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Editorial

**100 years after the First World War,
the struggle for proletarian principles is
as relevant as ever**

World War I

1914: Why the Second International failed

2014 Extraordinary Conference of the ICC

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Communism is on the agenda of history

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fatal flaws. Part 2: Dissidents in the
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in South Africa

**From the birth of capitalism to the eve of
the Second World War**

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In August 1914, the International disintegrated while its leaders and parliamentary deputies, one after the other, betrayed their solemn promises, voted for war budgets, and called the workers to join the slaughter.

How could such a disaster happen? What was the chain of events that led to it? With the exception of the left in the International, its leaders continued to believe that bourgeois diplomacy could preserve peace. They mobilised the workers for peace, instead of preparing the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism which alone could guarantee that peace. In reality, the International was divided between right and left, the former ready and even eager to make common cause with the ruling class in defence of its national interests, the latter preparing the revolution against war.

2014 Extraordinary Conference of the ICC

News of our death is greatly exaggerated... (Page 8)

The ICC recently held an Extraordinary Conference to confront a moral crisis within our organisation, which led to a comrade being scapegoated for criticising an opportunist policy within the organisation, affecting our functioning, but also activist and leftist tendencies in our intervention. This crisis demands of the ICC a long-term struggle to get to the root of the problem, and to reverse a certain tendency to find an “accommodation” with decomposing bourgeois society.

Communism is on the agenda of history

The war in Spain exposes anarchism’s fatal flaws. Part 2: Dissidents in the anarchist movement (Page 12)

The CNT’s successive betrayals of the workers’ cause during the war in Spain (1936-37), and its integration into the state of the bourgeois republic, provoked proletarian reactions both inside and outside the organisation. These came, to a greater or lesser extent, from groups of working class militants who had taken part in the heroic struggles of July 1936 and May 1937. They opposed the official policy of both the CNT and the POUM, a policy of strike-breaking and participation in the bourgeois state during the uprising of May 1937. Here we focus on the positions of the Friends of Durruti group, and in particular of Jaime Balius, and on those of the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri who edited *Guerra di Classe*.

Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa

From the birth of capitalism to the eve of the Second World War (Page 21)

Following our articles on the class struggle in France’s African colonies, we begin here a new series of articles on the class struggle in South Africa – which both before and during the *apartheid* period has been systematically either ignored, or presented as an “anti-*apartheid*” or “national liberation” struggle.

The main purpose of this contribution to the history of South African workers is to re-establish the historical truth about the struggle between the two principal classes: the bourgeoisie (which used *apartheid* as one of its main means of domination) and the South African proletariat which has generally taken up the struggle for its own demands as an exploited class, first against the colonial regime, then against that of Mandela’s ANC. In other words, the South African proletariat’s struggle is every bit a part of the struggle of the world working class.

100 years after the First World War, the struggle for proletarian principles is as relevant as ever

One hundred years ago, the war enters a new year of slaughter. It was supposed to have been “over by Christmas”, but Christmas has been and gone and the war continues.

On Christmas Eve, fraternisation along the front line gives rise to the “Christmas Truce”. On their own initiative, and to the consternation of their officers, the soldiers – workers and peasants in uniform – spontaneously leave their trenches to exchange beer, cigarettes, and food. The General Staffs on both sides, taken by surprise, do not know how to react.

This fraternisation poses the question: what would have happened if there had been a workers’ Party, and International, capable of giving them a broader vision, allowing them to bear fruit and become a conscious opposition not only to the war but to its causes? But the workers have been abandoned by their parties: worse still, these parties have become the recruiting officers of the ruling class. Behind the firing squads that await deserters and mutineers, stand the “socialist” ministers. The betrayal of the socialist parties in most of the belligerent nations has meant that the International has collapsed, incapable of applying the resolutions adopted by the Congresses of Stuttgart in 1907 and Basel in 1912: this collapse is the theme of one of the articles in this issue.

The New Year begins, but there will be no “Christmas Truce” in 1915: uneasy, the General Staffs will tighten discipline and shell the front lines next Christmas, to nip in the bud any attempt by soldiers and workers to bring the war to an end.

And yet, painfully and without any overall plan, the workers’ resistance re-emerges. In 1915 there will be more fraternisation on the fronts, major strikes in Scotland’s Clyde Valley, demonstrations of German working women against rationing. Little groups, like *Die Internationale* (of which Rosa Luxemburg is a member) or the *Lichtstrahlen* group in Germany, survivors of the wreckage of the International, begin to organise despite censorship and repression. In September, some of them will take part in the first international conference

of socialists against the war, in the Swiss village of Zimmerwald. This conference, and the two that follow it, will confront the same problems as the 2nd International: is it possible to pursue a policy of “peace” without a policy of revolution? Is it possible to imagine rebuilding the International on the basis of the pre-1914 unity which has been revealed as an illusion?

This time, the left will win the battle, and the 3rd International which will come out of Zimmerwald will be explicitly communist, revolutionary, and centralised: it will be the answer to the failure of the International, just as the Soviets in 1917 will be the answer to the bankruptcy of unionism.

Almost 30 years ago (in 1986), we commemorated the 70th anniversary of Zimmerwald in an article published in this *Review*. Six years after the failure of the International Conferences of the Communist Left,¹ we wrote: “*Like at Zimmerwald, the regroupment of revolutionary minorities is posed acutely today [...] Faced with the present stakes, the historic responsibility of revolutionary groups is posed. Their responsibility is to engage in the formation of the world party of tomorrow, whose absence can be cruelly felt today [...] The failure of the first attempt at conferences (1977-80) does not invalidate the necessity of such places of confrontation. This failure is a relative one: it is the product of political immaturity, of sectarianism and of the irresponsibility of a part of the revolutionary milieu which is still suffering the weight of the long period of counter-revolution [...] Tomorrow, new conferences of groups descending from the Left will be held*”.²

We cannot but accept that our hopes, our confidence of those years have been bitterly disappointed. Of the groups that took part in the Conferences, only the ICC and the ICT (ex-IBRP, created by *Battaglia Comunista* of Italy and the CWO of Britain shortly after the Conferences) remain.³ While the

1. We refer our readers to the article ‘Sectarianism, an inheritance from the counter-revolution that must be transcended’ <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/22/sectarianism>.

2. *International Review* n°44, 1st quarter 1986.

3. The GCI having gone over to the enemy camp when it gave its support to the Peruvian Shining

working class has not let itself be enrolled under the colours of generalised imperialist war, neither has it been able to impose its own perspective on bourgeois society. As a result, the class struggle has proven unable to impose on the revolutionaries of the Communist Left even a minimal sense of responsibility: there have been no more Conferences, and our repeated calls for a minimum of common action by internationalists (in particular at the time of the Gulf Wars during the 1990s) have fallen on deaf ears. The spectacle presented by anarchism is, if possible, even more deplorable. Few have emerged with honour (the KRAS in Russia is an admirable exception) from the lapse into nationalism and anti-fascism as a result of the wars in Ukraine and Syria.

Nor has the ICC been spared, in this situation characteristic of the general atmosphere of social decomposition. Our organisation is shaken by a profound crisis, which demands of us an equally profound calling into question and theoretical reflection if we are to face up to it. This is the theme of the article on our Extraordinary Conference, also published in this issue.

Crises are never comfortable, but without crises there is no life and they can be both healthy and necessary. As our article emphasises, if there is one lesson to be learned from the betrayal of the Socialist parties and the collapse of the International, it is that the unruffled path of opportunism leads to death and betrayal, and that the political struggle of the revolutionary left has never avoided confrontation and crisis.

ICC, December 2014

World War I

1914: Why the Second International failed

For more than ten years, the distant din of war had echoed across Europe – colonial wars in Africa, the Moroccan crises, the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, the Balkan wars – and the workers of Europe had trusted in the International to keep the threat of generalised war at bay. The contours of the war to come – already predicted by Engels in 1887¹ – had become clearer year by year, so much so that the International's congresses at Stuttgart in 1907, and at Basel in 1912, had denounced them clearly: not a defensive war, but a war of imperialist competition, pillage and rapine. Over and over,

the International and its member parties had warned the workers of the danger and threatened the ruling classes with their own overthrow should they dare defy the power of the organised working class and unleash the hounds of war. And yet in August 1914, the International disintegrated, blown away like insubstantial dust, as one after the other its leaders and parliamentary deputies betrayed their most solemn promises, voted war credits and called the workers to the slaughter.²

How could such a disaster happen? Karl Kautsky, once the Second International's foremost theoretician, blamed it on the workers: "who would dare assert that an order given by a handful of parliamentarians is sufficient to make four million class-conscious German proletarians turn right-about face within twenty-four hours, in direct opposition to their former aims? If this were true, it would, of course, be evidence of a terrible collapse, not only of our Party, but also of the masses. [Kautsky's emphasis] If the masses were such a spineless flock of sheep, we might just as well allow ourselves to be buried".³ In short, if four million German workers allowed themselves to be marched off to war, it was of their own volition, nothing to do with the parliamentarians who, with the backing of the majority of their parties, voted war credits and (in France and Britain) soon found a place in bourgeois governments of national unity.

1. "Eight to ten million soldiers will swallow each other up and in doing so eat all Europe more bare than any swarm of locusts. The devastation of the Thirty Years War compressed into the space of three or four years and extending over the whole continent; famine, sickness, want, brutalising the army and the mass of the population; irrevocable confusion of our artificial structure of trade, industry and credit, ending in general bankruptcy; collapse of the old states and their traditional statecraft, so that crowns will roll by the dozens in the gutter and no one be found to pick them up; it is absolutely impossible to predict where it will all end and who will emerge from the struggle as victor. Only one result is absolutely certain: general exhaustion and the establishment of the conditions for the final victory of the working class" (Engels, Introduction to Sigismund Borkheim's pamphlet *Zur Erinnerung für die deutschen Mordspatrioten 1806-1812*, 1887, quoted in James Joll, *The Second International*, p109, Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1974).

2. One noteworthy exception was the Serbian Social-Democracy, whose parliamentary deputies refused support for the war even as Austrian shells fell on Belgrade.

3. Cited in Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, chapter 6.

To this wretched, cowardly excuse, Lenin gave a stinging retort: "*Consider: the only people in a position to express their attitude to the war more or less freely (i.e., without being immediately seized and dragged to the barracks, or the immediate risk of being shot) were a 'handful of parliamentarians' (who were free to vote, with the right to do so; they were quite able to vote in opposition. Even in Russia, no one was beaten up or even arrested for this), a handful of officials, journalists, etc. And now, Kautsky nobly places on the masses the blame for the treachery and the spinelessness of that social stratum of whose links with the tactics and ideology of opportunism Kautsky himself has written scores of times over a number of years.*"⁴

Betrayed by their leaders, their organisations transformed almost overnight from fighting organisations for workers' defence to recruiting sergeants for the slaughter, the workers were left to confront the full might of the state's military machine individually and alone. As one French syndicalist was to write later: "*I have only one reproach to make to myself...and it is that I, an anti-patriot and anti-militarist, left with my comrades on the fourth day of mobilisation. I did not have the strength of character not to go, although I did not recognise frontiers or fatherland. I was afraid, it's true, of the firing squad. I was afraid... But at the front, thinking of my family, scratching the names of my wife and son on the bottom of the trench I said 'How is it possible that I, anti-patriot, anti-militarist, who acknowledged only the International, come to be attacking my companions in misery and perhaps shall die for my enemies against my own cause and my own interests?'*"⁵

4. Ibid.

5. Cited in Édouard Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement*

All over Europe, the workers had had confidence in the International, believed its congresses' repeated resolutions against the coming war. They trusted the International, that highest expression of the power of the organised working class, to stay the criminal hand of capitalist imperialism.

In July 1914, with the threat of war more and more imminent, an emergency meeting was called in Brussels of the International Socialist Bureau – the nearest thing that the International had to a central organ. The leaders of the parties present found it hard at first to believe that a full-scale war would really break out, but by the time the ISB met on 29th July, Austria-Hungary had declared war on Serbia and imposed martial law. Victor Adler told the meeting that his party was impotent, no attempt was planned to resist mobilisation or the war itself. No plans had been made for the Party to go underground and to continue its activity in clandestinity. The discussion lost itself in deliberation about changing the venue for the upcoming congress of the International, which was to have been held in Vienna: no practical action was considered. Forgetting everything that had been said at earlier congresses, the leaders were still trusting the diplomacy of the great powers to prevent war from breaking out, unaware – or unwilling to see – that this time, all the powers were bent on war. The British delegate Bruce Glasier⁶ wrote that "*although the dread peril of a general eruption of war was the main subject of the deliberations, no one, not even the German representatives, seemed apprehensive of an actual rupture between the great powers taking place until at least the full resources*

ouvrier (1871-1936): vol. II.

6. Member of the Independent Labour Party's National Council, opposed World War I, but fell ill with cancer in 1915 and was unable to play an active role against the war.

of diplomacy had been exhausted".⁷ Jaurès could even declare that "at this moment the French government wants peace and is working for the maintenance of peace. The French government is the best ally in the cause of peace of that admirable English government which has taken the initiative in conciliation."⁸

After the ISB meeting, thousands of Belgian workers gathered to hear the leaders of the International speak against the threat of war. Jaurès gave one of his greatest anti-war speeches ever, and the workers cheered him to the rafters. Yet one orator was notably absent from the platform: Rosa Luxemburg, the most clear-sighted and the most indomitable fighter of them all, refused to speak, sick to the heart at the spinelessness and self-delusion she saw all around her: she alone could see the wave of cowardice and betrayal that was to sweep the socialist parties into supporting their national governments' imperialist ambitions.

Once war had broken out, the socialist traitors in every belligerent country claimed to be fighting a "defensive" war: in Germany the war was to defend German "Kultur" against the Cossack barbarism of Tsarist Russia, in France it was to defend republican France against Prussian autocracy, in Britain it was to defend "little Belgium".⁹ Lenin demolished these hypocritical pretensions, reminding his readers of the solemn promises that the leaders of the 2nd International had made at the Congress of Basel in 1912 to oppose, not just war in general but this particular imperialist war which the workers' movement had long seen in the making: "*The Basel resolution does not speak of a national or a people's war – examples of which have occurred in Europe, wars that were even typical of the period of 1789-1871 – or of a revolutionary war, which Social-Democrats have never renounced, but of the present war, which is the outcome of 'capitalist imperialism' and 'dynastic interests', the outcome of 'the policy of conquest' pursued by both groups of belligerent powers – the Austro-German and the Anglo Franco-Russian. Plekhanov, Kautsky and Co. are flagrantly deceiving the workers by repeating the selfish lie of the bourgeoisie of all countries, which is striving with all its might to depict this*

7. Cited in James Joll, *The Second International*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p165.

8. Joll, op cit., p168. What Jaurès did not know, because he only returned to Paris on 29th July, was that the French President Poincaré had spent his time on a trip to Russia doing everything possible to bolster Russia's determination to go to war: Jaurès was to change his mind about the French government's intentions after his own return to Paris, in the days that preceded his assassination.

9. The British ruling class wins the prize for hypocrisy, since its own war plans included an invasion of Belgium to attack Germany.

imperialist and predatory war for colonies as a people's war, a war of defence (for any side); when they seek to justify this war by citing historical examples of non-imperialist wars."¹⁰

Without centralisation, no action

How was it that the International, in which the workers placed such confidence, proved incapable of action? In fact, its ability to act was more apparent than real: the ISB was a mere co-ordinating body whose role was largely restricted to organising congresses and mediating in the disputes within and among the socialist parties themselves. Although the International's left wing – around Lenin and Luxemburg in particular – considered the congress resolutions against war to be binding undertakings, the ISB had no power to enforce them; it was unable to take action independently – still less against the wishes – of each country's socialist parties themselves and especially of the most powerful among them: the German SPD. Indeed, although the International's founding congress was held in 1889, the International Socialist Bureau was only constituted at the congress of 1900: until then, the International in effect only existed while the congress was in session. The rest of the time it was little more than a web of personal relationships among the different socialist leaders, many of whom had come to know each other personally during years in exile. There was not even any formal network of correspondence; August Bebel was even to complain to Engels in 1894 that all the SPD's dealings with other socialist parties remained entirely in the hands of Wilhelm Liebknecht: "*To meddle with Liebknecht in his foreign connections is simply impossible. No one knows to whom he writes or what he writes; he talks to no one about that.*"¹¹

The contrast with the First International (the International Workingmen's Association) is striking. Practically the first act of the IWA following its creation in 1864 by a meeting of largely British and French workers held at St Martin's Fields in London, was to draft an organisational programme and to form a General Council – the centralising body of the International. Once the statutes were drafted, a broad range of workers' organisations across Europe (political parties, unions, even co-operatives) joined the organisation on the basis of agreement with the IWA's statutes. Despite the attempts by Bakunin's "Alliance" to undermine it, the General Council, elected by the IWA's

10. Lenin, op cit.

11. Cited in Raymond H Dominick, *Wilhelm Liebknecht*, University of North Carolina Press, 1982, p344.

congresses, enjoyed all the authority of a true centralising body.

