the Arab Spring, the Indignants of Puerta del Sol and those in Wall Street*”. That is why, faced with this latent discontent, the Mexican bourgeoisie promotes the campaign protesting the election of Peña Nieto¹⁷ to the presidency of the republic, a unifying slogan that sterilises any combativity, along with the more radical statements of Lopez Obrador¹⁸ and of “# yo soy 132” ensuring that nothing will go further than the defence of democracy and its institutions.

Accentuated by the adverse effects of decomposition, the capitalist crisis has generalised the impoverishment of the proletariat and other oppressed but has thereby shown the naked reality, in all its cruelty: capitalism can offer us nothing but unemployment, poverty, violence and death.

The profound crisis of capitalism and the destructive advance of decomposition announces the dangers that represent the survival of capitalism, affirming the imperative necessity of its destruction by the only class capable of confronting it, the proletariat.

Rojo, March 2012

17. Leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (social democrat).

18. Leader of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (left social democrat).

The state in the period of transition from capitalism to communism

We are publishing below our response to the article “Workers’ councils, proletarian state, dictatorship of the proletariat” by the group Oposição Operária (OPOP)¹ in Brazil, which appeared in the *International Review* n° 148.²

The position developed in the article by OPOP essentially takes up the work of Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*, and it’s from this point of view that the group rejects a central

1. OPOP, Oposição Operária (Workers Opposition) is a group in Brazil. See its publication on <http://revistagerminal.com>. For a number of years now the ICC has maintained a fraternal and co-operative relationship which has taken the form of systematic discussions between our two organisations, joint leaflets and declarations (<http://en.internationalism.org/wr/299/struggles-in-brazil>) or shared public interventions (‘Deux réunions publiques communes au Brésil, OPOP-CCI: à propos des luttes des futures générations de prolétaires’, <http://fr.internationalism.org/ri371/opop.html>) and reciprocal participation in each other’s congresses.

2. “Debate: the state in the period of transition from capitalism to communism”, *International Review* n° 148, <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4745/debate-state-period-transition-capitalism-communism-part-1>.

idea of the ICC’s position. This position, while recognising the fundamental contribution of *The State and Revolution* to the understanding of the question of the state during the period of transition, uses the experience of the Russian revolution, reflections by Lenin himself during this period, and the fundamental writings of Marx and Engels, in order to draw lessons which lead us to call into question the identity between the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat classically accepted up to now by the marxist currents.

In its article, OPOP also develops another position of its own regarding what it calls the “pre-state”, that’s to say the organisation of the councils before the revolution called upon to overthrow the bourgeoisie and its state. We will return later to this question, because we think that the priority is first of all to make our divergences with the OPOP clear concerning the question of the state and the period of transition.

Our response to the group Oposição Operária (Workers’ Opposition) - Brazil

The essential aspects of the thesis defended by OPOP in its article

So as to avoid the reader going backwards and forwards to OPOP’s article in *International Review* n° 148 we are going to reproduce the passages that we consider the most significant.

For the OPOP, the “*paradoxical separation between the system of councils and the post-revolutionary state*” “*distances itself from the conception of Marx, Engels and Lenin and reflects a certain influence of the anarchist conception of the state*” thus amounting to “*breaking the unity that should exist and exists under the dictatorship of the proletariat*”. In fact, “*such a separation places, on the one hand, the state as a complex administrative structure and managed by a body of officials – a nonsense in the simplified design of the state according to Marx, Engels and Lenin – and, on the other, a political structure in which the councils exert pressure on the state as such*”.

It is an error which, according to the OPOP, is explained by the following incomprehensions in relation to the Commune-State and its relations with the

proletariat:

- “*an accommodation to a vision influenced by anarchism that identifies the Commune-State with the bureaucratic (bourgeois) state*”. This puts “*the proletariat outside of the post-revolutionary state while actually creating a dichotomy that, itself, is the germ of a new caste reproducing itself in the administrative body separated organically from the workers’ councils*”;
- “*the identification between the state that emerged in post-revolutionary Soviet Union – a necessarily bureaucratic state – with the conception of the Commune-State of Marx, Engels and Lenin himself*”;
- “*the non-perception that the real simplification of the Commune-State, as described by Lenin in the words reported earlier, implies a minimum of administrative structure and that this structure is so small and in the process of simplification /extinction, that it can be assumed directly by the council system*”.

Finally, according to OPOP, another factor intervenes in order to explain the erroneous lessons drawn by the ICC from

the Russian revolution as to the nature of the state in the period of transition: it’s a question of our organisation not taking into account the unfavourable conditions with which the revolution was confronted: “*a misunderstanding of the ambiguities that resulted from the specific historical and social circumstances that blocked not only the transition but also the beginning of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR. Here, one ceases to understand that the dynamic taken by the Russian Revolution – unless you opt for the easy but very inconsistent interpretation in which deviations in the revolutionary process were the result of the policies of Stalin and his entourage – did not obey the conception of the revolution, the state and of socialism that Lenin had, but resulted from the restrictions of the social and political terrain from which the power of the USSR emerged, characterised among others, to recall, by the impossibility of the revolution in Europe, by civil war and the counter-revolution within the USSR. The resulting dynamic was foreign to the will of Lenin. He himself thought about this problem, but repeatedly came up with the ambiguous formulations present in this later thinking and just before his death*”.

The inevitability of a period of transition and the existence of a state within it

The difference between marxists and anarchists doesn't reside in the fact that the former conceive of communism with a state and the latter as it being a society without a state. On this point, there is total agreement: communism can only be a society without a state. It was thus rather with the pseudo-marxists of social democracy, the successors of Lassalle, that such a fundamental difference existed, given that for them the state was the motor force of the socialist transformation of society. Engels wrote against them in the following passage of *Anti-Dühring*: "As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished'. **It dies out.** This gives the measure of the value of the phrase 'a free people's state',¹ both as to its justifiable use at times by agitators, and as to its ultimate scientific insufficiency and also of the demands of the so-called anarchists for the abolition of the state out of hand."² The real debate with the anarchists is about their total misunderstanding of an inevitable period of transition and on the fact that they see history as an immediate and direct two-footed jump from capitalism into a communist society.

On this question of the necessity of the state during the period of transition, we are thus perfectly in agreement with OPOP. That's why we are astonished that this organisation reproaches us for "*distancing ourselves from the conception of Marx, Engels and Lenin by reflecting a certain influence of the anarchist conception of*

the state". In what way can our position appear to approach that of the anarchists, according to whom "it is possible to abolish the state out of hand"?

If we base ourselves on what Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution* regarding the marxist critique of anarchism on the question of the state, it appears that this is far from confirming OPOP's point of view: "*To prevent the true meaning of his struggle against anarchism from being distorted, Marx expressly emphasised the 'revolutionary and transient form' of the state which the proletariat needs. The proletariat needs the state only temporarily. We do not after all differ with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources, and methods of state power against the exploiters, just as the temporary dictatorship of the oppressed class is necessary for the abolition of classes.*"³ In a word, the ICC accepts this formulation as its own. It's a question of Lenin's qualification of the "revolutionary" transitory nature of the state. Can this difference be connected to a variant of anarchist ideas, as OPOP thinks, or on the contrary does it refer to a much more profound question of the state?

What is the real debate?

On the question of the state, our position effectively differs from that of *The State and Revolution* and of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* according to which, during the period of transition, "*the state will be nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat.*"⁴ This is the basis of the debate between us: why can't there be an identity between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the state in the period of transition that arises after the revolution? This is the idea, which has struck many marxists, who have asked the question: "*Where does the ICC get its position from on the state in the period of transition?*" We can respond: "*Not from its imagination but rather from history, from the lessons drawn by generations of revolutionaries, from the reflections and theoretical elaborations of the workers' movement*". In particular:

- successive improvements in the understanding of the question of the state coming from the workers' movement up to the Russian revolution, of which

Lenin's *The State and Revolution* gives a masterly account;

- taking into account all of the theoretical considerations of Marx and Engels on the question of the state which in fact contradict the idea that the state in the period of transition could constitute the bearer of the socialist transformation of society;
- the degeneration of the Russian revolution which shows that the state constituted the main carrier of the development of the counter-revolution within the proletarian bastion;
- within this process, certain critical positions of Lenin in 1920-21 which demonstrated that the proletariat had to be able to defend itself against the state and which, while remaining imprisoned by the limitations of the dynamic of degeneration which led to the counter-revolution, bring an essential illumination on the nature and role of the transitional state.

It's with this approach that a work of weighing up the world revolutionary wave was made by the Communist Left in Italy.⁵ According to the latter, if the state subsists after the taking of power by the proletariat given that social classes still exist, the former is fundamentally an instrument of the conservation of the status quo but in no way the instrument of the transformation of relations of production towards communism. In this sense, the organisation of the proletariat as a class, through its workers' councils, must impose its hegemony on the state but never identify with it. It must be able, if necessary, to oppose the state, as Lenin partially understood in 1920-21. It is

1. Note in the cited passage from *Anti-Dühring*: "*The free people's state, a demand inspired by Lassalle and adopted at the unification congress at Gotha, was subjected to a fundamental critique by Marx in the Critique of the Gotha Programme.*"

2. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*. "Third Part: Socialism, Chapter II: Theoretical", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm>.

3. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, "Chapter IV, Supplementary Explanations by Engels, 2. Controversy with the anarchists." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch04.htm#s2>.

4. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Part IV, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch04.htm>.

5. Italian communist left. Just as the development of opportunism in the Second International gave rise to a proletarian response in the shape of left wing currents, the mounting opportunism of the Third International was to meet with resistance from the communist left. The communist left was essentially an international current with expressions in a number of countries, from Bulgaria to Britain and from the USA to South Africa. But its most important representatives were found precisely in those countries where the marxist tradition was strongest: Germany, Italy and Russia. In Italy, the communist left – which at the beginning held a majority in the Communist Party of Italy – had a particularly clear position on the question of organisation. This enabled it not only to wage a courageous battle against the opportunism of the degenerating International, but also to give birth to a left fraction which was able to survive the shipwreck of the revolutionary movement and develop marxist theory during the sombre years of the counter-revolution. At the beginning of the 1920s its arguments for abstentionism from bourgeois parliaments, against the fusion of the communist vanguard with the big centrist parties to create the illusion of 'mass influence', against the slogans of the United Front and the Workers' Government were already founded on a profound assimilation of the marxist method. For more information see "The communist left and the continuity of Marxism", <http://en.internationalism.org/the-communist-left>.

exactly because, with the extinction of the life of the soviets (inevitable from the fact of the failure of the world revolution), the proletariat had lost this capacity for acting and imposing itself on the state that the latter was able to develop its own conservative tendencies to the point of becoming the gravedigger of the revolution in Russia at the same time as it absorbed the Bolshevik Party itself, turning it into an instrument of the counter-revolution.

The contribution of history to the understanding of the state in the period of transition

Lenin's *The State and Revolution* constituted, in its time, the best synthesis of what the workers' movement had elaborated concerning the question of the state and the exercise of power by the working class.⁶ In fact this work offers an excellent illustration of the way that light is thrown on the question of the state through historical experience. By basing ourselves on its content we take up here the successive clarifications of the workers' movement on these questions:

- The *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 shows the necessity for the proletariat to take political power, to constitute itself as the dominant class, and sees this power as being exercised by means of the bourgeois state which will have been conquered by the proletariat: “*The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.*”⁷
- In *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851), the formulation was already becoming more “precise” and “concise” (according to Lenin's own terms) than that in the *Communist Manifesto*. In fact, for the first time the question arises of the necessity to destroy the state: “*All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it. The parties, which alternately contended for domination, regarded the possession of this huge state structure as the chief spoils of the victor.*”⁸

6. See our article “*The State and Revolution, a striking validation of Marxism*”, part of the series “Communism is not just a nice idea, it's on the agenda of history”, *International Review* n° 91. Many of the themes looked at here in our reply to OPOP are developed at greater length in this article.

7. *The Communist Manifesto*, “II, Proletarians and Communists”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>.

