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# International Review

*Social movements in Turkey and Brazil*  
**Indignation**  
**at the heart of the proletarian dynamic**

**20<sup>th</sup> ICC congress**

**Resolution on the international situation**

**Report on imperialist tensions**

*Communism is not just 'a nice idea', Volume 3*  
***Bilan*, the Dutch left, and the transition  
to communism (Part Two)**

**A reader replies to *Bilan*  
on the Period of Transition  
(*Bilan* 46, December-January 1938)**

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# Indignation at the heart of the proletarian dynamic

Around the world, the feeling is growing that the present order of things cannot continue as before. Following the revolts of the 'Arab Spring', the movements of the *Indignados* in Spain and then of *Occupy* in the United States in 2011, the summer of 2013 has seen huge crowds come out into the streets almost simultaneously in Turkey and Brazil.

Hundreds of thousands, even millions, have protested against all kinds of evils: in Turkey it was the destruction of the environment by a senseless urban "development", the authoritarian intrusion of religion into private life and the corruption of politicians; in Brazil it was the increased cost of public transport, the diversion of wealth towards spending on prestige sports activities while health, transport, education and housing are falling apart – and again, the widespread corruption of politicians. In both cases, the initial protests were met with brutal police repression which only broadened and deepened the revolt. And in both cases, the spearhead of the movement was not the "middle class" (that is to say, in media language, anyone who still has a job), but the new generation of the working class who, although educated, have only a meagre prospect of finding a stable job and for whom living in an "emerging" economy means above all observing the development of social inequality and the repugnant wealth of a tiny elite of exploiters.

That is why, today, a 'spectre is haunting the world': the spectre of INDIGNATION. Just over two years after the 'Arab Spring' which shook and surprised the countries of North Africa, and whose effects are still being felt; two years after the movement of the *Indignados* in Spain and *Occupy* in the USA; and at exactly the same time as the movement in Turkey, the wave of demonstrations in Brazil has mobilised millions of people in over a hundred cities and shown characteris-

tics which are unprecedented for this country.

These movements, which appear in very different and very geographically distant countries, nevertheless share common characteristics: their spontaneity, their origins in reaction against brutal state repression, their massiveness, participation mostly by young people, particularly through social networks. But the common denominator that characterizes them is a great INDIGNATION faced with the deteriorating living conditions for the world's population, provoked by the depth of a crisis that is shaking the foundations of the capitalist system and has experienced a significant acceleration since 2007. This deterioration is expressed by the accelerated precariousness of the living standards of the working masses and a great uncertainty about the future among young people, either proletarianised or facing proletarianisation. It is not by chance that the movement in Spain took the name "Indignados", and that in this wave of massive social movements, it was the one that went furthest in both its questioning of the capitalist system and its organisational forms through massive general assemblies.<sup>1</sup>

The revolts in Turkey and Brazil in 2013 prove that the momentum created by these movements is not exhausted. Although the media evade the fact that these rebellions arose

in countries which have been in a phase of "growth" in recent years, they could not avoid showing the same "outrage" of the masses of the population against the way this system works: growing social inequality, the greed and corruption of the ruling class, the brutality of state repression, weakness of the infrastructure, environmental destruction. Above all, the system's inability to provide a future for the younger generation.

One hundred years ago, faced with the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg solemnly reminded the working class that the choice offered by the capitalist order in decay was between socialism or barbarism. The inability of the working class to carry through the revolutions that were its response to the war of 1914-1918 resulted in a century of real capitalist barbarism. Today, the stakes are even higher, because capitalism has the means to destroy all life on earth. The revolt of the exploited and oppressed, the massive struggle to defend human dignity and a real future; that is the promise of the social revolts in Turkey and Brazil.

A particularly significant aspect of the revolt in Turkey is its proximity to the bloody war in Syria. The war in Syria also began with popular protests against the regime there, but the weakness of the proletariat in this country, and the existence of deep ethnic and religious divisions within the population, allowed the regime to respond with most brutal violence. Divisions within the bourgeoisie widened and the popular revolt – as in Libya in 2011 – turned into a 'civil war' that has become a proxy war between imperialist powers. Syria is now transformed into a case study of barbarism, a chilling reminder of the alternative that capitalism has in store for mankind. In countries such as

<sup>1</sup> See our series of articles on the *Indignados* movement in Spain, especially in *International Review* n° 146 (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2011) and no 149 (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2012).

Tunisia and especially Egypt, where the social movement showed the real weight of the working class, the movements were unable to withstand the pressure of the dominant ideology and the situation is in the process of degenerating into a tragedy for the population, above all for the proletarians, who are becoming victims of the gangs and clashes between religious fundamentalists, supporters of the former regime and other rival factions of the bourgeoisie who have recently turned the national situation into bloody chaos. On the other hand, Turkey and Brazil, like other social revolts, continue to show the way that is open to humanity: the way to the rejection of capitalism, to the proletarian revolution and the construction of a new society based on solidarity and human needs.

## The proletarian nature of the movements

### Turkey

The movement of May/June began in opposition to the cutting down of trees to destroy Gezi Park in Taksim Square in Istanbul, and grew to a size unknown in the country's history to date. Many sectors of the population, dissatisfied with recent government policy, participated, but what precipitated the masses in the streets was state terror and this same terror caused a profound stir in a large part of the working class. The movement in Turkey is not only part of the same dynamic as the revolts in the Middle East in 2011, the most important of which (Tunisia, Egypt, Israel) have been strongly marked by the working class, but is above all a direct continuation of the Indignados movement in Spain and Occupy in the United States, where the working class represents not only the majority of the population as a whole but also of the participants in the movement. The same is true of the current revolt in Brazil, where the vast majority of those involved belong to the working class, especially the proletarian youth.

The sector that participated the

most in the movement in Turkey was the one dubbed the "1990s generation." Apoliticism was the label given to this generation, many of whom could not remember the time before the AKP government<sup>2</sup>. The members of this generation, who were said to be unconcerned with the social situation and only sought to help themselves, understood that there was no salvation on their own. They have had enough of the government telling them what to do and how to live. Students, especially high school students, participated in the demonstrations in a massive way. Young workers and unemployed youth were largely present in the movement. Workers and educated unemployed were also present.

One part of the working proletariat also participated in the movement and formed the main body of the proletarian tendency within it. The Turkish Airlines strike in Istanbul tried to join the struggle at Gezi. Particularly in the textile sector we saw voices expressed in this way. One of these protests was held in Bagcilar-Gunesli, in Istanbul, where textile workers, subjected to harsh conditions of exploitation, wanted to express their class demands at the same time as they declared their solidarity with the struggle at Gezi-Park. They protested with banners saying "*Greetings from Bagcilar to Gezi!*" and "*Saturday should be a day off!*". In Istanbul, workers with banners saying "*General strike, general resistance*" called on others to join them during a march attracting thousands of them in Alibeykov; or again "*No to work, fight!*" as carried by shopping centre and office employees gathered in Taksim Square. In addition, the movement has created a will to fight among unionized workers. Undoubtedly, KESK, DISK and other union organisations that called for strikes had to do so, not only because of social networking but under pressure from their own members. Finally, the platform of the various branches of Istanbul Turk-Is<sup>3</sup>, an emanation of all the local unions of Istanbul, called on the organisation and all other unions

2. Adaletve KalkinmaPartisi(Party for Justice and Development).This 'moderate' Islamist party has been in power in Turkey since 2002.

3. Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions.

to declare a general strike against the state terror on the Monday after the attack against Gezi Park. If these calls were made, it was because there was an outrage among the membership over what had happened.

### Brazil

The social movements last June have a particular significance for the proletariat of Brazil, Latin America and the rest of the world, and to a large extent went beyond the traditional regionalism of the country. These massive movements were radically different from the 'social movements' controlled by the state, by the PT (Workers' Party) and other political parties, such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST); similarly, it was different from other movements which have arisen in various countries of the region in the last decade or so, like the one in Argentina at the beginning of the century, the 'indigenous' movements in Bolivia and Ecuador, the Zapatista movement in Mexico or Chavism in Venezuela, which were the result of confrontations between bourgeois or petty bourgeois factions, disputing control of the state and the defence of national capital. In this sense, the mobilisations of June in Brazil represent the largest spontaneous mass mobilisation in this country and in Latin America for the past 30 years. This is why it is essential to learn the lessons of these events from a class point of view.

It is undeniable that this movement surprised the Brazilian and world bourgeoisie. The struggle against the public transport price rises (which are negotiated each year between the transport chiefs and the state) was just the detonator of the movement. It crystallised all the indignation which had been brewing for some time in Brazilian society and which took shape in 2012 with the struggles in public administration and in the universities, mainly in São Paulo, also with a number of strikes against wage cuts and insecure working conditions and against health and education cuts over the last few years.

Unlike the massive social movements in various countries since 2011, the one in Brazil was engendered and unified around a concrete demand, which made it possible for there to be



a spontaneous mobilisation of wide sectors of the proletariat: against the rise in public transport fares. The movement took on a massive character at the national level from the 13th June, when the demonstration in São Paulo against the fare increases called by the MPL (Movimento Passe Livre – Movement for Free Access to Transport)<sup>4</sup>, as well as by other social movements, were violently repressed by police in São Paulo<sup>5</sup>. For five weeks, in addition to large protests in São Paulo, various protests were held around the same demand in different cities in the country, so much so that, for example, in Porto Alegre, Goiânia and other cities, the pressure forced several local governments, whatever their political colour, to agree to revoke the higher transport prices, after hard struggles strongly repressed by the state.

The movement straight away situated itself on a proletarian terrain. In the first place, we should underline that the majority of the participants belong to the working class, mainly young workers and students, mainly coming out of proletarian families or those undergoing proletarianisation. The bourgeois press has presented the movement as an expression of the ‘middle classes’, with the clear intention of creating a division among workers. In reality, the majority of those categorised as middle class are workers who often receive lower wages than skilled workers in the country’s industrial zones. This explains the success of, and the widespread sympathy with, the movement against the transport increases, which represented a direct attack on the income of working class families. This also explains why this initial demand rapidly turned into the questioning of the state, given the dilapidation of sectors such as health, education and social assistance, and increasing protests against the colos-

sal sums of public money invested in organising next year’s World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.<sup>6</sup> For these events the Brazilian bourgeoisie has not hesitated to resort to the forced expulsion of people living near the stadia: at the Aldeia Maracanã in Rio in the first part of the year; in the zones chosen by construction firms in São Paulo, who have been burning down *favelas* in the way of their plans.

It is very significant that the movement organised demonstrations around the football stadia where Confederation Cup matches were being played, in order to get a lot of media attention and to reject the spectacle prepared by the Brazilian bourgeoisie; and also in response to the brutal repression of the demonstrations around the stadia, which resulted in a number of deaths. In a country where football is the national sport, which the bourgeoisie has obviously used as a safety valve for keeping society under control, the demonstrations of the Brazilian proletariat are an example for the world proletariat. The population of Brazil is known for its love of football, but this didn’t prevent it from rejecting austerity imposed to finance the sumptuous expenses devoted to the organisation of these sporting events, which the Brazilian bourgeoisie is using to show the world that it is capable of playing in the premier league of the world economy. The demonstrators demanded public services with a ‘FIFA type’ quality<sup>7</sup>.

An extremely significant fact was that there was a massive rejection of the political parties (especially the Workers’ Party, the PT which produced the current president Lula) and of the unions; in São Paulo some protestors were excluded from the marches because they held up banners with slogans of political, union or student organisations supporting the power.

Other expressions of the class character of the movement were shown,

even though in a minority. There were a number of assemblies held in the heat of the movement, even though they did not have the same extension or reach the level of organization of the Indignados in Spain. For example the ones in Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte, which were called ‘popular and egalitarian assemblies’ which proposed to create a “new spontaneous, open and egalitarian space for debate”, in which over 1000 people took part.

These assemblies, although they demonstrated the vitality of the movement and the necessity for the self-organisation of the masses to impose their demands, revealed a number of weaknesses:

- Even if several other groups and collectives took part in organising them, they were animated by the capitalist left, who mainly kept their activity to the periphery of the cities

- Their main aim was to be organs of pressure on and negotiation with the state, for particular demands for improvements in this or that community or town. They also tended to see themselves as permanent organs;

- They claimed to be independent of the state and the parties, but they were very well infiltrated by the pro-government or leftist organisations which annihilated any spontaneous expressions;

- They put forward a localist or national vision, struggling against the effects of problems rather than their causes, without questioning capitalism.

In the movement there were also explicit references to the social movements in other countries, especially Turkey, which also referred to Brazil. Despite the minority character of these expressions, they were still revealing about what was felt to be shared by the two movements. In different demonstrations, we could see banners proclaiming: “*We are Greeks, Turks, Mexicans, we are homeless, we are revolutionaries*” or signs bearing the slogan: “*This is not Turkey, not Greece, it is Brazil that is coming out of its inertia.*”

In Goiânia, the *Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento* (Front for the Struggle Against the Increase), which regrouped various base organisations,

4. Faced with rising transport fares, the MPL conveyed strong illusions about the state by claiming that, by popular demand, it could guarantee the right to free public transport for the whole population faced with private transport companies.

5. See our article ‘Brazil: police repression provokes the anger of youth’, published on our website on 20 June 2013 and in our printed territorial press.

6. According to forecasts, these two events will cost the Brazilian government \$31.3 billion or 1.6% of GDP while the “Family Allowance” program, presented as the Lula government’s key social measure, represents less than 0.5% of GDP.

7. FIFA –International Federation of Association Football.

underlined the need for solidarity and for debate between the different components of the movement: “*WE MUST REMAIN FIRM AND UNITED! Despite disagreements, we must maintain our solidarity, our resistance, our fighting spirit, and deepen our organisation and our discussions. In the same way as in Turkey, peaceful and militant elements can co-exist and struggle together, we must follow this example.*”

The great indignation which animated the Brazilian proletariat was concretised in the following reflections by the *Rede Extremo Sul*, a network of social movements on the outskirts of São Paulo: “*For these possibilities to become a reality, we can't allow the indignation being expressed on the streets to be diverted into nationalist, conservative and moralist objectives; we can't allow these struggles to be captured by the state and by the elites in order to empty them of their political content. The struggle against the fare increases and the deplorable state of services is directly linked to the struggle against the state and the big economic corporations, against the exploitation and humiliation of the workers, and against this form of life where money is everything and people are nothing.*”

## The traps set by the bourgeoisie

### Turkey

Various bourgeois political trends have been active, trying to influence the movement from the inside to keep it within the boundaries of the existing order, to avoid it radicalising and prevent the proletarian masses who took to the streets against state terror from developing class demands around their living conditions. So, while we cannot claim that they were adopted unanimously in the movement, it was democratic demands which generally dominated. The line calling for “more democracy” that formed around an anti-AKP, or rather anti-Erdogan position, expressed nothing but a reorganization of the Turkish State apparatus on a more democratic basis. The impact of democratic demands on the movement was its greatest ideological weakness. For Erdogan himself

has built all his ideological attacks against the movement around the axis of democracy and elections; government authorities combining lies and manipulations repeated ad nauseam the argument that, even in countries considered more democratic, the police use violence against illegal demonstrations – in which they were not wrong. In addition, the line aimed at obtaining democratic rights tied the hands of the masses faced with police attacks and state terror and pacified their resistance.

The most active element of this democratic tendency, which took control of the *Taksim Solidarity Platform* was in the left union confederations like KSEK and DISK. The *Taksim Solidarity Platform*, and therefore the democratic tendency, consisting of representatives of all kinds of associations and organisations, drew its strength not from an organic link with the protesters but its bourgeois legitimacy and the resources that it could therefore mobilise. The base of the left parties, which can also be defined as the legal bourgeois left, was to a large extent cut off from the masses. In general, it was the tail of the democratic tendency. The Stalinist and Trotskyist circles, along with the bourgeois radical left, were also largely cut off from the masses. They were only really influential in the neighbourhoods where they traditionally have a certain strength. While opposing the democratic tendency when the latter tried to disperse the movement, they generally supported it. Their most widely accepted slogan among the masses was “*Shoulder to shoulder against fascism.*”

### Brazil

The national bourgeoisie has for decades been working to make Brazil a major continental or world power. To achieve this, it's not enough to dispose of an immense territory which covers almost half of South America, or to count on its important natural resources. It has also been necessary to maintain social order, above all control over the workers. Thus in the 1980s it established a kind of alternation between right and centre left governments, based on ‘free and democratic’ elections. All this was indispensable for strengthening Brazil-

ian capital on the world arena.

The Brazilian bourgeoisie was thus better placed to reinforce its productive apparatus and face up to the worst of the economic crisis of the 90s, while on the political level, it succeeded in creating a political force which could control the impoverished masses, but above all maintain “social peace”. This situation was consolidated with the accession of the PT to power in 2002, making use of the charisma and ‘working class’ image of Lula.

In this way, during the first decade of the new century, the Brazilian economy raised itself to seventh place on the world ladder, according to the World Bank. The world bourgeoisie has hailed the ‘Brazilian miracle’ carried out under Lula’s presidency, which has supposedly pulled millions of Brazilians out of poverty and allowed more millions to enter this famous ‘middle class’. In fact, this ‘great success’ has been achieved by distributing a part of the surplus value as crumbs to the most impoverished, while at the same time the situation of the mass of workers has become ever more insecure.