This contrast between the two Internationals was itself the product of a new and different historical situation, and indeed confirmed the prescient words of the *Communist Manifesto*: "*Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie*".¹² Following the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871, the workers' movement entered a period of fierce repression and contraction especially in France – where thousands of the *Communards* were shot or exiled to penal servitude in the colonies – and in Germany where the SDAP (the SPD's predecessor) was driven underground by Bismarck's anti-socialist laws. It was clear that revolution was not on the immediate agenda as many revolutionaries, including Marx and Engels themselves, had hoped and believed during the 1860s. Economically and socially, the thirty years from 1870 to 1900¹³ were to see a period of massive capitalist expansion both internally with the growth of mass production and heavy industry at the expense of the artisan classes, and externally as capitalism spread into new territories both within Europe itself and across the seas, especially in the USA and in the growing number of the Great Powers' colonial possessions. This in turn meant a huge increase in the numbers of workers: the period was one where the working class had in effect to transform itself from an amorphous mass of displaced artisans and peasants, into a class of associated labour capable of asserting its own historical perspective and defending its own immediate economic and social interests. This process, indeed, had already been proclaimed by the First International: "*the lords of the land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economic monopolies. So far from promoting, they will continue to lay every possible impediment in the way of the emancipation of labour (...). To conquer political power has, therefore, become the great duty of the working classes. They seem to have comprehended this, for in England, Germany, Italy, and France, there have taken place simultaneous revivals, and simultaneous efforts are being made at the political organisation of the workingmen's party*".¹⁴

By its very nature, given the conditions

12. Chapter 1, "Bourgeois and proletarians".

13. Indeed, this period of economic expansion was to continue right up to the eve of war.

14. From the Inaugural Address of the First International, penned by Marx.

of the epoch, this self-formation of the working class was to take on forms that were specific to and determined by the historical development of each country. In Germany, the workers struggled at first in the difficult conditions of clandestinity imposed by Bismarck's anti-socialist laws, where the only possible legal action was in parliament, such that the unions grew under the wing of the socialist party. In Britain, still Europe's most advanced industrial power, the crushing defeat of the great political movement of Chartism in 1848 had all but discredited political action and the workers' organising energy was largely devoted to building up their trades unions: the socialist parties remained small and insignificant on the political scene. In France, the workers' movement was fractured between marxists (Jules Guesde's "Parti ouvrier" founded in 1882), the Blanquists inspired by the revolutionary tradition of the great Paris Commune (Edouard Vaillant's "Comité révolutionnaire central"), the reformists (known as "Possibilists") and the unions grouped in the CGT and strongly influenced by the ideas of revolutionary syndicalism. Inevitably, all these organisations struggled to develop the workers' organisation and education, and to win union and political rights, against their respective ruling classes and therefore within the national framework.

The development of mass union organisations and a mass political movement also helped to redefine the conditions under which revolutionaries worked. The old Blanquist tradition – the idea of a small, conspiratorial band of professional revolutionaries who would seize power with the more or less passive support of the masses – was outdated, replaced by the need to construct mass organisations which perform must operate within a certain legal framework. The right to organise, the right of assembly, the right to free speech, all these became objects of vital interest to the mass movement: inevitably all these demands, yet again, were posed within the legal framework specific to each nation. To take just one example: whereas the French socialists could get deputies elected to a Republican parliament which wielded effective legislative power, in Germany the government's direction depended not on the Reichstag (the Imperial parliament), but on the autocratic decisions of the Kaiser in person. It was thus far easier for the Germans to maintain an attitude of rigorous refusal to ally with bourgeois parties, since they were highly unlikely to be called on to do so; the fragility of this position of principle was shown by the way in which it was ignored by the SPD in South Germany, whose deputies regularly voted in favour of budget proposals in the regional Landtags

(Länder parliaments).

Nonetheless, as the workers' movements in different countries emerged from the period of reaction and defeat, the proletariat's inherently international nature reasserted itself. In 1887, the German party congress held at St Gallen in Switzerland decided to take the initiative of organising an international congress; in the same year, the British TUC meeting in Swansea voted in favour of an international conference to press for an eight-hour working day.¹⁵ The latter led to the holding of an exploratory meeting in November 1888 in London at the invitation of the TUC's Parliamentary Committee, attended by delegates from several countries, though not from Germany. These two simultaneous initiatives quickly demonstrated a fundamental split within the labour movement, between the reformists led by the British unions and the French Possibilists, and the revolutionary marxists, whose most important organisation was the German SDAP (the British unions, indeed, were opposed to any participation at all in their initiative by political organisations).

In 1889 – the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution, still a reference for all those who aspired to the overthrow of the existing order – there were thus not one but two international workers' congresses held in Paris simultaneously: the first called by the French Possibilists, the second by the marxist Parti Ouvrier¹⁶ led by Jules Guesde. The subsequent decline of the Possibilists meant that the marxist congress (known after its meeting-place in the Salle Petrelle) was thereafter considered as the 2nd International's founding congress. Inevitably, the congress was marked by inexperience and a great deal of confusion: confusion over the highly charged question of validating delegates' mandates, and also over translations which were undertaken by whichever members of the polyglot assembly happened to be available.¹⁷ The most important aspects of the Congress were thus not so much its practical decisions but first, the fact that it met at all, and second the roll-call of delegates. From France came Marx's sons-in-law Paul Lafargue and Charles Longuet, together with Edouard Vaillant, the hero of the Commune; from Germany came Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, together with Eduard Bernstein and Klara Zetkin; Britain's best-known representative was William Morris, and this was in itself indicative of the political backwardness of British socialism, since

15. See Joll, *op cit.*, p28.

16. By this time, the party had been renamed Parti Ouvrier Français.

17. The descriptions of the difficulties over translations are reminiscent of the ICC's first congresses!

the membership of his Socialist League was barely numbered in the hundreds. A highlight of the congress was the handshake between the joint presidents Vaillant and Liebknecht, symbolic of the international fraternity between French and German socialists.

The Gauche Communiste de France were thus right, in 1948, to highlight two major characteristics of the new International. First, it "*marked a stage of differentiation between the economic struggle of wage labour and the social, political struggle... [it] was the organisation of the struggle for reforms and of political conquests, for the political affirmation of the proletariat*". At the same time, the fact that the International was founded as an explicitly marxist, revolutionary organisation "*marked a higher stage in the ideological demarcation of the proletariat by clarifying and elaborating the theoretical foundations of its historic revolutionary mission*".¹⁸

May Day and the difficulty of united action

The 2nd International was founded, but it still had no permanent organisational structure. Existing only for the duration of its congresses, it had no means of enforcing the resolutions that these congresses adopted. This contrast between apparent international unity and national particularities in practice was nowhere more evident than in the campaign for the eight-hour day, centred on the May Day demonstration, which was one of the International's major preoccupations during the 1890s.

Probably the most important resolution of the 1889 Congress was that proposed by the French delegate Raymond Lavigne: that the workers in every country should take up the campaign for the eight-hour day decided by the 1888 St Louis congress of the American Federation of Labour, in the form of massive demonstrations and a generalised stoppage of work to be held every year on 1st May. Yet it soon became clear that the socialists and the unions in different countries had very different ideas as to what the May Day celebrations should mean. In France, partly as a result of the revolutionary syndicalist tradition in the unions, May Day quickly became the occasion for massive demonstrations leading to clashes with the police: in 1891 at Fourmies in the North of France, troops fired on a workers' demonstration leaving ten dead, including several children. In Germany on the other hand, difficult economic conditions which encouraged the employers

18. *Internationalisme, 1947* (cf <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201409/10368/nature-and-function-proletarian-party>).

to turn a strike into a lock-out combined with the German unions' and the SDP's reluctance to have their action dictated to them by anyone outside Germany, even by the International: as a result, there was a strong tendency within Germany to avoid putting the resolution into practice other than by holding meetings at the end of the working day. This German reluctance was shared by the unions in Britain.

The fact that the strongest socialist party in Europe should sound the retreat in this way alarmed the French and the Austrians in particular, and at the 1893 Congress of the International in Zürich, the Austrian socialist leader Victor Adler proposed a new resolution insisting that May Day should be the occasion for a real stoppage of work: the resolution was passed against the votes of the majority of the German delegates.

Yet only three months later, the SPD's Cologne Congress was reducing the extent of the International's resolution, by declaring that it should only apply to those organisations who actually felt it possible to join a stoppage.

The history of the May Day stoppages illustrates two important aspects that determined the International's ability – or inability – to act as a united body. On the one hand, it was impossible to get around the fact that what was possible in one country was not necessarily possible in another: Engels himself was dubious about the May Day resolutions on precisely these grounds, fearing that the German unions might discredit themselves by making commitments that they would in the end be unable to honour. On the other, the very fact of operating in a national framework, combined with the dissolving effects of reformism and opportunism within the movement, tended to make the national parties and unions jealous of their prerogatives: this was especially true of the German organisations since as the largest party they were even more reluctant than others to be dictated to by the smaller parties who ought – so thought many German leaders – to be following the German example.

The difficulties experienced in this first attempt at united international action were to bode ill for the future, when the International would play for higher stakes by far.

The illusion of inevitability

The meeting in the Salle Petrelle not only founded the International; it founded it as an avowedly marxist organisation. The marxism of the 2nd International at its beginnings, dominated as it was by the German

party and especially by Karl Kautsky as the editor of the SPD's theoretical review *Neue Zeit*, tended strongly towards a vision of historical materialism which emphasised the inevitability of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. This was already evident in Kautsky's unexpected critique of the Vorstand's (the Party Executive committee) proposed draft of the SPD's programme to be adopted at the 1891 Erfurt congress. In an article published in *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky described communism "as a necessity resulting directly from the historical trend of capitalist production methods", and criticised the Vorstand's proposal (drawn up by the veteran SPD leader Wilhelm Liebknecht) for deriving communism "not from the character of current production, but rather from the character of our party... The train of thought in the proposal of the Vorstand is as follows: the current method of production creates unbearable conditions; therefore we must eliminate them... In our opinion, the correct train of thought is this: the current method of production creates unbearable conditions; it also creates, however, the possibility and necessity of communism".¹⁹ In the end, Kautsky's proposal insisting on the "inherent necessity" of socialism, became the Erfurt programme's theoretical preamble.²⁰

To be sure, the evolution of capitalism makes communism a possibility. It is also a necessity for humanity. But in Kautsky's conception it is also increasingly an inevitability: the growth of the trades unions, the resounding electoral victories of the social-democracy, all appeared as the products of an inevitable force that could be predicted with scientific accuracy. In 1906, following the 1905 revolution in Russia, he could write that "any coalition of European powers against the revolution, such as took place in 1793, is inconceivable... There is no fear of a coalition against the revolution".²¹ In his polemic with Pannekoek and Luxemburg titled *The new tactics*, he argued as follows: "Pannekoek imagines that the destruction of the proletariat's organisations will be a natural consequence of sharpening class struggle, that they will no longer be protected by law and justice... The attempt, the effort to destroy the organisations of the working class certainly increases as these organisations become stronger and more dangerous to the established order. But the ability of these organisations to

resist also increases to the same extent, and yet more so their irreplaceability. To deprive the proletariat of any possibility of organisation has become impossible in the developed capitalist states today... Any destruction of working class organisations today could only be a passing episode".²²

During the last years of the 19th century, with capitalism still in the ascendant – enjoying, indeed, the massive expansion and prosperity that was later to be known, by contrast with the post-1914 era, as the *Belle époque* – the idea that socialism would be the natural and all but inevitable outcome of capitalism, was undoubtedly a source of strength for the working class. It gave a historical perspective and meaning to the painstaking work of building union and party organisations and it gave the workers a profound confidence in themselves, in their struggle, and in the future – this confidence in the future is one of the most striking differences between the working class at the beginning of the 20th and the 21st centuries.

History, however, is not a linear progression and what had been a strength for the workers as they built their organisations was to be transformed into a dangerous weakness. The illusion of the inevitability of the passage to socialism, the idea that this could be achieved by a gradual build-up of the workers' organisations until, almost painlessly, they could simply step into a place left vacant by a capitalist class whose "private ownership of the means of production has become incompatible with their appropriate application and full development" (Erfurt programme), obscured the fact that a profound transformation was under way in the capitalism of the early 20th century. The significance of these changing conditions, especially for the class struggle, was made explosively evident by the Russian revolution of 1905: suddenly, new methods of organisation and struggle – the soviet and the mass strike – burst onto the scene. Whereas the left on the SPD – above all Rosa Luxemburg in her famous pamphlet on the *Mass strike, party and unions* – saw the significance of these new conditions and began pushing for a debate within the German Party, the right and the unions did everything they could to suppress any discussion of the mass strike: the trades unions' 1905 congress explicitly banned any discussion of the mass strike, while in the SPD it became more and more difficult to have articles on the subject published in the Party press.

On the centre and right of the SPD,

22. "La nouvelle tactique" in *Socialisme, la voie occidentale* (texts by Pannekoek, Luxemburg and Kautsky, Presses universitaires de France), also in *Karl Kautsky and the socialist revolution 1880-1938*, Massimo Salvadori, Verso editions, p160.

19. See Raymond H Dominick *Wilhelm Liebknecht*, 1982, University of North Carolina Press, p361.

20. See <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm>.

21. Karl Kautsky, *Revolutions, past and present* (1906). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1906/xx/revolutions.htm>.

confidence in the future had become blindness, to the point where Kautsky could write in 1909 "*The proletariat has now grown so strong that it can contemplate a war with more confidence. We can no longer speak of a premature revolution, for it has already drawn so great strength from the present legal basis as to expect that a transformation of this basis would create the conditions for its further upward progress... if war should break out in spite of it, the proletariat is the only class that could confidently await its outcome.*"²³

Unity obscures division

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx reminds us that the "natural condition" of workers in capitalism is that of competing, atomised individuals: it is only through the struggle that they can achieve the unity which itself is the vital precondition for the struggle to succeed. It is therefore no accident that many a 19th century union banner bore the inscription "unity is strength"; the slogan expressed the workers' awareness that unity was something to fight for, and something to guard precious once achieved.

The same drive towards unity exists within and among the political organisations of the working class, inasmuch as they have no separate interests to defend, either for themselves or within the class itself. Naturally enough, this drive to unity finds its highest expression when the class struggle is historically on the rise, to the point where it becomes possible to create an international party: the IWA in 1864, the 2nd International in 1889, the 3rd International in 1919. The three Internationals themselves expressed a growing political unification within the working class: whereas the IWA had contained a very broad spectrum of political positions - from Proudhonists and Blanquists to Lassalleans to Marxists - the 2nd International was avowedly marxist, while the Third International's 21 Conditions for entry were explicitly intended to restrict membership to communists and revolutionaries and to correct precisely those factors which had caused the failure of the Second, in particular the absence of any centralising authority capable of taking decisions for the whole organisation.

Nonetheless, all the Internationals were real arenas of debate and ideological struggle, including the Third: witness, for example, Lenin's polemic against Left-wing communism and Herman Gorter's reply.

The 2nd International was deeply committed to the unity of the different socialist parties, on the grounds that since there was only one proletariat in any country, with the

same class interests, so there should only be one socialist party. There were constant efforts to keep the Russian Mensheviks and Bolsheviks united after 1903, but the main issue during the International's first years was the unification of the various French parties. This came to a head at the 1904 Amsterdam Congress, where Jules Guesde presented a resolution which was in effect no more than a translation of that adopted by the SPD at Dresden the year before, condemning "revisionist tactics [whose result] would be that instead of being a party which works for the most rapid transformation possible of existing bourgeois society into the socialist social order, i.e. revolutionary in the best sense of the word, the party would become one which is content with reforming bourgeois society".²⁴ This was an explicit condemnation of Millerand's²⁵ entry into government, and an implicit one of the reformism of Jean Jaurès' Parti socialiste français. Guesde's motion was passed by a massive majority, and the congress went on to pass unanimously a motion demanding the unification of the French socialists: the following April, the Parti socialiste and the Parti ouvrier united to form the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière. It is a measure of Jaurès' greatness that he accepted the majority vote of the International and gave up his own deeply held convictions²⁶ in the name of the International's unity.²⁷ This moment was probably the closest the International ever came to imposing unity of action in the name of principle on its member parties.

Unity of action, however necessary for the proletariat as a class, can be a double-edged sword in moments of crisis when the tide of history turns. And the International was entering just one such period of

crisis as the increasing tensions between the imperialist powers brought the threat of war closer. As Rosa Luxemburg put it: "*By covering up the contradictions by the artificial 'unification' of incompatible views, the contradictions can only come to a head, until they explode violently sooner or later through a split... Those who bring the divergences of view to the fore and fight against the divergent views, work towards the unity of the party. But those who cover up the divergences work towards a real split in the party.*"²⁸

Nowhere is this danger more evident than in the resolutions adopted against the looming threat of war. The final paragraphs of the 1907 Stuttgart resolution read as follows: "*If a war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved, supported by the co-ordinating activity of the International Socialist Bureau, to exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of war by the means they consider most effective, which naturally vary according to the sharpening of the class struggle and the sharpening of the general political situation.*

"*In case war should break out anyway, it is their duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.*"

The problem, is that the resolution has nothing to say about **how** the socialist parties were to intervene in the situation: they are merely to adopt "*the means they consider most effective*". This swept under the carpet three major issues.