8. *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chapter VII, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/>

- Through the experience of the Paris Commune (1871), Marx saw, as did Lenin, “*a real step much more important than a hundred programmes and arguments*”⁹ which justified, in his eyes and those of Engels, that the programme of the *Communist Manifesto*, becoming “*antiquated in some details*”¹⁰ is modified through a new preface. The Commune has notably demonstrated, they continued, that “*the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.*”¹¹

The 1917 revolution did not leave time for Lenin to write in *The State and Revolution* chapters dedicated to the contributions of 1905 and February 1917. Lenin limited himself to identifying the soviets as the natural successors of the Paris Commune. One could add that even if these two revolutions did not allow the proletariat to take political power, they did however furnish supplementary lessons in relation to the experience of the Paris Commune concerning the power of the working class: the soviets of workers' deputies based upon assemblies held in the place of work turned out to be the most apt expression of proletarian class autonomy rather than the territorial units of the Commune.

Beyond constituting a synthesis of the best of what the workers' movement had written on these questions, *State and Revolution* contained Lenin's own developments which, in their turn, constituted advances. In effect, whereas they drew essential lessons from the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels had left an ambiguity as to the possibility that the proletariat would come to power peacefully through the electoral process in certain countries, i.e. those that provided the most developed parliamentary institutions and the least important military apparatuses. Lenin wasn't afraid to correct Marx by using the marxist method and put the question into the new historic context: “*Today, in 1917, at the time of the first great imperialist war, this restriction made by Marx is no longer valid. [...] Today, in Britain and America, too, 'the precondition for every real people's revolution' is the smashing, the destruction of the 'ready-*

1852/18th-brumaire/.

9. *The State and Revolution*, Chapter III: “The experience of the Paris Commune. What made the Communards' attempt heroic?” In fact, the expression used here by Lenin is adapted from the words of Marx in a letter to Bracke on 5 May 1875 regarding the Gotha Programme: “*A single step of the real movement is worth more than a dozen programmes*” (“Marx to Bracke”, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/letters/75_05_05.htm).

10. Preface to the 1872 German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/preface.htm#preface-1872>.

11. Ibid.

made state machinery.”¹²

Only a dogmatic vision could accommodate itself to the idea that *The State and Revolution* constituted the last and supreme stage in the clarification of the notion of the state in the workers' movement. If there's a work that's the antithesis of such a vision it's that of Lenin. OPOP itself is not afraid to distance itself from what Lenin literally said in *The State and Revolution* by pushing to its conclusion the idea of the preceding quote: “*Today, the task of establishing the councils as a form of state organisation is not only situated in the perspective of a single country but at the international level and it's here that the principal challenge is posed to the working class.*”¹³

Written in August/September 1917, at the outbreak of the October revolution, *The State and Revolution* very quickly served as a theoretical weapon for revolutionary action for the overthrow of the bourgeois state and the setting up of the Commune-State. The lessons drawn from the Paris Commune up to then were thus put to the test of history through events of a much more considerable weight – the Russian revolution and its degeneration.

Can lessons be drawn on the role of the state from the world revolutionary wave of 1917?

OPOP responds negatively to this question when it tells us that the conditions were so unfavourable that they didn't allow the setting up of a workers' state such as Lenin described in *The State and Revolution*. Thus they reproach us for identifying “*the state that emerged in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union – a necessarily bureaucratic state – with the conception of the Commune-State of Marx, Engels and Lenin himself*” and adds “*Here, one ceases to understand that the dynamic taken by the Russian revolution [...] did not obey the conception of the revolution, the state and of socialism that Lenin had, but resulted from the restrictions of the social and political terrain from which the power of the USSR emerged.*”

We are in agreement with OPOP in saying that the first lesson to be drawn from the degeneration of the Russian revolution concerns the effects of the international isolation of the proletarian bastion following the defeat of other revolutionary attempts in Europe; Germany in particular. In fact, not only can there be no transformation of relations of production towards socialism

12. *The State and Revolution*, III, *ibid*.

13. Cf. “Debate: the state in the period of transition from capitalism to communism” *International Review* n° 148, <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4745/debate-state-period-transition-capitalism-communism-part-1>.

in a single country, but furthermore it is not possible that a proletarian power can maintain itself indefinitely in a capitalist world. But are there other lessons of great importance that can be drawn from this experience?

Yes, of course! And OPOP recognises one of them amongst others, although this explicitly contradicts the following passage in *The State and Revolution* in relation to the first phase of communism: “the exploitation of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the means of production – the factories, machines, land, etc. – and make them private property”¹⁴. In fact what the Russian revolution and above all the Stalinist counter-revolution shows is that the simple transformation of the productive apparatus into state property doesn’t suppress the exploitation of man by man.

In fact, the Russian revolution and its degeneration constitute historic events of such significance that one cannot fail to draw lessons from them. For the first time in history the proletariat of a country took political power as the most advanced expression of a world revolutionary wave, with the appearance of a state that was called proletarian! And then something happened that was equally unknown in the workers’ movement; the defeat of a revolution, not clearly and openly beaten down by the savage repression of the bourgeoisie as was the case of the Paris Commune, but as the consequence of a process of internal degeneration which took on the hideous face of Stalinism.

In the weeks following the October insurrection, the Commune-State is already something other than the “armed workers” described in *The State and Revolution*.¹⁵ Above all, with the growing isolation of the revolution, the new state was more and more infested with the gangrene of the bureaucracy, responding less and less to the organs elected by the proletariat and

14. *The State and Revolution*, Chapter V, 3, “The first phase of communist society: The economic basis of the withering away of the state”.

15. This expression is taken from the following passage: “Once we have overthrown the capitalists, crushed the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, and smashed the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the “parasite”, a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them all, as indeed all ‘state’ officials in general, workmen’s wages. Here is a concrete, practical task which can immediately be fulfilled in relation to all trusts, a task whose fulfilment will rid the working people of exploitation, a task which takes account of what the Commune had already begun to practice (particularly in building up the state)” *The State and Revolution*, Chapter III, “The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx’s analysis, 3. Abolition of parliamentarism”.

the poor peasants. Far from beginning to wither away, the new state was about to invade the whole of society. Far from bending to the will of the revolutionary class, it became the central point of a process of degeneration and internal counter-revolution. At the same time, the soviets were emptied of their life. The workers’ soviets were transformed into appendages of the unions in the management of production. Thus the force that made the revolution, and needed to maintain its control over it, lost its political and organised autonomy. The carrier of the counter-revolution was nothing more or less than the state and, the more that the revolution encountered difficulties, the more the power of the working class became weakened and the more the Commune-State manifested its non-proletarian nature, its conservative – even reactionary – side. We will explain this characterisation.

From Marx and Engels to the Russian experience: convergence towards the same characterisation of the state in the period of transition

It would be an error to definitively stop at the formulation of Marx in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* concerning the characterisation of the state in the period of transition, identified as the dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact other characterisations of the state were made by Marx and Engels themselves, later by Lenin and then by the Communist Left, which fundamentally contradict the formulae Commune-State=dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to converge towards an idea of a state conservative by nature, including here the Commune-State in the period of transition.

The transitional state is the emanation of society and not of the proletariat

How does one explain the appearance of the state? In this regard Engels left no ambiguity: “The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from without; just as little is it ‘the reality of the moral idea,’ ‘the image and the reality of reason,’ as Hegel maintains.¹⁶ Rather, it is a product of society at a particular stage of development; it is the admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, a power, apparently standing above

16. The note is in the cited passage from *The Origin of the Family* and is from Hegel, *Principles of the Philosophy of Law*, Sections 257 and 360.

society, has become necessary to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state”.¹⁷ Lenin took this passage of Engels into account, quoting it in *The State and Revolution*. Despite all the arrangements put in place by the proletariat for the transitional Commune-State, the latter had in common with the states of all previous past societies the fact of being a conservative organ at the service of the maintenance of the dominant order, that is to say, of the economically dominant classes. This has implications at both the theoretical and practical levels concerning the following questions: Who exercises power during the society of transition, the state or the proletariat organised in workers’ councils? Which is the economically dominant class of the society of transition? What is the motor force for the social transformation of society and of the dying out of the state?

The state cannot by nature express the sole interests of the proletariat

Where the political power of the bourgeoisie has been overturned, relations of production remain capitalist relations even if the bourgeoisie is no longer there to appropriate the surplus value produced by the working class. The point of departure of a communist transformation is based upon the military defeat of the bourgeoisie in a sufficient number of decisive countries to give a political advantage to the working class at a global level. This is the period during which the bases of a new mode of production slowly develop to the detriment of the old, up to the point where they supplant it and constitute the new mode of production.

After the revolution and as long as the world human community has not yet been realised, ie. as long as the immense majority of the world population has not been integrated into free and associated production, the proletariat remains an exploited class. Thus, contrary to revolutionary classes of the past, the proletariat is not destined to become the economically dominant class. For this reason, even if the established order after the revolution is no longer that of the economic and political dominance of the bourgeoisie, the state, which rises up during this period as the guarantor of the new economic order, cannot intrinsically be at the service of the proletariat. On the contrary, it is up to the latter to constrain it in the direction of its own class interests.

17. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chapter IX, “Barbarism and Civilisation”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch09.htm>.

The role of the transitional state: the integration of the non-exploited population into the management of society and the struggle against the bourgeoisie

In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin himself said that the proletariat needed the state to suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie, but also to lead the non-exploited population in the socialist direction: “*The proletariat needs state power, a centralised organisation of force, an organisation of violence, both to crush the resistance of the exploiters and to lead the enormous mass of the population — the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and semi-proletarians — in the work of organising a socialist economy.*”¹⁸

We support Lenin’s point of view here, according to which, in order to overthrow the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must be able to bring behind it the immense majority of the poor and the oppressed, among which it can itself be a minority. Any alternative to such a policy doesn’t exist. How was this concretised in the Russian revolution? Two types of soviets emerged: on the one hand, soviets based essentially on the centres of production and regrouping the working class, called workers’ councils; on the other, soviets based on territorial units (territorial soviets) in which all the layers of the non-exploited actively participated in the local management of that society. The workers’ councils organised the whole of the working class, that is to say, the revolutionary class. The territorial soviets,¹⁹ meanwhile, based on revocable delegates, were intended to be part of the Commune-State,²⁰ the latter having the function of managing society as a whole. In the revolutionary period, all of the non-exploited layers, while being for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and against the restoration of its domination, have not necessarily accepted the idea of the socialist transformation of society. They could even be hostile to it. In fact, within these layers,

18. *The State and Revolution*, Chapter II, “The experience of the years 1848-1851”.

19. Also participating in this State, in ever-increasing numbers, were experts, leaders of the Red Army, Cheka, etc.

20. In our series of five articles in the *International Review*, “What are workers’ councils?”, we showed the sociological and political differences between workers’ councils and territorial soviets. The workers’ councils are factory councils. Alongside these are also found neighbourhood councils, the latter integrating workers from small enterprises and shops, the unemployed, the young, pensioners, families who are part of the working class as a whole. The factory and neighbourhood councils (workers) played a decisive role at different moments in the revolutionary process (see the articles in IR n°s 141, 142). It was no accident that, with the process of the degeneration of the revolution, the factory councils disappeared at the end of 1918 and the neighbourhood councils at the end of 1919. The trade unions played a decisive role in the destruction of the former (see the article in *International Review* n° 145).

the proletariat can be in a small minority. That’s the reason why, in Russia, measures were taken in the means of electing delegates so that the weight of the working class within the Commune-State could be strengthened: 1 delegate for 125,000 peasants, 1 delegate for 25,000 workers of the towns. But this did not take away the necessity to mobilise the largely peasant population against the bourgeoisie and to integrate it into the process of the running of society, giving birth, in Russia, to a state which was made up not only of delegates of workers’ soviets, but also delegates of soldiers and poor peasants.

The warning of marxism against the state during the period of transition

In his 1891 introduction to *The Civil War in France*, and written on the twentieth anniversary of the Paris Commune, Engels wasn’t afraid to put forward common traits of all states, whether classical bourgeois states or the Commune-State of the period of transition: “*In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap.*”²¹ Considering the state as “*an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy*”²² is an idea perfectly logical with the notion that the state is an emanation of society and not of the revolutionary proletariat. And this has heavy implications regarding the necessary relations between the state and the revolutionary class. Even if these were not able to be completely clarified before the Russian revolution, Lenin was inspired by it in his strong insistence, in *The State and Revolution*, on the need for the workers to submit all the members of the state to constant supervision and control, particularly the elements of the state which most evidently embodied a certain continuity with the old regime, such as technical and military “experts” that the soviets will be forced to use.