The crisis nevertheless remains at the root of the situation in Brazil. To try to attenuate its effects, the Brazilian bourgeoisie has launched a policy of major works, provoking a construction boom in both the public and private sectors; at the same time it has been facilitating credit and debt among families to stimulate internal consumption. The limits are already tangible in the economic indicators (a slowdown of growth), but especially in the deterioration of working class living conditions: rising rates of inflation (an annual forecast of 6.7% in 2013), increased prices of consumer goods and services (including transport), a marked development of unemployment, cuts in public spending. So, the protest movement in Brazil does not come from nowhere.

The only concrete result, which was obtained under pressure from the masses, was the suspension of the increase in public transport fares that the state managed to compensate for in other ways. At the beginning of the wave of protests, to calm things down while the government worked out a strategy to control the movement,



President Dilma Rousseff declared, via one of her mouthpieces, that she considered the population's protests as "legitimate and compatible with democracy". Lula meanwhile criticised the "excesses" of the police. But state repression didn't stop, and neither have street demonstrations.

One of the most elaborate traps against the movement was the propagation of the myth of a right wing coup, a rumour spread not only by the PT and the Stalinist party, but also by the Trotskyists of the PSOL (*Partido-Socialismo e Liberdade*) and PSTU (*Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificados*): this was a way of derailing the movement and turning it towards supporting the Rousseff government, which has been severely weakened and discredited. In reality the facts show precisely that the ferocious repression against the protests in June by the left government led by the PT was equally if not more brutal than that of the military regimes. The left and extreme left of Brazilian capital are trying to obscure this reality by identifying repression with fascism or right wing regimes. There is also the smokescreen of 'political reform' put forward by Rousseff, with the aim of combating corruption in the political parties and imprisoning the population on the democratic terrain by calling for a vote on the proposed reforms. In fact, the Brazilian bourgeoisie showed more intelligence and know-how than its Turkish counterpart, which mostly confined itself to repeating the cycle of provocation/repression faced with social movements.

To try to regain an influence within the movement on the street, the political parties of the left of capital and the trade unions announced, several weeks in advance, a 'National Day of Struggle' for the 11 July, presented as a way of protesting against the failure of the collective labour agreements. Similarly, Lula, showing his considerable anti-working class experience, called on 25 June for a meeting of the leaders of movements controlled by the PT and the Stalinist party, including youth and student organisations allied with the government, with the explicit aim neutralising the street protests.

## The strengths and weaknesses of the two movements

### Turkey

Just as was the case with the Indignados movement and *Occupy*, these mobilizations have responded to the will to break with the atomization of economic sectors where mostly young people work in precarious conditions (delivering for kebab shops, bar staff, workers in call centres and offices ...) and where it is usually difficult to struggle. An important driver of engagement and commitment is indignation but also the sense of solidarity against police violence and state terror.

But at the same time it is often as individuals that the largest concentrations of workers participated in the demonstrations, which has been one of the most significant weaknesses of the movement. The living conditions of the proletarians, subject to the ideological pressure of the ruling class in this country, have made it difficult for the working class to perceive itself as a class and helped to reinforce the idea among the demonstrators that they were essentially a mass of individual citizens, legitimate members of the "national" community. The movement, having not recognized its own class interests, found its possibilities for maturation blocked, the proletarian tendency within it having remained in the background. This situation has much contributed to the focus on democracy, the central axis of the movement against government policy. A weakness of the demonstrations throughout Turkey has been the difficulty of creating mass discussions and gaining control of the movement through forms of self-organization. This weakness was certainly favoured by a limited experience of mass discussion, meetings, general assemblies, etc. However at the same time the movement has felt the need for discussion, and the means to organize it began to emerge, as evidenced by some isolated experiences: the creation of an open forum in Gezi Park did not attract much attention or last very long, but it nevertheless had some impact; during the strike of June 5, employees of the university who

were members of Eđitim-Sen<sup>8</sup> suggested establishing an open forum but the KSEK leadership not only rejected the proposal but also isolated the Eđitim-Sen branch to which the university employees belong. The most crucial experience was provided by the Eskişehir demonstrators who, in a general assembly, created committees to organize and coordinate the demonstrations; finally, on 17 June, in parks in different areas of Istanbul, masses of people inspired by the Gezi Park forums put in place mass assemblies also called "forums". In the following days, others were held in Ankara and other cities. The most discussed issues related to problems of the clashes with the police. Nevertheless, there has been a tendency among the protesters to understand the importance of involvement in the struggle of part of the working proletariat.

Although the movement in Turkey failed to establish a serious relationship with the whole of the working class, the strike calls via social networks had a certain echo that was manifested in work stoppages. In addition, proletarian tendencies were clearly revealed in the movement through elements who were conscious of the importance and strength of the class and who were against nationalism. In general, a significant portion of the protesters defended the idea that the movement must create a self-organization that would allow it to determine its own future. Moreover, the number of people who said that unions like KSEK and DISK, supposed to be "militant", were no different from the government grew significantly.

Finally, another characteristic of the movement, and not least: Turkish protesters welcomed the response from the other end of the world with slogans in Turkish: "*We are together, Brazil + Turkey!*" and "*Brazil resists!*".

### Brazil

The great strength of the movement was that, from the beginning, it affirmed itself as a movement against the state, not only through the central demand against the fare increases but also as a mobilisation against the abandonment of public services and the orientation of spending towards

8. Teachers' union, part of KSEK.

the sporting spectacles. At the same time the breadth and determination of the protest forced the bourgeoisie to take a step back and annul the fare increases in a number of cities.

The crystallisation of the movement around a concrete demand, while being a strength of the movement, also put limits on it as soon as it was unable to go any further. Obtaining the suspension of the fare increases marked a step forward, but the movement did not on the whole see itself as challenging the capitalist order, something which was much more present in the Indignados movement in Spain.

The distrust towards the bourgeoisie's main forces of social control took the form of the rejection of the political parties and the trade unions, and this represented a weakness for the bourgeoisie on the ideological level, the exhaustion of the political strategies which have emerged since the end of the dictatorship of 1965-85 and the discrediting of the teams which have succeeded each other at the head of the state, in particular as a result of their notoriously corrupt character. However, behind this undifferentiated rejection of politics stands the danger of the apoliticism, which was an important weakness of the movement. Without political debate, there is no possibility of taking the struggle forward, since it can only grow in the soil of discussion which is aimed at understanding the roots of the problems you are fighting against, and which cannot evade a critique of the foundations of the capital. It was thus no accident that one of the weaknesses of the movement was the absence of street assemblies open to all

participants, where you could discuss the problems of society, the actions to carry out, the organisation of the movement, its balance sheet and its objectives. The social networks were an important means of mobilisation, a way of breaking out of isolation. But they can never replace open and living debate in the assemblies.

The poison of nationalism was not absent from the movement, as could be seen from the number of Brazilian flags displayed on the demonstrations and the raising of nationalist slogans. It was quite common to hear the national anthem in the processions. This was not the case with the Indignados in Spain. In this sense the June movement in Brazil presented the same weaknesses as the mobilisations in Greece and in the Arab countries, where the bourgeoisie succeeded in drowning the huge vitality of the movements in a national project for reforming and safeguarding the state. In this context, the focus on corruption in the last analysis also worked for the benefit of the bourgeoisie and its political parties, especially those in opposition, and gave a certain credibility to the perspective of the next elections. Nationalism is a dead-end for the proletarian struggle, a violation of international class solidarity

Despite the majority of participants in the movement being proletarians, they were involved in an atomised way. The movement didn't manage to mobilise the workers of the industrial centres who have an important weight, especially in the São Paulo region. It wasn't even proposed. The working class, which certainly welcomed the movement and even identified with

it, because it was struggling for a demand which it saw was in its interest, did not manage to mobilise as such. This attitude is a characteristic of the period where the working class is finding it hard to affirm its class identity, aggravated in Brazil by decades of immobility resulting from the action of the political parties and the unions, mainly the PT and the CUT.

### **Their importance for the future**

The emergence of social movements of massive size and unparalleled historical importance since 1908 in Turkey, and for 30 years in Brazil, give an example to the world proletariat of the response of a new generation of proletarians to the deepening global crisis of the capitalist system. Despite their differences, these movements are an integral part of the chain of international social movements, of which the mobilization of the Indignados in Spain constitutes a reference point, in response to the historic and mortal crisis of capitalism. Despite all their weaknesses, they are a source of inspiration and lessons for the world proletariat. As for their weaknesses, they must be the subject, for the proletarians themselves, of an uncompromising critique to draw their lessons so that, tomorrow, they will arm other movements by helping to avoid in future the ideological influence and traps of the enemy class.

These movements are nothing other than the manifestation of "the old mole" to which Marx refers and which undermines the foundations of the capitalist order.

Wim (11 August)



## 20<sup>th</sup> ICC congress

Recently the ICC held its 20th International Congress. The congress of a communist organisation is one of the most important moments of its life and activity. It's when the whole organisation (through delegations nominated by each of its sections) makes a balance-sheet of its activities, analyses in depth the international situation, draws out perspectives and elects a central organ, which has the task of ensuring that the decisions of the congress are applied.

Because we are convinced of the need of debate and cooperation between organisations who fight for the overthrow the capitalist system, we invited three groups - two from Korea, and OPOP from Brazil, who have already attended previous international congresses. Since the work of a communist organisation's congress is not an 'internal' question but is of interest to the working class as a whole we aim here to inform our readers about the essential questions discussed there.

The congress took place against the background of sharpening tensions in Asia, ongoing war in Syria, worsening economic crisis and a situation of class struggle marked by a low development of 'classic' workers' struggles against the economic attacks of the bourgeoisie but also by the international upsurge of social movements, the most significant examples being the Occupy movement in the US and the 'Indignados' in Spain

### **The analysis of the world situation: a challenge that demands major theoretical effort**

The resolution on the international situation adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, which summarises the analyses which came out of the discussions, is published in this issue of the *Review*, and we need not return to it in detail here.

The resolution recalls the historical framework within which we understand the present situation of society – the decadence of the capitalist mode of production, whose beginning was marked by the outbreak of World War I; and the final phase of decadence, which the ICC, since the mid-80s, has defined as that of decomposition,

of a society rotting on its feet. Social decomposition is illustrated very clearly by the form being taken by today's imperialist conflicts, with the situation in Syria being a particularly tragic example, as we can see in the report on imperialist tensions adopted by the Congress and published in this issue, but also by the catastrophic degradation of the environment which the ruling class, despite all its alarmed declarations and campaigns, is quite incapable of preventing, or even slowing down.

The congress did not have a specific discussion on the imperialist conflicts since our preparatory discussions had already demonstrated a large measure of agreement on the question. However, the Congress heard a presentation by the Korean group Sanoshin on the imperialist tensions in the Far East, which we hope to publish as an annex on our website.

### **On the economic crisis**

Incapable of overcoming the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, the bourgeoisie finds itself – as the resolution points out – caught in a deadlock: a striking confirmation of marxist analysis. All the 'experts', whether they support or reject 'neoliberalism', regard the marxist analysis with the contempt of the ignorant; above all, they fight it, precisely because it foretells the historical failure of this mode of production and the necessity to replace it with a society where the market, profit and wage labour will have been relegated to the museum of history, a society where humanity will be free of the blind laws that today are dragging it towards barbarism, and will be able to live according to the principle "*from each according to their capacities, to*

*each according to their needs*".

As regards the present situation of the crisis of capitalism, the Congress stated clearly that the current 'financial crisis' is by no means the source of the contradictions plaguing the world economy, nor do its roots lie in the 'financialisation of the economy' and the obsession with short-term profit and speculation. "*On the contrary, it is overproduction which is the source of 'financialisation' and it is the fact that it is more and more risky to invest in production, given that the world market is more and more saturated, which directs the flow of finance more and more towards speculation. This is why all the 'left wing' economic theories which call for 'reining in international finance' in order to get out of the crisis are empty dreams since they 'forget' the real causes of this hypertrophy of the financial sphere*". (Resolution on the international situation, point 10). Similarly, the Congress recognised that "*The crisis of the 'sub-primes' in 2007, the huge financial panic of 2008 and the recession of 2009 marked a new and very important step in capitalism's descent into irreversible crisis*". (ibid, point 11)

Having said this, the Congress noted that our organisation is far from unanimous on the economic crisis and that it will be necessary to continue the discussion around a number of questions, for example: Was the aggravation of the crisis in 2007 a qualitative break, opening a new chapter in history, pushing the economy towards an immediate and rapid collapse? What was the significance of the events of 2007? More generally what kind of development of the crisis should we expect: a sudden collapse or a slow, politically 'managed' decline? Which countries will sink first and which last? Does the ruling class have choices, room for manoeuvre, and what kind of mistakes are they trying to avoid? Or more generally: when analysing the economic crisis and its perspectives, can and does

the ruling class ignore the expected reactions of the working class? Which criteria does the ruling class take into consideration when adopting austerity programmes in different countries? Are we in a situation where everywhere the ruling class can attack the working class in the same way as it has been doing in Greece? Can we expect a repetition of the same scale of attacks (wage cuts of up to 40% etc) in the old industrial heartlands? What difference is there between the crisis of 1929 and today's? How far has pauperisation advanced in the big industrial countries?

The organisation recalled that soon after 1989 we were able to predict the fundamental changes on the imperialist level and the class struggle which had occurred with the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the so-called 'socialist' countries.<sup>1</sup> However, we did not foresee the major economic changes which have occurred since. What, for example, has been the effect on the world economy of China's and India's abandonment of their previous mechanisms of relative economic autarchy?

Obviously, as we did for the debate we had a few years ago in our organisation on the mechanisms which allowed for the 'boom' that followed the Second World War<sup>2</sup>, we will bring to our readers the main elements of the current debate once the discussion has reached a sufficient level of clarity.

### On class struggle

The report on the class struggle to the Congress drew a balance sheet of the past two years (from the Arab Spring, the Indignados, Occupy movements, the struggles in Asia etc.) and the difficulties of the class to respond to the ever increasing attacks by the capitalists in Europe and the USA. The discussions at the Congress dealt mainly

1. See *International Review* 60, first quarter of 1990: 'Collapse of Stalinism: new difficulties for the proletariat'. [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/60/difficulties\\_for\\_the\\_proletariat](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/60/difficulties_for_the_proletariat) and *International Review* 64 (first quarter 1991): 'Orientation text: militarism and decomposition' <http://en.internationalism.org/node/3336>

2. 'Internal debate: the causes of the post-1945 economic boom' in *International Review* nos. 133,135,136, 138, 2008-2009 (<http://en.internationalism.org/series/1242>).

with the following questions: how are we to explain the difficulties of the working class to respond 'adequately' to the increasing attacks? Why are we not yet moving towards a revolutionary situation in the old industrial heartlands? Which policies is the ruling class putting in place to avoid massive struggles in the old industrial centres? What are the conditions for the mass strike?

What role does the working class in East Asia, in particular China, play in the global balance of forces between the classes? What can we expect from the class? Has the centre of the world economy, of the world proletariat, moved to China? How are we to assess the changes in the composition of the working class worldwide? The debate recalled our position on the "weak link" which we developed in the 1980s, in opposition to Lenin's idea that the chain of capitalist domination would break in its "weakest link"<sup>3</sup>, i.e. the less developed countries.

Even if the discussions didn't reveal disagreements on the report presented (which is summarised in the section on class struggle in the resolution), we felt that the organisation has to give deeper thought to this question, in particular by discussing around the theme: "What method should we use to analyse the class struggle in the present historical period?"

### On the life and activities of the organisation

Discussions on the life of the organisation, of the balance sheet and perspectives of its activities and functioning occupied a large part of the 20th Congress' agenda, as has always been the case in previous congresses. This is an expression of the fact that questions of organisation are not merely 'technical' questions but are political questions in their own right and must be approached in as great a depth as possible. When we look back at the history of the three Internationals created by the working class, we can see that these questions were always resolutely taken up by their marxist

3. See 'The proletariat of Western Europe at the centre of the generalization of the class struggle' in *International Review* 31 <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/1982/31/critique-of-the-weak-link-theory>

wing, as illustrated, among many others, by the following examples:

- the struggle of Marx and the Central Council of the International Workingmen's Association against Bakunin's Alliance, especially at the Hague Congress in 1872;

- the struggle of Lenin and the Bolsheviks against the petty bourgeois and opportunist conceptions of the Mensheviks during the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903 and subsequently;

- the struggle of the left fraction of the Communist Party of Italy against the degeneration of the International and to prepare the political and programmatic conditions for a new proletarian party when the historical conditions were suitable.

The historical experience of the workers' movement has shown that specific political organisations that defend the revolutionary perspective within the working class are indispensable if the class is going to be able to overthrow capitalism and create a communist society. But proletarian political organisations cannot just be proclaimed: they must be built. While the goal is to overthrow the capitalist system, and while a communist society can only be built once the power of the bourgeoisie has been overturned and an end been put to capitalism, a revolutionary organisation must be built within capitalist society. Therefore the construction of the organisation must confront all kinds of pressures and obstacles that spring from the capitalist system and its ideology. This means that the process of construction does not take place in a vacuum. Revolutionary organisations are like a foreign body within capitalist society, which this system constantly aims to destroy. A revolutionary organisation is therefore constantly obliged to defend itself against a whole series of threats coming from capitalist society. Obviously, it must resist repression. The ruling class, whenever it has felt the necessity, has never hesitated to unleash its police and even its military forces to silence the voices of the revolutionaries. Most of the organisations in the past existed for a long-time under conditions of repression: they were "outlawed" and many mili-



tants were driven into exile. However, this repression rarely crushed them; on the contrary, it often strengthened their resolve and helped to defend themselves against democratist illusions. This was the case for example with the SPD in Germany during the anti-socialist laws which resisted the poison of ‘democracy’ and ‘parliamentarism’ much better than it did during the period when it was legal.