The first of these was the question of the mass strike, which the left in the SPD had been trying to bring to the fore ever since 1905 against the determined and largely successful opposition of the opportunists in the Party and union leadership. The French socialists, and Jaurès in particular, were fervent supporters of the general strike as a means to prevent war, although by this they meant a strike organised by the unions on the syndicalist model rather than the mass upsurge of proletarian self-action that Luxemburg envisaged, in a movement which the Party should encourage but could in no way launch artificially. It was noteworthy that a joint attempt by the French Edouard Vaillant and the Scot Keir Hardie at the 1910 Copenhagen Congress, to get a resolution passed committing the International to general strike action in

24. Quoted in Joll, op cit., p102

25. Alexandre Millerand was an associate of Clémenceau and acted as an arbitrator in the 1892 Carmaux strike. He was elected to Parliament in 1885 as a radical socialist, and was to become the leader of Jaurès' Parti socialiste de France faction in Parliament. In 1899 he entered the Weldeck-Rousseau government which was supposed to defend the French republic against the threats of anti-Dreyfusard monarchists and militarists - though how real this threat was, was a matter of debate as Luxemburg pointed out. According to both Millerand and Jaurès, he entered the government on his own initiative and without consulting the party. The affair caused a huge scandal in the International, both because as a Minister in a bourgeois government he bore collective responsibility for the repression of workers' movements by the government, and because one of his fellow ministers was General Gallifet, who had led the massacre of the Paris Commune in 1871.

26. Jaurès, whatever his disagreements with the manner of Millerand's entry into the government, was honestly reformist and profoundly convinced of the necessity for the working class to use parliamentary methods to win reforms from the bourgeoisie.

27. This was not the case with others, like Briand and Viviani, who were to leave the party rather than face a future without the hope of a ministerial portfolio.

28. "Unser leitendes Zentralorgan", *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 22.9.1899, Rosa Luxemburg in Ges. Werke, Bd. 1/1, p. 558 (quoted in our article on the degeneration of the SPD).

23. Kautsky, *The road to power*, <http://marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/ch09.htm>.

the event of war, was voted down by the German delegation.

The second was the attitude the socialists in any particular country could be expected to take should that country be attacked: this was a critical question, since in imperialist war it is invariably the case that one belligerent appears as the “aggressor” and the other the “aggrieved”. The period of progressive national wars was still very recent, and national causes such as the independence of Poland or Ireland remained on the socialist agenda: Rosa Luxemburg’s SDKPiL²⁹ was very much a minority even on the left of the International, in opposing Polish independence. In the French tradition, the memory of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune was still active, and tended to identify revolution with the nation: hence Jaurès’ statement that “*revolution is necessarily active. And it can only be so if it defends the national existence which serves as its base*”.³⁰ For the Germans, the danger of Tsarist Russia as the “barbaric” crutch of Prussian autocracy was equally an article of faith, and in 1891 Bebel could write that “*The soil of Germany, the German fatherland belongs to us and the masses as much and more than to the others. If Russia, the champion of terror and barbarism, went to attack Germany... we are as much concerned as those who stand at the head of Germany*”.³¹

Finally, for all the threats of proletarian action against war, the leaders of the International (with the exception of the left) continued to believe in the diplomacy of the bourgeois classes to preserve peace. Hence while the Basel Manifesto of 1912 could declare: “*Let the governments remember that with the present condition of Europe and the mood of the working class, they cannot unleash a war without danger to themselves*”, yet at the same time it could “*consider the best means [to bridge the hostility between Britain and Germany] to be the conclusion of an accord between Germany and England concerning the limitation of naval armaments and the abolition of the right of naval booty*”. The working classes were called to agitate for peace, not to prepare themselves for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism which alone could guarantee that peace: “*The Congress therefore appeals to you, proletarians and Socialists of all countries, to make your voices heard in this decisive hour!... See to it that the governments are constantly kept aware of the vigilance and passionate will for peace on the part of the proletariat! To the capitalist world*

of exploitation and mass murder, oppose in this way the proletarian world of peace and fraternity of peoples!”

The unity of the International, on which any hope of united action against the threat of war depended, was thus founded on an illusion. The International, in reality was divided between a right wing and a left, the former ready and even eager to make common cause with the ruling class in defence of the nation, the latter preparing to answer war with the revolutionary overthrow of capital. During the 19th century, it was still possible for right and left to exist within the same workers’ movement, and participate in the organisation of the workers as a class aware of its own interests; as the “epoch of wars and revolutions” opened, this unity became an impossibility.

Jens, December 2014

29. Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.

30. Quoted in Joll, op cit., p115.

31. Quoted in Joll, op cit., p114.

2014 Extraordinary Conference of the ICC

News of our death is greatly exaggerated...

At the beginning of May the ICC convoked an Extraordinary International Conference. For some time a crisis had been developing within the ICC. It was judged necessary to call this Conference in addition to the regular International Congresses of the ICC, in view of the urgency of fully understanding the crisis, and developing the means to overcome it. Extraordinary Conferences have been convened before by the organisation in 1982 and 2002 according to the statutes of the organisation which allow for them when the fundamental principles of the ICC are called into question in a dangerous manner.¹

All the international sections of the ICC sent delegations to this third extraordinary Conference and participated very actively in the debates. The sections which were not able to come physically (because of the Schengen fortress around Europe) sent statements to the conference on the different reports and resolutions submitted for discussion.

Crises are not necessarily fatal

Contacts and sympathisers of our organisation may be alarmed by this news, just as the enemies of revolutionary organisation will receive a frisson of encouragement. Some of the latter have already assumed that this crisis is a harbinger of our demise. But this was also predicted in previous crises of our organisation. In the wake of the 1982 crisis - 32 years ago - we replied, as we do now, with the words of Mark Twain: news of our death is greatly exaggerated!

Crises are not necessarily a guarantee of impending collapse and failure. On the contrary, the existence of crises can be an expression of a healthy resistance to an underlying tendency towards failure that had hitherto been developing peacefully. And therefore crises can be the sign of reacting to danger and struggling against signs of collapse. A crisis is also an opportunity: to understand the root causes of serious difficulties that will enable the organisation to ultimately strengthen itself and temper

its militants for future battles.

In the Second International (1889-1914) the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was well known for undergoing a series of crises and splits, and for this reason was held in contempt by the leaders of the larger parties of the International like the German Social Democracy (SPD) who presented an appearance of going from success to success, steadily increasing their membership and electoral votes. However the crises of the Russian Party, and the struggle to overcome and learn from them by the Bolshevik wing, steeled the revolutionary minority in preparation for standing against the imperialist war in 1914 and for leading the October Revolution of 1917. By contrast the facade of unity of the SPD (challenged only by "trouble-makers" like Rosa Luxemburg) completely and irrevocably collapsed in 1914 with the complete betrayal of its internationalist principles in face of the First World War.

In 1982 the ICC recognised its own crisis - brought about by a growth of leftist and activist confusions that enabled Chenier² to create havoc in its British section - and drew the lessons of its setback to re-establish at a deeper level the principles of its function and functioning.³ The Bordigist Internationalist Communist Party (Com-

2. Chenier was a member of the section in France excluded in the summer of 1981 for having waged a secret campaign of denigration against the central organs of the organisation and certain of its most experienced militants with the aim of setting one against the other, activities which curiously enough recalled the work of GPU agents within the Trotskyist movement during the 1930s. A few months after his expulsion, Chenier took up a responsible post within the apparatus of the Socialist Party, then in government.

3. See *International Review* n° 29 "Report on the functioning of the revolutionary organisation". en.internationalism.org/specialtexts/IR029_function.htm [2], and IR33 "Report on the structure and functioning of the revolutionary organisation, en.internationalism.org/specialtexts/IR033_functioning.htm [3].

unist Programme) which was at that time the largest group of the communist left, was invaded even more seriously by similar tendencies, but this party seemed to carry on as normal - only to collapse like a house of cards with the loss of the majority of its members.⁴

In addition to the recognition of its own crises, the ICC thus also follows another principle learned from the Bolshevik experience: to make known the circumstances and details of its internal crisis in order to contribute to a more widespread clarification. We are convinced that the internal crises of the revolutionary organisation can bring into sharper relief general truths about the struggle for communism.

In the preface to *One step forward, two steps back*, in 1904, Lenin wrote:

"They [our adversaries] exult and grimace at the sight of our discussions; obviously, they will try, to serve their own purposes, to brandish my pamphlet devoted to the defects and weaknesses in our Party. The Russian social-democrats are sufficiently tempered in battle not to be troubled by such pinpricks, and to continue in spite of everything with their task of self-criticism, mercilessly unveiling their own weaknesses, which will be overcome necessarily and without fail by the growth of the workers' movement. Let our adversaries try to give us an image of the situation in their own 'parties' which comes close to that presented by the minutes of our 2nd Congress!"

We believe, like Lenin, that whatever superficial pleasure our enemies gain from learning about our problems, genuine revolutionaries will learn from our mistakes and emerge the stronger for it.

That is why we are publishing here, albeit briefly, an account of the evolution of this crisis in the ICC and the role that the Extraordinary Conference has played in responding to it.

The events of the present crisis of the ICC and the struggle against it

The epicentre of the present crisis of the

4. See *International Review* n° 32 "Convulsions in the revolutionary milieu", en.internationalism.org/node/3123 [4].

1. As at the time of the Extraordinary Conference of 2002 (see the article in *International Review* n° 110, "Extraordinary Conference of the ICC: the struggle for the defence of organisational principles", the one in 2014 partially replaced the regular congress of our section in France. So certain sessions were devoted to the extraordinary international conference and others to the congress of the section in France (see the article in *Révolution Internationale* n°450).

ICC was the existence in the section in France of a campaign of denigration, hidden from the organisation as a whole, of a comrade, who was demonised to such an extent that her very presence in the organisation was supposed to constitute a barrier to its development. Naturally the existence of such scapegoating - blaming a particular comrade for the problems of the whole organisation - is anathema in a communist minority which rejects the bullying that is endemic to capitalist society and flows from its morality of "everyman for himself" and "devil take the hindmost". The problems of the organisation are the responsibility of the whole organisation according to its ethic of "all for one, and one for all". The covert campaign of ostracism of one comrade put in question the very concept of communist solidarity that the ICC is founded on.

We could not be content to simply put a stop to this campaign once it had come into the open. We had to go to the roots and explain why and how such a blatant betrayal of a basic communist principle could develop once again in our ranks. The task of the Extraordinary Conference was to reach a common agreement on this explanation and the perspective for eradicating it in the future.

The organisation had already agreed to the maligned comrade's request for a Jury of Honour. One of the tasks of the Extraordinary Conference was to hear and pronounce on the final report of the Jury. It was not enough for everyone to agree that the comrade had been subjected to slanders and denigrations - it had to be proven wrong in facts. The allegations and denigrations had to be brought into the open in order to remove any ambiguity and prevent any recurrence of slanders in the future. After a year of work, the Jury of Honour (made up of comrades from four ICC sections) systematically refuted, as devoid of any foundation, all the accusations (and particularly certain shameful slanders developed by one militant).⁵ The Jury was able to show that this campaign of ostracism had, in reality, been based on the infiltration into the organisation of obscurantist prejudices spread by the circle spirit, and a certain "gossip culture", inherited from the past and from which certain militants had not really broken free.

5. Parallel to this campaign, in informal discussions in the section in France, certain militants of the "old" generation, spread some scandalous gossip about our comrade Marc Chirik, a founding member of the ICC and without whom our organisation would not have existed. This gossip was identified as an expression of the weight of the circle spirit and the influence of the decomposing petty bourgeoisie which profoundly marked the generation that came out of the student movement of May '68, with all its anarcho-modernist and leftist ideologies.

In devoting its resources to this Jury the organisation was following another lesson of the history of the revolutionary movement: that any militant who is the object of suspicions, of unfounded accusations or slanders has the duty to call for a Jury of Honour. To reject such an approach means implicitly recognising the validity of the accusations.

The Jury of Honour is also a means of "preserving the moral health of a revolutionary organisation", as Victor Serge insisted in his book *What every revolutionary should know about state repression*, since distrust among its members is a poison which can rapidly destroy a proletarian organisation.

This is a fact well known by the police who historically have tried to use this most favoured method to destroy revolutionary organisations from within. We saw this in the 1930s with the plots of the Stalinist GPU against the Left Opposition in France and elsewhere. Indeed singling out particular individuals for denigration and slander has been a principal weapon of the bourgeoisie as a whole in fomenting distrust of the revolutionary movement.

That's why revolutionary Marxists have traditionally devoted every effort to unmasking such attacks on communist organisations.

At the time of the Moscow Trials in the 1930s, the exiled Leon Trotsky demanded a Jury of Honour (known as the Dewey Commission) to clear his name of the repulsive slanders made against him by the prosecutor Vishinsky at the Moscow Trials.⁶ Marx broke off his writing of *Capital* for a year in 1860 in order to prepare an entire book systematically refuting the calumnies against him by "Herr Vogt".

Concurrently with the work of the Jury of Honour the organisation looked to the underlying roots of the crisis. After the crisis in the ICC in 2000-2 the ICC had already embarked on a long term theoretical effort to understand how a secret "fraction" could emerge within the organisation that behaved like thugs and informers: secretly circulating rumours that one of our militants was a state agent, stealing money and material from the organisation (notably the list of addresses of militants and subscribers), blackmail, death threats towards one of our militants, publication on the outside of internal information that deliberately did the work of the police etc. This ignoble "fraction" with its gangster

6. The ICC's Jury of Honour based itself on the scientific method of investigation and verification of the facts by the Dewey Commission. All of its work (documents, verbal proceedings, recordings of interviews and testimonies etc) is carefully conserved in the ICC's archives.

behaviour (recalling that of the Chenier tendency during the 1981 crisis) became known as the "Internal Fraction of the ICC" (IFICC).⁷

In the wake of this experience the ICC began to examine the problem of morality from a historical and theoretical perspective. In *International Review* n°s 111 and 112 we published the Orientation Text on "Confidence and solidarity in the proletarian struggle"⁸ and in *International Review* n°s 127 and 128 a text on "Marxism and Ethics"⁹ was published. Linked to these theoretical explorations there was also historical research into the phenomenon of "pogromism" - that complete antithesis of communist values that was displayed by the IFICC. It was on the basis of these earlier texts and theoretical work on aspects of communist morality that the organisation elaborated an understanding of its current crisis. Superficiality, slidings towards workerism and opportunism, a neglect of reflection and of theoretical discussions in favour of activist, left-type intervention in immediate struggles, impatience and the tendency to lose sight of our activity in the long term, facilitated this crisis within the ICC. This crisis was thus identified as an "intellectual and moral crisis" and was accompanied by a loss of sight, and transgressions of, the ICC's statutes.¹⁰

The fight to defend the moral principles of marxism

At the Extraordinary Conference we returned in further depth to a Marxist understanding of morality in the interests of preparing the theoretical core of our activity in the coming period. We will continue to discuss and explore this question as the main weapon of our regeneration from the current crisis. Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary organisation.

Contained within the communist project,

7. See in particular our articles "15th Congress of the ICC: Today the Stakes Are High—Strengthen the Organisation to Confront Them" ; http://en.internationalism.org/ir/114_congress.html; "The police-like methods of the 'IFICC'", http://en.internationalism.org/262_infraction.htm; "Calomnie et mouchardage, les deux mamelles de la politique de la FICCI envers le CCT" (http://fr.internationalism.org/icconline/2006_ficci).

8. en.internationalism.org/ir/111_OT_ConfSol_pt1 [7]; <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/200301/1893/orientation-text-2001-confidence-and-solidarity-proletarian-struggle>.

9. en.internationalism.org/ir/127/marxism-and-ethics [8]; <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/128/marxism-and-ethics-pt2>.

10. The central organ of the ICC, as well as the Jury of Honour, clearly showed that it was not the ostracised comrade who had not respected the statutes of the ICC but on the contrary the militants who had engaged in this campaign of denigration.

and inseparable from it, is an ethical dimension. And it is this dimension which is particularly menaced within a decomposing capitalist society that thrives on exploitation and violence, “oozing blood and filth from every pore” as Marx wrote in *Capital*. This threat is already particularly developed in capitalism’s decadent phase when the bourgeoisie progressively abandons even the moral tenets that it held in its expanding liberal period. The final episode of capitalist decadence - the period of social decomposition that begins approximately with the landmark of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 - accentuates this process still further. Today society is more and more openly, even proudly, barbaric. In every aspect of life we see it: the proliferation of wars whose main objective seems to be to humiliate and degrade its victims before slaughtering them; the widespread growth of gangsterism - and its celebration in film and music; the launching of pogroms to find a scapegoat for capitalism’s crimes and for social suffering; the rise of xenophobia towards immigrants and bullying at the workplace (“mobbing”); the development of violence towards women, sexual harassment and misogyny, including in schools and among the youth of city housing estates. Cynicism, lying and hypocrisy are no longer seen as reprehensible but are taught in “management” courses. The most elemental values of social existence - let alone those of communist society - have been desecrated as capitalism putrefies.

The members of revolutionary organisations cannot escape this environment of barbaric thought and behaviour. They are not immune to this deleterious atmosphere of social decomposition, particularly as the working class today remains relatively passive and disorientated and thus unable to offer an alternative *en masse* to the accelerating demise of capitalist society. Other classes in society close to the proletariat however provide an active vector of rotten values. The traditional impotence and frustration of the petit bourgeoisie - the intermediate strata between bourgeoisie and proletariat - becomes particularly exaggerated and finds an outlet in pogromism, in obscurantism and witch-hunts which provide a sense of cowardly empowerment to those hounding the “trouble-makers”.