Lenin also elaborated a theoretical basis for this necessity for a healthy distrust of the proletariat towards the new state. In the chapter entitled “The economic bases of the extinction of the state”, he explained that

21. Engels, 1891 Introduction to *The Civil War in France*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm>.

22. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

given its role of looking after the situation of “bourgeois right”, in certain regards one could define the transitional state as “*the bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie*”!²³ Even if this formulation is more of a call for reflection than a clear definition of the class nature of the transitional state, Lenin hit on the essential: since the task of the state is to protect a state of things which are not yet communist, the Commune-State reveals its fundamentally conservative nature and that is what makes it particularly vulnerable to a counter-revolutionary dynamic.

An intervention by Lenin in 1920-21 which put forward the necessity for the workers to be able to defend themselves against the state

These theoretical perceptions certainly made it possible for Lenin to demonstrate a certain lucidity about the nature of the state in Russia in the debate on the unions,²⁴ where he particularly opposed Trotsky, then a partisan of the militarisation of labour and for whom the proletariat should identify itself with “the proletarian state” and even subordinate itself to it. Although he himself was caught up by the process of the degeneration of the revolution, Lenin was then arguing in favour of the necessity for the workers to maintain organs defending their interests,²⁵ even against the transitional state, at the same time as he repeated his warnings about the growth of state bureaucracy. At a speech to communist delegates in a meeting at the end of 1920, Lenin posed the question in the following terms:

“... Comrade Trotsky ... seems to say that in a workers’ state it is not the business of

23. The context for this expression from Lenin’s text is the following: “*In its first phase, or first stage, communism cannot as yet be fully mature economically and entirely free from traditions or vestiges of capitalism. Hence the interesting phenomenon that communism in its first phase retains ‘the narrow horizon of bourgeois law’. Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of consumer goods inevitably presupposes the existence of the bourgeois state, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of enforcing the observance of the rules of law. It follows that under communism there remains for a time not only bourgeois law, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie!*”, *The State and Revolution*, Chapter 5, “The higher phase of communist society”.

24. See in particular our article “Understanding the defeat of the Russian revolution” in the series “Communism is not just a nice idea, it’s on the agenda of history” in *International Review* n° 99, <http://en.internationalism.org/node/4040>.

25. These are unions which at the time were seen by all concerned as authentic defenders of the interests of the proletariat. This is explained by the backward conditions in Russia, where the bourgeoisie had not developed a sophisticated state apparatus capable of recognising the value of trade unions as instruments of social peace. For this reason not all the unions formed before and even after the 1917 revolution were necessarily organs of the class enemy. There was in particular a strong tendency to form industrial unions which still expressed a certain proletarian content.

the trade unions to stand up for the material and spiritual interests of the working class. That is a mistake. Comrade Trotsky speaks of a 'workers' state'. May I say that this is an abstraction. It was natural for us to write about a workers' state in 1917; but it is now a patent error to say: 'Since this is a workers' state without any bourgeoisie, against whom then is the working class to be protected, and for what purpose?' The whole point is that it is not quite a workers' state. That is where Comrade Trotsky makes one of his main mistakes. We have got down from general principles to practical discussion and decrees, and here we are being dragged back and prevented from tackling the business at hand. This will not do. For one thing, ours is not actually a workers' state but a workers' and peasants' state. And a lot depends on that. (Bukharin: 'What kind of state? A workers' and peasants' state?') Comrade Bukharin back there may well shout 'What kind of state? A workers' and peasants' state?' I shall not stop to answer him. Anyone who has a mind to should recall the recent Congress of Soviets, and that will be answer enough.

"But that is not all. Our Party Programme – a document which the author of the ABC of Communism knows very well – shows that ours is a workers' state with a bureaucratic twist to it. We have had to mark it with this dismal, shall I say, tag. There you have the reality of the transition. Well, is it right to say that in a state that has taken this shape in practice the trade unions have nothing to protect, or that we can do without them in protecting the material and spiritual interests of the massively organised proletariat? No, this reasoning is theoretically quite wrong [...] We now have a state under which it is the business of the massively organised proletariat to protect itself, while we, for our part, must use these workers' organisations to protect the workers from their state, and to get them to protect our state."²⁶

We consider this reflection luminous and of the greatest importance. Himself caught up in the dynamic of the counter-revolution, Lenin, unfortunately wasn't up to carrying on with the deepening that he made (on the contrary he went back on his characterisation of the state as a 'workers' and peasants' state'). Moreover this intervention didn't even give rise (above all from Lenin himself) to reflection or common work with the Workers' Opposition led by Kollontai and Shliapnikov, which expressed at the time a proletarian reaction both against the bureaucratic theorisations of Trotsky and against the real bureaucratic

distortions which were eating away at proletarian power. Nevertheless, this precious reflection has not been lost to the proletariat. If fact as we previously noted, it constituted the point of departure for a more profound reflection on the nature of the state of the period of transition led by the Communist Left of Italy, which was later transmitted to following generations of revolutionaries.

It's the proletariat and not the state which is the force of the revolutionary transformation of society

One of the fundamental ideas of Marxism is that the class struggle constitutes the motor of history. It is not by chance that this idea is expressed in the first phrase, just after the preamble, of the *Communist Manifesto*: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"²⁷. It is not the state which can play this role of motor when its historical function is precisely "to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'"²⁸. This characterisation of the state in class societies still applies to the society of transition where it is the working class, which remains the revolutionary force. Already, regarding the Paris Commune, Marx had clearly distinguished the revolutionary force of the proletariat on one hand, and the Commune-State on the other: "the Commune is not the social movement of the working class and therefore of a general regeneration of mankind, but the organised means of action. The Commune does not [do] away with the class struggles, through which the working classes strive to [read for] the abolition of all classes and, therefore, of all classes [class rule] [...] but it affords the rational medium in which that class struggle can run through its different phases in the most rational and humane way."²⁹

The characterisation of the proletariat after the revolution as both the dominant political class and one still exploited on the economic level means that, both on the economic and political levels, the Commune-State and the dictatorship of the proletariat are essentially antagonistic:

- as an exploited class the proletariat must defend its "material and spiritual interests" (as Lenin said) against the economic logic of the Commune-State representing society as a whole at a given moment;
- it is as a revolutionary class that the

proletariat must defend its political and practical orientations with the aim of transforming society against the social conservatism of the state and its tendency to self-preservation as an organ which, according to Engels "places itself above (society) and becomes more and more alien to it."³⁰

So as to be able to assume its historic mission of transforming society in order to finish with all economic domination of one class or another, the working class must assume its political domination over the whole of society through the international power of the workers' councils, the monopoly on the control of arms and the fact that it is the sole class of society that is permanently armed. Its political domination is also exercised over the state. The workers' class power is moreover inseparable from the effective and unlimited participation of the immense mass of the class, from their activity and organisation, and it finishes when their political power becomes superfluous, when classes have disappeared.

Conclusion

We hope that we have responded to the criticisms of the OPOP on our position on the state in the most well argued way possible. We are quite conscious of not having responded specifically to a certain number of concrete and explicit objections (for example, "the organisational and administrative tasks that the revolution puts on the agenda from the beginning are essentially political tasks, whose implementation must be carried out directly by the victorious proletariat"). If we haven't done so at this time it's because it seemed a priority for us to present the greater historical and theoretical lines of our framework of analysis and because, very often, this constitutes an implicit response to the objections of OPOP. If necessary, we will return to them in a further article.

Finally, we essentially think that this question of the state in the period of transition is not the only one whose theoretical and practical clarification has been advanced considerably by the experience of the Russian revolution; it's the same for the role and place of the proletarian party. Is its role to exercise power? Is its place within the state in the name of the working class? No for us, these remain errors that contributed to the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. We also hope to be able to return to this question in another debate with the OPOP.

Sylvio 9/8/12

26. 30 December 1920. "The trade unions, the present situation and Trotsky's mistakes", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/dec/30.htm>.

27. The *Communist Manifesto*, "I. Bourgeois and Proletarians", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>.

28. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

29. The first draft of *The Civil War in France*, http://marxengels.public-archive.net/en/ME1511en_d1.html.

30. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

Primitive communism

Why write about primitive communism today? The sudden plunge into catastrophic economic crisis and the development of struggles around the world are raising new problems for the working class, dark clouds are gathering over capitalism's future, and all the while the hope of a better world seems unable to break through. Is this really the time to study the our species' social history in the period from its emergence some 200,000 years ago to the beginning of the Neolithic

(about 10,000 years ago)?¹ For ourselves, we are convinced that the question is every bit as important for communists today as it was for Marx and Engels in the 19th century, both in general for its scientific interest and as an element in our understanding of humanity and its history, and for our understanding of the perspective and possibility of a future communist society able to replace moribund capitalism.

This is why we can only welcome the publication in 2009 of a book titled *Le communisme primitif n'est plus ce qu'il était* ("Primitive communism is not what it was") by Christophe Darmangeat; and indeed it is even more encouraging that the book is already in its second edition, which clearly indicates a public interest in the subject.² This article will try, through a critical review, to return to the problems posed by the question of the first human societies; we will profit from the opportunity to explore the ideas put forward some twenty years ago by Chris Knight,³ in his book *Blood Relations*.⁴

Before we get into the meat of the subject, one thing should be clear: the question of primitive communism, and of humanity's "species being", are scientific questions, not political ones. In this sense, it is out of the question for a political organisation to adopt a "position" on human

nature, for example. We are convinced that a communist organisation should stimulate debate and a thirst for scientific knowledge amongst its militants, and more generally in the working class, but the aim here is to encourage the development of a materialist and scientific view of the world, based on an awareness of modern scientific theory, at least as far as this is possible for non-scientists, as most of us are. The ideas presented cannot therefore be considered the "positions" of the ICC: they are the responsibility of the author alone.⁵

Why is the question of our origins important?

Why then is the question of the origin of our species, and of the first human societies, an important one for communists? The terms of the problem have changed considerably since the 19th century when Marx and Engels discovered with enthusiasm the work of the American anthropologist Lewis Morgan. In 1884, when Engels published *The origins of the family, private property, and the state*, science had barely escaped the clutches of an epoch where the estimates of the age of the planet, or of human society, were based on Bishop Ussher's biblical calculations.⁶ As Engels wrote in his 1891 preface: "*Before the beginning of the 'sixties, one cannot speak of a history of the family. In this field, the science of history was still completely under the influence of the five books of Moses. The patriarchal form of the family,*

which was there described in greater detail than anywhere else, was not only assumed without question to be the oldest form, but it was also identified – minus its polygamy – with the bourgeois family of today, so that the family had really experienced no historical development at all".⁷ The same was true of notions of property, and the bourgeoisie could still object to the working class' communist programme that "private property" was intrinsic to human society itself. The idea of the existence of a social condition of primitive communism was so unknown that in 1847 the *Communist Manifesto* could open with the words "*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*" (a declaration that Engels thought it necessary to correct with a note in 1884).

Morgan's book *Ancient Society* greatly helped in dismantling the ahistorical view of a human society eternally based on private property, even though his contribution was often hidden or passed over in silence by official anthropology, especially in Britain. As Engels notes, again in his Preface: "*Morgan filled the measure to overflowing by not merely criticizing civilization, the society of commodity production, the basic form of present-day society, in a manner reminiscent of Fourier, but also by speaking of a future transformation of this society in words which Karl Marx might have used.*"

Today, in 2012, the situation is very different. A succession of discoveries have pushed man's origins further and further back in time, so that today we know not only that private property is not society's eternal foundation, but on the contrary that it is a relatively recent invention, since

1. A social history which, for some human populations, has continued to the present day.

2. Editions Smolny, Toulouse, 2009. We became aware of the publication of the second edition of Darmangeat's book (Smolny, Toulouse, 2012) just as this article was about to go to press, and we obviously wondered whether we would have to rewrite this review. After reading through the second edition, it seems to us that we can leave this article essentially in its original state. The author himself points out in a new preface that he has not "*modified the text's essential ideas, nor the arguments on which it is based*", and our reading of this new edition confirms this. We have therefore limited ourselves to elaborating some arguments on the basis of the 2nd edition. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes and page references are taken from the first edition.