The revolutionary organisation also has to resist destruction from within – penetration through spies, informers, adventurers, etc., which can often cause more damage than open repression.

Finally, and above all, it has to resist the pressure of the dominant ideology, in particular democratism and ‘good old common sense’, which was roundly attacked by Marx. They have to fight against all ‘values’ and ‘principles’ of capitalist society. The history of the workers’ movement has taught us, through the opportunist gangrene that carried off the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Internationals, that the main threat to revolutionary organisations is precisely their inability to combat the penetration of the ‘values’ and habits of thought of bourgeois society.

**Therefore, a revolutionary organisation cannot function in the same way as capitalist society; it must function in an associated manner.**

Capitalist society works through competition, alienation, ‘comparing’ each other, establishing norms, streamlining. A communist organisation requires working together and overcoming the spirit of competition. It can only function if its members do not act like a flock of sheep, tail-ending and accepting blindly what the central organ or other comrades say. The search for truth and clarity must constantly stimulate all the activities of the organisation. Independent thinking, the capacity to reflect, to put things into question, are vital. This means we cannot hide behind a collective, but we must assume our individual responsibility by expressing our opinions and pushing forward clarification. Conformism is a big obstacle in our struggle for communism.

In capitalist society, if you do not fit into the norm, you are quickly “excluded”, made into a scapegoat, the one

who is blamed for everything. A revolutionary organisation has to establish a mode of functioning where all kinds of different individuals and personalities can be integrated into one big body. It requires the art of drawing on the riches of all personalities. This means a fight against personal pride and other ideas linked to competition. It means valuing the contribution of each comrade. And at the same time this means an organisation must have a set of rules and principles which are based on ethical principles. These need to be elaborated, which is a political battle in itself. Whereas the ethics of capitalist society know no scruples, the goal of the proletarian struggle must be in harmony with the means of the struggle.

The construction and the functioning of an organisation thus entail a theoretical and moral dimension, both of which require a constant and conscious effort. Any sluggishness or wavering, any weakening of effort and vigilance on one level pave the way for a weakening on the other. These two dimensions are inseparable from each other and determine each other mutually. The less theoretical efforts an organisation undertakes, the easier and quicker a moral regression can occur; and at the same time the loss of our moral compass will inevitably weaken our theoretical capacities. Thus, at the turning point of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Rosa Luxemburg showed that the opportunist trajectory of German social democracy went hand in hand with its moral and theoretical regression.

One of the most fundamental aspects of the life of a communist organisation is its internationalism, not only at the level of its principles, but also at the level of the conception it has of its own way of life, its mode of functioning.

The goal – a society without exploitation and producing for the needs of humanity – can only be achieved internationally, and it requires the unification of the proletariat across all borders. This is why internationalism has been the slogan of the proletariat since its appearance. Revolutionary organisations must be the vanguard in adopting an international point of view and fighting against a ‘localist’ perspective.

Although from the outset the proletariat has always attempted to organise internationally (the Communist League 1847-1852 was the first international organisation), the ICC is the first organisation which is internationally centralised, and where all sections defend the same positions. Our sections are integrated into international debates in our organisation, where all our members – across the continents – can draw on the experience of the entire organisation. This means we have to learn to bring together militants from all sorts of backgrounds, learn to hold debates in spite of all the different languages – all of which is a very inspiring process, where clarification and the deepening of our positions is enriched by the contributions of comrades from the whole planet.

Last but not least, it is vital for the organisation to have a clear understanding of the role it has to play in the proletarian struggle for emancipation. As the ICC has often emphasised, the function of the revolutionary organisation today is not to ‘organise the class’ or its struggles (as could be the case during the first steps of the workers’ movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Its essential role, already set out in the Communist Manifesto in 1848, derives from the fact that communists “*have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement*”. In this sense, the permanent and essential function of the organisation is the elaboration of political positions, and in order to do this it cannot afford to be totally absorbed by its tasks of intervention in the class. It has to be able to take a step back and arrive at a general view. It must be permanently preoccupied with deepening the questions posed by the class as a whole and with placing them within a historical perspective. This means that it cannot limit itself to an analysis of the world situation. It needs to explore broader, underlying theoretical questions, rejecting superficiality and the distortions of capitalist society and ideology. This is a permanent struggle, one with a long-term view that embraces a whole series of aspects that go well beyond the questions posed to the class at this or that



moment in the struggle.

Since the proletarian revolution is not just a struggle around “bread and butter” issues, as Rosa Luxemburg underlined, but the first revolution in the history of humanity where all the chains of exploitation and oppression are overthrown, this struggle necessarily implies a great cultural transformation. A revolutionary organisation does not only deal with questions of political economy and the class struggle in a narrow sense. It must develop its own vision on the most important questions facing humanity, constantly expanding its views and being open and ready to face new questions. Theoretical elaboration, the search for truth, the wish for clarification, must be our daily passion.

And at the same time we can only fulfil our role if the old generation of militants transmits the experience and lessons they have acquired to the new militants. If the old generation has no “treasure” of experience and lessons to pass on to the new generation, it has failed in its task. The construction of the organisation thus requires the art of drawing the lessons of the past in order to prepare the future.

As we can see, the task of building a revolutionary organisation is extremely complex and demands a permanent struggle. In the past, our organisation has already waged important battles for the defence of its principles. But experience has shown that these battles have been insufficient and they have to be carried on in the face of the difficulties and weaknesses that result from the origins of our organisation and the historical conditions in which it maintains its activity:

*“There is not one single cause for each of the different weaknesses of the organisation. The latter are the result of various factors which, while they can be linked together, must be clearly identified:*

*- The weight of our origins in the historic resurgence of the world proletariat at the end of the 1960s, and in particular, the effects of the break in organic continuity;*

*- The weight of decomposition which began to have an impact in the mid-80s;*

*- The pressure of the ‘invisible hand*

*of the market’, of reification, whose imprint on society has only intensified with the prolonged survival of capitalist relations of production.*

*The different weaknesses which we have identified, even if they can mutually influence each other, derive in the final instance from these three factors or their combination:*

*- The underestimation of theoretical elaboration, and particularly on organisational questions, has its source in our very origins: the impact of the student revolt with its component of petty bourgeois academicism, with an opposing tendency which mixes up anti-academicism and a disdain for theory, and this in an ambiance of contesting authority, including that of an ‘old geezer’ like comrade MC, which affected a lot of young militants and thus the organisation. Later on this underestimation of theory was fed by the general atmosphere of the destruction of thought characteristic of the period of decomposition, and the growing impregnation of good old common sense, a manifestation in our ranks of the insidious penetration of reification;*

*- The loss of acquisitions is a direct consequence of the underestimation of theoretical elaboration: the acquisitions of the organisation, whether on questions of programme, analysis or organisation, can only be maintained, above all in the face of the constant pressure of bourgeois ideology, if they are permanently fed and watered by theoretical reflection: thought which doesn’t move forward, which is content with the repetition of stereotyped formulas, is not only threatened with stagnation, it can only regress. The superficiality in the assimilation of our positions, which has often been noted in the past, is the best guarantee of losing our acquisitions;*

*- Immediatism is one of the youthful faults of an organisation which was formed by young militants who awoke to political life at a time of spectacular revival in the class struggle, and many of whom thought that the revolution was just around the corner. The most immediatist among us did not hold fast and were in the end demoralised, abandoning the combat, but this weakness also survived among those who remained: it continued to imbue*

*the organisation and has expressed itself on numerous occasions. It is a weakness which can be fatal because, associated with a loss of acquisitions, it inexorably leads towards opportunism, an approach which has regularly undermined the foundations of our organisation;*

*- Routinism, for its part, is one of the major expressions of the weight of the alienated, reified relations which dominate capitalist society and which tend to turn the organisation into a machine and the militants into robots. It is obviously reinforced by the poverty of theoretical reflection which leads us to lose sight of the reason for the organisation’s existence;*

*- Sclerosis results to a large extent from routinism but it is also fed by the loss of acquisitions and theoretical impoverishment, and is for this reason the other side to the coin of opportunism. Even if it does not lead to treason like the latter illness (the two can exist side by side), the paralysis which it provokes vis-à-vis the responsibilities of the organisation results in the death of the capacity of the latter to be an active factor in the development of class consciousness;*

*- The circle spirit, as the whole history of the ICC bears out, along with the whole history of the workers’ movement, is one of the most dangerous poisons for the organisation, bringing with it not only the tendency to transform an instrument of proletarian combat into a mere ‘bunch of pals’, not only the personalisation of political questions which saps the culture of debate, but the destruction of collective work and the unity of the organisation, above all in the form of clanism. It is also responsible for the hunt for scapegoats which undermines moral health, just as it is one of the worst enemies of the culture of theory in that it destroys profound and rational thought in favour of contortions and gossip. Again, it is a frequent vehicle for opportunism, the antechamber of betrayal” (Resolution on activities adopted by the congress, point 4)*

To fight against the weaknesses and dangers facing the organisation, there is no magical formula and we have to direct our efforts in several directions. One of the points which

was given particular emphasis was the necessity to combat routinism and conformism, stressing the fact that the organisation is not an anonymous, uniform body but an association of different militants, all of whom have a specific contribution to make to the common work.

*“In order to work for the construction of a real international association of communist militants where each one can bring his brick to the collective building, the organisation must reject the reactionary utopia of the ‘model militant’, the ‘standard militant’, or the invulnerable and infallible super-militant... Militants are neither robots nor supermen, but human beings with different personalities, histories and socio-cultural origins. It is only through a better understanding of our human ‘nature’ and of the diversity which is specific to our species that confidence and solidarity between militants can be built and consolidated... each comrade has the capacity to make a unique contribution to the organisation. It is also their individual responsibility to do so. In particular, it is the responsibility of each comrade to express his positions in debate, in particular disagreements and questioning, without which the organisation will not be able to develop its culture of debate and theoretical elaboration”* (Resolution on activities, point 9).

And so the congress insisted in particular on the need to take up the tasks of theoretical elaboration with determination and perseverance.

*“The first challenge for the organisation is to become aware of the dangers we are facing. We cannot overcome these dangers by resorting to last minute “fire brigade” actions. We must examine all our problems with a theoretical-historical approach and oppose all pragmatist, superficial outlooks. This means we have to develop a long-term vision and not fall into a ‘day-to-day’ and empirical approach. Theoretical study and political combat must be brought back to the centre of the organisation’s life, not only in regard to immediate intervention, but most importantly by pursuing the deeper theoretical questions about marxism itself that have been posed in the past ten years through the orientations we have given our-*

*selves but which remain undeveloped by the organisation. This means we must give ourselves the necessary time to deepen and fight any conformism in our ranks. The organisation has to encourage critical questioning, the expression of doubts and efforts to explore things deeper.*

*We must not forget that “theory is not a passion of the head but the head of passion”, and that “when theory grips the masses, it becomes a material force” (Marx). The struggle for communism contains not only an economic and political dimension, but also and above all a theoretical dimension (‘intellectual’ and moral). It is by developing a ‘culture of theory’, i.e. a capacity to permanently place all the activities of the organisation in a historical and/or theoretical framework, that we can develop and deepen the culture of debate in our ranks, and better assimilate the dialectical method of marxism. Without the development of this ‘culture of theory’, the ICC will not be able to maintain its compass over the long term so that it can orient itself, adapt to unprecedented situations, evolve and enrich marxism, which is not an invariant and immutable dogma but a living theory aimed towards the future.*

*This ‘culture of theory’ is not a problem of militants’ level of education. It contributes to the development of a rational, rigorous and coherent thought which is indispensable to the capacity to develop an argument, to advancing the consciousness of all the militants, and to the consolidation of the marxist method in our ranks.*

*This work of theoretical reflection cannot ignore the contribution of the sciences (and notably of the human sciences, such as psychology and anthropology), the history of the human species and the development of its civilisation. It is for this reason that the discussion on the theme “Marxism and science” has been of the highest importance and the advances which it has made possible must remain present and be reinforced in the thinking and life of the organisation.”* (Resolution on activities, point 8)

### **The invitation to scientists**

This concern for the sciences is not new for the ICC. In particular, in ar-

ticles on our previous congresses we talked about the invitation of scientists who made a contribution to the reflection of the whole organisation by submitting their own thoughts from their areas of research. This time, we invited the British anthropologists Camilla Power and Chris Knight, who had already attended previous congresses, and whom we thank warmly for coming to this one. These two scientists shared a presentation on the theme of violence in pre-history, in societies which were not yet divided into classes. Communists obviously have a fundamental interest in this question. Marxism has devoted much research into the role of violence. Engels in particular dedicated an important part of *Anti-Dühring* to the role of violence in history. Today, as we get ready to mark the centenary of the First World War, a century distinguished by the worst violence humanity has ever known, and when violence is ever-present in social life, it’s important that those who fight for a society that has rid itself of the scars of capitalist society, of wars and oppression, should ask questions about the place of violence in different societies. In particular, faced with the standpoint of bourgeois ideology for whom the violence of today corresponds to ‘human nature’, whose rule is ‘everyman for himself’ and the domination of the strong over the weak, it is necessary to look into the role of societies which were not divided into classes, as in primitive communism.

We cannot give an account here of the very rich presentations by Camilla Power and Chris Knight (which we plan to publish as a podcast on our website). But it is worth pointing out that these two scientists argued against the theory of Steven Pinker<sup>4</sup>, who claims that thanks to ‘civilisation’ and the influence of the state, violence has been receding. Camilla Power and Chris Knight showed that amongst hunter and gatherer societies there was a much lower level of violence than in subsequent social formations.

The discussion that followed the

4. <http://stevenpinker.com/publications/better-angels-our-nature>



# Resolution on the international situation

## Capitalism decomposition

1. A century ago the capitalist mode of production entered its period of historical decline, its epoch of decadence. It was the outbreak of the First World War which marked the passage from the 'Belle Epoque', the high point of bourgeois society, to the 'epoch of wars and revolutions' described by the Communist International at its first congress in 1919. Since then, capitalism has continued to sink into barbarism, most notably in the shape of a Second World War which cost 50 million lives. And if the period of 'prosperity' which followed this horrible butchery could sow the illusion that this system had finally been able to overcome its contradictions, the open crisis of the economy at the end of the 1960s confirmed the verdict which revolutionaries had already pronounced half a century before: the capitalist mode of production could not escape the destiny of the modes of production which had preceded it. It too, having constituted a progressive step in human history, had become an obstacle to the development of the productive forces and the progress of humanity. The time for its overthrow and its replacement by another society had arrived.

2. At the same time that it showed the historic dead end that the capitalist system now faced, this open crisis, like the one in the 1930s, once again placed society in front of the alternative between generalised imperialist war and the development of decisive proletarian struggles with the perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Faced with the crisis of the 1930s, the world proletariat, which had been ideologically crushed by the bourgeoisie following the defeat of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave, had not been able to come up with its own response, leaving the bourgeoisie to impose its own: a new world war. By contrast, with the first

blows of the open crisis at the end of the 1960s, the proletariat had launched very widespread struggles: May 1968 in France, the 'Hot Autumn' in Italy 1969, the massive strikes of the workers in Poland in 1970, and many other combats, less spectacular but no less significant as signs of fundamental change in society. The counter-revolution was over. In this new situation, the bourgeoisie did not have a free hand to head towards a new world war. There followed more than four decades marked by the world economy getting more and more bogged down and by increasingly violent attacks against the living conditions of the exploited. During these decades, the working class waged many resistance struggles. However, even though it did not suffer a decisive defeat which could have overturned the historic course, it was not able to develop its struggles and its consciousness to the point of offering society the outline of a revolutionary perspective. *'In this situation, where society's two decisive - and antagonistic - classes confront each other without either being able to impose its own definitive response, history nonetheless does not just come to a stop. Still less for capitalism than for preceding social forms, is a "freeze" or a "stagnation" of social life possible. As a crisis-ridden capitalism's contradictions can only get deeper, the bourgeoisie's inability to offer the slightest perspective for society as a whole, and the proletariat's inability, for the moment, openly to set forward its own can only lead to a situation of generalised decomposition. Capitalism is rotting on its feet'* ('Decomposition, final phase in the decadence of capitalism', *International Review* 62)). Thus a new phase in the decadence of capitalism opened up a quarter of a century ago, the phase where the phenomenon of decomposition has become a decisive element in the life of the whole of society.