It was particularly necessary to return to the problem of morality at the 2014 Extraordinary Conference because the explosive nature of the crisis of 2000-2002, the odious and clearly repulsive actions of the IFICC, the behaviour of certain of its members as nihilist adventurers, had tended to obscure the deeper underlying incomprehensions that had provided the soil for the pogromist mentality at the origin of the formation of

this so-called “fraction”.¹¹

Because of the dramatic nature of the IFICC scandal a decade ago, there had been a strong trend in the organisation in the intervening period to want to “return to normal” - to try find an illusory breathing space. There was a mood to avert attention away from a deep theoretical and historical treatment of organisational questions to more “practical” issues of intervention and to a smooth, but superficial, “building” of the organisation. Despite devoting a considerable effort to the work of theoretically overcoming its previous crisis, this was more and more seen as a side issue rather than a life or death question for the future of the revolutionary organisation.

The slow and difficult revival of class struggle in 2003 and the greater receptivity within the political milieu to discussion with the communist left tended to reinforce this weakness. Parts of the organisation began to “forget” the principles and acquisitions of the ICC, and develop a disdain for theory. The statutes of the organisation which encapsulate internationalist centralised principles tended to become ignored in favour of the habits of local and circle philistinism, of good old common sense and the “religion of daily life”, as Marx put it in volume one of *Capital*. Opportunism began to grow in an insidious manner.

However there was a resistance to this tendency to theoretical disinterest, political amnesia and sclerosis. One comrade in particular was outspoken in criticising this opportunist trend and as a consequence became increasingly seen as an obstacle to a “normal” machine-like functioning of the organisation. Instead of providing a coherent political answer to the comrade’s criticism, opportunism expressed itself by an underhand personal vilification. Other militants, notably in the ICC sections in France and Germany, who shared the comrade’s point of view against the opportunist deviations also became the “collateral damage” of this campaign of defamation.

Thus the Extraordinary Conference showed that today, as in the history of the workers’ movement, campaigns of denigration and opportunism go together. Indeed the former appears in the workers’

11. The resistance in our ranks to developing a debate on the question of morality had its origin in a congenital weakness of the ICC (and which actually affects all the groups of the communist left): the majority of the first generation of militants rejected this question which could not be integrated into our statutes, as our comrade Marc Chirik had hoped. Morality was seen by these young militants at the time as a prison, a “product of bourgeois ideology”, to the point where some of them, coming out of the libertarian milieu, demanded to live “without taboos”! Which reveals a gross ignorance of the history of the human species and the development of its civilisation.

movement as the extreme expression of the latter. Rosa Luxemburg, who, as spokeswoman of the Marxist left was unsparing in her denunciations of opportunism, was systematically persecuted and denigrated by the leaders of German Social Democracy. The degeneration of the Bolshevik Party and Third International was accompanied by the unending persecution of the Bolshevik old guard, and in particular of Leon Trotsky.

The organisation also thus had to reprise the classical concepts of organisational opportunism from the history of the Marxist left that includes the lessons of the ICC’s own experience.

The need to reject both opportunism, and its conciliatory expression as centrism, was to be the motto of the Extraordinary Conference: the crisis of the ICC demanded a protracted struggle against the identified roots of the problems, which took the form of certain tendency to treat the ICC as a cocoon, to turn the organisation into a “club” of opinions and to try to find a place inside decomposing bourgeois society. In fact the very nature of revolutionary militancy means a permanent fight against the weight of the dominant ideology and of all the ideologies alien to the proletariat which can insidiously infiltrate revolutionary organisations. It is this combat which has to be understood as the “norm” of the life of communist organisation and each of its members.

The struggle against superficial agreement, the courage to express and develop differences and the individual effort to speak one’s mind in front of the whole organisation, the strength to take political criticism - these were the qualities that the Extraordinary Conference insisted on. According to the Activities Resolution which was agreed at the Conference:

“5d) The revolutionary militant must be a fighter, for the class positions of the proletariat and for his own ideas. This is not an optional condition of militancy, it is militancy. Without it there can be no struggle for the truth which can only arise out of the clash of ideas and of each militant standing up for what he believes in. The organisation needs to know the positions of all comrades, passive agreement is useless and counter-productive... Taking individual responsibility, being honest is a fundamental aspect of proletarian morality.”

The present crisis is not the “final” crisis of the ICC

On the eve of the Extraordinary Conference the publication on the internet of an

“Appeal to the proletarian camp and the militants of the ICC”, announcing the “final crisis” of the ICC, strongly underlined the importance of this necessity to fight for the defence of the communist organisation and its principles, in particular against all those who try to destroy it. This particularly nauseating “Appeal” emanates from the so-called “International Group of the Communist Left”, in reality a disguise for the infamous former IFICC thanks to its marriage with elements from KLASBATALO in Montreal. It’s a text dripping with hatred and calls for a pogrom against certain of our comrades. This text announces grandly that the “IGCL” is in possession of internal documents of the ICC. Its intention is clear: to try to sabotage our Extraordinary Conference, to sow trouble and discord within the ICC by spreading suspicion in its ranks on the very eve of the Extraordinary Conference – sending out the message that “there is a traitor inside the ICC, an accomplice of the IGCL who is sending us the ICC’s internal bulletins”.¹²

The Extraordinary Conference immediately took position on the IGCL’s “Appeal”. To all our militants it was clear that the IFICC was once again, and in an even more pernicious manner, doing the work of the police in the manner so eloquently described in Victor Serge’s book *What every revolutionary should know about state repression* (written on the basis of the archives of the Czarist police discovered after the October revolution¹³).

But instead of turning the comrades of the ICC against each other, the unanimous disgust for the methods the “IGCL”, worthy of the political police of Stalin and of the Stasi, served to make plain the wider stakes of our internal crisis and tended to reinforce the unity of the militants behind the slogan of the workers’ movement: “All for one and one for all!” (Recalled in the book *The Nature of Human Brain Work* by Joseph Dietzgen, who Marx called “the philosopher of the proletariat”). This police-like attack by the IGCL made it clearer to all the militants that the internal weaknesses of the organisation, a lack of vigilance towards the permanent pressure of the dominant ideology within revolutionary organisations, had made it vulnerable to

the machinations of the class enemy whose destructive intent is unquestionable.

The Extraordinary Conference saluted the enormous and extremely serious work of the Jury of Honour. It also saluted the courage of the comrade who called for it and who had been ostracised for her political disagreements.¹⁴ Only cowards and those who know they are completely guilty would refuse to clarify things in front of such a commission, which is an inheritance of the workers’ movement. The cloud hanging over the organisation had been lifted. And it was timely: the need of every comrade to fight together was more imperative than ever.

The Extraordinary Conference could not complete the struggle of the ICC against this “intellectual and moral crisis” - this struggle is necessarily ongoing - but it did provide an unambiguous orientation: the opening of a theoretical debate on the “Theses on Morality” proposed by the central organ of the ICC. Obviously we will eventually publish the debates and divergences around this text when the discussion has reached a sufficient level of maturity.

Some of our readers may feel that the polarisation of the ICC around its internal crisis and on fighting against the police-like attacks aimed at us is the expression of a kind of narcissistic lunacy or of a collective paranoid delirium. The concern for the intransigent defence of our organisational, programmatic and ethical principles is, from this point of view, a diversion from the practical, common sense task of developing our influence in the immediate struggles of the working class. This point of view is essentially a repetition, although in a different context, of the arguments of the opportunists comparing the smooth functioning of German social democracy with that of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which was shaken by crises throughout the period leading up to the First World war. The approach which seeks to avoid differences, to reject the confrontation of political arguments in order to preserve “unity” at any price will sooner or later lead to the disappearance of organised revolutionary minorities.

14. This had also been the case at the beginning of the crisis of 2001: when this same comrade had expressed a political disagreement with a text written by the International Secretariat of the ICC (on the question of centralisation), the majority of the IS put up the shutters and instead of opening a debate to reply to the comrade’s political arguments, stifled this debate and embarked on a campaign of slander against this comrade (holding secret meetings and spreading rumours in the sections in France and Mexico that this comrade, because of her political disagreements with members of the central organ of the ICC, was a “shit-stirrer” and even a “cop”, to cite the two members of the ex-IFICC, Juan and Jonas, who were at the origin of the formation of the IGCL).

12. See “Communiqué to our readers: the ICC under attack by a new agency of the bourgeois state”, en.internationalism.org/icconline/201405/9742/communiqué-our-readers-icc-under-attack-new-agency-bourgeois-state.

13. As if to confirm the class nature of the attack, a certain Pierre Hempel published on his blog further internal documents of the ICC that the ex-IFICC had given to him. He volunteered the comment that “if the police had passed such a document to me, I would have thanked them in the name of the proletariat!” This Holy Alliance of the enemies of the ICC, to a large extent made up of a “Friendly Society of ICC Veterans”, know which camp they belong to!

The defence of fundamental communist principles, however distant this may seem from the current needs and consciousness of the working class, is nonetheless the primordial task of revolutionary minorities. Our determination to wage a permanent combat for the defence of communist morality – which is at the heart of the principle of solidarity – is key to preserving our organisation from the miasma of capitalism’s social decomposition which inevitably seeps through into all revolutionary organisations. Only by politically arming ourselves, by strengthening our work of theoretical elaboration, will we be able to face up to this deadly danger. Furthermore, without the implacable defence of the ethics of the class which is the bearer of communism, the possibility that the developing class struggle will lead to the revolution and the construction of a real world community will be continually smothered.

One thing became clear at the 2014 Extraordinary Conference: there would be no “return to normal” whether in the internal or external activities of the ICC.

Contrary to what happened in the crisis of 2001, we can already rejoice in the fact that comrades who had got drawn into a logic of irrational stigmatisation and scapegoating were able to see the gravity of what they had been involved in. These militants have freely decided to remain loyal to the ICC and its principles and are now engaged in our combat for consolidating the organisation. As with the rest of the ICC, they are now taking part in the work of theoretical reflection and deepening which had been largely underestimated in the past. By appropriating Spinoza’s formula “neither laugh nor cry but understand”, the ICC is trying to return to a key idea of marxism: that the proletariat’s struggle for communism not only has an “economic” dimension (as the vulgar materialists imagine) but also and fundamentally an “intellectual and moral” dimension (as Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in particular argued).

We must therefore regretfully inform our detractors that within the ICC there is no immediate perspective of a new parasitic split as was the case with previous crises. There is no perspective for the formation of a new “fraction” susceptible to joining up with the IGCL’s “Appeal” for a pogrom against our own comrades - an appeal frenetically relayed by various “social networks” and the so-called “Pierre Hempel” who takes himself for a representative of the “universal proletariat”. On the contrary: the police-like methods of the IGCL

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Communism is on the agenda of history

The war in Spain exposes anarchism's fatal flaws. Part 2: Dissidents in the anarchist movement

The first part of this article looked at the process which led to the integration of the official anarcho-sindicalist organisation, the CNT, into the bourgeois Republican state in Spain in 1936-37, and sought to link these betrayals to the underlying programmatic and theoretical weaknesses of the anarchist world-view. Certainly these capitulations did not go unopposed by proletarian currents inside and outside the CNT. The Libertarian Youth, a left tendency in the POUM around Rebull,¹ the Bolshevik Leninist (Trotskyist) group around Munis, the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri who edited *Guerra di Classe*, and in particular the Friends of

Durruti, animated by Jaime Balius and others.² To a greater or lesser extent all these groups were made up of working class militants who fought in the heroic struggles of July '36 and May '37, and without ever reaching the clarity of the Italian communist left, which we highlighted in the first part, opposed the official CNT/POUM policy of participation in the bourgeois state and the strike breaking role of the CNT and the POUM during the May days.

The Friends of Durruti

The Friends of Durruti were perhaps the most important of all these tendencies. They greatly outweighed the other groups numerically, and were able to carry out a significant intervention in the May days, distributing the famous leaflet which defined their programmatic positions:

“CNT-FAI ‘Friends of Durruti’ group. Workers! A revolutionary Junta. Shoot the culprits. Disarm the armed corps. Socialise the economy. Disband the political parties which have turned on the working class. We must not surrender the streets. The revolution before all else. We salute our comrades from the POUM who fraternised with us on the streets. Long live the social revolution! Down with the counter-revolution!”

This leaflet was a shorter version of the outline list of demands which the Friends had published in the form of a wall poster in April 1937:

“From the Group of the Friends of Durruti. To the working class:

- 1) *The immediate constitution of a Revolutionary Junta formed of workers from the city and the countryside and combatants.*
- 2) *The family wage. Rationing card. Direc-*

tion of the economy and control over distribution by the trade unions.

- 3) *Liquidation of the counterrevolution.*
- 4) *Creation of a revolutionary army.*
- 5) *Absolute control of public order by the working class.*
- 6) *Firm opposition to any armistice.*
- 7) *A proletarian justice system.*
- 8) *Abolition of prisoner exchanges.*

Attention, workers: our group is opposed to the advancing counterrevolution. The decrees on public order, sponsored by Aiguadé, will not be implemented. We demand that Maroto and the other imprisoned comrades be released.

All power to the working class. All economic power to the trade unions. Against the Generalitat, the Revolutionary Junta.”

The other groups, including the Trotskyists, tended to look to the Friends of Durruti as a potential vanguard: Munis was even optimistic that they would evolve towards Trotskyism. But perhaps the most significant aspect of the Friends was that, despite emerging from inside the CNT, they recognised the inability of the CNT to develop a revolutionary theory and thus the revolutionary programme which they considered was demanded by the situation in Spain. Agustin Guillamon draws our attention to a passage in the pamphlet *Towards a Fresh Revolution*, published in January 1938, where the author, Balius, writes:

“The CNT was utterly devoid of revolutionary theory. We did not have a concrete programme. We had no idea of where we were going. We had lyricism aplenty: but when all is said and done, we did not know what to do with our masses of workers

or how to give substance to the popular effusion which erupted inside our organisations. By not knowing what to do, we handed the revolution on a platter to the bourgeoisie and the Marxists who support the farce of yesteryear. What is worse, we allowed the bourgeoisie a breathing space: to return, to re-form and to behave as would a conqueror.”³

As pointed out in our article “The Friends of Durruti: lessons of an incomplete break with anarchism” in *IR* n° 102, the CNT did in fact have a theory of sorts at this stage – a theory justifying participation in the bourgeois state, above all in the name of anti-fascism. But the Friends were correct in the more general sense that the proletariat cannot make the revolution without a clear and conscious understanding of the direction in which it is heading, and it is the specific task of the revolutionary minority to develop and elaborate such an understanding, based on the experience of the class as a whole.

In this quest for programmatic clarity, the Friends were obliged to question some fundamental assumptions of anarchism: its rejection of the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat and for a revolutionary vanguard to fight within the working class for its implementation. The advance made by the Friends at this level is clearly recognised by Guillamon, particularly in his analysis of the articles Balius wrote from exile,

“After a reading of these two articles, it has to be acknowledged that the evolution of Balius’s political thinking, rooted in analysis of the wealth of experience garnered during the civil war, had led him

1. See *International Review* n° 104, “Historical document: Josep Rebull of the POUM, On the 1937 May Days in Barcelona” <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/200101/10395/1937-may-days-barcelona>.

2. The definitive work on this group, and one written from a clearly proletarian standpoint, is by Agustin Guillamon *The Friends of Durruti Group 1937-39* (AK Press, 1996), which we shall refer to throughout this part of the article. See also the ICC article http://en.internationalism.org/ir/102_durruti.htm.

3. Guillamon, *The Friends of Durruti Group*, p 78.

to confront issues taboo in the anarchist ideology: 1) the need for the proletariat to take power. 2) the ineluctability of the destruction of the capitalist state apparatus to clear the way for a proletarian replacement. 3) the indispensable role of a revolutionary leadership."⁴

Aside from Badius's reflections, the notion of a revolutionary leadership was more implicit in the practical activity of the group than explicitly formulated, and was not really compatible with the Friends' definition of itself as an "affinity group", which at best implies a temporary formation limited to specific ends, rather than a permanent political organisation based on a definite set of programmatic and organisational principles. But the group's recognition of the need for an organ of proletarian power is more explicit. It is contained in the idea of the "revolutionary junta", which the Friends admitted was a kind of innovation for anarchism, "we are introducing a slight variation in anarchism into our programme. The establishment of a Revolutionary Junta."⁵ Munis, in an interview with the French Trotskyist paper *Lutte Ouvrière*, equates the junta with the idea of the soviet and has no doubt that "This circle of revolutionary workers (the Friends of Durruti) represented a beginning of anarchism's evolving in the direction of Marxism. They had been driven to replace the theory of libertarian communism with that of the 'revolutionary junta' (soviet) as the embodiment of proletarian power, democratically elected by the workers".⁶

In his book Guillamon recognises this convergence between the "innovations" of the Friends and the classic positions of marxism, although he is at pains to refute any idea that the Friends were directly influenced by the marxist groups that they were in contact with, such as the Bolshevik-Leninists. Certainly the group itself, as we can see from the passage in the Badius pamphlet above, would have angrily repudiated the charge that they were heading in the direction of marxism, which they were barely able to distinguish from its counter-revolutionary caricatures. But if marxism is indeed the revolutionary theory of the proletariat, it is not surprising that revolutionary proletarians, reflecting on the lessons of the class struggle, should be drawn towards its fundamental conclusions. The question of the specific influence in such a process of this or that political group is not unimportant, but it is a secondary element.