3. Chris Knight is an English anthropologist and member of the "Radical Anthropology Group". He has taken part in the debates on science at the 19th ICC Congress, and we have published his article on "Marxism and Science" on our web site (<http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2011/07/marxism-and-science-chris-knight>)

4. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1991.

5. That said, the author is deeply indebted to the discussions within the organisation, without which it would certainly have been impossible to develop these ideas.

6. Bishop Ussher was a prolific 17th scholar who calculated the age of the Earth on the basis of biblical genealogies: he gave a date for the planet's creation in 4004 BC.

7. <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/preface2.htm>

agriculture and so private property and the division of society into classes only date back some 10,000 years. Certainly, as Alain Testart has shown in his work *Les chasseurs-cueilleurs ou l'origine des inégalités*, the formation of wealth and classes did not take place overnight; a long period must have elapsed before the emergence of fully fledged agriculture, during which the development of storage techniques encouraged the emergence of an unequal distribution of accumulated wealth. Nonetheless, it is clear today that by far the longest period of human history is not that of class struggle, but of a society without classes: a society that we are justified in calling primitive communism.

The objection to the idea of a communist society that we hear most today is no longer that it violates the eternal principles of private property, but that it is supposedly contrary to "human nature". "You can't change human nature", we are told, and by that is meant the supposedly violent, competitive and egocentric nature of man. Capitalist order is thus no longer eternal, but merely the logical and inevitable result of unchanging nature. Nor is this argument limited to right-wing ideologues. Humanist scientists, following as they believe the same logic of a genetically determined human nature, reach similar conclusions. The *New York Review of Books* (a left leaning intellectual journal) gives us an example of this reasoning in its October 2011 edition: "*Humans compete for resources, living space, mates, social status, and almost everything else. Each living human is at the apex of a lineage of successful competitors that extends back to the origin of life. We are nothing if not fine-tuned competitors. The compulsion to compete enters into nearly everything we do, whether we recognize it or not. And the best competitors among us are often the best rewarded. One needs to look no further than Wall Street for a flagrant example [...] The human predicament of overpopulation and overexploitation of resources is fundamentally driven by the primordial impulses that drove our ancestors to achieve above-average reproductive success.*"⁸

This argument appears unanswerable at first sight: one hardly need look far to find endless examples of cupidity, violence, cruelty and egoism in today's society, and in history. But does it follow that these defects are determined – as we would say today – genetically? Nothing could be more uncertain. If we can risk an analogy, a tree growing on a windswept cliff will grow twisted and stunted. Yet this is not wholly inscribed in its genes: under better

conditions the tree would grow straight and tall.

Could we say the same of human beings?

It is a truism that features often enough in our articles, to say that the world proletariat's resistance to capitalism's crisis does not correspond to the violence of the attacks to which it is subjected. Communist revolution has perhaps never seemed so necessary, and yet at the same time so difficult. One of the reasons for this is certainly – in our view – because the workers not only lack confidence in their own strength but in the very possibility of communism. "It's a nice idea", people say to us, "but you know, human nature..."

To regain its self-confidence, the proletariat must not only confront the immediate problems of the struggle; it must also confront the greater historical problems posed by its potential revolutionary confrontation with the ruling class. Amongst these problems there is precisely that of "human nature", and this problem can only be investigated in the spirit of science. We have no interest in "proving" that man is "good". We hope to arrive at a better understanding of precisely what man is, in order to integrate this knowledge into communist political project. The communist goal does not depend on man's "natural goodness": the need for communism is set in the given of capitalist society as the only solution to the social logjam which will undoubtedly lead us to a catastrophic future if capitalism does not give way before a communist revolution.

Scientific method

Before continuing, we want to turn aside briefly to consider the question of scientific method, especially as it applies to the study of human history and behaviour. A passage at the beginning of Knight's book seems to us to pose the problem of anthropology's place among the sciences very well: "*More than any other field of knowledge, anthropology taken as a whole spans the chasm which has traditionally divided the natural from the human sciences. Potentially if not always in practice, it therefore occupies a central position among the sciences as a whole. The crucial threads which – if joined – might bind the natural sciences to the humanities would have to run through anthropology more than through any other field. It is here that the ends join – here that the study of nature ends and that of culture begins. At which point on the scale of evolution did biological principles cease to predominate while other, more complex, principles began prevailing in their place? Where exactly is the dividing*

line between animal and human social life? Is the distinction here one of kind, or merely one of degree? And, in the light of this question, is it really possible to study human phenomena scientifically – with the same detached objectivity as an astronomer can show towards galaxies or a physicist towards subatomic particles?

"*If this area of relationships between the sciences seems to many to be confused, it is only in part because of the real difficulties involved. Science may be rooted at one end in objective reality, but at the other end it is rooted in society and ourselves. It is for ultimately social and ideological reasons that modern science, fragmented and distorted under immense yet largely unacknowledged political pressures, has stumbled upon its greatest problem and its greatest theoretical challenge – to incorporate the humanities and the natural sciences into a single unified science on the basis of an understanding of humanity's evolution and place within the rest of the universe.*"⁹

The question of the "dividing line" between the animal world, whose behaviour is determined above all by its genetic heritage, and the human world where behaviour depends to a far greater extent both on genes and on our cultural evolution, does indeed seem to us crucial to an understanding of "human nature". Other primates are capable of learning, and up to a point of inventing and transmitting new behaviour, but this does not mean that they possess a "culture" in the human sense. These learned behaviours remain "*marginal to the maintenance of social-structural continuity*".¹⁰ What made it possible for culture to gain the upper hand, in a "*creative explosion*",¹¹ is the development of communication amongst human groups, the development of symbolic culture based on language and ritual. Knight indeed makes the comparison between symbolic culture and language, which allowed human beings to communicate and so transmit ideas, and therefore culture, universally, and science, which is also founded on a common symbolism based on a planet-wide accord between all scientists, and potentially at least between all human beings. The practice of science is inseparable from debate, and the ability of each to verify the conclusions at which science arrives: it is therefore the sworn enemy of any form of esotericism which lives through secret knowledge, closed to non initiates.

9. Knight, op.cit. p.56-7

10. Ibid, p11. We can draw an analogy here with commodity production and capitalist society. Commodity production and trade have existed since the dawn of civilisation, and perhaps even before, but they become determining factors only in capitalism.

11. Ibid, p.12

8. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/oct/13/can-our-species-escape-destruction>

Because it is a universal form of knowledge, and because since the industrial revolution it has been a productive force in its own right dependent on the associated labour, in both time and space, of scientists,¹² science is internationalist by nature, and in this sense the proletariat and science are natural allies.¹³ This absolutely does not mean that there can be such a thing as “proletarian science”. In his article on “Marxism and science”, Knight quotes these words of Engels: “... the more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers.”¹⁴ Knight continues: “Science, as humanity’s only universal, international, species-unifying form of knowledge, had to come first. If it had to be rooted in the interests of the working class, this was only in the sense that all science has to be rooted in the interests of the human species as a whole, the international working class embodying these interests in the modern epoch just as the requirements of production have always embodied these interests in previous periods.”

There are two other aspects of scientific thought, highlighted in Carlo Rovelli’s book on the Greek philosopher Anaximander of Miletos,¹⁵ which we want to take up here because they seem to us fundamental: respect for one’s predecessors, and doubt.

Rovelli shows that Anaximander’s attitude towards his master Thales broke with the attitudes that characterised his epoch: either a total rejection in order to establish oneself as the new master, or a slavish devotion to the words of the “master” whose thought is maintained in a state of mummification. The scientific attitude on

the contrary, consists in basing ourselves on the work of the “masters” who have gone before, while at the same time criticising their mistakes and trying to take knowledge further. This the attitude we find in Knight’s book with regard to Lévi-Strauss, and in Darmangeat with regard to Morgan.

Doubt is fundamental to science, the very opposite of religion which always seeks certainty and consolation in the invariance of eternally established truth. As Rovelli says, “Science offers the best answers precisely because it does not consider its answers to be absolute truths; this is why it is always able to learn, and to take in new ideas”.¹⁶ This is especially true of anthropology and paleo-anthropology, whose data is often scattered and uncertain, and whose best theories can be upended overnight by new discoveries.

Is it even possible to have a scientific vision of history? Karl Popper,¹⁷ who is a reference for most scientists, thought not. He considered history as a “unique event” which is therefore non-reproducible, and since the verification of a scientific hypothesis depends on reproducible experiment, historical theory cannot be considered scientific. For the same reasons, Popper rejected the theory of evolution as non-scientific, and yet it is obvious today that the scientific method has proved itself capable of laying bare the fundamental mechanisms of the evolutionary process to the point where humanity can now manipulate evolution through genetic engineering. Without going as far as Popper, it is nonetheless clear that to apply the scientific method to the study of history, to the point we can make predictions about its evolution, is an extremely hazardous exercise. On the one hand human history – like meteorology for example – incorporates an incalculable number of independent variables, on the other, and above all, because – as Marx said – “men make their own history”; history is therefore determined by laws, but also by the ability or otherwise of human beings to base their acts on conscious thought and on the knowledge of these laws. Historical evolution is always subject to constraints: at any given moment, certain developments are possible, others are not. But the manner

in which a given situation will evolve is also determined by men’s ability to become conscious of these constraints and to act on the basis of this awareness.

It is thus particularly bold on Knight’s part to accept the full rigour of the scientific method and to subject his theory to experimental test. Obviously, it is impossible to “reproduce” history experimentally. Knight therefore makes predictions on the basis of his hypotheses (in 1991, the date when *Blood Relations* was published) as to future archaeological discoveries: in particular, that the earliest traces of human symbolic culture would reveal an extensive use of red ochre. In 2006, 15 years later, it would seem that these predictions have been confirmed by the discoveries in the Blombos caves (South Africa) of the first known vestiges of human culture;¹⁸ these include engraved red ochre, pierced seashells apparently used for body decoration, and even the world’s first paint-pot, all of which fits into the evolutionary model that Knight proposes (to which we will return later). Obviously, this is not a “proof” of his theory, but it seems to us undeniable that it strengthens the hypothesis.

This scientific method is very different from that followed by Darmangeat who remains, or so it seems to us, restricted to the inductivist method which brings together known facts to try to extract from these some common factors. This method is not without value in scientific historical study: after all, any theory must conform to known reality. But Darmangeat seems to be very reticent about any attempt to go further and this seems to us an empirical rather than a scientific approach: science does not advance through induction from observed fact, but through hypothesis, which must certainly be in conformity with observation but must also propose an approach (experimental if possible), which would make it possible to go further towards new discoveries and new observations. String theory in quantum mechanics gives us a striking example of this method: although it is in accord, as far as possible, with observed fact, it cannot today be verified experimentally, since the particles (or “strings”) whose existence it postulates are too small to be measured with existing technology. String theory thus remains a speculative hypothesis – but without this kind of bold speculation, science would be unable to advance.

Another problem with the inductivist method is that it must, inevitably, pre-select its observations from the immensity

12. See our article “Reading notes on science and marxism”, <http://en.internationalism.org/iconline/201203/4739/reading-notes-science-and-marxism>

13. This is true of science as it is of other productive forces under capitalism: “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground — what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour? [...] The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property” (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Part I “Bourgeois and Proletarians”).

14. Engels, “Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy”. In *K Marx and F Engels, On Religion*. Moscow 1957, p. 266.

15. *The first scientist : Anaximander and his legacy*, Westholme Publishing, 2011

16. Our translation from the French, cited in an article published on our French site.

17. Karl Popper (1902-1994) was born in Vienna, Austria. He became one of the 20th century’s most influential philosophers of science, and an unavoidable reference for any scientist interested in questions of methodology. He insists in particular on the idea of “refutability”, which states that any hypothesis, if it is to be considered scientific, must be able to propose experiments which would allow it to be refuted: should such experiments be impossible, then a hypothesis could not claim to be scientific. On this basis, Popper held that marxism, psychoanalysis, and – at least at first – Darwinism, could not claim to be scientific disciplines.

18. See the work of the Stellenbosch conference published in *The cradle of language*, OUP, 2009, and the article published in the November 2011 issue of *La Recherche* (<http://www.larecherche.fr/content/recherche/article?id=30891>).

of known reality. This is how Darmangeat proceeds, when he bases himself solely on ethnographic observation and leaves aside any consideration of the role of evolution and genetics – which seems to us an impossibility in a work which aims to lay bare “the origin of the oppression of women” (as Darmangeat’s book is sub-titled).