## Imperialist tensions

3. The area where the decomposition of capitalist society is expressed in the most spectacular way is that of military conflicts and international relations in general. What led the ICC to elaborate its analysis of decomposition in the second half of the 1980s was the succession of murderous attacks which hit the big European cities, especially Paris – attacks that were not carried out by isolated groups but by established states. This was the beginning of a form of imperialist confrontations, later described as 'asymmetrical warfare', which marked a profound change in relations between states and, more generally, in the whole of society. The first historic manifestation of this new and final stage in the decadence of capitalism was the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Europe and of the eastern bloc in 1989. Straight away the ICC pointed out the significance of this event in terms of imperialist conflicts: *"The disappearance of the Russian imperialist gendarme, and that to come of the American gendarme as far as its one-time 'partners' are concerned, opens the door to the unleashing of a whole series of more local rivalries. For the moment, these rivalries and confrontations cannot degenerate into a world war.... However, with the disappearance of the discipline imposed by the two blocs, these conflicts are liable to become more frequent and more violent, especially of course in those areas where the proletariat is weakest. (International Review no 61, 'After the collapse of the eastern bloc, destabilisation and chaos').* Since then the international situation has only confirmed this analysis:

- Gulf war in 1991
- War in ex-Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001
- Two wars in Chechnya (in 1994-95 and 1999-2000)



- War in Afghanistan from 2001, which is still going on 12 years later

- The war in Iraq in 2003, the consequences of which continue to effect this country in a dramatic way, but also the initiator of the war, the USA

- The many wars which have ravaged the African continent (Rwanda, Somalia, Congo, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Mali, etc)

- The numerous military operations by Israel against Lebanon or the Gaza Strip in response to rocket attacks from Hezbollah or Hamas

4. In fact, these different conflicts graphically illustrate how war has taken on a totally irrational character in decadent capitalism. The wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however murderous they may have been, had a rationality from the standpoint of the development of capitalism. Colonial wars allowed the European states to establish empires where they could obtain raw materials or as outlets for their commodities. The American Civil War, won by the north, opened the door to the full industrial development of what would become the world's leading power. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 was a decisive element in German unity and thus in creating the political framework for the future powerhouse of Europe. By contrast, the First World War bled the countries of Europe dry, both the 'victors' and the 'vanquished', above all those which had been the most 'warlike' (Austria, Russia and Germany). As for the Second World War, it confirmed and amplified the decline of the European continent where it had begun, with a special mention for Germany, which in 1945 was a pile of ruins, as was the other 'aggressor' power, Japan. In fact, the only country which benefited from this war was the one which had entered it later on and which, because of its geographic position, meant that the war was not fought on its territory – the USA. However, the most important war waged by the US after the Second World War, the war in Vietnam, certainly showed its irrational character because it brought nothing to the American power despite a considerable cost at the economic and above all human and political levels.

5. This said, the irrational character

of war has gone on to a new level in the period of decomposition. This has been clearly illustrated by the American adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars also had a considerable cost, notably at the economic level. But their benefits were severely limited, if not negative. In these wars, the American power was able to display its immense military superiority, but this did not enable it to obtain the objectives it was seeking: stabilising Iraq and Afghanistan and forcing its old allies of the western bloc to close ranks around the US. Today, the phased withdrawal of American and NATO troops from Iraq and Afghanistan is leaving these countries in an unprecedented state of instability, threatening to aggravate the instability of the whole region. At the same time, the other participants in these military adventures have jumped or will jump ship in dispersed order.

6. During the last period, the chaotic nature of the imperialist tensions and conflicts has been illustrated once again with the situation in Syria and the Far East. In both cases, we are witnessing conflicts which bring with them the threat of a much wider extension and destabilisation.

In the Far East we've seen rising tensions between the states of the region. Thus in recent months there have been tensions involving a number of countries, from the Philippines to Japan. China and Japan have been in dispute over the Senkaku/Diyao islands, Japan and South Korea over the island of Takeshima/Dokdo, while there are other tensions involving Taiwan, Vietnam and Burma. But the most spectacular conflict is obviously the one ranging North Korea against South Korea, Japan and the US. In the grip of a dramatic economic crisis, North Korea has upped the stakes on the military level, with the aim of putting pressure on the others, and especially the USA, in order to gain a certain number of economic advantages. But this adventurist policy contains two very serious elements. On the one hand, the fact that it involves, even if in an indirect manner, the Chinese giant, which remains one of North Korea's only allies, and which is more and more pushing forward its imperialist interests wherever it can,

in the Far East of course, but also in the Middle East, through its alliance with Iran (which is its main supplier of hydrocarbons), and also in Africa where a growing economic presence is aimed at preparing the ground for a future military presence when it has the means to establish it. On the other hand, the adventurist policy of the North Korean state, a state whose brutal police rule is evidence of its basic fragility, contains the risk of things getting out of hand, of an uncontrolled process creating a new focus for direct military conflicts whose consequences would be hard to predict but which we can already say would be a further tragic episode to add to the long list of expressions of military barbarism ravaging the planet today.

7. The civil war in Syria followed on from the 'Arab spring' which, by weakening the Assad regime, opened up a Pandora's Box of contradictions and conflicts which the iron hand of this regime had managed to keep under control for decades. The western countries have come out in favour of Assad's departure but they are quite incapable of coming up with an alternative, given that the opposition is totally divided and that the preponderant sector is made up of the Islamists. At the same time, Russia has given unstinting military support to the Assad regime, which has guaranteed it the capacity to maintain its war fleet in the port of Tartus. And this is not the only state supporting the regime: there are also Iran and China. Syria has thus become the stakes of a bloody conflict involving multiple imperialist rivalries between powers of the first and second order – rivalries which have exacted a heavy price from the populations of the Middle East for decades. The fact that the manifestation of the 'Arab Spring' in Syria has resulted not in the least gain for the exploited and oppressed masses but in a war which has left over 100,000 dead is a sinister illustration of the weakness of the working class in this country – the only force which can form a barrier to military barbarism. And this situation also applies, even if in less tragic forms, to the other Arab countries where the fall of the old dictators has resulted in the seizure of power by the most retrograde sectors of the bourgeoisie, represented by the

Islamists in Egypt or Turkey, or in utter chaos, as in Libya.

Thus, Syria offers us today a new example of the barbarism which capitalism in decomposition is unleashing on the planet, a barbarism which is taking the form of bloody military confrontations but which is also affecting zones which have avoided war but where society is sinking into growing chaos, as for example in Latin America where the drug gangs, with the complicity of sectors of the state, have imposed a reign of terror in a number of areas.

8. But it's at the level of the destruction of the environment that the short term consequences of the collapse of capitalist society take on a totally apocalyptic quality. Although the development of capitalism has from the beginning been characterised by the extreme rapacity of its search for profit and accumulation in the name of the 'conquest of nature', the depredations brought about by this tendency over the last 30 years have reached levels of devastation that are unprecedented whether in previous societies or at the time of its birth 'in blood and filth'. The concern of the revolutionary proletariat faced with the destructive essence of capitalism is as old as the threat itself. Marx and Engels already warned against the negative impact – both on nature and on human beings – of the agglomeration and confinement of people in the first industrial concentrations in Britain in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In the same spirit, revolutionaries have in different epochs understood and denounced the ignoble nature of capitalist development, showing the danger that it represents not just for the working class, but for the whole of humanity and now for its very survival on the planet.

The current tendency towards the definitive and irreversible degradation of the natural world is frankly alarming, as shown by the constant terrible scenarios of global warming, pillage of the planet, deforestation, soil erosion, destruction of species, pollution of water sources, seas and air and nuclear catastrophes. The latter are an example of the latent danger of the devastation resulting from the potential that capitalism has put at the service of its mad logic, turning it into

a Sword of Damocles hanging over the head of humanity. And although the bourgeoisie tries to attribute the destruction of the environment to the wickedness of individuals 'lacking an ecological conscience' – thereby creating an atmosphere of guilt and anguish – the truth revealed by its vain and hypocritical attempts to resolve the problem is that this is not a problem of individuals or even of companies or nations, but of the very logic of devastation inscribed in a system which, in the name of accumulation, a system whose principle and goal is profit, has no scruples about undermining once and for all the material premises for metabolic exchange between life and the Earth, as long as it can gain an immediate benefit from it.

This is the inevitable result of the contradiction between the productive forces – human and natural – which capitalism has developed, compressing them to the point of explosion, and the antagonistic relations based on the division between classes and on capitalist competition. This dramatic scenario must also stimulate the proletariat in its revolutionary efforts, because only the destruction of capitalism can enable life to flourish once again.

### Economic crisis

9. Fundamentally, this powerlessness of the ruling class in front of the destruction of the environment, even though it is more and more conscious of the threat it poses to the whole of humanity, has its roots in its inability to overcome the economic contradictions which assail the capitalist mode of production. It is the irreversible aggravation of the economic crisis which is the fundamental cause of the barbarism which is more and more spreading throughout society. For the capitalist mode of production, there is no way out. Its own laws have led it into this impasse and it can't get out of this without abolishing its own laws, i.e. without abolishing itself. Concretely, the motor of capitalism's development from the beginning has been the conquest of new markets outside its own sphere. The commercial crises which it went through from the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which expressed the fact that the commodities produced by a capitalism in full deve-

lopment could not find enough buyers to absorb its products, were overcome by a destruction of excess capital but also and above all by the conquest of new markets, mainly in the zones which had not yet been developed from a capitalist point of view. This is why this century was the century of colonial conquests: for each developed capitalist power it was essential to constitute zones where they could obtain cheap raw materials but which also and above all could serve as outlets for its commodities. The First World War was fundamentally the result of the fact that the division of the world among the capitalist powers meant that any conquest of new zones dominated by this or that power could only mean a confrontation with other colonial powers. This did not mean however that there were no longer any extra-capitalist markets capable of absorbing the excess of commodities produced by capitalism. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote on the eve of the First World War: *'The more ruthlessly capital sets about the destruction of non-capitalist strata, at home and in the outside world, the more it lowers the standard of living for the workers as a whole, the greater also is the change in the day-to-day history of capital. It becomes a string of political and social disasters and convulsions, and under these conditions, punctuated by periodical economic catastrophes or crises, accumulation can go on no longer. But even before this natural economic impasse of capital's own creating is properly reached it becomes a necessity for the international working class to revolt against the rule of capital'* (Rosa Luxemburg, *Accumulation of Capital*, chapter 32). The First World War was precisely the most terrible expression of this epoch of "catastrophes and convulsions" capitalism was going through "even before this natural economic impasse of capital's own making is properly reached". And 10 years after the imperialist slaughter, the great crisis of the 1930s was the second expression, a crisis which would lead to a second generalised imperialist massacre. But the period of 'prosperity' which the world went through in the second post-war period, a prosperity piloted by the mechanisms set up by the western bloc even before the end of the war



(notably the Bretton Woods accords in 1944), and which were based on the systematic intervention of the state in the economy, proved that this 'natural economic impasse' had not yet been reached. The open crisis at the end of the 1960s demonstrated that the system was getting closer to these limits, especially with the end of the process of decolonisation which, paradoxically, had made it possible to open up new markets. From then onwards, the increasing narrowness of extra-capitalist markets has forced capitalism, more and more threatened by generalised overproduction, to resort more and more to credit, a real headlong flight since the more the debts accumulated, the less possibility there was for these debts to be repaid.

10. The rising influence of the financial sector of the economy, to the detriment of the productive sphere proper, and which today is stigmatised by politicians and journalists of all kinds as being responsible for the crisis, is in no way the result of the triumph of one kind of economic thinking over another ('monetarists' against 'Keynesians' or 'neo-liberals' against 'interventionists'). It derives fundamentally from the fact that the forward flight into credit has given a growing weight to those organisms whose function is to distribute credit, the banks. In this sense, the 'financial crisis' is not the source of the economic crisis and the recession. On the contrary, it is overproduction which is the source of 'financialisation' and it is the fact that it is more and more risky to invest in production, given that the world market is more and more saturated, and this directs the flow of finance more and more towards speculation. This is why all the 'left wing' economic theories which call for 'reining in international finance' in order to get out of the crisis are empty dreams since they 'forget' the real causes of this hypertrophy of the financial sphere.

11. The crisis of the 'sub-primes' in 2007, the huge financial panic of 2008 and the recession of 2009 marked a new and very important step in capitalism's descent into irreversible crisis. For decades, capitalism had used and abused credit to counter-act the growing tendency towards overproduction, expressed in particular by a

succession of recessions which were increasingly profound and devastating, followed by 'recoveries' which were more and more timid. The result of this was that, leaving aside variations on growth rates from one year to the next, average growth in the world economy has continued to fall from decade to decade while at the same time unemployment has increased. The recession of 2009 has been the most important since the Great Depression of the 1930s, bringing unemployment rates in many countries to levels not seen since the Second World War. It was only a massive intervention by the IMF, decided at the G20 summit of March 2009, which saved the banks from generalised bankruptcy resulting from their accumulation of 'toxic debts', i.e. loans which would never be repaid. In doing so, the 'debt crisis', as the bourgeois commentators describe it, was taken onto a higher level: it was no longer just particular individuals (as happened in the US in the USA with the housing crisis), not just companies or banks, who were unable to reimburse their debts, or even pay the interest on their debts. It was now entire states which were confronted with the increasingly crushing weight of debt, 'sovereign debt', which affects their capacity to intervene in order to revive their respective national economies through budget deficits.

12. It's in this context which we saw, in the summer of 2011, what has henceforward been known as the 'Euro crisis'. Like the Japanese state or the American state, the debt of the European states has grown in a spectacular manner, particularly in those countries of the Eurozone whose economies are the most fragile or the most dependent on the illusory palliatives put in motion during the previous period – the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain). In the countries which have their own currency, like the USA, Japan or the UK, state debt can be partly compensated by the printing of money. Thus the American FED has bought up large quantities of American state Treasury Bonds, i.e. the recognition of state debts, in order to transform them into greenbacks. But such a possibility does not exist at the individual level for countries which have abandoned

their national currency in favour of the Euro. Deprived of this possibility of 'monetising' debt, the countries of the Eurozone have no other recourse but to borrow even more to make up for the hole in their public finances. And if the countries of northern Europe are still able to raise funds from private banks at reasonable rates, such a possibility is out of the question for the PIIGS whose loans are subjected to exorbitant rates because of their flagrant insolvency, which obliges them to call on a series of 'salvage plans' put into place by the European Central Bank and the IMF, accompanied by the demand for drastic reductions in their public deficits. The consequence of these reductions are dramatic attacks on the living conditions of the working class; but they still don't give states a real capacity to limit their public deficits since the recession they provoke has the consequence of reducing the resources that can be derived from taxes. Thus the snake oil remedies used to 'heal the sick' threaten more and more to kill the patient. This is also one of the reasons why the European Commission decided very recently to soften its demands for the reduction of deficits in certain countries like Spain and France. We can thus note once again the impasse that capitalism faces: debt has been used as way of supplementing the insufficiency of solvent markets but it can't grow indefinitely as could be seen from the financial crisis which began in 2007. However, all the measures which can be taken to limit debt once again confront capitalism with its crisis of overproduction, and this in an international context which is in constant deterioration and which more and more limits its margin of manoeuvre.

13. The case of the 'emergent' countries, notably the 'BRICs' (Brazil, Russia, India, China) whose rates of growth have stayed well above those of the US, Japan, or western Europe, does not contradict the insoluble nature of the contradictions of the capitalist system. In reality, the 'success' of these countries (the differences between which should be underlined since a country like Russia is notable mainly for the preponderance of exports of raw materials, especially hydrocarbons) has in part been the



consequence of the capitalist economy's general crisis of overproduction, which, by exacerbating competition between enterprises and obliging them to reduce drastically the cost of labour power, has led to the 'relocation' of major parts of the productive apparatus of the old industrial countries (automobiles, textiles and clothing, electronics, etc) to regions where workers' wages are much lower. However, the close dependence of these emerging countries on exports towards the most developed countries will sooner or later lead to convulsions in these economies when sales to the former are affected by deepening recessions, which will not fail to develop.

14. Thus, as we said 4 years ago, *'even though the capitalist system is not going to collapse like a pack of cards, the perspective is one of sinking deeper and deeper into a historical impasse, of plunging more and more into the convulsions that affect it today. For more than four decades, the bourgeoisie has not been able to prevent the continual aggravation of the crisis. Today it is facing a situation which is far more degraded than the one it faced in the 60s. In spite of all the experience it has gained in these decades, it can only do worse, not better'*, (Resolution on the international situation, 18<sup>th</sup> congress of ICC). This does not mean however that we are going back to a situation similar to that of 1929 and the 1930s. 70 years ago, the world bourgeoisie was taken completely aback faced with the collapse of its economy, and the policies it applied, with each country turning in on itself, only succeeded in exacerbating the consequences of the crisis. The evolution of the economic situation over the last four decades has proved that, even if it's clearly incapable of preventing capitalism from sinking deeper and deeper into the crisis, the ruling class has the ability to slow down this descent and to avoid a situation of generalised panic like on 'Black Thursday' on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1929. There is another reason why we are not going to relive a situation similar to that of the 1930s. At this time, the shock wave of the crisis began from the world's leading power, the USA, and then spread to the second world power, Germany.

It was in these two countries that we saw the most dramatic consequences of the crisis, like the mass unemployment that hit 30% of the active population, or the endless queues outside employment offices or soup kitchens, whereas countries like Britain and France were relatively spared. Today, a somewhat comparable situation is developing in countries in the south of Europe (notably Greece), without yet reaching the same level of workers' misery as in the US and Germany in the 1930s. At the same time, the most developed countries, in northern Europe, the USA and Japan, are still very far from such a situation. On the one hand, because their national economies are better able to resist the crisis, but also, and above all, because today the proletariat of these countries, and especially in Europe, is not ready to accept such a level of attacks on its conditions. Thus one of the major components of the evolution of the crisis escapes from a strict economic determinism and moves onto the social level, to the rapport de forces between the two major classes in society, bourgeoisie and proletariat.