4. *Friends*, p 92.

5. *Towards a fresh revolution*, cited in *Friends*, p 84.

6. *Lutte Ouvrière* February 24 and March 3, 1939, quoted in *Friends*, p 98.

An incomplete break with anarchism

Nevertheless, despite these advances, the Friends never succeeded in making a profound break with anarchism.

The Friends remained powerfully attached to anarcho-syndicalist traditions and ideas. To be eligible to join the group, you had to also be member of the CNT. As can be seen from the April wall poster and other documents, they still considered that workers' power could be expressed not only through a "revolutionary junta" or through the workers' committees created in the course of the struggle, but simultaneously through union control of the economy and through "free municipalities"⁷— formulae which reveal a continuity with the Zaragoza programme whose severe limitations we examined in the first part of this article. Thus the programme elaborated by the Friends had not succeeded in basing itself on the real experience of the revolutionary movements of 1905 and 1917-23, where in practice the working class had gone beyond the union form, and where the Spartacists, for example, had called for the dissolution of all existing organs of local government in favour of the workers' councils. It is significant in this respect that in the columns of the group's paper, *El Amigo del Pueblo*, which tried to draw the lessons of the events of 36-37, a major historical series was written on the experience of the French bourgeois revolution, not the proletarian revolutions in Russia or Germany.

The Friends certainly saw the "revolutionary junta" as the means for the proletariat to take power in 1937, but was Munis right that the "revolutionary junta" was equivalent to the soviet? There is an area of ambiguity here, no doubt precisely because of the Friends' apparent incapacity to connect with the experience of the workers' councils outside Spain. For example, it is not clear how they saw the junta as being formed. Did they see it as the direct emanation of general assemblies in the factories and the militias, or was it to be the product of the most determined workers on their own? In an article in n° 6 of *El Amigo*, they "advocate that the only participants in the revolutionary Junta should be the workers of city and countryside and the combatants who have shown themselves at every crucial juncture in the conflict to be the champions of social revolution."⁸ Guillamon is in no doubt about the implication of this: "The evolution of the Friends of Durruti's political thinking was by now unstoppable. After the necessity of a dictatorship of the proletariat had been

7. Cf *Friends*, p64.

8. Cited in *Friends*, p 68.

acknowledged, the next issue to arise was: And who is to exercise that dictatorship of the proletariat? The answer was: the revolutionary Junta, promptly defined as the vanguard of revolutionaries. And its role? We cannot believe that it be anything other than the one which Marxists ascribe to the revolutionary party."⁹ But from our point of view, one of the fundamental lessons of the revolutionary movements of 1917-23, and the Russian revolution in particular, was that the revolutionary party cannot exercise its role if it identifies itself with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Here Guillamon seems to theorise the Friends' own ambiguities on this question; we shall return to this shortly.

In any case, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the junta was a kind of expedient, rather than the "finally discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat" as marxists like Lenin and Trotsky had viewed the soviets. In *Towards a fresh revolution*, for example, Badius argues that the CNT itself should have taken power "When an organisation's whole existence has been spent preaching revolution, it has an obligation to act whenever a favourable set of circumstances arises. And in July the occasion did present itself. The CNT ought to have leapt into the driver's seat in the country, delivering a severe coup de grace to all that is outmoded and archaic. In this way, we would have won the war and saved the revolution"¹⁰ Apart from severely underestimating the deep process of degeneration that had been gnawing away at the CNT well before 1936,¹¹ this again reveals an inability to assimilate the lessons of the whole 1917-23 revolutionary wave, which had made it clear why the soviets, and not syndicalist unions, were the indispensable form of the proletarian dictatorship.

The Friends' attachment to the CNT also had major implications at the organisational level. In their manifesto of 8th May, the role played by the CNT's upper echelons in undermining the May 1937 uprising was characterised without hesitation as *treason*; those it denounced as traitors had already attacked the Friends as *agents provocateurs*, echoing the habitual slanders of the Stalinists, and threatened their immediate expulsion from the CNT. This fierce antagonism was without doubt a reflection of the class divide between the political camp of the proletariat and

9. *Ibid*.

10. Cited in *Friends*, p79.

11. See our articles on the history of the CNT from the broader series on anarcho-syndicalism: <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/128/cnt-rev-syndicalism>; <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/130/CNT-1919-1923>; <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/131/CNT-1921-31>, <http://en.internationalism.org/book/export/html/2381>

forces that had become an agency of the bourgeois state. But faced with the necessity to make a decisive break with the CNT, the Friends drew back and agreed to drop the charge of treason in exchange for the lifting of the call for expulsion, a move which undoubtedly undermined the capacity of the Friends to continue functioning as an independent group. The sentimental attachment to the CNT was simply too strong for a large part of the militants, even if many – and not only members of the Friends or other dissident groups – had torn up their membership cards on being ordered to dismantle the barricades and return to work in May '37. This attachment was summed up in the decision of Joaquín Aubi and Rosa Muñoz to resign from the group under threat of expulsion from the CNT: *"I continue to regard the comrades belonging to the 'Friends of Durruti' as comrades: but I say again what I have always said at plenums in Barcelona: 'The CNT has been my womb and the CNT will be my tomb.'"*¹²

The "national" limitations of the Friends' vision

In the first part of this article, we showed that the CNT programme was stuck in a narrowly national framework, one which saw "libertarian communism" as being possible in the context of a single self-sufficient country. The Friends certainly had a strong internationalist attitude at an almost instinctive level – for example, in their appeal to the international working class to come to the aid of the insurgent workers in May '37 – but this attitude was not informed theoretically either by a serious analysis of the balance of class forces on a global and historical scale, or in a capacity to develop a programme on the basis of the international experience of the working class, as we have already noted in discussing the imprecision of their notion of the "revolutionary junta". Guillamon is particularly scathing in his criticisms of this weakness as revealed in a chapter of Balias's pamphlet:

*"The next chapter in the pamphlet tackles the subject of Spain's independence. The entire chapter is replete with wrong-headed notions which are short-sighted or better suited to the petit bourgeoisie. A cheap and vacuous nationalism is championed with limp, simplistic references to international politics. So we shall pass over this chapter, saying only that the Friends of Durruti subscribed to bourgeois, simplistic and/or backward-looking ideas with regard to nationalism"*¹³

The influences of nationalism were particularly crucial in the Friends' incapacity to understand the real nature of the war in Spain. As we wrote in our article in *IR* n° 102:

"In fact the Friends of Durruti's considerations on the war were made on the basis of anarchism's narrow and ahistorical nationalist thinking. This led them to a vision of the events in Spain as the continuation of the bourgeoisie's ludicrous revolutionary efforts against the Napoleonic invasion of 1808. Whilst the international workers' movement was debating the defeat of the world proletariat and the perspective of a Second World War, the Anarchists in Spain thought about Fernando VII and Napoleon:

*'What is happening today is a re-enactment of what happened in the reign of Ferdinand VII. Once again in Vienna there has been a conference of fascist dictators for the purpose of organising their invasion of Spain. And today the workers in arms have taken up the mantle of El Empecinado. Germany and Italy need raw materials. They need iron, copper, lead and mercury. But these Spanish mineral deposits are the preserves of France and England. Yet even though Spain faces subjection, England does not protest. On the contrary - in a vile manoeuvre, she tries to negotiate with Franco... It is up to the working class to ensure Spain's independence. Native capitalism will not do it, since international capital crosses all frontiers. This is Spain's current predicament. It is up to us workers to root out the foreign capitalists. Patriotism does not enter into it. It is a matter of class interests' (from *Towards a fresh revolution*).*

As we can see, it takes a clever piece of work to turn an imperialist war into a patriotic war, a 'class' war. This is an expression of Anarchism's political disarming of such sincere worker militants as the Friends of Durruti. These comrades who wanted to struggle against the war and for the revolution, were incapable of finding the point of departure for an effective struggle. This would have meant calling on the workers and peasants, enlisted in both gangs - the Republic and the Franquistas - to desert, to turn their guns on the officers who oppressed them and to return to the rear and struggle through strikes and demonstrations, on a class terrain, against the whole of capitalism."

And this takes us to the most crucial question of all: the Friends' position on the nature of the war in Spain. Here there is no doubt that the group's name signified more than a sentimental reference to

Durruti,¹⁴ whose bravery and sincerity was much admired by the Spanish proletariat. Durruti was a militant of the working class but he was completely unable to make a thorough critique of what had happened to the Spanish workers after the July '36 uprising – of how the ideology of anti-fascism and the transfer of the struggle from the social front to the military fronts was already a decisive step which dragged the workers into an imperialist conflict. Durruti, along with many sincere anarchists, was a *"jusqu'au boutiste"*¹⁵ when it came to the war, arguing that the war and the revolution, far from being in contradiction with each other, could reinforce each other as long as the struggle on the fronts was combined with the "social" transformations in the rear, which Durruti identified with the establishment of libertarian communism. But as *Bilan* insisted, in the context of a military war between capitalist blocs, the self-managed industrial and agricultural enterprises could only function as a means of further mobilising the workers for the war. This was a "war communism" that was feeding an imperialist war.

The Friends never challenged this idea that the war and the revolution had to be fought simultaneously. Like Durruti, they called for the total mobilisation of the population for the war, even when they analysed that the war was being lost.¹⁶

Guillamon's position on the war and his criticisms of *Bilan*

For Guillamon, summing up, the events in

14. Buenaventura Durruti was born in 1896, the son of a railworker. From the age of 17 he was involved in militant workers' struggles – first on the railways, then in the mines, and later in the massive class movements that swept through Spain during the post-war revolutionary wave. He joined the CNT around this time. During the reflux of the post-war wave, Durruti was involved in the "pistolero" battles against hired guns of the state and employers, and carried out at least one high-profile assassination. Exiled to South America and Europe during most of the 20s, he was under sentence of death in several countries. In 1931, following the fall of the monarchy, he returned to Spain and became a member of the FAI and of the Nosotros group, both of which were formed with the intention of combating the increasingly reformist tendencies in the CNT. In July 1936, in Barcelona, he took a very active part in the workers' response to the Franco coup, and then formed the Iron Column, a specifically anarchist militia which went to fight at the front against the Francoists, while at the same time initiating or supporting the agrarian collectivisations. In November 1936 he went to Madrid with a large contingent of militiamen to try to relieve the besieged city, but was killed by a stray bullet. 500,000 people attended his funeral. For these and many more Spanish workers, Durruti was a symbol of courage and dedication to the cause of the proletariat. A short biographical sketch of Durruti can be found here: <http://www.libcom.org/library/buenaventura-durruti-peter-newell>.

15. A term coined during the First World War to describe those who insisted that the war must be fought "to the bitter end".

16. Cf *Friends*, p71.

12. Quoted in the preface to *Friends*, p vii.

13. *Friends*, p82.

Spain were “*the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory.*”¹⁷ We can only add that despite the heroism of the Friends and their laudable efforts to develop a revolutionary theory, the anarchist soil on which they attempted to grow this flower proved inhospitable.

But Guillamon himself was not free from ambiguities about the war in Spain and this is evident in his criticisms of the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left that published *Bilan*.

On the central question of the war, Guillamon's position, as summarised in his book, seems clear enough:

“1. Without destruction of the State, there is no revolution. The Central Antifascist Militias Committee of Catalonia (CAMC) was not an organ of dual power, but an agency for military mobilization of the workers, for sacred union with the bourgeoisie, in short, an agency of class collaboration.

2. Arming of the people is meaningless. The nature of military warfare is determined by the nature of the class directing it. An army fighting in defense of a bourgeois State, even should it be antifascist, is an army in the service of capitalism.

3. War between a fascist State and an antifascist State is not a revolutionary class war. The proletariat's intervention on one side is an indication that it has already been defeated. Insuperable technical and professional inferiority on the part of the popular or militia-based army was implicit in military struggle on a military front.

4. War on the military fronts implied abandonment of the class terrain. Abandonment of the class struggle signified defeat for the revolutionary process.

5. In the Spain of August 1936, revolution was no more and there was scope only for war: A non-revolutionary military war.

6. The collectivizations and socializations in the economy count for nothing when State power is in the hands of the bourgeoisie.”¹⁸

This looks very much like a reprise of the positions defended by the communist left. But Guillamon actually rejects some of the most important positions of *Bilan*, as we can see from another document, “Theses on the Spanish civil war and the revolutionary situation created on July 1936” published in 2001 by the group Balances.¹⁹ Despite his acknowledgment

that there were brilliant aspects of *Bilan's* analysis of the events in Spain, he makes some fundamental criticisms both of this analysis and the political conclusions drawn from it:

1) *Bilan* failed to recognise that there was a “revolutionary situation” in July ‘36. “On the one hand, *Bilan* acknowledges the class character of the struggles of July and May, but on the other hand not only denies their revolutionary character, but even denies the existence of a revolutionary situation. This viewpoint can only be explained by the distance of an absolutely isolated Parisian group, which placed a higher priority on its analyses than on the study of the Spanish reality. There is not even one word in *Bilan* about the real nature of the committees, or on the struggle of the Barcelona proletariat for socialization and against collectivization, or on the debates and confrontations within the Militia Columns concerning the militarization of the Militias, or a serious critique of the positions of The Friends of Durruti Group, for the simple reason that they are practically totally unaware of the existence and the significance of all these matters. It was easy to justify this ignorance by denying the existence of a revolutionary situation. *Bilan's* analysis fails because in its view the absence of a revolutionary (Bordigist) party necessarily implies the absence of a revolutionary situation.”

2) *Bilan's* analysis of the May events is incoherent: “The incoherence of *Bilan* is made evident by its analysis of the May Days of 1937. It turns out that the ‘revolution’ of July 19th, which one week later ceased to be a revolution, because its class goals had been turned into war goals, now reappears like the Phoenix of history, like a ghost that had been hiding in some unknown location. And now it turns out that in May 1937 the workers were once again ‘revolutionary’, and defended the revolution from the barricades. Was it not the case, however, that, according to *Bilan*, a revolution had not taken place? Here, *Bilan* gets all tangled up. On July 19 (according to *Bilan*) there was a revolution, but one week later, there was no longer a revolution, because there was no (Bordigist) party; in May 1937 there was another revolutionary week. But how do we characterize the situation between July 26th 1936 and May 3rd, 1937? We are not told anything about this. The revolution is considered to be an intermittent river [“Guadiana”: a river in Spain that runs on the surface, then underground, then reappears on the surface— libcom Translator's note]

that emerges onto the historical stage when *Bilan* wants to explain certain events that it neither understands, nor is capable of explaining”.

3) *Bilan's* position on the party and its idea that it's the party, not the class that makes the revolution, is based on a “Leninist, totalitarian and substitutionist concept of the party.”

4) *Bilan's* practical conclusions about the war were “reactionary”: “According to *Bilan* the proletariat was immersed in an antifascist war, that is, it was enrolled in an imperialist war between a democratic bourgeoisie and a fascist bourgeoisie. In this situation, the only appropriate positions were desertion and boycott, or to wait for better times, when the (Bordigist) party would enter the stage of history from the wings where it had been biding its time” Thus: denying the existence of a revolutionary situation in ‘36 led *Bilan* to “reactionary political positions such as breaking up the military fronts, fraternization with the Francoist troops, cutting off weapons to the republican troops.”

To respond in depth to Guillamon's criticisms of the Italian Fraction would take a separate article but we want to make a few remarks in reply:

– It's not true that *Bilan* were totally unaware of the real class movement in Spain. It is true that they didn't appear to know about the Friends, but they were in touch with Camillo Berneri, so despite their stringent criticisms of anarchism they were quite capable of recognising that a proletarian resistance could still emerge within its ranks. More important, they were able, as Guillamon accepts, to see the class character of the July and May events and it's simply false to claim that they said not one word about the committees that emerged from the July uprising: in part one of this article we cited an extract from their text “Lessons of the events in Spain” in *Bilan* n° 36 which mentions these committees, sees them as proletarian organs but then also recognises the rapid process of recuperation via the “collectivisations”. *Bilan* do imply in that same article that power was within the workers' grasp and that the next step was the destruction of the capitalist state. But they had a historic and international framework which enabled them to have a clearer view of the overall context which determined the tragic isolation of the Spanish proletariat - one of triumphant counter-revolution and a course towards world imperialist war, for which the Spanish conflict was a dress rehearsal. This is something which Guillamon hardly deals with,

17. *Friends*, p108.

18. *Ibid*, p 10.