Morgan, Engels, and the scientific method

After these very modest considerations on the question of methodology, let us now return to Darmangeat’s book, which is this article’s starting-point.

The book is divided into two parts: the first examines the work of the American anthropologist Lewis Morgan on which Engels based his *Origins of the family, private property and the state*, while the second takes up Engels’ question as to the origins of the oppression of women. In this second part, Darmangeat concentrates on attacking the idea that there once existed a primitive communism based on matriarchy.

The first part seems to us especially interesting,¹⁹ and we can only agree wholeheartedly with Darmangeat when he rounds on a supposedly “marxist” position which raises the work of Morgan (and *a fortiori* Engels) to the status of untouchable religious texts. Nothing could be further from the scientific spirit of marxism. While we should expect marxists to have a historical view of the emergence and development of materialist social theory, and so to take account of previous theories, it is absolutely obvious that we cannot take 19th century texts as the last word, and ignore the immense accumulation of ethnographic knowledge since then. Certainly, it is necessary to maintain a critical view in this respect: Darmangeat, like Knight, rightly insists on the fact that the struggle against Morgan’s theories was far from being waged on the basis of “pure”, “disinterested” science. When Morgan’s contemporary and later adversaries pointed out his mistakes, or when they highlighted discoveries that did not fit his theory, their aim was not in general neutral. By attacking Morgan, they attacked the evolutionary view of human society, and tried to re-establish bourgeois society’s patriarchal family and private property as the “eternal” categories of all human society, past present and future. This was perfectly explicit for Malinowski, one of the early 20th century’s greatest ethnographers, who said in a 1931 radio interview: “I believe that the most disruptive element in the modern revolutionary tendencies

19. Ironically, in the second edition Darmangeat has moved the book’s first part to an Appendix, apparently for fear of discouraging the non-specialist reader with its “aridity”, to use the author’s own term.

is the idea that parenthood can be made collective. If once we come to the point of doing away with the individual family as the pivotal element of our society, we should be faced with a social catastrophe compared with which the political upheaval of the French revolution and the economic changes of Bolshevism are insignificant. The question, therefore, as to whether group motherhood is an institution which ever existed, whether it is an arrangement which is compatible with human nature and social order, is of considerable practical interest”.¹⁸ We are a long way, here, from scientific objectivity...

Let us move on to Darmangeat’s critique of Morgan. This is of great interest in our view, if only because it begins with a fairly detailed summary of Morgan’s theories, making them readily accessible for the non expert reader. We especially appreciate the table which aligns the different stages of social evolution used by Morgan and the anthropology of his epoch (“savagery”, “barbarism”, etc.) and those in use today (Palaeolithic, Neolithic, etc.), which makes it easier to place oneself in historical time, and the explanatory diagrams of different kinship systems. The whole section abounds in clear, didactic explanations.

The foundation of Morgan’s theory is to bring together the type of family, kinship systems, and technical development, in a series of evolutionary steps which lead from “the state of savagery” (the first stage of human social evolution, which corresponds to the Palaeolithic), to “barbarism” (the Neolithic and the age of metals), and finally to civilisation. This evolution is supposedly determined by technical development, and the apparent contradictions that Morgan noted among many peoples (the Iroquois in particular) between the systems of family and kinship, represented for him the intermediary stages between a more primitive and a more advanced economy and technology. Sadly for the theory, when we look more closely this turns out not to be the case. To take only one of Darmangeat’s many examples, according to Morgan the “punaluan” kinship system is supposed to represent one of the most primitive technical and social stages, and yet it is to be found in Hawaii, in a society which contains wealth, social inequality, an aristocratic social stratum, and which is on the point of evolving into a full-blown state and class society. Family and kinship systems are thus determined by social needs, but not in a straight line from the most primitive to the most modern.

Does this mean that the marxist view of social evolution should be thrown into the bin? Not in the least, says Darmangeat. However, we need to dissociate what Mor-

gan, and Marx and Engels after him, tried to bring together: the evolution of technology (and therefore of productivity) and family systems. “... *Although modes of production are all qualitatively different, they all possess a common quantity, productivity, which makes it possible to order them in a rising series, which moreover roughly corresponds to their chronological order* [...] [For the family] *there is no common quantity which could be used to establish a rising series of different forms*”.²⁰ It is obvious that the economy is the determining factor “in the last instance”, to use Engels term: if there were no economy (ie the reproduction of everything necessary to human life), then there would be no social life either. But this “last instance” leaves a great deal of space for other influences, be they geographical, historical, cultural, or other. Ideas, culture – in its broadest sense – are also determining factors in society. At the end of his life, Engels himself regretted that the pressing need, for Marx and himself, to set historical materialism on a sure footing, and to fight for its defence, left them too little time to analyse other historically determining factors.²¹

The critique of anthropology

In the second part of his book, Darmangeat puts forward his own thoughts. We find here two basic themes, so to speak: on the one hand a historical critique of anthropological theory on the position of women in primitive societies, on the other we have the exposition of his own conclusions on the subject. This historical critique is focused on the evolution of what, for Darmangeat, is the marxist – or at least marxist-influenced – vision of primitive communism from the standpoint of women’s place in primitive society, and is a vigorous denunciation of “feminist” attempts to defend the idea of a primeval matriarchy in the first human societies.

This choice is not unreasonable, none-
20. p136 of the first edition. The translation from the French is ours’ throughout.

21. “*Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction. But when it came to presenting a section of history, that is, to making a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error was permissible. Unfortunately, however, it happens only too often that people think they have fully understood a new theory and can apply it without more ado from the moment they have assimilated its main principles, and even those not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent “Marxists” from this reproach, for the most amazing rubbish has been produced in this quarter, too...*” (Engels, letter to J Bloch, 21st September 1890: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm)

theless in our view it is not always a happy one, leading the author to ignore some marxist theoreticians who belong in such a study, and to include others who have no business there at all. To take just a few examples, Darmangeat criticises Alexandra Kollontai²² over several pages, yet says almost nothing about Rosa Luxemburg. Now, whatever Kollontai's role in the Russian revolution and in the resistance to its degeneration (she played a leading role in the "Workers' Opposition"), Kollontai never played a great part in the development of marxist theory, and still less in that of anthropology. Luxemburg on the other hand, was not only a leading marxist theoretician, she was also the author of an *Introduction to political economy*, which devotes an important part to the question of primitive communism, on the basis of the most up to date research of the day. The only justification for this imbalance is that Kollontai played an important part, first in the socialist movement, then in early Soviet Russia, in the struggle for women's rights, whereas Luxemburg never took a close interest in feminism. Two other marxist authors who have written on the theme of primitive communism are not even mentioned: Karl Kautsky (*Ethics and the materialist conception of history*) and Anton Pannekoek (*Anthropogenesis*).

Amongst the unfortunate "inclusions" we find, for example, Evelyn Reed: this member of the American Socialist Workers' Party (a Trotskyist organisation which gave its "critical" support to participation in World War II), is included for having written in 1975 *Feminism and anthropology*, a work which enjoyed a certain success in left-wing circles at the time. But as Darmangeat says, the book was almost completely ignored by anthropologists largely because of the poverty of its arguments, which were pointed out even by sympathetic critics.

We find the same absences amongst the anthropologists: Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the most important figures in 20th century anthropology and whose theory of the passage from nature to culture is founded on the idea of the exchange of women between men, only gets a walk-on part, while Bronislaw Malinowski does not appear at all.

Perhaps the most surprising absence is that of Chris Knight. Darmangeat's book is focused especially on the situation of women in primitive communist societies, and on the critique of theories which belong to a certain marxist, or marxist-influenced tradition. In 1991, the British anthropologist Chris Knight, who considers his work

to lie explicitly within the marxist tradition, published a work – *Blood Relations* – which deals with precisely the issue that concerns Darmangeat. One would expect that Darmangeat would pay it the closest attention, all the more so since he himself recognises the work's "great erudition". Yet nothing of the sort is to be found in Darmangeat's book, quite the reverse. He devotes barely a page (p321) to Knight's thesis, where he tells us that it "reiterates the serious methodological errors of Reed and Briffault (Knight says nothing about the former, but quotes the latter abundantly)", which could leave the francophone reader with no access to a book available only in English with the impression that Knight does no more than follow behind people who Darmangeat has already demonstrated are not to be taken seriously.²³ Yet a mere glance at Knight's bibliography is enough to show that while he does indeed cite Briffault, he gives a good deal more space to Marx, Engels, Lévi-Strauss, Marshall Sahlins... and many more. And if one takes the trouble to consult his references to Briffault, one finds immediately that Knight considers the latter's work (published in 1927), whatever its merits, to be "outdated in its sources and methodology"²⁴

In short, our feeling is that Darmangeat leaves us rather "sitting on the fence": we end up with a critical narrative which is neither a real critique of the positions defended by marxists, nor a real critique of anthropological theory, and this sometimes gives us the impression of witnessing Don Quixote's joust with the windmills. This choice of structure seems to us to obscure more than anything else, an argument which in other respects is of considerable

23. The critique of Knight's work is no more extensive in the second edition, with the exception of a reference to a critical review by Joan M Gero, a feminist anthropologist and author of *Engendering archaeology*. This review seems to us somewhat superficial and politically partisan. Here is a typical example: "What Knight puts forward as an 'engendered' perspective on the origins of culture is a paranoid and distorting view of 'female solidarity', featuring (all) women as sexually exploiting and manipulating (all) men. Male-female relations are characterized forever and everywhere as between victims and manipulators; exploitative women are assumed always to have wanted to trap men by one means or another, and indeed their conspiring to do so serves as the very basis of our species' development. Readers may similarly be offended by the assumption that men have always been promiscuous and that only good sex, coyly metered out by calculating women, can keep them at home and interested in their offspring. Not only is the scenario unlikely and undemonstrated, repugnant to feminists and non-feminists alike, but the sociobiological reasoning dismisses all the nuanced versions of social construction of gender relations, ideologies, and activities that have become so central and fascinating in gender studies today". In short, we are invited to reject a scientific thesis not because it is wrong – Gero has nothing to say about this and takes no trouble to demonstrate it – but because it is "repugnant" to certain feminists.

24 Darmangeat, op.cit, p. 328.

interest.

Jens (to be continued)

22. In the second edition, Kollontai even has her own sub-section.

Revolutionary syndicalism in Germany (iv)

The revolutionary syndicalist movement in the German revolution, 1918-19

The previous article¹ provided an overview of the efforts of the revolutionary syndicalist current in Germany to defend an internationalist position against the war of 1914-18. The Free Union of German Trade Unions (Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften - FVDG) had survived the war with only a few hundred members in hiding who, under conditions of brutal repression, were, like other revolutionaries, most

of the time condemned to silence. But late in 1918 events came to a head in Germany. When the struggles broke out in November 1918, the spark from the Russian revolution of October 1917 ignited the mass action of the proletariat in Germany.

The reorganisation of the FVDG in 1918

During the first week of November 1918, the revolt of the sailors of the Kiel fleet brought German militarism to its knees. On November 11th Germany signed the armistice. The FVDG wrote: *"The imperial government has been overthrown, not by parliamentary or legal means, but through direct action, not by the ballot box, but by force of arms by striking workers and mutinying soldiers. Without waiting on orders of leaders, workers and soldiers councils have been formed spontaneously and have immediately begun to dismiss the old authorities. All power to the workers and soldiers councils! This is now the watchword."*²

With the outbreak of the revolutionary wave, a turbulent era with a rapid influx of militants opened up for the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany. Membership increased from about 60,000 at the time of the revolution of November 1918 until mid-1919 to over 111,000 by the end of 1919. The political radicalisation of the working class at the end of the war drove many workers who had left the main social democratic unions because of the open support of the latter for the war policy, into the revolutionary syndicalist movement. The revolutionary syndicalist movement was clearly a place for honest and militant workers to come together.

With the publication of its new newspaper, *Der Syndikalist*, from December 14th 1918, the FVDG again made its voice heard: *"From early August [1914], our press has been banned, our most prominent comrades taken into 'custody', any attempt*

*by anyone, or any local unions to engage in political agitation has been outlawed. Yet the weapons of revolutionary syndicalism are in use today in every corner of the German Empire, and the masses instinctively feel the time has passed for formulating demands and that we now have to start to take action."*³ On December 26th and 27th Fritz Kater organised a conference in Berlin attended by 43 local unions of the FVDG and so it restarted its organised activity following the clandestinity of the war.