### **Class struggle**

15. Although the ruling class would like to present its putrid sores as if they were beauty spots, humanity is beginning to wake up from a dream which has become a nightmare, and to grasp the total historic bankruptcy of this society. But although the feeling that there is a need for a different order of things is gaining ground faced with the brutal reality of a world in decomposition, this vague consciousness does not yet mean that the proletariat has become convinced of the necessity to abolish this world, still less that it has developed the perspective of constructing a new one. Thus the unprecedented aggravation of the capitalist crisis in the context of decomposition is the framework in which the class struggle develops today, although in an uncertain manner given that this struggle is not developing in the form of open confrontations between the two classes. Here we must underline the unprecedented framework of the present struggles since they are taking place in the context of a crisis which has lasted for nearly 40 years and whose gradual

effects - apart from particular convulsions - have 'habituated' the proletariat to seeing a slow, pernicious deterioration in its living conditions, which make it all the harder to grasp the gravity of the attacks and to make a consequent response. Even more, it's a crisis whose rhythm makes it difficult to understand who lies behind the attacks which are made 'natural' by their slow, staggered nature. This is very different from the obvious and immediate convulsions in the whole of social life in a situation of war. Thus there are differences between the development of the class struggle - at the level of possible responses, of breadth, of depth, of extension and content - in a context of war which makes the need to fight dramatically urgent, as was the case during the First World War early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even if there was not an immediate response to the war - and a crisis evolving at a slow pace.

The starting point for today's struggles is precisely the absence of class identity in a proletariat which, since capitalism entered into its phase of decomposition, has had serious difficulties not only in developing its historic perspective but even in recognising itself as a social class. The so-called 'death of communism', supposedly brought about by the fall of the eastern bloc in 1989, unleashed an ideological campaign whose aim was to deny the very existence of the proletariat, and it dealt a very heavy blow to the consciousness and militancy of the proletariat. The attacking force of this campaign has weighed on the course of the struggle ever since. But despite this, as we have been saying since 2003, the tendency towards class confrontations has been confirmed by the development of various movements in which the working class 'demonstrated its existence' to a bourgeoisie which had wanted it buried while it was still alive. Thus, the working class of the whole world has not stopped fighting, even if its struggles have not attained the hoped for breadth or depth given the critical situation it faces. However, thinking about the class struggle in terms of 'what should be', as though the present situation had just fallen from the sky, is not permissible for revolutionaries. Understanding the difficulties and the

potential of the class struggle has always been a task demanding a patient, historical, materialist approach, in order to find sense in apparent chaos, to understand what is new and difficult and what is promising.

16. It's in this context of crisis, of decomposition and the fragile subjective state of the proletariat that we can understand the weaknesses, insufficiencies and errors as well as the potential strength of the struggle, confirming us in our conviction that the communist perspective does not derive in an automatic or mechanical way from determined circumstances. Thus, during the last two years, we have seen the development of movements which we have described with the metaphor of the five streams:

1) Social movements of young people in precarious work, unemployed or still studying, which began with the struggle against the CPE in 2006, continued with the youth revolt in Greece in 2008 and culminated with the movement of the Indignados and Occupy in 2011;

2) Movements which were massive but which were well contained by the bourgeoisie preparing the ground in advance, as in France 2007, France and Britain in 2010, Greece in 2010-12, etc;

3) Movements which suffered from a weight of inter-classism, like Tunisia and Egypt in 2011;

4) Germs of massive strikes as in Egypt in 2007, Vigo (Spain) in 2006, China in 2009;

5) The development of struggles in the factories or in localised industrial sectors but which contained promising signs, such as Lindsey in 2009, Tekel in 2010, electricians in the UK in 2011.

These five streams belong to the working class despite their differences; each one in its own way expresses an effort by the proletariat to find itself again, despite the difficulties and obstacles which the bourgeoisie puts in its way. Each one contained a dynamic of research, of clarification, of preparing the social soil. At different levels they are part of the search "for the word that will lead us to socialism" (as Rosa Luxemburg put it, referring to the workers' councils) via the gen-

eral assemblies. The most advanced expressions of this tendency were the Indignados and Occupy movements - especially in Spain - because they were the ones which most clearly showed the tensions, contradictions and potential of the class struggle today. Despite the presence of strata coming from the impoverished petty bourgeoisie, the proletarian imprint of these movements manifested itself in the search for solidarity, in the assemblies, in the attempts to develop a culture of debate, in the capacity to avoid the traps of repression, in the seeds of internationalism, and in an acute sensibility towards subjective and cultural elements. And it is through this dimension of preparing the subjective terrain that these movements show all their importance for the future.

17. The bourgeoisie has in turn been showing signs of anxiety at this resurrection of its worldwide grave digger, which has been reacting against the horrors imposed on it on a daily basis to maintain the present system. Capitalism has therefore been widening its offensive by strengthening union containment, sowing democratic illusions and shooting off the fireworks of nationalism. It's no accident that its counter-offensive focussed on these questions: the aggravation of the crisis and its effects on the living conditions of the proletariat have provoked a resistance which the unions try to control through actions which fragment the unity of the struggles and prolong the proletariat's loss of confidence in its own strength.

Since the development of the class struggle is taking place today in the framework of an open crisis of capitalism that has been going on for nearly 40 years - which is to some degree an unprecedented situation in the experience of the workers' movement - the bourgeoisie is trying to prevent the proletariat from becoming aware of the world wide and historic character of the crisis. Thus the idea of national solutions and the development of nationalist discourse prevent an understanding of the real character of the crisis which is indispensable for the struggle of the proletariat to take on a radical direction. Since the proletariat doesn't recognise itself as a class, its resistance tends to start out

as a general expression of indignation against what is happening throughout society. This absence of class identity and thus of a class perspective enables the bourgeoisie to develop mystifications about citizenship and struggles for a "real democracy". And there are other sources of this loss of class identity, which trace their roots to the very structure of capitalist society and the form which the current aggravation of the crisis is taking. Decomposition, which entails a brutal worsening of the minimal conditions for human survival, is accompanied by an insidious devastation of the personal, mental and social terrain. This translates itself into a "crisis of confidence" of humanity. Furthermore the aggravation of the crisis through the spread of unemployment and precarious working has weakened the socialisation of young people and facilitated the tendency to escape into a world of abstraction and atomisation.

18. Thus, the movements of these last two years, and especially the "social movements", are marked by many contradictions. In particular the rarity of specific demands apparently doesn't correspond to the "classic" trajectory from the particular to the general which we expect from the class struggle. But we must also take into account the positive aspects of this general point of view, which derives from the fact that the effects of decomposition are felt at the general level, and from the universal nature of the economic attacks mounted by the ruling class. Today the road taken by the proletariat has its point of departure in the "general", which tends to raise the question of politicisation in a much more direct way. Confronted with the obvious bankruptcy of the system and the deleterious effects of decomposition, the exploited mass revolts and cannot go forward until it understands these problems as products of the decadence of the system and the necessity to overcome it. It's at this level that the methods of proletarian struggle that we have seen (general assemblies, open and fraternal debates, solidarity, the development of an increasingly political perspective) take on all their importance, since it is these methods which make it possible to undertake a critical reflection and arrive at the conclusion that the prole-

tariat can not only destroy capitalism but can create a new world. A decisive moment in this process will be the entry into the struggle of the workplaces and their conjunction with the more general mobilisations, a perspective which is beginning to develop despite the difficulties we are going to encounter in the years ahead. This is the content of the perspective of the convergence of the 'five streams' we mentioned above into the "ocean of phenomena" which Rosa Luxemburg called the mass strike.

19. To understand this perspective of convergence, the relationship between class identity and class consciousness is of capital importance and a question arises: can consciousness develop without class identity or will the latter emerge from the development of consciousness? The development of consciousness and of a historic perspective are rightly associated with the rediscovery of class identity, but we cannot envisage this developing bit by bit in a rigid sequence: first forge your identity, then struggle, then become conscious and develop a perspective, or some other order of these elements. The working class today does not appear as an increasingly massive pole of opposition, so the development of a critical stance by a proletariat which still doesn't know itself is more probable. The situation is complex but it is more likely that we will see a re-

sponse in the form of a general questioning which is potentially positive in political terms, starting off not from a sharply distinct class identity but from movements which tend to find their own perspective through their own struggle. As we said in 2009 *"For consciousness of the possibility of the communist revolution to gain a significant echo within the working class, the latter has to gain confidence in its own strength, and this takes place through the development of massive struggles"* (Resolution on the international situation, point 11, 18<sup>th</sup> ICC Congress). The formulation 'develop its struggles to gain confidence in itself and its perspective' is perfectly adequate since this means recognising a 'self' and a perspective, but the development of these elements can only derive from the struggles themselves. The proletariat does not 'create' its consciousness but becomes conscious of what it really is.

In this process, debate is the key to criticising the insufficiencies of partial points of view, to exposing traps, rejecting the hunt for scapegoats, understanding the nature of the crisis, etc. At this level, the tendencies towards open and fraternal debate of these last years are very promising for this process of politicisation which the class will have to take forward. Transforming the world by transforming ourselves begins to take form in

the evolution of initiatives for debate and in the development of concerns based on a critique of the most powerful chains holding the proletariat. The process of politicisation and radicalisation needs debate in order to make a critique of the present order, giving a historical explanation of problems. At this level it remains valid to say that *"the responsibility of revolutionary organisations and the ICC in particular is to participate fully in the reflection going on in the working class, not only intervening actively in the struggles which are already developing but also by stimulating the positions of the groups and elements who aim to join the struggle"* (Resolution on the international situation, 17<sup>th</sup> ICC Congress). We must be firmly convinced that the responsibility of revolutionaries in the phase now opening up is to contribute to and catalyse the nascent development of consciousness expressing itself in the doubts and criticisms already arising in the proletariat. Developing and deepening theory has to be at the heart of our contribution, not only against the effects of decomposition but also as a way of patiently sowing the social field, as an antidote to immediatism in our activities, because without the radicalisation and deepening of theory by revolutionary minorities, theory will never seize hold of the masses.

## 20<sup>th</sup> ICC congress (Continued from page 11)

presentation by Camilla Power and Chris Knight was, as at the previous congresses, very animated. In particular it illustrated once again how the contribution of the sciences can enrich revolutionary thought, an idea which Marx and Engels defended a century and half ago.

### Conclusion

The 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the ICC, by highlighting the obstacles facing the working class in its struggle for emancipation, as well as the obstacles encountered by the organisation

of revolutionaries in carrying out its specific responsibilities within this struggle, showed the difficulty and length of the road ahead of us. But this should not be a source of discouragement. As the resolution adopted by the congress puts it:

*"The task which lies ahead of us is long and difficult. It will demand patience, which Lenin saw as one of the main qualities of a Bolshevik. We have to resist discouragement in the face of our difficulties. These are inevitable and we should see them not as a curse but on the contrary as an encourage-*

*ment to pursue and intensify the combat. Revolutionaries, and this is one of their essential characteristics, are not people who look for comfort or the easy way out. They are fighters whose aim is to make a decisive contribution to the most immense and difficult task the human species will ever have to accomplish, but also the most exciting because it means the liberation of humanity from exploitation and alienation, and the beginning of its 'real history'"* (Point 16)



## Report on imperialist tensions

At the end of the 80's. the ICC put forward the idea of the entry of capitalism into its phase of decomposition: *"In this situation, where society's two decisive - and antagonistic - classes confront each other without either being able to impose its own definitive response, history nonetheless does not just come to a stop. Still less for capitalism than for preceding modes of production, is a 'freeze' or a 'stagnation' of social life possible. As crisis-ridden capitalism's contradictions can only get deeper, the bourgeoisie's inability to offer the slightest perspective for society as a whole, and the proletariat's inability, for the moment, to openly put forward its own historic perspective, can only lead to a situation of generalised decomposition. Capitalism is rotting on its feet"* (International Review 62, 1990, 'Decomposition, final phase of the decadence of capitalism').

The implosion of the eastern bloc has dramatically accelerated the unwinding of the different components of the social body into "each for themselves", into a plunge into chaos, and if there is an area where this is straight away confirmed it is precisely that of imperialist tensions: *"The end of the 'Cold War' and the disappearance of the blocs has thus only exacerbated the unleashing of the imperialist antagonisms specific to decadent capitalism and qualitatively aggravated the bloody chaos into which the whole of society is sinking (...)"* (IR 67, 1991, 9th Congress of the ICC, Resolution on the International Situation, point 6). Two characteristics of imperialist confrontations in the period of decomposition were pointed out:

a) The irrationality of conflicts, which is one of the striking characteristics of war in decomposition: *"While the Gulf War is an illustration of the irrationality of the whole of decadent capitalism, it also contains an extra and significant element of irrationality which is characteristic of the opening up of the phase of decomposition. The other wars of decadence could, despite their basic irrationality, still take on apparently 'rational' goals (such as the search for 'living space' for the German economy or the defence of imperialist positions by the allies during the Second World War). This isn't at all the case with the Gulf War. The objectives of this war, on one side or the other, clearly express the total and desperate impasse that*

*capitalism is in today"* (IR 67, 1991, 9th Congress of the ICC, Report on the International Situation [extracts]).

b) The central role played by the dominant power in the extension of chaos over the whole of the planet: *"The difference is that today the initiative isn't being taken by a power that wants to overturn the imperialist balance but is on the contrary the world's leading power, the one that for the moment has the best slice of the cake (...) The fact is that at the present time the maintenance of 'world order' (...) doesn't imply a 'defensive' attitude (...) of the dominant power, but is characterised by an increasingly systematic use of the military offensive, and even of operations that will destabilise whole regions in order to ensure the submission of the other powers; (and this) expresses very clearly decadent capitalism's slide into the most unrestrained militarism. This is precisely one of the elements that distinguish the phase of decomposition from previous phases of capitalist decadence..."* (IR 67, 1991, 9th Congress of the ICC, Report on the International Situation [extracts]).

These characteristics feed a growing chaos which accelerated still more after the attacks of September 11 2001 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which came out of these events. The 19th Congress aimed to evaluate the impact of these last 10 years of the "War on Terror" on the general spread of imperialist tensions, the development of "each for them-

selves" and the evolution of US leadership. It put forward the following four orientations in the development of imperialist confrontations:

a) **The growth of each for themselves**, which is particularly shown in the all-directional multiplication of imperialist ambitions, leading to the exacerbation of tensions, above all in Asia around the economic and military expansion of China. However, despite a strong economic expansion, a growing military power and a more and more marked presence in imperialist confrontations, China doesn't have the industrial and technological capacities sufficient to impose itself as the head of a bloc and thus to challenge the US on the global level.

b) **The growing impasse of US policy and the slide into the barbarity of war**: The crushing setback of the intervention in Iraq and in Afghanistan has weakened the world leadership of the USA. Even if the bourgeoisie under Obama, by choosing a policy of controlled retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan, has reduced the impact of the catastrophic policy undertaken by Bush, it has not been able to overturn this tendency and that has led it to the flight into militarist barbarity. The execution of Bin Laden expressed an attempt of the USA to react to the setback to their leadership and underlined their absolute technical and military superiority. However, this reaction didn't call into question the basic tendency towards weakening. On the contrary, this assassination accelerated the destabilisation of Pakistan and thus the extension of the war, whereas the ideological bases for it (the "War against Terrorism") are more undermined than ever.

c) **A tendency towards the explosive extension of permanent zones of instability and chaos over entire regions of the planet**, from Afghanistan up to Africa, to such a point that some bourgeois analysts, such as J. Attali in France, bluntly talk about

the “Somalisation” of the world.

d) The absence of any mechanical and immediate links between the aggravation of the crisis and the development of imperialist tensions, even if some phenomena can have a certain impact one on the other:

- the exploitation by some countries of their economic weight in order to dictate their will over other countries and favour their own industrial power (USA, Germany);

- the industrial and technical backwardness (China, Russia), but also budgetary difficulties (Britain, Germany) that can weigh on the development of military efforts.

These general orientations, put forward at the time of the preceding congress, have not only been confirmed during the last two years, but have been amplified in a spectacular manner over the same period: their exacerbation dramatically increases the destabilisation of the relations of force between imperialisms; it heightens the risk of war and chaos in important regions of the planet such as the Middle East and the Far East, with all the catastrophic consequences which can unfold from such events on the human, ecological and economic levels for the whole of the planet and for the working class in particular.

The forty-five year old history of the Middle East strikingly expresses the advance of decomposition and the loss of control by the leading world power:

- the 70's: although the US bloc assures itself of the global control of the Middle East and progressively reduces the influence of the Russian bloc, the coming to power of the Mullahs in Iran marks the development of decomposition.

- the 80s: The Lebanese swamp underlines the difficulties of Israel but also of the USA in keeping control over the region, the latter pushing Iraq into war with Iran;

- 1991: first Gulf War where the US Godfather mobilises a number of states behind it in the war against Saddam, chasing him out of Kuwait;

- 2003: setback of the mobilisation of Bush against Iraq and the growth of Iran which, since the 90's, is itself on the offensive as a regional power

defying the USA;

- 2011: US retreat from Iraq and growing chaos in the Middle East.

Certainly the policy of progressive retreat (“step by step”) of the USA from Iraq and Afghanistan by the Obama administration has succeeded in limiting the damage for the world cop, but these wars have resulted in an incommensurable chaos throughout the region.

The accentuation of each for themselves in imperialist confrontations and the extension of chaos, which opens up the particular development of unforeseen events, is illustrated in the recent period through four more specific situations:

- a) The dangers of military confrontations and the growing instability of states in the Middle East;

- b) The growth of China's power and the exacerbation of tensions in the Far East;

- c) The fragmentation of states and the extension of chaos to Africa;

- d) The impact of the crisis on tensions between states in Europe.