19. <https://libcom.org/library/theses-spanish-civil-war-revolutionary-situation-created-july-19-1936-balance-agust%C3%ADn-gu>.

just as it was more or less absent from the analyses of the Spanish anarchists at the time;

- the May events confirmed *Bilan's* analysis rather than showing its confusions. The class struggle, like class consciousness itself, is indeed rather like a river that can go underground only to resurface: the most important example being the revolutionary events of 1917-18, which followed a terrible defeat of the class on the ideological level in 1914. The fact that the initial proletarian impetus of July 1936 was stymied and diverted did not mean that the fighting spirit and class consciousness of the Spanish proletariat had been utterly smashed, and they re-appeared in a last rearguard action against the unending attacks on the class, imposed above all by the republican bourgeoisie; but this reaction was crushed by the combined forces of the capitalist class from the Stalinists to the CNT, and this was a blow from which the Spanish proletariat did not recover;
- it is an example of lazy thinking, surprising in a historian normally as rigorous as Guillamon, to dismiss *Bilan's* view of the party as “Leninist and substitutionist”. Guillamon implies that *Bilan* had the view that the party is a *deus ex machina*, which waits in the wings till the time is ripe. This could be said about today's Bordigists who claim to be The Party, but Guillamon totally ignores *Bilan's* conception of the *fraction*, which is based on the recognition that the party cannot exist in a situation of counter-revolution and defeat precisely because the party is the product of the class and not the other way round. It's true that the Italian left had not yet broken with the substitutionist idea of the party that takes power and exercises the proletarian dictatorship – but we have already shown that Guillamon himself is not entirely free of this conception, and *Bilan* were beginning to provide a framework that would make it possible to break with the whole notion.²⁰ In Spain '36 they explained the absence of the party as a product of the world-wide defeat of the working class, and although they did not discount the possibility of revolutionary upsurges, they saw that the cards were stacked against the proletariat. And as Guillamon himself acknowledges, a revolution which does not give birth to a revolutionary party cannot succeed. Thus, *Bilan's* position was not, as was

so often falsely asserted, the idealist “there is no revolution in Spain because there is no party”, but the materialist “there is no party because there is no revolution”;

- Guillamon's own incoherence is shown most clearly in his rejection of *Bilan's* “revolutionary defeatist” position on the war. Guillamon accepts that the war was very rapidly transformed into a non-revolutionary war, and that this was in no way altered by the existence of armed militias, collectivisations, etc. But this idea of a “non-revolutionary war” is ambiguous: Guillamon seems reluctant to accept that this was an **imperialist** war and that the class struggle could only revive by returning to the *class terrain* of the defence of the material interests of the proletariat, against the labour discipline and sacrifices imposed by the war. This would have certainly undermined the military fronts and sabotaged the republican army – precisely the reason for the savage repression of the May events. And yet when push comes to shove Guillamon argues that the classic proletarian methods of struggle against imperialist war – strikes, mutinies, desertions, fraternisations, strikes in the rear – were reactionary, even though this is a “non-revolutionary war”. This is at best a centrist position which aligns Guillamon with all those who fell for the siren calls of participation in the war, from the Trotskyists to the anarchists and sections of the communist left itself.

As for *Bilan's* isolation, they recognised that this was a product not of geography but of the dark times they were going through, when all about them were betraying the principles of internationalism. As they wrote in an article entitled precisely “The isolation of our Fraction faced with the events in Spain” in *Bilan* n° 36, October-November 1936.

“Our isolation is not fortuitous. It is the consequence of a profound victory by world capitalism which has managed to infect with gangrene even those groups of the communist left whose spokesman up until now was Trotsky. We do not claim that at the present moment we are the only group whose positions have been confirmed by every turn of events, but what we do claim categorically is that, good or bad, our positions have been based on a permanent affirmation of the necessity for the autonomous class activity of the proletariat. And it is on this question that we have seen the bankruptcy of all Trotskyist and semi-Trotskyist groups”.

It was the strength of the Italian marxist tradition that it was able to give to give

rise to a fraction as clear sighted as *Bilan*. It was a severe weakness of the Spanish workers' movement, characterised by the historical predominance of anarchism over marxism, that no such fraction was able to emerge in Spain.

Beneri and his successors

In the manifesto produced in response to the crushing of the workers' revolt in May 1937 in Barcelona, the Italian and Belgian Fractions of the Communist Left paid homage to the memory of Camillo Berneri,²¹ whose murder at the hands of the Stalinist police was part of the general repression doled out by the republican state to all those, workers and revolutionaries, who had played an active part in the May Days and who, either by words or by action, came out in opposition to the CNT-FAI policy of collaboration with the capitalist state.

This is what the Left Fractions wrote in *Bilan* n° 41, June 1937:

“The proletariat of the whole world salutes Berneri as one of its own, and his martyrdom for the ideal of anarchism is yet another protest against a political school which has met its downfall during these events in Spain. It was under the direction of a government in which the anarchists participated that the police have done to the body of Berneri what Mussolini did to the body of Matteotti!”

In another article in the same issue, “Antonio Gramsci – Camillo Berneri”, *Bilan* noted that these two militants, who had died with a few weeks of each other, had given their lives to the cause of the proletariat despite the serious weaknesses of their ideological standpoints.

“Berneri, a leader of the anarchists? No, because even after his murder, the CNT and the FAI are mobilising the workers around

21. Camillo Berneri was born in northern Italy in 1897, son of a civil servant and a school teacher. Berneri himself worked for a while as a teacher and at a teacher training college. He joined the Italian Socialist Party during his teenage years, and during the 1914-18 war, along with Bordiga and others, took an internationalist position against the party's centrist wavering and against the outright treason of the likes of Mussolini. But by the end of the war he had become an anarchist and was close to the ideas of Errico Malatesta. Driven into exile by the fascist regime, he remained a target of the machinations of the fascist secret police, the OVRA. It was during this period that he wrote a number of contributions on the psychology of Mussolini, on anti-Semitism and the regime in the USSR. On hearing of the workers' uprising in Barcelona, he went to Spain and fought on the Aragon front. Returning to Barcelona, he was a consistent critic of the opportunist and openly bourgeois tendencies in the CNT, writing for *Guerra di Classe* and making contact with the Friends of Durruti. As recounted in this article, he was assassinated by Stalinist killers during the 1937 May Days. See the short biographical sketch here: <http://www.libcom.org/history/berneri-luigi-camillo-1897-1937>.

20. In particular, their insistence that the party could not become entangled with the transitional state, a mistake which they saw as having proved fatal for the Bolsheviks in Russia. See an earlier article in this series: <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/127/vercesi-period-of-transition>.

the danger that they will be kicked out of the government which is dripping with Berneri's blood. The latter thought that he could count on the school of anarchism to contribute to the task of the social redemption of the oppressed, and it was a ministry made up of anarchists which launched the attack on the exploited of Barcelona!

"The lives of Gramsci and Berneri belong to the proletariat which will be inspired by their example to continue its struggle. And the communist victory will enable the masses to honour the two of them with all due dignity, because it will also enable them to better understand the errors to which they were victims and which certainly added, along with the action of the enemy class itself, the torment of seeing events tragically contradicting their convictions, their ideologies."

The article ends by saying that more would be written on these two figures of the workers' movement in the next issue of *Bilan*. There is indeed a specific article devoted to Gramsci in that issue (*Bilan* n° 42, July-August 1937), which though of considerable interest is outside the focus of this essay. Berneri himself was mentioned in the editorial to the issue, "The repression in Spain and in Russia", which examines the tactics the police had used to assassinate Berneri and his comrade Barbieri.

"We know how Berneri was murdered. Two policemen presented themselves at his house. 'We are friends' they said. Why had they come? They had come to check on where two rifles were kept. They came back, to make a simple requisition, and they took the two weapons away. They came back a last time and it was for the final blow. Now they were sure that Berneri and his comrade were disarmed, that they had no possibility of defending themselves, they arrested them on the basis of a legal order drawn up by the authority of a government of which Berneri's political friends, the representatives of the CNT and the FAI, are a part. The wives of Berneri and Barbieri were then informed that the bodies of their two comrades were in the morgue.

"We know, finally, that in the streets of Madrid and Barcelona, this is standard practice from now on. Armed squads, controlled by the centrists, are wandering the streets killing workers suspected of subversive ideas.

"And all this without the edifice of socialisations, militias, trade union control of production, being wiped out by a new reorganisation of the capitalist state."

In fact there are to this day different accounts of the murder: Augustin Souchy's contemporary account, "The tragic week in May", originally published in *Spain and*

the World and republished in *The May Days Barcelona 1937* (Freedom Press, 1998) is very similar to *Bilan*'s; on the other hand the short biography on libcom written by Toni²² has it that he was gunned down in the street after going to the offices of Radio Barcelona to speak about the death of Gramsci; and there are other variations in descriptions of the details. But the key issue, as *Bilan* said, was that in the general repression that followed the defeat of the May revolt it was now standard practice to proceed to the physical elimination of troublesome elements like Berneri who had the courage to criticise the social democratic/Stalinist/anarchist government, and the counter-revolutionary foreign policy of the USSR. The Stalinists, who had a tight grip over the police apparatus, were in the vanguard of these assassinations. Despite the continuing use of the term, "centrists" to describe the Stalinists, *Bilan* clearly saw them for what they were: violent enemies of the working class, cops and assassins with whom no collaboration was possible. This was in marked contrast to the Trotskyists who continued to define the CPs as workers' parties with whom a united front was still desirable, and the USSR as a regime that should still be defended against imperialist attack.

What was the common ground between Berneri and *Bilan*?

If some of the facts about Berneri's murder are still rather hazy, we are even less clear about the relationship between the Italian Fraction and Berneri. Our book on the Italian left informs us that, following the departure of the minority of *Bilan* to fight in the militias of the POUM, the majority sent a delegation to Barcelona to try to find elements with whom a fruitful debate might be possible. Discussions with elements in the POUM proved fruitless, and "only a discussion with the anarchist teacher Camillo Berneri had any positive results" (p 98). But the book isn't precise about what these positive results were.

At first sight, there is not an obvious reason why *Bilan* and Berneri should find common ground.

If for example we look at one of his better known texts, the open letter written to Frederica Montseny after she had become a minister in the Madrid government, dated April 1937,²³ we don't find a lot to distinguish Berneri's position from that of many other "left" antifascists of the

day. Underlying his approach – which is more a dialogue with an erring comrade than a denunciation of a traitor – is the conviction that there is indeed a revolution in progress in Spain, that there was no contradiction between deepening the revolution and prosecuting the war till victory, provided that revolutionary methods were used – but such methods did not preclude calling on the government to take more radical action, such as immediately granting political autonomy to Morocco to weaken the grip of the Francoist forces over their North African recruits. Certainly the article is very critical of the decision of the CNT-FAI leaders to enter the government, but there is much in this article to support Guillamon's contention that "*The Friends of Durruti's criticism was even more radical than that of Berneri, because Berneri was critical of CNT participation in the Government, whereas the Group was critical of the CNT's collaboration with the capitalist state.*"²⁴ So why was the Italian Fraction able to hold positive discussions with him? We suspect that it was because Berneri was, like the Italian left, committed first and foremost to proletarian internationalism and a global outlook, whereas, as Guillamon himself has noted, a group like the Friends of Durruti still showed signs of bearing the heavy baggage of Spanish patriotism. Certainly Berneri had taken a very clear position during the First World War: when he has still a member of the Socialist Party, he had worked closely with Bordiga in expelling the "interventionists" from the Socialist paper *L'Avanguardia*.²⁵ His article on the imperialist rivalries behind the conflict, "Burgos and Moscow",²⁶ published in *Guerra di Classe* n° 6, 16th December 1936, despite leaning towards calls for intervention by France in defence of its national interests,²⁷ is at the same time rather clear about the anti-revolutionary and imperialist designs of all the big powers, fascist, democratic and "Soviet", towards the conflict in Spain. Souchy in fact argues that it was in particular this denunciation of the USSR's imperialist role in the situation which signed Berneri's death warrant.

In our text "Marxism and Ethics", we wrote: "*Characteristic of moral progress is the enlarging of the radius of application of social virtues and impulses, until*

24. *Friends*, p 82.

25. "Interventionists" refers to those who were in favour of Italy joining the First World War on the side of the Entente.

26. Also known as "Between the war and the revolution", <https://libcom.org/history/between-war-revolution>.

27. This dangerous position is even more explicit in other articles: eg "Non-intervention and international involvement in the Spanish civil war", <http://struggle.ws/berneri/international.html>, an article first published in *Guerra di Classe*, 7, July 18 1937.

22. <https://libcom.org/history/berneri-luigi-camillo-1897-1937>.

23. *Guerra di Classe* n°. 12, 14th April 1937. Reprinted here: <https://libcom.org/history/anarchists-government-spain-open-letter-comrade-federica-montseny>.

the whole of humanity is encompassed. By far the highest expression of human solidarity, of the ethical progress of society to date, is proletarian internationalism. This principle is the indispensable means of the liberation of the working class, laying the basis for the future human community.”²⁸

Behind the internationalism that united Bilan and Berneri, there lies a profound commitment to proletarian morality – the defence of fundamental principles no matter what the cost: isolation, ridicule, and physical threat. As Berneri put it in the last letter he wrote to his daughter Marie-Louise:

“One can lose one’s illusions about everything and about everyone, but not about what one affirms with one’s moral conscience.”²⁹

Beneri’s stand against the “circumstantialism” adopted by so many in the anarchist movement of the day – “principles are well and good, but in these particular circumstances we have to be more realistic and practical” – would certainly have struck a chord among the comrades of the Italian left, whose refusal to abandon principles in face of the euphoria of anti-fascist unity, of the opportunist immediatism that swept through almost the entire proletarian political movement at that time, had obliged them to furrow a very lonely path indeed.

Vernon Richards and the Lessons of the Spanish Revolution

As we have noted elsewhere,³⁰ Camillo Berneri’s daughter Marie-Louise Berneri, and her partner, the Anglo-Italian anarchist Vernon Richards, were among the few elements within the anarchist movement, in Britain or internationally, who carried on an internationalist activity during the Second World War, through their publication *War Commentary*. The paper “strongly denounced the pretence that the war was an ideological struggle between democracy and fascism, and the hypocrisy of the democratic allies’ denunciations of Nazi atrocities after their tacit support for the fascist regimes and for Stalin’s terror during the 1930s. Highlighting the hidden nature of the war as a power struggle between British, German and American imperialist interests, *War Commentary* also denounced the use of fascist methods by the ‘liberating’ allies and their totalitarian measures against the working class at

home.”³¹ Marie Louise and Richards were arrested at the end of the war on the charge of fomenting insubordination among the armed forces; although Marie-Louise did not stand trial on the basis that spouses cannot be considered to be conspiring together, Richards went to prison for nine months. Marie-Louise gave birth to a still-born child and died not long afterwards in April 1949 as a result of a viral infection contracted during childbirth, a tragic loss for Richards and the proletarian movement.

Richards also published a very influential book, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, based on articles published in *Spain and the World* during the 1930s. This book, first published in 1953 and dedicated to Camillo and Marie-Louise, is quite unflinching in its exposure of the opportunism and degeneration of “official” anarchism in Spain. In his introduction to the first English edition, Richards tells us that some in the anarchist movement had “suggested to me that this study provides ammunition for the political enemies of anarchism”, to which Richards responds: “Apart from the fact that the cause of anarchism surely cannot be harmed by an attempt to establish the truth, the basis of my criticism is not that anarchist ideas were proved unworkable by the Spanish experience, but that the Spanish anarchists and syndicalists failed to put their theories to the test, adopting instead the tactics of the enemy. I fail to see, therefore, how believers in the enemy, i.e. government and political parties, can use this criticism against anarchism without it rebounding on themselves.”³²

During the Second World War, large parts of the anarchist movement had succumbed to the seductions of anti-fascism and the Resistance. This was particularly true of important elements in the Spanish movement, who have bequeathed to history the image of armoured cars festooned with CNT-FAI banners leading the “Liberation” parade into Paris in 1944. In his book Richards attacks the “combination of political opportunism and naivety” which resulted in CNT-FAI leaders adopting the view “that every effort should be made to prolong the war at any cost until the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Britain, which everyone knew to be inevitable sooner or later. Just as some hoped for victory as a result of the international conflagration, so many Spanish revolutionaries gave their support to World War II because they believed that a victory of the ‘democracies’ (including Russia!) would result in Spain’s automatic liberation from the Franco-fas-

cist tyranny.”³³

And again, this loyalty to internationalism is integrally linked to a powerful ethical stance, expressed both at the intellectual level and in Richard’s obvious indignation at the repellent behaviour and hypocritical self-justifications of the official representatives of Spanish anarchism.

In a response to the arguments of the anarchist minister Juan Peiro, Richards puts his finger on the mentality of “circumstantialism”: “every compromise, every deviation, it was explained, was not a ‘rectification’ of the ‘sacred principles’ of the CNT, but simply actions determined by the ‘circumstances’ and that once these were resolved there would be a return to principles.”³⁴ Elsewhere, he denounces the CNT leadership for being “prepared to abandon principles for tactics”, and for their capitulation to the ideology of “the end justifies the means”: “The fact of the matter is that for the revolutionaries as well as for the Government all means were justified to achieve the ends of mobilising the whole country on a war footing. And in those circumstances the assumption is that everybody would support the ‘cause’. Those who do not are made to; those who resist are hounded, humiliated, punished or liquidated.”³⁵

In this particular example, Richards was talking about the CNT’s capitulation to traditional bourgeois methods for the disciplining of prisoners, but the same anger is lucidly expressed at the political betrayals of the CNT in a whole series of areas. Some of these are evident and well-known:

- The rapid abandonment of the traditional critique of collaboration with government and political parties in favour of anti-fascist unity. Most famously this included the acceptance of ministerial posts in the central government and the infamous ideological justification of this step by the anarchist ministers, who claimed that it signified that the state was ceasing to be an instrument of oppression. But Richards also castigates anarchist participation in other state organs such as the regional government of Catalonia and the National Defence Council - which Camillo Berneri had himself recognised as part of the government apparatus, despite its “revolutionary” label, rejecting an invitation to serve on it.
- CNT participation in the capitalist normalisation of all the institutions that had emerged out of the workers’ uprising

28. <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/127/marxism-and-ethics>.