It was in the industrial and mining towns of the Ruhr that the FVDG experienced its most significant numerical growth. The influence of revolutionary syndicalists was particularly strong in Mülheim and forced the social democratic unions to withdraw from the workers' and soldiers' councils on December 13th 1918; it clearly opposed them as representatives of the workers and took this role into its own hands. Massive strikes of miners from the Hamborn region led by the revolutionary syndicalist movement took place from November 1918 to February 1919.⁴

Workers' councils or unions?

Faced with the war of 1914, the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany had passed the historic test of defending internationalism against the war, and had not, like the vast majority of unions, rallied behind the war aims of the ruling class. The outbreak of the revolution of 1918 posed a huge new challenge: how is the working class going to organise to overthrow the bourgeoisie and make the revolution?

As was the case in Russia in 1905, then in 1917, in Germany in November 1918

the working class created workers' councils that marked the emergence of a revolutionary situation. The whole period since the establishment of the "Localists" in 1892 and the formal foundation of the FVDG in 1901 had not given rise to any revolutionary upheaval. Unlike Russia, where, in 1905, the first workers' councils appeared, reflection on the councils remained very abstract in Germany until 1918. During the brief but exciting "Winter of the Councils" from 1918 to 1919 in Germany, the FVDG still clearly saw its form of organisation as a union and it was as a union that it reappeared on the scene. The FVDG responded to the unique situation of the emergence of workers' councils with great enthusiasm. The core of the revolutionary majority of the FVDG supported workers' councils, so that *Der Syndikalist* n° 2 of December 21st 1918 clearly proclaimed: *"All power to the revolutionary workers and soldiers' councils."*

However, theoretical consciousness often follows proletarian intuition. Despite the emergence of workers' councils, and as if nothing new had happened, *Der Syndikalist* n° 4 wrote that the FVDG was the only workers' organisation *"whose representatives and organs don't need changing"*, an expression that sums up the arrogance of the Reorganisation Conference of the FVDG in December 1918 and which became the motto of the revolutionary syndicalist current in Germany. But for the workers' movement an era of great upheaval had opened up, where precisely a great deal had to change, particularly as regards the forms of organisation!

To explain the shameful policies of support for the war and opposition to the workers' councils of the main unions, the FVDG tended to settle for a half-truth, and to ignore the other half. Only "social democratic education" was challenged.

1. *International Review* n° 147 "The revolutionary syndicalist FVDG during the First World War"

2. *Der Syndikalist* n° 1, "Was wollen die Syndikalisten? Der Syndikalismus lebt!" 14th December 1918.

3. *Ibid.*

4. See Ulrich Klan & Dieter Nelles, *Es lebt noch eine Flamme*, Ed. Trotzdem Verlag.

The question of the fundamental differences between the union form and that of the workers' councils was completely neglected.

Undoubtedly the FVDG, and the organisation that came after, the FAUD, were revolutionary organisations. But they did not see that their organisation came from the same seeds as the workers' councils: spontaneity, the desire to extend the movement and the revolutionary spirit – all characteristics that went well beyond union practices.

In the FVDG's publications in 1919, it is almost impossible to find an attempt to address the fundamental contradiction between union practices and those of the workers' councils, instruments of the revolution. Quite the contrary, it saw the "revolutionary unions" as the basis for the councils' movement. *"The revolutionary unions must expropriate the expropriators.... The workers' councils and factory councils should direct production along socialist lines. The power to the workers' councils; the means of production and goods produced to satisfy social needs. Such is the goal of proletarian revolution: the revolutionary syndicalist movement is the means to achieve it."* But did the revolutionary councils' movement in Germany actually arise from the union movement? *"It was the workers inside the 'factory committees' who had acted just like they had in the factory committees of the large enterprises in Petrograd in 1905, without knowing about this activity. In July 1916, the political struggle could not be conducted with support of the political parties and unions. The leaders of these organisations were the opponents of such a struggle; after the struggle, they also helped to deliver the leaders of this political strike to the scourge of repression of the military authorities. These 'factory committees', the term is not quite accurate, can be considered the precursors of the revolutionary workers' councils in Germany today. ...These struggles were not supported and led by the existing parties and unions. This was the beginnings of a third type of organisation, the workers' councils."*⁵ This was how Richard Müller, member of Revolutionäre Obleute (Revolutionary "men of confidence") described the "way it was achieved".

The unionists of the FVDG were not the only ones not to question the union form of organisation. At that time, it was extremely difficult for the working class to draw out fully and clearly what was implied by the emergence of the "period of wars and revolutions". The illusions in the union form of organisation, the bankruptcy

of the latter faced with the revolution, had still to be subjected, inevitably, painfully and concretely, to practical experience. Richard Müller quoted above, wrote just a few weeks later when the workers' councils were losing their power: *"But if we recognise the necessity of the daily struggle for demands - and nobody can deny it - then we must also recognise the need to preserve the organisations that have the function of conducting this struggle, and these are the unions. (...) If we recognise the need for existing unions... then we must examine further ahead whether unions can find a place inside the council system. During the period when the council system was being established, it was necessary to unconditionally answer this question in the affirmative."*⁶

The social democratic unions had lost credit in the eyes of the broad masses of workers and doubts grew increasingly about whether these organisations could still represent the interests of the working class. In the logic of the FVDG, the dilemma of capitulation and the historic bankruptcy of the old form of union organisation was resolved by the prospect of "revolutionary syndicalism".

At the beginning of the era of the decadence of capitalism, the impossibility of the struggle for reforms put forward the following alternative for the permanent mass organisations of the working class: either they were integrated by state capitalism into the state (as had usually been the case with the social democratic organisations – but also for some revolutionary syndicalist unions like the CGT in France); or it destroyed them (which was ultimately the fate of the revolutionary syndicalist FAUD). This raises the question of whether the proletarian revolution requires other forms of organisation. With the experience we have today, we know that it is not possible to put new content into old forms, such as the trade unions. The revolution is not only about content but also about form. This is the view stated quite correctly by the theoretician of the FAUD, Rudolf Rocker, in December 1919 in his critique of false visions of the "revolutionary state": *"We can't agree with the expression the revolutionary state. The state is always reactionary and to not understand that is to not understand the depth of the revolutionary principle. Every tool is shaped in accordance with its proposed use; and this is also the case for institutions. The pincers of the farrier are not suitable for pulling teeth and the grippers used by the dentist cannot shape a horseshoe..."*⁷

6. Richard Müller, *Hie Gewerkschaft, hie Betriebsorganisation!*, 1919.

7. The FAUD's Declaration of Principles in a spoken presentation by R. Rocker.

This, unfortunately, is exactly what the revolutionary syndicalist movement has failed to apply consistently to the question of the form of organisation.

Against the trap of "works councils"

So as to politically emasculate the spirit of the system of workers' councils, the Social Democrats and their unions in the service of the bourgeoisie began to skillfully undermine from within the principles of self-organisation of the working class in the councils. This was only possible because the workers' councils emerged from the struggles of November 1918, and these struggles had lost their strength and vitality with the first ebb of the revolution. The first Congress of the Councils from 16th to 20th December 1918, under the subtle influence of the SPD and the continued weight of illusions of the working class in democracy, had abandoned its power and proposed the election of a National Assembly, completely disarming itself.

In the spring of 1919, after the wave of strikes in the Ruhr, the SPD government took the initiative of proposing the establishment of "works councils" in the factories – representatives of the de facto workforce actually fulfilling the same function of negotiation and collaboration with the capital as the traditional unions. Under the auspices of the Social Democratic Party and trade union officials, Gustav Bauer and Alexander Schlicke, the works councils were permanently enshrined in the bourgeois Constitution of the German State in February 1920.

It was necessary to develop the illusion inside the working class that the fighting spirit expressed inside the workers' councils would find its incarnation in this new form of direct representation of workers' interests. *"The works councils are designed to address all issues related to work and pay. It is their responsibility to ensure the continuation and increase of production in the company and seek to eliminate any obstacles that may arise... District committees in collaboration with the management regulate and supervise the standard of the work in the district, as well as the distribution of raw materials."*⁸ After the bloody repression of the working class, democratic integration into the state would definitely seal the work of the counter-revolution. Having even more authority in the workplace than the unions, and working hand in hand with the companies, the establishment of these councils led to a total collaboration

8. *Protokoll der Ersten Generalversammlung des Deutschen Eisenbahnverbandes in Jena, Mai 25-31 1919*, p.244.

5. Richard Müller, 1918: *Räte in Deutschland*, p.3.

with capital.

In the spring of 1919 the press of the FVDG took a clear and courageous position against this strategy of works councils: “*Capital and the state only recognise the workers’ committees that are now called works councils. The works council does not only claim to represent the interests of workers, but also those of the company. And since these companies are owned by private capital or by the state, the workers’ interests must be subordinated to the interests of their exploiters. It follows that the works council defends the exploitation of workers and encourages them to continue working as docile wage slaves. [...] The methods of struggle of the revolutionary syndicalists are incompatible with the functions of the works council.*”⁹

This attitude was widely shared among the revolutionary syndicalists because, on the one hand the works councils seemed so obviously a tool of social democracy and, on the other hand, the combativity of the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany had not yet been broken. The illusion of having “obtained something” and “of having taken a concrete step” had very little effect in 1919 in the most determined fractions of the proletariat – the working class had not yet been defeated.¹⁰

Later, after the evident decline of the revolutionary movement from 1921, it was not surprising that heated debates broke out within the revolutionary syndicalist FAUD lasting a year about participation in elections to the works councils. A minority developed the orientation that it would be necessary, through the legalised works councils, to establish “*a link with the labouring masses to launch massive struggles when the situation was ripe.*”¹¹ The FVDG as an organisation refused to engage in “*the sterile works councils dedicated to neutralising the revolutionary view of the councils*”, according to the comments of the militant August Beil. That at least was the position prevailing until November 1922, when, as a result of impotence produced by the defeat of the

revolution, the 14th Congress of the FAUD modified its stand, granting the right to its members to participate in the elections to works councils.

The dynamic of the revolution brings together the revolutionary syndicalists and the Spartacus League

Just as in Russia in October 1917, the uprising of the working class in Germany had immediately aroused a sense of solidarity within the working class. For the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany, solidarity with the struggle of the working class in Russia had, until the end of 1919, undoubtedly constituted an important reference point shared internationally with other revolutionaries. The Russian revolution, because of revolutionary uprisings in other countries, still provided a perspective in 1918-1919 and had not yet begun to degenerate internally. To defend their class brothers in Russia and in direct opposition to the policy of the SPD and the social democratic unions, in the second issue of its paper *Der Syndikalist* the FVDG made this denunciation: “*...no means was too disgusting for them, no weapon too vile to slander the Russian Revolution and to rail against Soviet Russia and its workers and soldiers’ councils*”.¹² Despite their many reservations with regard to the views of the Bolsheviks – not all of which were unfounded – the revolutionary syndicalists remained in solidarity with the Russian revolution. Even Rudolf Rocker, influential theorist of the FVDG and outspoken critic of the Bolsheviks, appealed, two years after the October revolution, in his famous speech introducing the FAUD Declaration of Principles in December 1919, for a show of solidarity: “*We unanimously take sides with Soviet Russia in its heroic defence against the Allied powers and against the counter-revolutionaries, and this, not because we are Bolsheviks, but because we are revolutionaries*”.

Although the revolutionary syndicalists in Germany had their traditional reservations towards “marxism” that “wanted to seize political power”, what they believed they had in common with the Spartacus League was that it clearly defended common action with all other revolutionary organisations: “*Revolutionary syndicalism therefore considered the division of the workers’ movement unnecessary, it wants its forces concentrated. Right now, we recommend our members to support, on matters economic and political, the general lines of the most left-wing groups of the workers’ movement: the Independents, the*

Spartacus League. We do caution, however, against any participation in the circus of elections to the National Assembly.”¹³

The revolution of November 1918 was not the work of a specific political organisation such as the Spartacus League and the Revolutionäre Obleute (revolutionary syndicalist delegates), even though they did adopt the clearest position and were the most eager for action during the November days. It was an uprising of the whole working class when for a short period the potential unity of this class was demonstrated. One expression of this trend towards unity has been the widespread phenomenon of double affiliation to the Spartacus League and FVDG. “*In Wuppertal, the militants of the FVDG were active for the first time within the Communist Party. A list established in April 1919 by the police of Wuppertal communists contains the names of all the future key members of the FAUD.*”¹⁴ In Mülheim, from December 1st 1918 there appeared the paper “*Die Freiheit, the organ defending the interests of all working people, the Newspaper of the workers and soldiers’ councils*”, published jointly by revolutionary syndicalists and members of the Spartacus League.