## **1. The extension of chaos to the Middle East**

### **1.1. A brief historical perspective.**

For economic and strategic reasons (commercial routes towards Asia, oil...) the region has always been an important stake in the confrontation between powers. Since the beginning of the decadence of capitalism and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in particular, it has been at the centre of imperialist tensions:

- up until 1945: after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Sykes-Picot Accords carved up the region between Britain and France. It's the theatre of the Turkish civil war and the Greco-Turk conflict, of the emergence of Arab nationalism and Zionism, and it became one of the stakes of the Second World War (German offensives in Russia, North Africa, Libya);

- after 1945: it made up a central zone for East-West tensions (1945-89), with attempts by the Russian bloc to implant itself in the region, which then came up against the strong presence of the USA. The period is marked by the implantation of the new state of

Israel, Israeli-Arab wars, the Palestinian question, the Iranian “revolution” which was the first expression of decomposition, the Iran-Iraq War;

- after 1989 and the implosion of the Russian bloc: all the contradictions which existed since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire exacerbated the development of each for themselves, the putting into question of US leadership and the extension of chaos. Iran, Iraq and Syria were denounced by the USA as rogue states. The region underwent the two US wars in Iraq, two Israeli wars in Lebanon, the growth of the power of Iran and its ally Hezbollah in Lebanon;

- since 2003 we've seen an explosion of instability: the fragmentation of the Palestinian Authority and Iraq, the “Arab Spring” which has led to the destabilisation of a number of regimes in the region (Libya, Egypt, Yemen) and a war of factions and imperialisms in Syria. The permanent massacres in Syria, the efforts by Iran to obtain nuclear weapons, new Israeli bombardments of Gaza or the permanent political instability in Egypt, demand that each of these events are situated in the global dynamic of the region.

### **1.2. Growing danger of military confrontations between imperialisms**

More than ever, war threatens in the region: preventative intervention by Israel (with or without the USA's approval) against Iran, the possibilities of intervention by different imperialisms in Syria, the war of Israel against the Palestinians (supported at present by Egypt), tensions between the Gulf monarchies and Iran. The Middle East is a terrible confirmation of our analysis of the impasse of the system and the descent into “each for themselves”:

- the region has become an enormous powder keg and arms purchases have again multiplied these last years (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman);

- flocks of vultures of the first, second and third order confront each other in the region, as the conflict in Syria shows: the USA, Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt with more and more armed

gangs at the service of these powers or the warlords acting on their own account:

- in this context, we should point out the destabilising role of Russia in the Middle East (since it wants to maintain its last points of support in the region) and of China (which has a more offensive attitude, supporting Iran which is a crucial provider of oil). Europe is more discrete, even if a country like France is advancing its cards in Palestine, in Syria and even in Afghanistan (with the organisation of a conference in Chantilly, near Paris, in December 2012, bringing together the main Afghan factions).

It is an explosive situation which is **escaping the control** of the big imperialisms; and the withdrawal of western forces from Iraq and Afghanistan will further accentuate this destabilisation, even if the USA has made attempts to limit the damage:

- by restraining Israel's desires for war against Iran and Hamas in the Gaza strip;

- by attempting a rapprochement with the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi, the new president of Egypt.

Globally however, throughout the "Arab Spring", America has shown its incapacity to protect the regimes favourable to it (which has led to a loss of confidence: cf. the attitude of Saudi Arabia which has taken its distance from the USA) and is becoming increasingly unpopular.

This multiplication of imperialist tensions can lead to major consequences at any moment: countries such as Israel or Iran could provoke terrible shocks and pull the entire region into turmoil, without anyone being able to prevent it, because it's under no-one's control. We are thus in an extremely dangerous and unpredictable situation for the region, but also, because of the consequences that can arise from it, for the entire planet.

### 1.3. The growing instability of many states across the region

Since 1991, with the invasion of Kuwait and the first Gulf war, the Sunni front put in place by the west to contain Iran has collapsed. The **explosion of "every man for himself"** in the region has been breathtaking and Iran has been the main benefici-

ary from the two Gulf wars, with the strengthening of Hezbollah and some Shi'ite movements; as for the Kurds, their quasi-independence has been the collateral effect of the invasion of Iraq. The tendency towards each for themselves is again sharpened in the extension of the social movements of the "Arab Spring", in particular where the proletariat is weakest and this has led to the more and more marked destabilisation of numerous states in the region:

- it's evident in the case of Lebanon, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, "free Kurdistan", Syria, or the Palestinian territories which are sinking into the war of clans or open civil war;

- it's also the case in Egypt, of Bahrain, of Jordan (the Muslim Brotherhood against King Abdullah II) and even Iran for example, where social tensions and clan oppositions render the situation unpredictable.

The aggravation of tensions between adverse factions is mixed up with diverse religious tensions. Thus, outside of Sunni/Shi'ite or Christian/Muslim opposition, oppositions within the Sunni world are also increasing with the coming to power in Turkey of the moderate Islamist Erdogan or recently the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in Tunisia (Ennahda) and within the Moroccan government, supported today by Qatar, which opposes the Salafist/Wahhabi movement financed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), which supported Mubarak and Ben Ali respectively.

Of course these religious tendencies, some more barbaric than others, are just there to hide imperialist interests which govern the policies of diverse government cliques. More than ever today, with the war in Syria or tensions in Egypt, it's evident that no such "Muslim bloc" or "Arab bloc" exists, but different bourgeois cliques defending their own imperialist interests by exploiting the religious oppositions (Christians, Jews, Muslims and diverse tendencies within Sunni or Shi'ite religions), which also appears in countries like Turkey, Morocco, Saudi Arabia or Qatar for the control of mosques abroad (Europe).

But, in particular, this explosion of antagonisms and religious factional-

ism since the end of the 80s and the collapse of "modernist", "socialist" regimes (Iran, Egypt, Syria, Iraq...) above all expresses the weight of decomposition, of chaos and misery, the total absence of any perspective through a descent into totally retrograde and barbaric ideologies.

In brief, the idea that the USA could re-establish a form of control over the region, through the eviction of Assad for example, is not rational. Since the first Gulf war, all attempts to restore its leadership have failed and have, on the contrary, led to the unchaining of regional appetites, in particular those of a strongly militarised Iran, rich in energy and supported by Russia and China. But this country is in competition with Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey... The "ordinary" imperialist ambitions of each state, the explosion of "each for themselves", the Israel-Palestine question, religious oppositions, but also the ethnic divisions (Kurds, Turks, Arabs), all play on the layers of tensions and make the situation particularly unpredictable and dramatic for the inhabitants of the region, but potentially also for the whole of the planet: thus, a greater destabilisation around Iran, and an eventual blockage of the Straits of Hormuz, could have incalculable consequences for the world economy.

## 2. Exacerbation of imperialist oppositions in the Far East

### 2.1. A brief historical perspective

The Far East has been a crucial zone for the development of imperialist confrontations since the beginning of decadence: Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, the Chinese "revolution" of 1911 and the ferocious civil war between diverse cliques and warlords, the Japanese offensive in Korea and Manchuria (1932), Japanese invasion of China (1937), Russian-Japanese conflict (May-August 1939) unfolding into the Second World War where the Far East made up one of the central fronts of this war and subsequent conflicts:

- between 1945 and 1989, the region was at the centre of east-west tensions: the developing civil war in China (1949), the wars of Korea and Indo-



china (Vietnam), but also the Russo-Chinese border conflicts; the same for China-Vietnam, China-India, and India-Pakistan. The US policy of the “neutralisation” of China during the 1970’s was to be an important moment in the increasing pressure by the US bloc on its Russian adversary.

- since the implosion of the Russian bloc, “each for themselves” has also developed in the Far East. What marks this region above all else is the economic and military growth in the power of China, which has aggravated regional tensions (regular incidents these last months in the China Sea with Vietnam or the Philippines and above all with Japan, the repeated tensions between the two Korea’s...) and in its turn the accelerated armament of the other states of the region (India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore...).

## 2.2 The growing power of China and the exacerbation of warlike tensions

The development of the economic and military power of China and its attempts to impose itself as a power of the first order not only in the Far East but also in the Middle East (Iran), in Africa (Sudan, Zimbabwe, Angola) or even in Europe where it’s looking for a strategic rapprochement with Russia, means that it is seen by the US as the most important potential danger to its hegemony. It’s from this starting point that the US is essentially orienting its strategic manoeuvres against China, as was shown by the 2012 visit of Obama to Burma and Cambodia, two countries allied to China.

The economic and military rise of China inevitably pushes it to advance its national economic and strategic interests, in other words to express a growing imperialist aggressiveness and thus to become a more and more destabilising factor in the Far East.

**This growth in the power of China concerns not only the USA, but also numerous countries in Asia itself**, from Japan to India, Vietnam to the Philippines, who feel threatened by the Chinese ogre and thus have palpably increased the money they spend on arms. Strategically, the US has tried to promote a large alliance aiming to contain Chinese ambitions, regrouping around the pillars of Japan, India and Australia the less pow-

erful countries such as South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore. By standing in the front rank of such an alliance and above all with the aim of issuing a warning to China, the world cop aims to restore the credibility of its leadership which is in free-fall throughout the world.

Recent events confirm that in the present period the major economic development of a country cannot be made without an important increase of imperialist tensions. The context of the appearance of this most serious rival onto the world scene, in a situation of the weakening of the position of the leading world gendarme, announces a more dangerous future of confrontations, not only in Asia but in the entire world.

This danger of confrontations is much more real as the tendencies for “each for themselves” are very much present in other countries of the Far East. Thus the hardening of Japan’s position is confirmed with the return to power of the nationalist Shinzo Abe who campaigned on the theme of the restoration of national power. He wants to replace the Self-Defence Force with a real army of national defence, going head to head with China over the conflict about a group of islands in the East China Sea, and wants to re-establish the somewhat degraded links with old allies in the region, the USA and South Korea. It’s the same thing with South Korea and the election of Park Geun-Hye, the candidate for the Conservative Party (and daughter of the old dictator Park Chung-hee), which could also lead to an accentuation of “each for themselves” and of the imperialist ambitions of these countries.

Further, there’s a whole series of apparently secondary conflicts between Asiatic countries which can further increase destabilisation: there’s the Indo-Pakistan conflict of course, the continual altercations between the two Korea’s, but also the less publicised tensions between South Korea and Japan (regarding the Dokdo/Takeshima islands), between Cambodia and Vietnam or Thailand, between Burma and Thailand, between India and Burma or Bangladesh, etc., all contributing to the exacerbation of tensions throughout the region.

## 2.3. Tensions within the political apparatus of the Chinese bourgeoisie

The recent congress of the Chinese ‘Communist’ Party has given various indications confirming that the present economic, imperialist and social situation is provoking strong tensions within the ruling class. This poses a question that’s been insufficiently treated up to now: the question of the characteristics of the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie in a country like China and the way in which the rapports de force have evolved within it. The inadequacy of this type of political apparatus was an important factor in the implosion of the Eastern bloc, but what about China? Rejecting any sort of “Glasnost” or “perestroika”, the leading classes have successfully introduced mechanisms of the market economy while maintaining a rigid Stalinist organisation on the political level. In preceding reports, we have pointed to structural weaknesses of the political apparatus of the Chinese bourgeoisie as one of the arguments establishing why China could not become a real challenger to the USA. Also, the deterioration of the economy under the impact of the world crisis, the multiplication of social explosions and the growth of imperialist tensions will without doubt reinforce the existing tensions between factions of the Chinese bourgeoisie, as we’ve seen with certain surprising events, such as the removal of the “rising star” Bo Xilai and the mysterious disappearance for a fortnight of the “future president” Xi Jinping some weeks before the congress was held.

The different lines of fracture must be taken into account in order to understand the struggle between factions:

- a first line of fracture concerns **the opposition between regions** which have strongly benefited from economic development and others who have been somewhat neglected, thus also **between economic policies**. Pitched against each other are the two great networks marked by cronyism: on the one hand a circumstantial coalition between the “party of the princes”, children of the upper cadres during the time of Mao and Deng, and the

Shanghai clique, functionaries from the coastal provinces. Representative of the leading groups from the more industrialised coastal provinces, they advocate economic growth at any price, even if that increases the social divide. This faction is represented by the new president Xi Jinping and the macro-economic expert Wang Qishan. Up against them is the “Tuanpai” faction around the Young Communist League, within which the main figures have made their careers. As it’s a question of bureaucrats having made careers in the poorer provinces of the hinterland, this faction extols a policy of the economic development of the central and western regions, which would favour a greater “social stability”. They represent groups having more experience in administration and propaganda. Represented by the former president Hu Jintao, this faction will be represented in the new direction by Li Keqiang, who will probably replace Wen Jiabao as prime minister. This confrontation seems to have played a role in the clash around Bo Xilai.

- **the social situation** can equally generate tensions between factions within the state. Thus, certain groups, in particular in the industrial and export sectors could be sensitive to social tensions and favourable to more concessions at the political level towards the working class. They are thus opposed to the “hard” factions who favour repression in order to preserve the privileges of the cliques in power.

- **imperialist policy** also plays a role in the confrontations between cliques. On one side there are the factions which have adopted a more aggressive attitude, such as the coastal regional governments of Hainan, Guangxi and Guangdong, who are looking for new resources for their enterprises, pushing for control of the areas rich in hydrocarbons and marine resources. On the other hand, this aggressiveness can bring counter blows on the level of exports or foreign investments, as was shown with the question of the Japanese islands. The more and more frequent fierce nationalist thrusts in China are without doubt the product of internal confrontations. What, moreover, is the impact of nationalism on the working class, what is the

capacity of the young generation not to get hoodwinked and defend its own interests? On this level the context is quite different from that of 1989 in the USSR.

These three lines of fracture are not separate of course but overlap and have played on the tensions which have marked the congress of the CCP and the nomination of the new leadership. According to observers, the latter has been marked by the victory of the “conservatives” over the “progressives” (out of the 7 members of the permanent Political Bureau, 4 are conservatives). But the more and more frequent revelations bear on behaviour, corruption, the amassing of gigantic fortunes, which goes to the highest spheres of the party (thus, the fortune of the family of the old prime minister Wen Jiabao is estimated to be \$2.7 billion through a complex network of businesses, often in his mother’s, wife’s or daughter’s name; and that of the new president, Xi Jinping, is already estimated to be at least one billion dollars). This not only shows a problem of effectively gigantic proportions but also a growing instability within the sphere of the leadership that the new conservative and older leadership seem unable to get a grip on.

### **3. The extension of “Somalisation”: the case of Africa**

The explosion of chaos and “each for themselves” has given birth to “no-go” areas and zones of instability, which haven’t stopped expanding since the end of the twentieth century and which are spreading at present over the whole of the Middle East up to Pakistan. They also cover the totality of the African continent which is sinking into a terrifying barbarity. This “Somalisation” is manifested in several forms.

#### **3.1. The tendency towards the fragmentation of states.**

Written into the charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, the principle of the inviolability of frontiers seems to have broken down. From 1993, Eritrea separated from Ethiopia and since then this process has affected the whole of

Africa: since the end of the 90’s, the disappearance of the central power in Somalia has seen the fragmentation of countries with the appearance of pretend states, such as Somaliland and Puntland. Recently there’s been the secession of South Sudan from Sudan and the bloody rebellion in Darfur, the secession of Azawad regarding Mali; and separatist tendencies are appearing in Libya (Cyrenia around Benghazi), in Casamance in Senegal and, recently, in the Mombasa region of Kenya.

Outside of the more and more numerous regions who have declared independence, from the end of the 90’s we also see a multiplication of internal conflicts with a political-ethnic or ethnic-religious character: Liberia and Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast are tending to re-start politico-ethnic civil wars which have exploded the state to the profit of armed clans. In Nigeria there is a Muslim rebellion in the north, the “Lord’s Army” in Uganda and the Hutu and Tutsi clans who are tearing each other apart in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The transnational diffusion of tensions and conflicts in a context of weakened states mean that these areas, collapsing and incapable of assuring national order, fall back on religious or ethnic loyalties which are going to dominate. Consequently the defence of interests will be made on the basis of the militias that have appeared.

These internal fragmentations are often stirred up and exploited by interventions from the outside: thus, the western intervention in Libya has worsened internal instability and provoked the spreading of arms and armed groups throughout the Sahel. The growing presence of China on the continent and its support for the warlike policies of Sudan are an example of that and the destabilisation of the whole region. Finally, the big multinationals and the states that back them have even orchestrated local conflicts so as to get their hands on mineral wealth (in the east of the DRC, for example).

Alone, the south seems to escape from this scenario. We do see however a dilution of frontiers, here made to the profit of South Africa from the weaker countries of the region (Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana,



but also Namibia, Zambia, Malawi), which are being transformed into colonies of the former.

### 3.2. The wearing away of frontiers.

The destabilisation of states is being fed by a trans-frontier criminality, such as the traffic in arms, drugs and human beings. Consequently, these territorial limits are diluted to the profit of border zones where regulation is effected "from below". Armed insurrections, the incapacity of the authorities to maintain order, trans-national trafficking of arms and munitions, local gang leaders, foreign interference, access to natural resources, all play a part. Delinquent states are losing control of these more and more ample "grey zones", which are often administered in a criminal manner (sometimes also there is the perverse effect of the intervention of humanitarian organisations who make the protected zones "extra-territorial" in fact). Some examples:

- all the zone around the Sahara and the Sahel, from the Libyan desert to Azawad, Mauritania, Niger and Chad being the terrain of criminal movements and the radical Islamist groups;

- between Niger and Nigeria, there's a band of some 30 to 40 kilometres which is free from the supervision of Niamey and Abuja. The frontiers are evaporating;

- the east of the DRC where the control of the borders with Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania by the central state is non-existent, facilitating trans-national movements of raw materials and arms;

- through the states of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Benin or Guinea where there's a pull of migrants towards agriculture or fishing. As to Guinea-Bissau, it's become a total "no-go" zone, a nerve centre for the entry and re-directing of drugs from South America or Afghanistan towards Europe and the USA.