29. http://struggle.ws/berneri/last_letter.html.

30. http://en.internationalism.org/wr/270_rev_against_war_03.html; see also our book *The British Communist Left*, p101

31. http://en.internationalism.org/wr/270_rev_against_war_03.html.

32. *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, 1995 edition by Freedom Press, p.14.

33. *Lessons*, p. 153-4.

34. *Lessons* p. 179-80.

35. *Lessons* p. 213.

in July 1936: the incorporation of the militias into a regular bourgeois army, and the institution of state control of the enterprises, even though masked by the syndicalist fiction that the workers were now masters in their own house. His analysis of the Extended National Economic Plenum of January 1938 (chapter XVII) shows how totally the CNT had adopted the methods of capitalist management, with its obsession with increasing productivity and punishing idlers. But the rot had certainly set in much earlier than that, as Richards shows by exposing what it meant for the CNT to sign the “Unity of Action” pact with the Socialist UGT union and the Stalinist PSUC – acceptance of militarisation, of nationalisation of the enterprises with a thin veneer of “workers control”, and so on.³⁶

- The CNT’s role in sabotaging the May Days of 1937. Richards analysed these events as a spontaneous and potentially revolutionary rising by the working class, and as the concrete expression of a growing divide between the rank and file of the CNT and its bureaucratic apparatus, which used all its capacities for manoeuvring and outright deceit to disarm the workers and get them back to work.

But some of Richards’ most revealing exposés are of the manner in which the CNT’s political and organisational degeneration necessarily involved a growing moral corruption, above all of those most in the forefront of this process. He shows how this was expressed both in the statements of the anarchist leaders and in the CNT press. Three expressions of this corruption in particular aroused his fury:

- A speech by Federica Montseny to a mass meeting on August 31st, 1936, which says of Franco and his followers that they were “*this enemy lacking dignity or a conscience, without a feeling of being Spaniards, because if they were Spaniards, if they were patriots, they would not have let loose on Spain the Regulars and the Moors to impose the civilisation of the fascists, not as a Christian civilisation, but as a Moorish civilisation, people we went to colonise*”

36. Richards’ concern for the truth also means that the book is far from being an apology for the anarchist collectives, which for some were proof that the “Spanish revolution” far outstripped the Russian in terms of its social content. What Richards really shows is that while decision-making by assemblies and experiments in money-less distribution lasted longer in the countryside, above all in more or less self-sufficient areas, any challenge to the norms of capitalist management were very quickly eliminated in the factories, which were more immediately dominated by the needs of war production. A union-managed form of state capitalism very soon re-imposed discipline over the industrial proletariat.

*for them now come and colonise us, with religious principles and political ideas which they wish to impose on the minds of the Spanish people.”*³⁷ Richards comments acidly: “*Thus spoke a Spanish revolutionary, one of the most intelligent and gifted members of the organisation (and still treated as one of the outstanding figures by the majority section of the CNT in France). In that one sentence are expressed nationalist, racist and imperialist sentiments. Did anyone protest at the meeting?*”

- The cult of leadership: Richards cites articles in the anarchist press which, almost from the beginning of the war, aim to create a semi-religious aura around figures like Garcia Oliver: “*the lengths to which the sycophants went is displayed in a report published in Solidaridad Obrera (August 29th, 1936) on the occasion of Oliver’s departure to the front. He is variously described as ‘our dear comrade’, ‘the outstanding militant’, ‘the courageous comrade’, ‘our most beloved comrade’*”, and so on and so forth. Richards adds further examples of this sycophancy and ends with the comment: “*It goes without saying that an organisation which encourages the cult of the leader, cannot also cultivate a sense of responsibility among its members which is absolutely fundamental to the integrity of a libertarian organisation.*”³⁸ Note that both Montseny’s speech and the canonisation of Oliver come from the period before they became government ministers.
- The militarisation of the CNT: “*Once committed to the idea of militarisation, the CNT-FAI threw themselves wholeheartedly into the task of demonstrating to everybody that their rank and filers were the most disciplined, the most courageous members of the armed forces. The Confederal Press published innumerable photographs of its military leaders (in their officers’ uniforms), interviewed them, wrote glowing tributes on their elevation to the exalted ranks of colonel or major. And as the military situation worsened so the tone of the Confederal Press became more aggressive and militaristic. Solidaridad Obrera published daily lists of men who had been condemned by the military Tribunals in Barcelona and shot for ‘fascist activities’, ‘defeatism’ or ‘desertion’. One reads of a man sentenced to death for helping conscripts to escape over the frontier...”* Richards then quotes an item in *Solidaridad Obrera* of 21st April 1938 about another man executed for leaving his post, “*to set a greater example. The*

37. *Lessons*, p. 211.

38. *Lessons*, p. 181.

*soldiers of the garrison were present and filed past the body cheering the Republic”, and he concludes: “this campaign of discipline and obedience through fear and terror... did not prevent large-scale desertions from the fronts (though not often to Franco’s lines) and a falling output in the factories.”*³⁹

Anarchist ideology and proletarian principle

These examples of Richards’ outrage at the total betrayal of class principles by the CNT are an example of the proletarian morality which is an indispensable foundation to any form of revolutionary militancy. But we also know that anarchism tends to distort this morality with ahistorical abstractions, and this lack of method underlines some of the key weaknesses in the book.

This can be illustrated by Richards’ approach to the union question. Behind the question of the unions there is an “invariant” element of principle: the necessity for the proletariat to equip itself with forms of association to defend itself from the exploitation and oppression of capital. Anarchism historically has usually accepted that trade unions (or industrial unions of the IWW type, or anarcho-syndicalist organisations) are one such form of association while maintaining an opposition to all political parties. But because it rejects the materialist analysis of history, it cannot understand that these forms of association can change profoundly in different historical epochs. Hence the position of the marxist left that with capitalism’s entry into its epoch of decadence, the trade unions and the old mass parties lose their proletarian content and are integrated into the bourgeois state. The growth of anarcho-syndicalism at the beginning of the 20th century was a partial response to this process of degeneration in the old unions and parties, but it lacked the theoretical tools to really explain the process, and therefore got trapped into new versions of the old unionism: the tragic fate of the CNT in Spain was proof that in the new epoch, it would not be possible to maintain permanent mass organisations which retained their proletarian, let alone their overtly revolutionary, character. Influenced by Errico Malatesta⁴⁰ (as was

39. *Lessons* p 161. Marc Chirik, a founding member of the Gauche Communiste de France and of the ICC, was part of the delegation of the majority of the Fraction that went to Barcelona. In later years he talked about the extreme difficulty of the discussions with most of the anarchists and felt that some of them would be quite capable of shooting him and his comrades for questioning the validity of the anti-fascist war. This attitude was a clear reflection of the calls in the CNT press for the shooting of deserters.

40. See for example “Syndicalism and anarchism”, 1925: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/malatesta/1925/04/syndic1.htm>.

Berner), Richards⁴¹ was aware of some of the limitations of the anarcho-syndicalist idea: the contradiction involved in constructing an organisation which both proclaims itself to be for the defence of the workers' day-to-day interests, and is thus open to all workers, and which at the same time is committed to the social revolution, a goal which at any given time inside capitalist society will only be espoused by a minority of the class. This would inevitably foster tendencies towards bureaucratism and reformism, both of which exploded to the surface in the events of '36-'39 in Spain. But this view doesn't go far enough in explaining the process whereby all permanent mass organisations, which had been possible in the past as expressions of the proletariat, are now directly incorporated into the state. Thus Richards, despite some intuitions that the treason of the CNT was not simply a matter of the "leaders", is unable to recognise that the apparatus of the CNT itself had, at the culmination of a long process of degeneration, become part of the capitalist state. This inability to understand the qualitative transformation of trade unions is also seen in his view about the Socialist union federation, the UGT: for him, while collaboration with the political parties and the government was a betrayal of principle, he was positively in favour of a united front with the UGT, which in reality could only have been a more radical version of the Popular Front.

The key weakness in the book, however, is the one shared by overwhelming majority of the dissident anarchists and oppositional groups of the day: that there had actually been a proletarian revolution in Spain, that the working class had indeed come to power, or had at least established a dual power situation which lasted well beyond the initial days of the July uprising. For Richards, the organ of dual power was the Central Committee of the Anti-fascist Militias, even though he was aware that the CCAM later on became an agent of militarisation. In fact, as we noted, following *Bilan*, in the previous article, the CCAM was crucial to preserving capitalist rule almost from day one of the uprising. From this fundamental error, Richards is unable to break from the notion, which we have already noted in the positions of the Friends of Durruti, that the war in Spain was in essence a revolutionary war which could have simultaneously beaten back Franco on the military front and established the bases for a new society, instead of seeing that the military fronts and the general mobilisation for war were in themselves a negation of the class struggle. Although Richards makes some very lucid criticisms of the concrete manner in

which the mobilisation for war led to the forced militarisation of the working class, the crushing of its autonomous initiative, and the intensification of its exploitation, he remains ambiguous about questions like the necessity to increase the pace and hours of work in the factories in order to ensure the production of arms for the front. Lacking a global and historical view of the conditions of the class struggle in this period, which was one of defeat for the working class and preparation for a new imperialist re-division of the world, he does not grasp the nature of the war in Spain as an imperialist conflict, a general rehearsal for the coming world holocaust. His insistence that the "revolution" made a key error in not using Spain's gold reserves to buy weapons from abroad shows (as did Berneri's more or less open call for intervention by the democracies) a deep underestimation of the degree to which the very rapid shift from the terrain of class struggle to the military terrain also flung the conflict into the world-wide inter-imperialist cauldron.

For *Bilan*, Spain 1936 was to anarchism what 1914 was to social democracy: a historical act of treason which marked a change in the class nature of those who had betrayed. It did not mean that all the various expressions of anarchism had passed to the other side of the barricade, but—as with the survivors of the shipwreck of social democracy — it did call for a process of ruthless self-examination, of profound theoretical reflection precisely on the part of those who had remained loyal to class principles. On the whole, the best tendencies within anarchism have not gone far enough in this self-critique, and certainly not as far as the communist left in analysing the successive failures of social democracy, the Russian revolution, and the Communist International. The majority — and this was certainly the case with the Friends of Durruti, the Berneris and Richards — have tried to preserve the core of anarchism when it is precisely this core which reflects the petty-bourgeois origins of anarchism and its resistance to the coherence and clarity of the "Marx party" (in other words, the authentically marxist tradition). Rejection of the historical materialist method prevented them from developing a clear perspective in the period of capitalism's ascendancy, and then from understanding the changes in the life of the enemy class and of the proletarian struggle in the epoch of capitalist decay. And it still prevents them from reaching an adequate theory of the capitalist mode of production itself — its motor forces and its trajectory towards crisis and collapse. Perhaps most crucially of all, anarchism is unable to develop a materialist theory of

the state — its origins, nature, and historical modifications — and of the organisational means the proletariat needs to overthrow it: the workers' councils and the revolutionary party. In the final analysis, anarchist ideology is an obstacle to the task of elaborating the political, economic and social content of the communist revolution.

CDW

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(sponsored by a "critical" tendency inside a bourgeois reformist party, the NPA¹⁵) have only succeeded in strengthening the indignation of the militants of the ICC and their determination to fight for the strengthening of the organisation. The news of our death is thus both exaggerated and premature....

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15. We should point out that to this day the IGCL has given no explanation for its relations and convergence with this tendency, which works inside the New Anti-Capitalist party, NPA, of Olivier Besancenot. Silence means assent!

41. See for example *Lessons*, p. 196.

From the birth of capitalism to the eve of the Second World War

After West Africa,¹ we begin a second series on the history of the African workers' movement with a contribution on the class struggles in South Africa. A country famous mainly for two reasons: on the one hand, its mineral wealth (gold, diamonds, etc.) due to which it is relatively well developed; and on the other, its monstrous apartheid system, the aftermath of which we still see today. At the same time, apartheid gave birth to a huge "icon", namely Nelson Mandela, considered its principal victim but above all the product of this system of another age, who with his titles of "hero of the anti-apartheid struggle" and man of "peace and reconciliation of the peoples of South Africa" was revered throughout the capitalist world. Mandela's media image

veils everything else to the point where the history and struggles of the South African working class before and during apartheid are either completely ignored or distorted by being systematically categorised under the rubric of "anti-apartheid struggles" or "national liberation struggles". Of course, for bourgeois propaganda, all struggles can be incarnated in Mandela, even though it is public knowledge that since coming to power, Mandela and his party, the African National Congress (ANC), have not exactly been kind to the strikes of the working class.²

The main purpose of this contribution is to restore the historical truth about the struggles between the two fundamental classes, namely the bourgeoisie (for whom apartheid was only one means of domination) and the proletariat of South Africa that, for most of the time, was left to struggle for its own demands as an exploited class, from the epoch of the Dutch-British colonial bourgeoisie and then under the Mandela/ANC regime. In other words, a South African proletariat whose struggle fits perfectly with that of the world proletariat.

A brief survey of the history of South Africa

According to some historical sources, this area was originally occupied by the Xhosa, Tswana and Sotho people who settled there between 500 and 1000AD. In this regard, the historian Henri Wesseling tells us the following:

"South Africa was not a virgin land when European ships landed for the first time in 1500 at the foot of Table Mountain. It was populated by different ethnic groups, mostly nomads. Dutch settlers divided them into Hottentots and Bushmen. They regarded them as two totally distinct peoples from a physical and cultural point of view. Bush-

*men were smaller than the Hottentots and they spoke a different language. Moreover, they were more 'primitive', practising hunting and gathering, while the Hottentots had reached the level of pastoral peoples. This traditional dichotomy has long dominated the historiography. Today, we no longer use these terms, but those of Khoikhoi or Khoi for Hottentots and San for the Bushmen, the term Khoisan serving to designate the ethnic group they form together. In fact, currently, one emphasises less the distinction between these people, mainly because they are both very different from neighbouring ethnic groups speaking Bantu languages and formerly known as Kaffirs, from the Arabic kafir (infidel). This term has equally fallen into disuse."*³

It can be noted how the Dutch settlers considered themselves the first inhabitants of this region, as colonial ideology established rankings between "primitive" and "advanced". Furthermore the author indicates that the term South Africa is a (recent) political concept and that many of its populations are historically from neighbouring countries in southern Africa.

As far as European colonisation is concerned, the Portuguese were the first to set foot in South Africa in 1488 followed by the Dutch who landed in the area in 1648. The latter decided to settle there permanently from 1652, marking the beginning of the permanent "white" presence in South Africa. In 1795, Cape Town was occupied by the British, who 10 years later took possession of Natal, while the Boers (Dutch) led the Transvaal

and Orange Free State in winning recognition of their independence from Britain in 1854. As for the various African states or groups, through prolonged warfare they resisted the presence of European settlers on their soil before finally being defeated by the dominant powers. At the end of the wars against the Afrikaners and the Zulus, the British proceeded in 1920 to unify South Africa under the name "Union of South Africa", which it remained until 1961 when the Afrikaner regime decided to simultaneously leave the Commonwealth and change the name of the country.

Apartheid was officially established in 1948 and abolished in 1990. We will return to this later in more detail.

Concerning imperialist rivalries, South Africa played the role of "delegated policeman" for the Western imperialist bloc in southern Africa, and it was in this role that Pretoria intervened militarily in 1975 in Angola which was supported by the Eastern imperialist bloc with Cuban troops.

South Africa is considered today as an "emerging" member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and is looking to make its entry into the arena of the great powers.

Since 1994, South Africa has been governed principally by the ANC, the party of Nelson Mandela, in company with the Communist Party and the COSATU trade union federation.

The South African working class emerged at the end of the 19th century and constitutes today the largest and most experienced industrial proletariat on the

1. See the series "Contribution to a history of the workers' movement in Africa", on Senegal in particular, in *International Review* n°s.145, 146, 147, 148 and 149.

2. In August 2012, the police of the ANC government massacred 34 strikers at the Marikana mines.

3. See Henri Wesseling, *Le partage de l'Afrique*, Editions Denoel, 1996, for the French translation.

African continent.

Finally, we think it useful to explain two related but nevertheless distinct terms, that we will use often in this contribution, namely the terms “Boer” and “Afrikaner”, which have Dutch roots.

Those called Boers (or Boertrekkers) were originally Dutch farmers (predominantly small peasants) who in 1835-1837 undertook a vast migration in South Africa due to the abolition of slavery by the British in the Cape Colony in 1834. The term is still used today for descendants, direct or not, of these farmers (including factory workers).

Concerning the definition of the term Afrikaner, we refer to the explanation given by the historian Henri Wesseling: “*The white population that settled in the Cape was of different origins. It consisted of Dutch, but also many Germans and French Huguenots. This community gradually adopted a different way of life. One could even say that a national identity was formed, that of the Afrikaners, who considered the British government as a foreign authority.*”⁴

We can therefore say that the term refers to a kind of identity claimed by a number of European migrants of the time, a notion that is still used in recent publications.

Birth of South African capitalism

The birth of capitalism in each region of the world like South Africa has been marked by specific or local characteristics. Nevertheless it developed in general in three different phases, as by described by Rosa Luxemburg:

“*[In its development] we must distinguish three phases: the struggle of capital against natural economy, the struggle against commodity economy, and the competitive struggle of capital on the international stage for the remaining conditions of accumulation.*”

“*The existence and development of capitalism requires an environment of non-capitalist forms of production, but not every one of these forms will serve its ends. Capitalism needs non-capitalist social strata as a market for its surplus value, as a source of supply for its means of production and as a reservoir of labour power for its wage system.*”

In South Africa, capitalism followed these three phases. In the 19th Century there was a natural economy, a market economy and a workforce sufficient to develop wage labour.