In early 1919, inside the revolutionary syndicalist movement there was a clear aspiration to unite with other organisations of the working class. “*They are still not united, they are still divided, they still do not think and behave in an honest manner like true socialists and they are not always individually and inextricably connected through the marvellous chain of proletarian solidarity. They are still divided between right-wing socialists, left socialists, Spartacists, and others. The working class must finally end the gross absurdity of political particularism.*”¹⁵ This attitude of great openness reflected the great political heterogeneity, even confusion, within the FVDG which had experienced rapid growth. Its internal cohesion relied less on programmatic clarification or demarcation vis-à-vis other proletarian organisations than on the link of workers’ solidarity, as shown in its indiscriminating characterisation of all “socialists”.

The attitude of solidarity with the Spartacus League was developed in the ranks of the revolutionary syndicalists following the repression against Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg during the war and continued until the autumn of 1919. But

9. *Der Syndikalist* n°36, “Betriebsräte und Syndikalismus”, 1919.

10. At a broader level, in addition to the illusion of the works councils as “negotiating partners” with Capital, there existed another, emanating from Essen in the Ruhr – but also present in the ranks of the revolutionary syndicalists – in the possibility of immediate “socialisation”, that is to say, the nationalisation of mines and businesses. This weakness, present throughout the working class in Germany, was above all an expression of impatience. On December 4th 1918 the Ebert government created a national socialisation commission comprising representatives of Capital and renowned social democrats such as Kautsky and Hilferding. The declared aim of the nationalisations was to maintain production.

11. See the debates of the 15th Congress of the FAUD in 1925.

12. *Der Syndikalist* n° 2, “Verschandelung der Revolution”, 21st December 1918.

13. *Der Syndikalist* n° 1, “Was wollen die Syndikalisten? Der Syndikalismus lebt!”, 14th December 1918.

14. Ulrich Klan & Dieter Nelles, *Es lebt noch eine Flamme*, Ed. Trotzdem Verlag, p.70.

15. Karl Roche in *Der Syndikalist* n°13, “Syndikalismus und Revolution”, 29th March 1919.

on the other hand, it failed to establish any common history with the Spartacus League. Until the time of the Zimmerwald Conference in 1915, it was much more a case of mutual distrust between the two. The main cause of their reconciliation was the political clarification that matured within the entire working class and its revolutionary organisations during the November revolution: the rejection of bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism. The revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany, which had long rejected the parliamentary system, saw this position as part of its own heritage. The Spartacus League, which had a clear position against any illusions of democracy, regarded the FVDG, which followed the same path, as the organisation closest to it in Germany.

However, from the outset, Rudolf Rocker, who was to take charge of the political orientation of the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany after December 1919, “did not have great sympathy with appeals to comrades to support the left wing of the socialist movement, the Independents and the Spartacists or intervention of the newspaper supporting the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’...”¹⁶ In March 1919, on his return from internment in England during the war, Rocker, anarcho-syndicalist revolutionary, strongly influenced by the ideas of Kropotkin, joined the FVDG.

Despite the differences of opinion on the Spartacus League, between Rocker and the tendency gathered around Fritz Kater, Carl Windhoff and Karl Roche, which was the most influential in the FVDG in the first months of the revolution of 1918-19, it would be wrong at this time to speak of the struggles of tendencies inside the FVDG, such as would occur later in 1920 as a symptom of the defeat of the German revolution. There was no significant tendency at the time among the revolutionary syndicalists wanting a priori to set itself apart from the KPD. Instead, the search for unity of action with the Spartacists was the product of the momentum towards the unity of workers’ struggles and the “pressure from below” on these two currents in the weeks and months where the revolution seemed to be within reach. It was the painful defeat of the premature uprising of January 1919 in Berlin, and the subsequent crushing of the strike waves in the Ruhr in April, that were supported by the revolutionary syndicalists, the KPD and the USPD, which, due to the disappointment they aroused, provoked mutual and emotional recriminations that expressed a lack of maturity on both sides.

From the summer of 1919 the “informal

alliance” with Spartacus and the Communist Party would hence break apart. The responsibility for this lay less with the FVDG than the aggressive attitude the KPD had begun to adopt towards the revolutionary syndicalists.

The “provisional programme” of the revolutionary syndicalists in spring 1919

In spring 1919, the FVDG published a pamphlet written by Roche, “*What do the revolutionary syndicalists want?*” This was intended as a programme and orientation text for the organisation up to December 1919. It is difficult to judge the revolutionary syndicalist movement on the basis of a single text, given the coexistence within its ranks of different ideas. However, this programme constitutes a milestone, and, from several points of view, is one of the most finished positions of the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Germany. Despite the painful past experiences of their own history with the social democrats and the permanent demonisation of politics¹⁷ that resulted from it, it concludes: “*The working class must make itself master of the economy and of politics.*”¹⁸

The strength of the positions spread by the FVDG through this programme within the working class in Germany at this time lies elsewhere: in its attitude towards the state, bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism. It specifically refers to the description Friedrich Engels made of the state as a product of a society divided into classes: “*The state is a product of society at a certain stage of its development*”; it is “*the admission that this society is entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is divided into irreconcilable antagonisms*” and is not “*a force imposed on society from outside*” or an instrument of the ruling class created in a purely arbitrary manner by it. The FVDG consistently called for the destruction of the bourgeois state.

With this position, in a period when social democracy was without doubt the most insidious weapon of the counter-revolution, the FVDG put its finger on a key point. Against the farce of the SPD seeking to subdue the workers’ councils by integrating them into the bourgeois

parliament, its programme argued: “*Social democratic ‘socialism’ definitely needs a state. And a state that would use exactly the same methods against the working class as the capitalist state. ... It will be the result of a proletarian half-revolution and the target of the total proletarian revolution. It is because we recognise the nature of the state and we know the political domination of the propertied classes is rooted in their economic power, that we have to fight not for the conquest of the state, but its elimination.*”

Karl Roche also tried to formulate in the FVDG programme the basic lessons of November and December 1918, going far beyond the rebellious or individualistic rejection of the state that was wrongly attributed to the revolutionary syndicalists, and clearly unmasked in its essence the system of bourgeois democracy. “*Democracy is not equality, but the demagogic use of a comedy of equality. ... The property owners always have, for as long as they confront the workers, the same interests. ... The workers have no common interest with any of them, and none with the bourgeoisie. Here, democracy is a general absurdity. ... Democracy is one of the most dangerous slogans in the mouth of the demagogues who rely on the laziness and ignorance of the workforce. ... Modern democracies in Switzerland, France, America are nothing but a capitalist democratic hypocrisy in the most repulsive form.*” Faced with the traps of democracy this precise formulation is more relevant than ever.

We can make numerous criticisms of the FVDG’s spring 1919 programme, notably a certain number of classic revolutionary syndicalist ideas that we do not share such as “complete self-determination” and “federalism”. But on the crucial points of that time, such as the rejection of parliamentarism, the program written by Roche, remained adamant. “*For parliamentarism as much as social democracy: if the working class wants to fight for socialism, it must reject the bourgeoisie as a class. It should neither grant it the right to power, nor vote with it or deal with it. Workers’ councils are the parliaments of the working class. [...] It is not bourgeois parliaments, but the dictatorship of the proletariat which implements socialism.*” At this time, the Communist Party was going back on its original clear positions against parliamentarism and work within the social democratic unions, and began to regress dramatically from the positions of its founding congress.

A few months later, in December 1919, the Declaration of Principles of the FAUD focused on different points. Karl Roche who, in the early days after the war had

16. Rudolf Rocker, *Aus den Memoiren eines deutschen Anarchisten*, Ed. Suhrkamp, p.287

17. Roche wrote: “*Party politics is the bourgeois method of monopolising the product of labour extorted from the workers. (...) Political parties and bourgeois parliaments are complementary, they both obstruct the proletarian class struggle and cause confusion*”, as if to say the possibility of revolutionary parties of the working class did not exist. What about its collaborator in the struggle, the Spartacus League, which was a political party?

18. *Was wollen die Syndikalisten? Programm, Ziele und Wege der ‘Freien Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften’*, March 1919.

influenced the FVDG in a decisive way on the programmatic level, rejoined the AAU in December 1919.

The break with the Communist Party

During the revolution of November 1918, many common points brought together the revolutionaries of the revolutionary syndicalist FVDG with those of the Spartacus League: the reference to the uprising of the working class in Russia in 1917; the taking of all power by the workers' councils; the rejection of democracy and of parliamentarism, as well as a clear rejection of social democracy and its unions. So how can we explain why during the summer of 1919 relations began to harden between the two currents that had previously shared so many things?

There are various factors which cause a revolution to fail: the weakness of the working class and the weight of its illusions or the isolation of the revolution. In Germany in 1918-19, it was above all its experience that allowed the German bourgeoisie, through social democracy, to sabotage the movement from within, to foment democratic illusions, to push the working class into the trap of isolated and premature uprisings in January 1919 and to deprive it, through murder, of its clearest revolutionaries and of thousands of militant workers.

The polemics between the KPD and the revolutionary syndicalists following the crushing of the strike in the Ruhr in April 1919 show on both sides the same attempt to find the reasons for the failure of the revolution in other revolutionaries. Roche had already been swept up in this trend in April at the conclusion of the FVDG programme, saying "(...) do not let the Spartacists divide the working class", in a confused way putting them in the same bag as the "right-wing socialists." From the summer of 1919 it became fashionable in the FVDG to talk about the "three social democratic parties", that is to say, the SPD, USPD and KPD – a polemical attack which in the atmosphere of frustration at the failures of the class struggle no longer made any distinction between counter-revolutionary organisations and proletarian organisations.

In August the Communist Party (KPD) published a pamphlet on the revolutionary syndicalists with an equally unfortunate line of argument. It now considered the presence of revolutionary syndicalists in its ranks as a threat to the revolution: "The inveterate revolutionary syndicalists must finally realise that they do not have a com-

mon interest with us. We must no longer allow our party to provide a playground for people who spread all kinds of ideas foreign to the party."¹⁹

The Communist Party's critique of the revolutionary syndicalists focused on three points: the question of the state and economic organisation after the revolution, tactics and organisational forms – in fact the classic debates with the revolutionary syndicalist current. Although the Communist Party was right to conclude that: "In the revolution, the importance of unions to the class struggle more and more recedes. Workers' councils and political parties become the exclusive protagonists and leaders of the struggle", the polemic against the revolutionary syndicalists revealed above all the weaknesses of the Communist Party under Levi's leadership: a fixation on the conquest of the state. "We believe that we will necessarily use the state after the revolution. Revolution in the first place means precisely to take power within the state"; the mistaken belief that coercion within the proletariat could be a means for conducting the revolution: "Let us say with the Bible and the Russians: those who do not work do not eat. Those who do not work receive only what those active can spare"; flirting with the resumption of parliamentary activity: "Our attitude towards parliamentarism shows that for us the question is posed differently to the tactics of the revolutionary syndicalists. [...] And as the entire life of the people is something living, changing, a process that is constantly taking new forms, all of our strategy must also constantly adapt to new conditions"; and finally the tendency to consider continual political debate, especially on basic issues, as something that is not positive: "We must take action against people who make it difficult for us to plan the life of the party. The party is a community of united struggle and not a discussion club. We cannot continually have discussions on organisational forms and other things."