### 3.3. The dominance of clans and warlords.

With the delinquency of national states, entire regions are falling under the control of groups and warlords along the frontiers. It's not only Somaliland and Puntland where clans and local armed bosses rule by force

of arms. In the Sahel region this role is fulfilled by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, the movement for the unity of jihad in West Africa (Mujao) and some nomad Tuareg groups. In east Congo, a group like the M23 is a private army at the service of a warlord who follows the most money.

Such groups are generally linked to traffickers with whom they exchange money and services. Thus in Nigeria, in the Niger Delta, similar groups hold firms to ransom and sabotage oil installations.

The emergence and the extension of "no-go" zones are certainly not limited to Africa alone. Thus the generalisation of organised crime, the wars between gangs in various countries of Latin America, Mexico, Venezuela, for example, even the control of entire quarters by gangs in the big western towns, witness the progression of decomposition over the whole planet. However, the level of fragmentation and chaos reaching the scale of a whole continent gives an idea of the barbarity wrought by the decomposition of the system for the whole of humanity.

## 4. Economic crisis and the tensions between European states

In the report for the 19th Congress of the ICC, we underlined the absence of any immediate and mechanical link between the aggravation of the economic crisis and the development of imperialist tensions. That doesn't mean that they don't have an impact on each other. This is particularly the case with the role of European states on the imperialist scene.

### 4.1. The impact of imperialist ambitions in the world.

The crisis of the euro and the EU has imposed the cures of budget austerity on most European states, which is also expressed at the level of military spending. Thus, contrary to the states of the Far East or Middle East, who have seen their armaments budgets explode, the budgets of the main European powers have been appreciably lowered.

This retreat in armaments provisions is accompanied by less pro-

nounced European imperialist ambitions on the international scene (with the exception perhaps of France, which is present in Mali and is attempting a diplomatic push in Afghanistan by bringing all the Afghan factions together under its tutelage at Chantilly): there is less emphasis on autonomy on the part of the European powers and even a certain rapprochement with the USA, a partial "return to the ranks" that is without doubt contingent.

### 4.2. The impact on tensions between European states.

Within the EU, this goes along with a growing tension between centripetal tendencies (a need for stronger centralisation in order to face up more strongly to economic collapse) and centrifugal tendencies towards each for themselves.

The conditions for the birth of the EU were a plan to contain Germany after 1989, but what the bourgeoisie needs today is a much stronger centralisation, a budgetary union and thus a much more political union. It needs this if it is to face up to the crisis in the most effective manner possible, which also corresponds to German interests. The necessary thrust for greater centralisation thus strengthens German control over other European states inasmuch as it allows Germany to dictate the measures needed to be taken and to directly intervene in the functioning of other European states: "*From now on, Europe will be talking German*", as the president of the CDU/CSU group in the Bundestag noted in 2011.

On the other hand, the crisis and the drastic measures imposed are pushing towards a break-up of the EU and a rejection of submission to the control of another country, that's to say a push towards each for themselves. Britain has out and out refused the proposed measures of centralisation and in the southern European countries a nationalist anti-Germanism is growing. Centrifugal forces can also imply a tendency towards the fragmentation of states, the autonomy of regions such as Catalonia, northern Italy, Flanders and Scotland.

Thus, the pressure of the crisis,

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## **Bilan, the Dutch left, and the transition to communism (Part Two)**

In the previous article in this series, we looked at the way the Belgian/Italian left communists around the review *Bilan* in the 1930s criticised the conceptions of the Dutch council communists regarding the transition from capitalism to communism. We looked mainly at the political aspects of the transition period, in particular *Bilan's* argument that the Dutch comrades underestimated the problems posed by the proletarian revolution and the inevitable recomposition of a form of state power during the transitional period. In this article we will study *Bilan's* criticisms of the central focus of the Dutch communists book *Grundprinzipien Kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung* (Principles of Communist Production and Distribution, published by the Groep van Internationale Communisten, GIC): the economic programme of the proletarian revolution.

Their criticisms centre round two main areas:

- the problem of value and its elimination
- the system of remuneration in the transition period

### **Value and its elimination**

The author of the *Bilan* articles, Mitchell, begins by affirming that the proletarian revolution cannot immediately introduce integral communism, but only a transitional, hybrid social form, still marked ideologically by the 'stigmata' of the past and by its more material incarnations: the law of value, and thus even by money and wages, even if in a modified form. In short, labour power does not immediately cease to be a commodity because the means of production has become collective property. It continues to be measured in terms of 'value', that mysterious quality which "*while finding its source in the activity of a physical force – labour – has no material reality in itself*" (*Bilan* 34, republished in *IR* 130). Regarding the difficulties posed by the whole concept of value, Mitchell quotes Marx from his Preface to *Capital*, where he notes that, regarding the value-form, "*the human mind has for more than 2,000 years sought in vain to get to the bottom of it all*" (and it is fair to say that this question remains a source of puzzlement and controversy even among genuine followers of Marx...).

In his own effort to get to the bottom of it all, to discover what makes a commodity 'worth' something on the market, Marx, in line with the classi-

cal economists, recognised the core of value is in concrete human activity, in labour carried out within a given social relationship – more precisely, in the average labour time embodied in the commodity. It is not a pure result of supply and demand, or arbitrary whims and decisions, even if these elements may cause fluctuations of price. It is thus the regulating principle behind the anarchy of the market. But Marx went beyond the classical economists in showing how it is also the basis for the particular form of exploitation in bourgeois society and of the specific character of the crisis and breakdown of capitalism, and thus of a complete loss of control by humanity over its own productive activity. These revelations led to the majority of bourgeois economists abandoning the labour theory of value even before the capitalist system entered its epoch of decline.

In 1928, the Soviet economist I I Rubin, soon to be accused of deviation from marxism and eliminated along with thousands of other communists, published a masterly analysis of Marx's theory of value, which appeared in English in 1972 under the title *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, published by Black and Red. From the beginning of the work, he insists that Marx's theory of value is inseparable from his critique of com-

modity fetishism and the "reification" of human relations in bourgeois society – the transformation of a relationship between people into a relationship between things: "*Value is a production relation among autonomous commodity producers; it assumes the form of being a property of things and is connected with the distribution of social labour. Or, looking at the same phenomenon from the other side, value is the property of the product of labour of each commodity producer which makes it exchangeable for the products of labour of any other commodity producer in a determined ratio which corresponds to a given level of productivity of labour in the different branches of production. We are dealing with a human relation which acquires the form of being a property of things and which is connected with the process of distribution of labour in production. In other words, we are dealing with reified production relations among people. The reification of labour in value is the most important conclusion of the theory of fetishism, which explains the inevitability of 'reification' of production relations among people in a commodity economy.*" (Rubin, p72, chapter 8, 'Basic characteristics of Marx's theory of value')

The Dutch left were certainly aware that the question of value and its elimination was key to the transition towards communism. Their book was an attempt to elaborate a method that could guide the working class away from a society where their products rule over them, to one where the producers are in direct command of the entirety of production and consumption. Their driving concern was to replace the "reified" relations characteristic of capitalist society with the simple transparency of social relations which Marx alludes to in the first chapter of *Capital* when he describes the future society of associated producers.

How did the Dutch comrades envisage this being achieved? As we wrote in the previous article, “*For the Grundprinzipien the nationalisation or collectivisation of the means of production can perfectly well co-exist with wage labour and the alienation of the workers from their own product. What is key, therefore, is that the workers themselves, through their own organisations rooted in the workplace, dispose not only of the physical means of production but of the entire social product. But in order to ensure that the social product remained in the hands of the producers from the beginning to the end of the labour process (decisions on what to produce and in what quantities, distribution of the product including the remuneration of the individual producer) a general economic law was needed which could be subject to rigorous accounting: the calculation of the social product on the basis of the average socially necessary labour time*”.

For Mitchell, as we have seen, the law of value inevitably persists during the transition period. This is certainly the case during the phase of civil war, where the proletarian bastion “cannot abstract itself from a world economy which continues to evolve on a capitalist basis” (Bilan 34). But he also argues that even within the “proletarian economy” (and after the victory over the bourgeoisie in the civil war) not all sectors of the economy can be immediately socialised (he had in mind the example of the huge peasant sector in Russia and throughout the peripheries of the capitalist system). There will thus be exchange between the socialised sector and these very considerable vestiges of small-scale production, and this will impose, with more or less weight, the laws of the market on the sector directly controlled by the proletariat. The law of value, instead of being abolished by decree, must instead go through a kind of historical reversion: “*the law of value, instead of developing the way it did by going from simple commodity production to capitalist production must go through the reverse process of regression and extinction which leads from the ‘mixed’ economy to full communism*” (Bilan 34).

Mitchell considers that the Dutch

comrades are deluded in thinking that you can abolish the law of value simply through the calculation of labour time. For one thing, their idea of formulating a kind of mathematical law of accounting that will make it possible to do away with the value-form will encounter considerable difficulties. To precisely measure labour value, you need to establish the ‘socially average’ labour time embodied in commodities. But the unit of this social average can only be unskilled or simple labour, i.e. labour in its most elementary expression: skilled or compound labour needs to be reduced to its simplest form. And in Mitchell’s view Marx himself accepted that he did not manage to solve this problem. In sum, “*the reduction of compound labour to simple labour (which is the real unit of measure) remains unexplained, and that as a result the elaboration of a scientific method for calculating labour time, which is a necessary function of this process of reduction, is impossible. Probably the conditions for the emergence of such a law will only come together when it is no longer of any use: i.e. when production can answer all needs and when, as a result, society will no longer need to calculate labour: the administration of things will only require a simple register of what has been produced. In the economic domain we can thus see an analogy with political life, when democracy will be superfluous at the moment that it has been fully realised*” (Bilan 34).

Perhaps more important is Mitchell’s charge that both in their means of advancing towards the higher goals, and in their definition of the more advanced stages of the new society, the *Grundprinzipien’s* vision of communism actually contains a disguised form of the law of value, since it still contains its essence, the measure of labour by socially average labour time.

To support this argument, Mitchell warns that there is a danger that the *Grundprinzipien’s* ‘non-centralised’ network of enterprises could actually function as a society of commodity production (not dissimilar from the anarcho-sindicalist view that the Dutch comrades rightly criticise in their book): “*They note however that ‘the suppression of the market must be*

interpreted in the sense that while the market appears to survive under communism, its social content as regards circulation is entirely different: the circulation of products on the basis of labour time is the basis of new social relation’ (p 110). *But if the market survives (even if its form and basis are different) it can only function on the basis of value. This is what the Dutch internationalists don’t seem to see, ‘subjugated’, as they are, to their formulation about ‘labour time’, which in substance is nothing but value itself. Furthermore, for them it is not excluded that in ‘communism’ we will still talk about ‘value’; but they refrain from drawing out the significance of this with regards to the mechanism of the social relations that result from maintaining labour time as a unit of measurement. Instead they conclude that since the content of value will have changed, all we need to do is replace the term value with the term production time. But this obviously doesn’t change the economic reality at all; it’s the same thing when they say that there is no longer any exchange of products, but only the passage of products (p 53-54). Equally: ‘instead of the function of money, we will have the registering of the movement of products, social accounting on the basis of the average social labour time’ (p 55)”.*

### **The remuneration of labour and the critique of egalitarianism**

Mitchell’s criticism of the Dutch left’s advocacy of equal remuneration through the system of labour time vouchers is connected to a more general criticism, which we looked at in the first part of this article: that of an abstract vision where everything operates smoothly from the day after the insurrection. Mitchell does recognise that both the Dutch comrades and Hennaute share Marx’s distinction (developed in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*) between the lower and higher stages of communism, and that for both, in the first stage, there is still a persistence of “bourgeois right”. But for Mitchell, the Dutch comrades have a one-sided interpretation of what Marx was saying in this document: “*But apart from this, the Dutch internationalists falsify the significance of Marx’s words about the repartition of products. When they say that the wor-*



ker receives from the process of distribution a pro rata of the quantity of labour he has given, they only discover one aspect of the dual inequality which we have underlined, and it is the one which results from the social situation of the worker (p 81); but they don't dwell on the other aspect, which expresses the fact that the workers, in the same amount of labour time, provide different quantities of simple labour (simple labour which is the common measure exerted through the play of value), thus giving rise to unequal repartition. They prefer to stick with their demand for the suppression of inequality in wages, which remains hanging in mid air because the suppression of capitalist wage labour does not immediately result in the disappearance of the differences in the remuneration of labour". (Bilan 35, republished in IR 131).

In other words, although the Dutch comrades are in continuity with Marx who saw that the differing situations of individual workers mean that there would be a persistence of inequality ("But one man is superior to another physically, or mentally, and supplies more labour in the same time, or can labour for a longer time...one worker is married, another is not, one has more children than another, and so on and so forth", as Marx puts it in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*), they ignore the deeper problem of the calculation of simple labour, which means that remunerating workers on the basis of hours of labour alone means that workers in the same social situation but working with different means of production will still not be equally rewarded.

Mitchell criticises Hennaut on similar grounds: "Comrade Hennaut comes up with a similar solution to the problem of distribution in the period of transition, a solution which he also draws from a mistaken, because incomplete, interpretation of Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. In Bilan, p 747, he said: 'the inequality which still exists in the first phase of socialism results not from an unequal remuneration being applied to various kinds of labour: the simple work of the labourer or the compound work of the engineer, with all the stages in between. No, all these types of labour are of equal worth, only their duration and intensity has to be measured; inequality results from the fact that

men who have different capacities and needs are carrying out the same tasks with the same resources'. And Hennaut inverses Marx's thinking when he locates inequality in the fact that "the part of the social profit remains equal - an equal amount of remuneration of course - for each individual, whereas their needs and the effort made to achieve the same remuneration are different"; whereas, as we have indicated, Marx saw inequality in the fact that individuals received unequal shares because they provided unequal shares of labour and this is the basis for the application of bourgeois equal rights." (ibid)

At the same time, underlying this rejection of 'absolute' egalitarianism in the earlier phases of the revolution is a deeper critique of the very notion of equality: "the fact that in a proletarian economy the basic motive force is no longer the ceaselessly enlarged production of surplus value and of capital but the unlimited production of use values does not mean that the conditions are right for a levelling of "wages" that translates into equality in consumption. In fact, such an equality can exist neither at the beginning of the transitional period nor in the communist phase, which is based on the formula "to each according to his needs". In reality, formal equality can never exist, while communism will finally realise a real equality in natural inequality" (ibid)

Marx's communism began with a rejection of 'barracks' or crude communism which flourished in the early days of the workers' movement; and against this kind of 'downward' collectivism - realised to some degree by Stalinist state capitalism - it opposes an association of free individuals where natural 'inequality' or diversity, will be positively cultivated.

### Labour time vouchers and the wage system

The other target of Mitchell's critique is the GIC's view that recompensing labour on the basis of labour time - the famous system of labour time vouchers - has already overcome the essentials of the wage system. Mitchell does not seem to disagree with Marx's advocacy of this system in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, since he quotes it in his article without criticism. He also agrees with Marx

that in this method of distribution, money has lost its characteristic as "abstract wealth' capable of appropriating any kind of wealth" (Bilan 34). But unlike the GIC, Mitchell emphasises its continuity with the wage system rather than its discontinuity, since he puts particular emphasis on the passage from *Gotha* where Marx says frankly that "Here, obviously, the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is exchange of equal values. Content and form are changed, because under the altered circumstances no one can give anything except his labour, and because, on the other hand, nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals, except individual means of consumption. But as far as the distribution of the latter among the individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form".

In this sense, it seems, Mitchell considers that the labour time vouchers are a kind of wage. Nor does he see any superior system in the first stages of the revolution: the system of equal rationing in the Russian revolution was this was "not an economic method capable of ensuring the systematic development of the economy; it was the regime of a people under siege and concentrating all its energies on the civil war" (Bilan 35).

For Mitchell, the key to really abolishing value was not in selecting the particular forms through which labour would be rewarded in the period of transition, but in overcoming the narrow horizons of bourgeois right by creating a situation where in Marx's words, "all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly". Only such a society could "inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!".

### Comments on a response to Mitchell's critique

The comrades of the GIC did not reply to Mitchell's criticisms and council communism as an organised current has more or less disappeared.



But the American comrade David Adam, who has written extensively about Marx, Lenin and the transition period<sup>1</sup>, does to a certain extent identify with the tradition represented by GIC and Mattick in America. In correspondence with the author of this article, he made these comments about Mitchell and *Bilan* : “*With regard to Bilan's reading of Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme, I think it is confused. They clearly identify the first phase of communism with transition to communism and the law of value, and seem to identify the existence of 'bourgeois right' with the law of value. I think this creates problems, not least of which is the interpretation of the Grundprinzipien. They identify the sort of accounting that was called for by the Dutch left with the law of value, when the Grundprinzipien is clear that they are talking about a socialist society emerging after the period of proletarian dictatorship, which is in line with Marx. Mitchell also seems to think that the Dutch left were talking about a transitional phase in which the market still existed, and this is not the case. So I think this diminishes the value of the criticism of the Grundprinzipien, because I don't think they have understood Marx. And this could mean that they don't see the necessity for transformation of economic relations right from the beginning of the revolutionary process, as if the law of value can simply go through 'profound changes in nature' and eventually disappear. The whole idea of its disappearance is bound up with the emergence of effective social control over production, which is what the first phase of communism addresses. But Bilan seems to say that once such planning mechanisms are found they will no longer be necessary. I don't think this is true.*”

There are a number of different elements here.