The Communist Party thus tried to rid itself of the revolutionary syndicalists who were also members of the Communist Party. In June 1919, in its appeal *To revolutionary syndicalists of the Communist Party!*, it certainly presented these as "filled with honest revolutionary aspirations." But the KPD nevertheless defined their combativity as a tendential risk of putschism and posed the following ultimatum to them: either to organise themselves in a strictly centralised party, or "The Communist Party of Germany cannot tolerate in its ranks members who, in their propaganda by speech, writing and action, violate these

19. *Syndikalismus und Kommunismus*, F. Brandt, KPD-Spartakusbund, August 1919.

principles. It will be forced to exclude them." Given the onset of confusions and the dilution of the positions of the Founding Congress of the Communist Party, this sectarian ultimatum against the revolutionary syndicalists was rather an expression of helplessness faced with the reflux of the revolutionary wave in Germany. It deprived the Communist Party of living contact with the most combative parts of the proletariat. The exchange of blows between the KPD and the revolutionary syndicalists during the summer of 1919 shows equally that the atmosphere of defeat accompanied by growing tendencies towards activism formed a combination unfavourable to political clarification.

A brief journey together with the Unions

During the summer of 1919, the atmosphere in Germany was characterised in part by a major disappointment after consecutive defeats and, secondly, by a radicalisation of certain parts of the working class. There were mass defections in the social democratic unions, and a massive influx into the FVDG, which doubled the number of its members.

In addition to the revolutionary syndicalists, a second current began to develop against the traditional trade unions, also strengthened by a large influx. In the Ruhr region the Allgemeine Arbeiter Union-Essen (AAU-E: General Union of Workers - Essen) and the Allgemeine Bergarbeiter Union (General Union of Miners) appeared under the influence of fractions of the radical left in the Communist Party of Hamburg, and supported by the active propaganda of groups close to the American International Workers of the World (IWW) around Karl Dannenberg in Brunswick. Unlike the FVDG revolutionary syndicalists, the Unions wanted to abandon the principle of trade union organisation by branches of industry to regroup the working class by entire enterprises in "combat organisations." From their point of view, it was now the enterprises that were exercising their strength and possessed power in society and it was here, therefore, that the working class drew its strength – where it organised itself in accordance with this reality. Thus, the Unions sought a greater unity and considered the trade unions as a historically obsolete form of organisation of the working class. We can say that the Unions were in some way a response of the working class to the question it was posed concerning new forms of organisation, the very question that the revolutionary syndicalist current in Germany had sought

to avoid until now.²⁰

We cannot in this article develop our analysis on the nature of the Unions, which are neither workers' councils, trade unions or political parties. That would require the writing of a text specifically on the subject.

It is often difficult in this period to distinguish precisely the Unionist and the revolutionary syndicalist currents. Within both currents there was scant support for "political parties", even if the Unions were eventually more sympathetic to the Communist Party. Both tendencies were direct expressions of the most militant fractions of the working class in Germany, were opposed to social democracy and advocated, at least until the end of 1919, in favour of workers' councils.

In an initial period up until the winter of 1919-1920, the Unionist current in the Ruhr region became a part of the revolutionary syndicalist movement, which was the stronger, at the so-called "fusion" Conference of September 15th-16th 1919 in Düsseldorf. The Unionists had taken part in the founding of the Freie Arbeiter Union (FAU) of North Rhine-Westphalia. This Conference was the first step towards the creation of the FAUD, which was to take place three months later. The FAU-North Rhine-Westphalia expressed a compromise between revolutionary syndicalism and Unionism in its positions. The guidelines adopted said that "... the economic and political struggle must be conducted consistently and steadfastly by the workers...." and that "as an economic organisation, the Freie Arbeiter Union cannot tolerate any party politics in its meetings, but leaves it to the discretion of each member to support left-wing parties and to participate in any activity that it considers necessary."²¹ The Allgemeine Arbeiter Union-Essen and the Allgemeine Bergarbeiter Union would largely withdraw from the Alliance with the revolutionary syndicalists before the foundation of the FAUD in December.

The foundation of the FAUD and its Declaration of Principles

The rapid numerical growth of the FVDG during the summer and autumn of 1919, the spread of the revolutionary syndicalist movement in Thuringia, Saxony, Silesia, in southern Germany, in the coastal regions of the North and Baltic Seas, required there

20. In reality, many sections of the FAU in Germany, as they exist today, for decades have played more the role of a political group than a union, by expressing themselves on numerous political questions and not limiting themselves in any way to the "economic struggle" – this, whether we agree with them or not, we find positive.

21. *Der Syndicalist*, n° 42, 1919.

to be a national structure to the movement. The 12th Congress of the FVDG of December 27th to 30th in Berlin, turned into the founding congress of the FAUD, with 109 delegates present.

The Congress is often described as the "turning point" from German revolutionary syndicalism to anarcho-syndicalism or as the beginning of the era of Rudolf Rocker – a label used above all by the staunch opponents of revolutionary syndicalism believing it a "negative move". Most of the time, they claimed that the FAUD at its foundation stood for a defence of federalism, a farewell to politics, a rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat and a return to pacifism. However, this analysis does not do justice to the FAUD of December 1919. "*Germany is the Eldorado of political slogans. Words are uttered and people are intoxicated by the rhythmic chanting, but they don't really understand what's being said*", says Rocker (who we quote from below) in his speech on the Statement of Principles regarding allegations against the revolutionary syndicalists.

There is no doubt that the views of Rocker, an anarchist who remained an internationalist during the war and the editor of the new *Declaration of Principles*, acquired a significant influence in the FAUD, which was enhanced by his physical presence within the organisation. But the foundation of the FAUD reflected first and foremost the popularity of revolutionary syndicalist ideas within the working class in Germany and showed a clear demarcation between the Communist Party and the budding Unionism. Since the end of the war the positions of the FVDG had been very influential inside the working class: the expression of solidarity with the Russian revolution, the explicit rejection of bourgeois democracy and any form of parliamentary activity, the challenging of all "arbitrarily drawn political and national borders", were reaffirmed in the *Declaration of Principles* of December 1919. The FAUD clearly defended revolutionary positions.

In comparison with the programme of the FVDG in the spring of 1919, the Congress had considerably reduced its enthusiasm for the perspective of workers' councils. The signs that the workers' councils in Russia were losing influence demonstrated to the Congress the scale of the inherent risk that "political parties" posed, and were proof that the Union form of organisation was the more resistant and better able to defend the idea of the councils.²² The disarming of the workers'

22. Despite his distrust of the existing political parties, Rocker clearly stated that: "...the struggle is not just economic, but must also be political. We are saying

councils in Russia at that time was indeed a reality that the Bolsheviks had tragically contributed towards. But what the FAUD was not able to understand was the affect of the international isolation of the Russian revolution and that it would inevitably suffocate the life out of the working class.

"*They fight against us, the revolutionary syndicalists, mainly because we openly advocate federalism. Federalists, we are told, divide up the workers' struggles*", said Rocker. The aversion of the FAUD to centralism and its commitment to federalism were not based on a vision of the fragmentation of the struggle of the classes. The reality of life for the revolutionary syndicalist movement after the war provided sufficient proof of its commitment to the unity and coordination of the struggle. The excessive rejection of centralisation was rooted in the trauma of the capitulation by social democracy: "*The central committees dictated from on high, the masses obeyed. Then came the war; the party and the unions were given a fait accompli: we must support the war to save the country. However, the defence of the country became a socialist duty, and the same masses who, the previous week protested against the war, were now for the war, but on the orders of their central committees. This shows the moral consequences of the system of centralisation. Centralisation is the eradication of the consciousness from the human brain, and nothing else. It is the death of a sense of independence*". For many militants of the FAUD centralism was in principle just a method inherited from the bourgeoisie in "...organising society from top to bottom so that it serves the ruling class's interests." We agree absolutely with the FAUD of 1919 that it's the political life and the initiative of the working class "from below" that is the well-spring of the proletarian revolution. The struggle of the working class must be based on solidarity, and in this sense, it always generates a spontaneous dynamic unifying the movement, which leads to centralisation through elected and revocable delegates. In "the Eldorado of political slogans", the majority of the revolutionary syndicalists of the FAUD was led in December 1919 to adopt the slogan of federalism, a standpoint that was not really associated with the FAUD at its foundation.

Did the founding congress of the FAUD actually reject the idea of "the dictatorship of the proletariat"? "*If by the term the*

the same thing. We are only opposed to parliamentary activity, but not at all the political struggle in general. [...] Even the general strike is a political tool, just like the anti-militarist propaganda of the revolutionary syndicalists, etc." The theorised rejection of the political struggle wasn't predominant in the FAUD at this time, although its form of organisation was clearly designed for the economic struggle.

dictatorship of the proletariat is meant a party taking control of the State machine, if this only means the establishment of a new state, then the revolutionary syndicalists are sworn enemies of such a dictatorship. If, on the other hand, it means that the proletariat compels the propertied classes to renounce their privileges, if it is not a dictatorship top to bottom, but that the revolutionary impact is from the bottom up, then the revolutionary syndicalists are the supporters and representatives of the dictatorship of the proletariat."²³ Absolutely right! The crucial reflection on the dictatorship of the proletariat, which at that time was associated with the dramatic situation in Russia, was a legitimate question regarding the risk of internal degeneration of the Russian Revolution. It was not possible to make a balance sheet of the Russian revolution in December 1919. Rocker's assertions were more a barometer of the already visible contradictions, and the beginning of a debate that would last for years in the workers' movement on the reasons for the failure of the revolutionary wave after the war. These doubts didn't emerge by chance in an organisation like FAUD, but reflected the highs and lows in the life of the "rank and file" working class.

Even the traditional cataloguing of the Founding Congress of the FAUD as a "move towards pacifism" which undoubtedly sabotaged the determination of the working class, does not correspond to the reality. Like the discussion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the debates on violence in the struggle between the classes were rather the sign of a real problem facing the working class internationally. How would it be possible to maintain the momentum of the stalled revolutionary wave and break the isolation of the working class in Russia? In Russia, as in Germany, it was inevitable that the working class would use arms to defend itself against the attacks of the ruling class. But the extension of the revolution by military means, even "revolutionary war", was impossible, if not absurd. In Germany especially, the bourgeoisie constantly attempted to underhandedly provoke the proletariat militarily. "*The essence of the revolution does not lie in the use of violence, but in the transformation of the economic and political institutions. Violence in itself is absolutely not revolutionary, but, on the contrary, is reactionary to the highest degree.... Revolutions are the result of a great spiritual transformation in the opinions of men. They cannot be achieved arbitrarily by force of arms... But I also recognise violence as a means of defence, when the conditions themselves leave us no other choice*", argued Rocker against Krohn,

a supporter of the Communist Party. The tragic events of Kronstadt in 1921 confirmed that this critical standpoint towards the false hope that the resort to arms could save the revolution had nothing to do with pacifism. The FAUD in the aftermath of its Founding Congress, didn't adopt a pacifist position. A large part of the Red Army of the Ruhr that responded to the Kapp Putsch in the spring of 1920 was composed of revolutionary syndicalists.

In this article, over and above our criticisms, we have also intentionally highlighted the strengths of the positions of revolutionary syndicalists in Germany during 1918-19. The next part of this article will deal with the period from the late 1920s up to the rise of Hitler in 1933 and the destruction of FAUD.

Mario 16/6/12

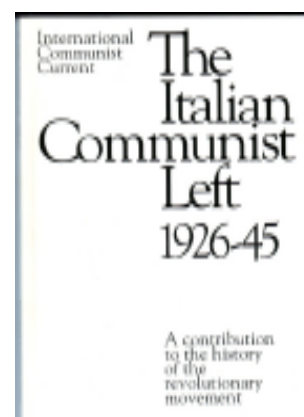
23. Rocker, *Der Syndicalist*, n° 2, 1920.

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This history of the Italian Left is not neutral, looking down on the social battlefield. In today's world of decomposing capitalism, the alternative posed more than sixty years ago by the Communist Left is more valid than ever: "communist revolution or the destruction of humanity".

Of course, according to the ruling classes everywhere today, communism, the revolutionary perspective of the working class, has died with the collapse of Stalinism. But this is a monstrous lie. Stalinism was the gravedigger of the 1917 October Revolution, and therefore the deadliest enemy of the communist perspective. Stalinism was the main vehicle for the greatest counter-revolution in history.

In the midst of this defeat the Italian Communist Left remained faithful to the internationalist principles of the working class, and tried to draw the lessons of a counter-revolution which terminally infected even the Trotskyist Opposition.

The aim of this brief history of the struggle of the Italian Communist Left is to help all those who have thrown in their lot with the revolutionary working class to bridge the gap between their past and their present.

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BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

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

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

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

* The 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*.

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