1. Were the Dutch comrades always clear about the distinction between the lower and higher stages? We have seen that Mitchell accepts that they did make this distinction. In the previous article, we also quoted a passage from

the *Grundprinzipien* which clearly recognises that the measurement of individual labour becomes less important as integral communism is reached. But we have also seen that the *Grundprinzipien* contain a number of ambiguities. As we noted in the first part of this article, they seem to speak far too soon of a society operating as an association of free and equal producers, and they don't always clearly state whether they are talking about a particular proletarian outpost or a world in which the entire bourgeoisie has been overthrown.

2. Perhaps the issue here is whether Marx himself envisaged the lower stage as beginning **after** or **during** the proletarian dictatorship. This would require a much longer discussion. It is certainly true that the period of transition in the full sense cannot get underway in a phase dominated by civil war and the struggle against the bourgeoisie. But in our view even after this ‘initial’ political and military victory over the old ruling class, the proletariat can only begin the positive communist transformation of society on the basis of its political domination, because it will not be the only class in society. We will return to this problem in a future article.

3. Is the measurement of production and distribution in terms of labour time necessarily a form of value, as Mitchell implies when he criticises the Dutch left for being “*subjugated*”, as they are, to their formulation about ‘labour time’, which in substance is nothing but value itself.” (*Bilan 34*, quoted above)? As ever with the question of value, this raises complex questions. Can there be value without exchange value?

It's true that Marx was obliged, in *Capital*, to make a theoretical distinction between value and exchange value, “*We have seen that when commodities are exchanged, their exchange value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use value. But if we abstract from their use value, there remains their Value as defined above. Therefore, the common substance that manifests itself in the exchange value of commodities, whenever they are exchanged, is their*

*value. The progress of our investigation will show that exchange value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed. For the present, however, we have to consider the nature of value independently of this, its form*”<sup>2</sup>.

However, as Rubin points out, it is nonetheless the case that “...the ‘value form’ is the most general form of the commodity economy; it is characteristic of the social form which is acquired by the process of production at a determined level of historical development. Since political economy analyzes a historically transient social form of production, commodity capitalist production, the ‘form of value’ is one of the foundation stones of Marx's theory of value. As can be seen from the sentences quoted above, the ‘form of value’ is closely related to the ‘commodity form,’ i.e., to the basic characteristic of the contemporary economy, the fact that the products of labour are produced by autonomous, private producers. A working connection between producers is brought about only by means of the exchange of commodities”<sup>3</sup>.

Both aspects – value and exchange value – only have a general application in the context of the social relations of capitalist commodity society. A society which no longer functions on the basis of exchange between independent economic units is no longer regulated by the law of value, so the question goes back to the degree to which the Dutch left envisaged the survival of exchange relations in the lower stage of communism. And as we have noted, there are ambiguities in the *Grundprinzipien* about this too. Earlier on in this article we quoted Mitchell's argument that the network of enterprises envisaged by the GIC appears to retain a market relationship of sorts. On the other hand, there are other passages which go in the opposite direction and there is a strong case for arguing that they express the thinking of the GIC much more accurately. For example, in chapter 2, in the section headed ‘Free Com-

1. For example: <http://www.libcom.org/library/karl-marx-state>; <http://www.libcom.org/library/lenin-liberal-reply-chris-cutrone>

2. *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 1, p 46)

3. *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, chapter 12. ‘Content and form of value’, p114-115 of the 1972 edition

munism', the GIC develops a critique of the French anarchist Faure which makes it clear that they are in favour of forging the economy into a single unit: "*The substance of the matter is not that one would hold it against the Faurian system that it seeks to forge the entire economy into one single unit; such an act of combination is indeed the end purpose of the process of development which is brought to fruition by the combined producers and consumers. Having done this, however, the basis must then be provided to ensure that they themselves keep control of it*".

We should add that Mitchell's argument that any form of measurement of labour time is essentially an expression of value is not supported by Marx's approach to the question in his descriptions of communist society. In the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx argues that "*economy of time along with the planned distribution of labour time among the various branches of production, remains the first economic law on the basis of communal production. It becomes law, there, to an even higher degree. However, this is essentially different from a measurement of exchange values (labour or products) by labour time*".<sup>4</sup>

4. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook 1, pp. 172-3. Mitchell's assumption that measurement of labour time always equals value is carried over into the criticisms of the *Grundprinzipien* in our book on the Dutch left. The concluding paragraph of this section, reproduced as an annex to the first part of the article, puts it thus: "*The final weakness of the Grundprinzipien lies in the very question of the accounting of labour time, even in an advanced communist society which has gone beyond scarcity. Economically, this system could reintroduce the law of value, by giving the labour time needed for production an accounted value rather than a social one. Here the GIC goes against Marx, for whom the standard measure in communist society is no longer labour time but free time, leisure time*". The latter point is no doubt taken from the passage in the *Grundrisse* where Marx writes: "*real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time*" (Marx, *Grundrisse* notebook VII, p708). But for Marx this did not imply that society would cease measuring the time it put into maintaining and reproducing itself (the material basis for setting free the creative capacities of the individual). This is made plain in *Theories of Surplus Value* where Marx writes: "*Labour-time, even if exchange-value is eliminated, always remains the creative substance of wealth and the measure of the cost of its production. But free time, disposable time, is wealth itself,*

The real weakness of the GIC lies, we would argue, less in their occasional concessions to the idea of the market, but in their inordinate faith in the system of accounting. As they say in the sentence which follows the passage just cited: "*To achieve this they must keep an exact account of the labour-hours used up, in every form of economic activity, in order that they may know exactly how much labour-time is embodied in each product. Then it is quite unnecessary for the right of decision as to how the social product is to be distributed to be handed over to any 'central administration'; on the contrary, the producers themselves in each factory or other establishments can then determine this through their computation of labour-time expended*". No doubt the computation of the exact amount of labour time expended by the producers is extremely important, but the GIC seems to radically underestimate the degree to which maintaining control over economic and political life during the transition period is a struggle for the development of class consciousness, for the conscious construction of new social relationships, a struggle which goes far deeper than elaborating a system of accounting.

4. Does *Bilan* underestimate the need for radical social and economic change from the start? This is perhaps a more substantial criticism. For example, in Mitchell's critique of egalitarian remuneration he argues that this would undermine the productivity of labour and implies that in order to arrive at communism a prodigious development of the productive forces is required. It's certainly true that the attainment of communism depends on a profound development and transformation of the productive forces. But the key question here is this: on what basis will this development take place? We know that the last chapter of Mitchell's study contains a clear rejection of 'productivism', the sacrificing of workers' consumption in the interests of building up industry,

*partly for the enjoyment of the product, partly for free activity which—unlike labour—is not dominated by the pressure of an extraneous purpose which must be fulfilled, and the fulfilment of which is regarded as a natural necessity or a social duty, according to one's inclination*". *Theories of Surplus Value*, Book III

and throughout its existence this was a fundamental aspect of *Bilan's* critique of the so-called 'achievements of socialism' in the USSR. Nonetheless, since Mitchell is so insistent that the wages system, in its essentials at least, cannot be this done away with until a much later stage of the revolutionary transformation, the doubt remains that Mitchell is advocating a more worker-oriented version of 'socialist accumulation'.

In the final issue of *Bilan* (no 46, December-January 1938) a reader responding to the 'Problems of the Period of Transition' series goes so far as to dismiss the comrades of *Bilan* as a new species of reformists whose revolution will merely replace one set of masters with another (see the appendix for the text of this letter and Mitchell's response).

We obviously think that this accusation is both uncomradely and unfounded but it is given a semblance of reality by two key weaknesses in *Bilan's* theoretical armoury: their difficulty in seeing the capitalist nature of the USSR even in the 1930s, and their inability to break with the notion of the dictatorship of the party. Despite all their criticisms of the Stalinist regime and their recognition that a form of exploitation did exist in the USSR, they still clung to the view that the collectivised nature of the 'Soviet' economy conferred on it a proletarian character, however degenerated. This seems to betray a difficulty to draw the consequences from what was already basically understood by the Italian left – i.e. that an economy founded on the wage relationship can only be capitalist, whether or not the means of production are 'individually' or 'collectively' owned. And a result of this difficulty would be a reluctance to see the struggle against the wage form as being an integral part of the social revolution. And this is just another aspect of the struggle for what David Adam calls "effective social control of production" by the workers themselves.

At the same time, the idea that the role of the party is to exercise the proletarian dictatorship (albeit while somehow avoiding an entanglement with the state<sup>5</sup>) runs counter to the

5. *Bilan's* contradictory position on 'the



need for the working class to impose its control over both production and the apparatus of political power. It's certainly true that the workers will have to learn a vast amount to take charge of production, not just in the framework of the individual enterprise but across an entire society. The same applies to the question of political power, which in any case is not a separate sphere from the problem of reorganising economic life. It's also true that *Bilan* always understood that the workers would need to learn from their own mistakes and that they could not be coerced towards socialism. Nevertheless the idea of the dictatorship of the party still retains the

dictatorship of the party' is examined at greater length in a previous article: <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/127/vercesi-period-of-transition>

somewhat substitutionist idea that the workers will only be able to take full control of their destiny at some point in the future, and that in the meantime a minority of the class must hold onto power 'on their behalf'.

Precisely because the Italian left was a proletarian current and not a variant of reformism, these weaknesses would in time be addressed and overcome, particularly by the French Fraction and by elements in the party formed in Italy in 1943. In our view, it was the French Fraction, later the Gauche Communiste de France, which took these clarifications the furthest, and it is no accident that it was able, in the years after World War Two, to engage in a fruitful debate with the tradition and organisations of the Dutch communist left. We will take this up in the next article in this series.

We don't pretend to have resolved all the questions raised by the debate between the Italian and Dutch lefts on the period of transition. These questions – such as how the law of value will be eliminated, how labour will be remunerated, how the workers will keep control over production and distribution – remain to be clarified and indeed can only be finally resolved in the course of a revolution itself. But we do think that the contributions and discussions developed by these revolutionaries in a dark period of defeat for the working class remain an indispensable theoretical point of departure for the debates that will one day be used to guide the practical transformation of society.

CD Ward

## A reader replies to Bilan on the Period of Transition (Bilan 46, December-January 1938)

Just as Bilan was going to press, the group received a letter from a correspondent in the Parisian suburb of Clichy. The letter and the reply from Mitchell were printed in the following issue and we reproduce both here.

We have received from a reader in Clichy a letter of critique which we publish in full followed by some brief comments from our collaborator. We hope our impatient correspondent will excuse us for not having put his letter in the previous issue, but it arrived at exactly the same moment that this number was coming off the press.

### On the period of transition

After the publication in *Bilan* of Hennaut's summary of the book by the Dutch left communists on the 'fundamentals of communist production and distribution', some may have thought that the reformists of right and left had been definitively disarmed and they wouldn't dare to move an inch. But that is if you don't know them very well. In the issue which published the end of the summary, their criticisms could already be heard: the Dutch comrades, like Hennaut, don't think

like marxists...Then we had Mitchell's critical study on 'The problems of the period of transition'. The aim of this study was, of course, to demonstrate the anti-marxist utopianism of those who believe that the proletarian revolution will really free the workers from exploitation in all its forms. Thus we should not be astonished that all through his article Mitchell is at pains to prove, with the use of numerous quotes, that this revolution will only serve to bring a new master to the proletarians who made it – just like the revolutions of the past. We recognise the traditional standpoint of reformists of all types. What's more Mitchell was careful to warn is in his 'introductory expose' that his work would deal with the following points: "a) *the historic conditions in which the proletarian revolution arises*; b) *the necessity for the transitional state*; c) *the economic and social categories which will of necessity survive in the transitional phase*; d) *finally, some elements regarding a proletarian management of the transitional state*".

Once these points have been enounced, it was easy to imagine what the article would be like. Mitchell is not embar-

assed to affirm, a priori, the survival after the revolution of "*the economic and social categories which will of necessity (!) survive in the transitional phase*". This assertion alone is enough for anyone with an alert mind to see what's coming next. What is most astonishing in Mitchell's article is the abundance of quotes which a revolutionary marxist could at any moment turn against what he tries to prove and justify. One doesn't need 50 pages of *Bilan* to annihilate the sage arguments of the reformist Mitchell. All those who have read Marx and Engels know that, for them, the famous period of transition marks the end of the capitalist society and the birth of an entirely new society in which the exploitation of man by man will have ceased to exist; i.e. where classes will have disappeared and the state as such will have no reason to exist. Now, in the society of transition as Mitchell and all the avowed reformists understand it, the exploitation of the proletariat subsists and in the same way as it does under the capitalist regime: by means of wage labour. In this society there will be a scale of wages...just like now! This will make



it possible to socialise (?) the most advanced branches of production; then, we don't know when or how, all of industrial and agricultural production. In other words, during the transitional phase, a part of the workers will continue to be exploited by particular people, with the others already being exploited by the State-Boss. Starting from this viewpoint, the higher phase of communism would correspond to the full statification of production – to state capitalism as we see operating in Russia! The most revolting thing is that Mitchell dares to base himself on Marx and Engels to defend such a point of view. We know that Stalin also dared in his speech of June 2 1931 to base himself on Marx to justify the incredible inequality of wages reigning in the USSR, and just like Mitchell, he did so by invoking the quality of labour supplied. However Marx explained himself clearly on this subject in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Do we need to recall that for Marx the inequality which subsists in the first phase of communism does not derive, contrary to what Mitchell thinks, from inequality in the retribution of labour, but simply from the fact that the workers don't always live in the same way": *"One worker is married"*, says Marx, *"another is not; one has more children than another, and so on and so forth. Thus, with an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on. To avoid all these defects, right, instead of being equal, would have to be unequal"*. This is so clear it doesn't need further elaboration.

We know that, for Marx, "wage labour is the precondition for the exis-

tence of capital", which means that if we want to kill capital, we have to abolish wage labour. But the reformists don't think this way at all: for them the revolution means that all capital has to progressively be taken over by the state so that it becomes the only master. What they want is to replace private capitalism with state capitalism. But don't talk to them about abolishing capitalist exploitation, about destroying the state machine which serves to maintain this exploitation: the proletarians must make the revolution solely in order to change their master. All those who see the revolution as a way of liberating yourself from exploitation are vulgar utopians. Revolutionary workers be warned!

### Mitchell's reply

Nothing is more difficult than replying to a critique which takes the liberty of decrying material which it has not assimilated or has assimilated very imperfectly and which believes all the more easily that it has come up with the right formulations, even though they are in fact purely illusory.

Thus our correspondent should not be astonished if we suggest to him that the discussion continues on the basis of an attentive and thorough examination of the study that has been published.

Let's reassure our contradictor right away about our so-called "left reformism": everything that he invokes against is to justify this charge of "reformism" is precisely what is fought in our study in the least equivocal way possible. What's more, it's not enough for our correspondent to reproach us for the "abundance" of our quotes: he also has to prove what he

insinuates, i.e. that these quotes have a meaning that runs counter to the one we give them. If he can't demonstrate this, it would still be permissible, if he likes facile and simplistic answers, to contest the bases of certain conceptions, for example Marx's remarks about the necessity to temporarily tolerate unequal remuneration of labour in the transitional period. He could then "repudiate" Marx, but not deform his thought.

On the question of the remuneration of labour, since our correspondent is of the opinion that Marx did not put things the way we say he did, he should go back over the whole part of our work where we deal with the measurement of labour (*Bilan* 34, p 1133 to 1138...) and the whole part where we deal with the remuneration of labour, particularly beginning at the bottom of page 1157 up to the top of the second column on page 1159, *Bilan* no. 35.

Furthermore, whether the comrade likes it or not, it is Marx who affirmed the transitional survival of capitalist categories like value, money and wages since the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat *"is still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges"* (see *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and p 1137 of *Bilan*)

Again, on the problem of the state, how can be seen as defenders of state capitalism on the basis of what we developed in the second part of our work (*Bilan* 31, p 1035).

If our correspondent doesn't share our opinion on this major question, the he should at least give his own opinion and engage in a positive critique.

Mitchell.

## Report on imperialist tensions (Continued from page 24)

through a complex play of centripetal and centrifugal forces, is accentuating the break-up of the EU and is exacerbating tensions between states.

In a global manner, this report accentuates the orientations laid out in the report to the 19th Congress of the ICC and underlines the acceleration of the tendencies it identified. More than ever, the more and more absolute

nature of the historic impasse of the capitalist mode of production is being made clear. Thus, the period opening up *"will tend to impose the more and more clear cut connections between*

*- the economic crisis, revealing the historic impasse of the capitalist mode of production;*

*- its warlike barbarity, showing the*

*fundamental consequences of the historic impasse: the destruction of humanity.*

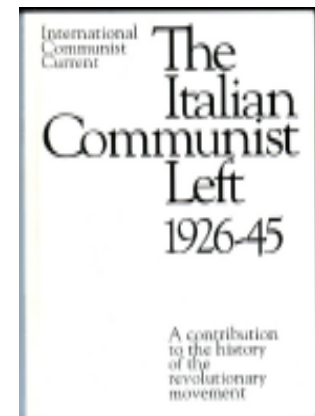
*From today, for the working class, this link represents a point of fundamental reflection on the future that capitalism is reserving for humanity and on the necessity to find an alternative faced with this dying system".*

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## ICC Publication



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.

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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 stratified 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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