“*In the Cape Colony and the Boer Re-*

publics, pure peasant economy prevailed until the sixties of the last century. For a long time the Boers had led the life of animal-tending nomads; they had killed off or driven out the Hottentots and Kaffirs with a will in order to deprive them of their most valuable pastures. In the eighteenth century they were given invaluable assistance by the plague, imported by ships of the East India Company, which frequently did away with entire Hottentot tribes whose lands then fell to the Dutch immigrants. [...] Boer economy in general and on the whole remained patriarchal and based on natural economy until the sixties. But their patriarchal attitude did not deter the Boers from extreme brutality and harshness. It is well known that Livingstone complained much more about the Boers than about the Kaffirs. [...] In fact, peasant economy and great capitalist colonial policy were here competing for the Hottentots and Kaffirs, that is to say for their land and their labour power. Both competitors had precisely the same aim: to subject, expel or destroy the coloured peoples, to appropriate their land and press them into service by the abolition of their social organisations. Only their methods of exploitation were fundamentally different. While the Boers stood for out-dated slavery on a petty scale, on which their patriarchal peasant economy was founded, the British bourgeoisie represented modern large-scale capitalist exploitation of the land and the natives.”⁵

We should note the fierceness of the struggle engaged in by Boers and the British for conquest and the establishment of capitalism in this zone which emerged, as elsewhere, “mired in blood and filth”. In the end it was British imperialism that dominated the situation and concretised the advent of capitalism in South Africa, as related in her own way by the researcher Brigitte Lachartre:

“*British imperialism, when it manifested itself in the south of the continent in 1875, had other aims: citizens of the leading economic power of the time, representatives of the most developed mercantile and capitalist society in Europe, the British imposed on their colony in southern Africa a much more liberal native policy than that of the Boers. Slavery was abolished in the areas they controlled, while the Dutch settlers fled into the interior of the country to escape the new social order and the administration of the British settlers. After defeating the Africans by arms (a dozen ‘Kaffir’ wars in a century), the British devoted themselves to ‘liberating’ the labour force: the*

defeated tribes were regrouped in tribal reserves whose limits were more and more restricted; Africans were prevented from leaving without authorisation and their pass in order. But the true face of British colonisation appeared with the discovery of diamonds and gold in 1870. A new era began which brought about a profound transformation of all social and economic structures of the country: mining led to industrialisation, urbanisation, disruption of traditional African societies, but also of the Boer communities, immigration of new waves of Europeans...”⁶

Clearly, this statement can be read as a concrete continuation of the process described by Rosa Luxemburg, by which capitalism emerged in South Africa. In its struggle against the “natural economy”, British economic power had to break the old tribal societies and violently get rid of the old forms of production such as slavery, incarnated by the Boers who were forced to flee to escape the modern capitalist order. This was at the root of the wars between the proponents of the old and the new economic order by which the country passed so rapidly to modern capitalism, thanks to the discovery of diamonds (1871) and gold (1886). The “gold rush” translated itself into a lightning acceleration of industrialisation of the country as a result of the exploitation and commercialisation of precious materials, which hugely attracted capitalist investors from the developed countries. It was therefore necessary to recruit engineers and skilled workers, and in this way thousands of Europeans, Americans and Australians came to settle in South Africa. And the City of Johannesburg came to symbolise this emerging dynamism by its rapid development. On 17th July 1896, a census showed that the city had had 3,000 inhabitants in 1887 and 100,000 ten years later. A little over ten years later the white population had grown from 600,000 to over a million. In the same period the gross domestic product (GDP) rose from £150,000 to nearly £4 million. This is how South Africa became the first and only African country to be relatively developed on an industrial scale – something which was not slow to whet the appetites of rival economic powers:

“*The economic and political centre of South Africa was no longer in the Cape, but in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Germany, Europe’s biggest economic power, was established in South West Africa and had expressed an interest in South East Africa. If the Transvaal showed itself unwilling to submit to the authority of London, the future of England would be challenged in*

5. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, Section 3, Chapter 27, “The Struggle Against Natural Economy”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/ch27.htm>.

6. Brigitte Lachartre, *Luttes ouvrières et libération en Afrique du Sud*, Editions Syros, 1977.

4. Ibid.

the whole of South Africa.”⁷

At this time you can see that behind the economic issues lurked imperialist issues between the major European powers vying for control of this region. Moreover, British power did everything to limit the presence of its German rival to the west of South Africa, which is today called Namibia (colonised in 1883), after neutralising Portugal, the other imperialist presence with far more limited means. The British Empire could therefore boast that it was the sole master in command of the booming South African economy.

But the economic development of South Africa, powered by mineral discoveries, very quickly ran into a series of problems which in the first place were social and ideological:

“Economic development, stimulated by the discovery of minerals, will soon face the white settlers with a profound contradiction [...]. On the one hand the introduction of the new economic order required the creation of a waged labour force; on the other, the release of the African workforce from the reserves and out of their traditional subsistence economy put in jeopardy the racial balance of the whole territory. At the end of the last century (the 19th), the African populations were therefore subject to a multitude of laws with often contradictory effects. Some aimed to make them migrate to areas of white economic activities to submit to wage labour. Others tended to keep them partly on the reserves. Among the laws intended to make manpower available, there were some which penalised vagrancy in order to ‘tear the natives away from this idleness and laziness, teach them the dignity of work, and to contribute to the prosperity of the state.’ There were others to submit Africans to taxation. [...] Among other laws, those on passes were intended to filter the migrations, to steer them according to the needs of the economy or stop them in the event of a flood.”⁸

We see here that the British colonial authorities found themselves caught up in contradictions related to the development of the productive forces. But we can say that the strongest contradiction here was ideological, when British power decided to consider the black labour force on segregationist administrative criteria, in particular with the laws on passes and the penning of Africans. In fact, this policy was in flagrant contradiction with the liberal orientation that led to the abolition of slavery.

Difficulties also related to the colonial wars. After suffering defeats and winning the wars against its Zulu and Afrikaner

opponents between 1870 and 1902, the British Empire had to digest the extremely high cost of its victories, especially that of 1899-1902, both in human and economic terms. Indeed, the “Boer War” was a real butchery:

“The Boer War was the greatest colonial war of the modern imperialist era. It lasted more than two and a half years (11th October 1899 to 31st May 1902). The British engaged around half a million soldiers, 22,000 of whom were killed in South Africa. Their total losses, that is to say killed, wounded, and missing, rose to more than 100,000 men. The Boers, meanwhile, mobilised nearly 100,000 men. They lost more than 7,000 soldiers and nearly 30,000 died in the camps. An unknown number of Africans fought alongside one or the other side. The losses they suffered are also undetermined. Tens of thousands of them probably lost their lives. The British War Office also calculated that 400,346 horses, donkeys and mules died during the conflict, as well as millions of cattle belonging to the Boers. This war cost the British taxpayer £200 million, or ten times the annual budget of the army or 14% of national income in 1902. If the subjugation of the future British subjects of Africa cost on average fifteen pennies per head, the submission of the Boers however cost £1000 per man.”⁹

In other words, an open pit of warfare inaugurated the entry of British capitalism into the 20th century. Furthermore, we can see in the details of this horrible butchery that the Nazi concentration camps found a source of inspiration. British capitalism developed a total of forty-four camps destined for the Boers where about 120,000 women and children were imprisoned. At the end of the war in 1902 it was found that 28,000 white detainees had been killed, including 20,000 children under the age of 16.

Yet it was without remorse that the commander of the British Army, Lord Kitchener, justified the massacres in speaking of the Boers as “a species of savages born from generations leading a barbarous and solitary existence.”¹⁰

This is rich coming from a major war criminal. Certainly we must note that in this butchery, Afrikaner troops were not to be outdone in terms of mass killings and atrocities, and that the Afrikaner leaders were later allies of the German army during the Second World War, above all to settle accounts with British power.

“Defeated by British imperialism, submitted to the capitalist system, humiliated in their culture and traditions, the Afrikaner

people... organised from 1925 to 1930 a strong movement to rehabilitate the Afrikaner nation. Its vengeful, anti-capitalist, anti-communist and profoundly racist ideology designated Africans, mestizos, Asians and Jews as a threat to the Western civilisation they claimed to represent on the African continent. Organised at all levels, school, church, union and terrorist secret societies (the best known is the Broederbond), Afrikaners later proved fervent partisans of Hitler, Nazism and its ideology.”¹¹

The fact that the Afrikaner workers were dragged into this same movement shows the immensity of the obstacle to be crossed by the working class of this country to join the struggles of workers of other ethnicities.

This conflict permanently shaped relationships between the British and Afrikaner colonialisms on South African soil until the fall of apartheid. To divisions and ethnic hatred between British and Afrikaner whites, can be added those between on the one hand these two categories and on the other blacks (and other people of colour) that the bourgeoisie systematically used to destroy all attempts at unity in the workers’ ranks.

Birth of the working class

The birth of capitalism led to the dislocation of many traditional African societies. From the 1870s, the British Empire began a liberal colonial policy by abolishing slavery in areas it controlled, in order to “liberate” the labour force then consisting of Boer and African farm workers. We have noted that the Boer settlers themselves continued to exploit black farmers under the old form of slavery before being defeated by the British. But ultimately it was the discovery of gold which accelerated sharply the birth of capitalism and the emergence of the working class:

“There was no shortage of capital. Exchanges in London and New York willingly supplied the necessary funds. The global economy, which was growing, demanded gold. Workers streamed in too. Mining attracted crowds in the Rand. People went there not in their thousands, but tens of thousands. No city in the world knew a development as rapid as Johannesburg.”¹²

In the space of 20 years the European population of Johannesburg grew from a few thousand to a million, the majority of whom were skilled workers, engineers and other technicians. These are the ones who gave birth to the South African working

7. Henri Wesseling, *ibid.*

8. Brigitte Lachartre, *op.cit.*

9. Wesseling, *op.cit.*

10. Cited in Wesseling, *op.cit.*

11. Lachartre, *op.cit.*

12. Wesseling, *op.cit.*

class in the marxist sense of the term, that is to say, those who, under capitalism, sell their labour in exchange for a wage. Capital had a strong and urgent need for a more or less skilled labour force which it could not find on the spot without recourse to migrants from Europe, including the British Empire. But gradually, as economic development progressed, the industrial apparatus was driven to recruit more and more unskilled African workers from the interior of the country or from outside, including Mozambique and Zimbabwe. From then the workforce of the South African economy truly “internationalised” itself.

As a result of the massive arrival in South Africa of British-born workers, the working class was immediately organised and supervised by the British trade unions and in the early 1880s there were numerous companies and corporations which were created on the “English model” (the trade union). This meant that workers of South African origin, as groups or individuals without organisational experience, could only with difficulty organise outside of the pre-established unions.¹³ Certainly, there were dissensions within the unions as well as in parties claiming to defend the working class, with attempts to develop an autonomous union activity on the part of radical proletarian elements who could no longer put up with the “treachery of the leaders.” But these were in a tiny minority.

Everywhere in the world where there are conflicts between the classes under capitalism, the working class always secretes revolutionary minorities defending, more or less clearly, proletarian internationalism. This was also the case in South Africa. Some elements from the working class were at the origin of struggles but also initiated the formation of proletarian organisations. We propose to introduce three figures from this generation in the form of a short summary of their trajectories.

– Andrew Dunbar (1879-1964). A Scottish immigrant, he was general secretary of the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) created in South Africa in 1910.¹⁴ He was a railway worker in Johannesburg and actively participated in the massive strike of 1909 after which he was dismissed. In 1914 he fought against the war and participated in the creation of the International Socialist

League (ISL), which belonged to the revolutionary syndicalist tendency. He also fought against the repressive and discriminatory measures against Africans which earned him the sympathy of black workers. He was also responsible for creating the first “African Union” modelled on the IWW in 1917. But his sympathy for the Russian revolution became more and more enthusiastic, so he decided with other comrades to form the “Communist Party of Africa” in October 1920 on an essentially syndicalist platform and of which he was secretary. In 1921 his organisation decided to merge with the official Communist Party which had been formed. But he was expelled a few years later and in the wake of this he abandoned his union activities.

– TW Thibedi (1888-1960). Considered a prominent trade union member of the IWW (he joined in 1916). He was originally from the South African town of Vereeniging and had a teaching job in a school attached to a church in Johannesburg. As part of his trade union activities he advocated class unity and mass action against capitalism. He was part of the left wing of the African nationalist party, the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). Thibedi was also a member of the ISL and, during a strike movement led by this group in 1918, along with his comrades, he suffered harsh police repression. A member of the South African CP from its formation, he was expelled in 1928 but due to the reaction of many of his comrades he was reinstated before finally being driven from the party. He then decided to sympathise briefly with the Trotskyist movement before entering into complete anonymity. The sources we have do not give a total strength of South African Trotskyist militants at that time.¹⁵

– Bernard Le Sigamoney (1888-1963). Of Indian origin and from a farming family, he was an active member of the Indian IWW union and as with his above-mentioned comrades he was also a member of the ISL. He showed himself in favour of the unity of the industrial workers of South Africa, and along with his fellow ISL comrades he was at the head of important strike movements in 1920/1921. However, he did not join the Communist Party and decided to abandon his political and union activities, going to study in Britain in 1922. In 1927 he returned to South Africa (Johannesburg) as an Anglican missionary clergyman while resum-

ing his trade union activities within an organisation close to the IWW. He was then denounced as a “troublemaker” by the authorities and eventually became discouraged, simply working in the church and promoting civil rights for people of colour.

So here are three “portraits” of the trajectories of union and political militants which are quite similar despite being of different ethnic origin (European, African and Indian). Above all they share an essential common characteristic: proletarian class solidarity, an internationalist spirit and a great combativity against the capitalist enemy. It is they and their comrades in struggle who are the precursors of the current working class fighters in South Africa.

Other organisations, of different origins and nature, were active within the working class. These are the main parties and organisations¹⁶ claiming more or less formally at their origins to be working class or to defend its “interests”, excluding the Labour Party which remained faithful to its bourgeoisie since its active participation in the first world slaughter. More precisely, we give here an overview¹⁷ of the nature and origin of the ANC and of the South African CP as part of the forces of the ideological containment of the working class since the 1920s.

– The ANC. This organisation was created in 1912 by and for the indigenous petty bourgeoisie (doctors, lawyers, teachers and other functionaries, etc.), individuals who demanded democracy, racial equality and defended the British constitutional system, as illustrated in the words of Nelson Mandela: “*For 37 years, that is to say, until 1949, the African National Congress fought with scrupulous respect for the law [...] It believed that the grievances of the Africans would be considered after peaceful discussions and that we would move slowly towards full recognition of the rights of the African nation.*”¹⁸ In this sense, since its birth up until the 1950s,¹⁹ far from seeking to overthrow the capitalist system, the ANC led peaceful actions respectful of the established order, and was therefore very far from seeking to overthrow the capitalist system. This same Mandela boasted of his “anti-communist” struggle, as outlined in his autobiography *A Long Walk to*

13. The South African government certainly contributed to this with laws against all non-white organisation.

14. The IWW was at the time one of the few trade union movements to organise white and non-white workers, not only in the same union but in the same union branches, regardless of race. See our articles in *International Review* n°s. 124, 125: <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/200601/1609/iww-failure-revolutionary-syndicalism-usa-1905-1921>

15. Lucien van der Walt (Bikisha collective media), <http://www.zabalaza.net> [1]

16. We will return later to the unions claiming to defend the working class.

17. In the next article we will develop on the role of the parties/unions active within the working class.

18. Quoted by Brigitte Lachartre, op.cit.

19. It was after the formal establishment of apartheid in 1948 that the CP and the ANC entered into armed struggle.

Freedom. But its Stalinist orientation, suggesting an alliance between the (“progressive”) bourgeoisie and the working class, allowed the ANC to rely on the CP to gain a foothold in the ranks of the workers, especially in the base of the unions that these two parties together control even today.

- The South African Communist Party. The CP was created by elements claiming to defend proletarian internationalism and as such a member of the Third International (1921). In its beginnings it advocated the unity of the working class and put forward the perspective of the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of communism. But by 1928 it became simply an executive arm of Stalinist policies in the South African colony. The Stalinist theory of “socialism in one country” was accompanied by the idea that the underdeveloped countries were required to go through “a bourgeois revolution” and that, in this vision, the proletariat could fight against colonial oppression but not establish any proletarian power in the colonies at this time. The South African CP took this orientation to absurd lengths, becoming the faithful lapdog of the ANC in the 1950s, as this quote illustrates: “*The CP made offers of service to the ANC. The Secretary General of CP explained to Mandela: ‘Nelson, what do you have against us? We are fighting the same enemy. We are not talking about dominating the ANC; we are working in the context of African nationalism.’ And in 1950 Mandela accepted that the CP would put its militant apparatus in the service of the ANC, thus giving him control over a good part of the labour movement and a significant advantage allowing the ANC to take hegemony over the whole of the anti-apartheid movement. In exchange the ANC would provide a legal front for the prohibited CP apparatus.*”²⁰

Thus, both openly bourgeois parties have become inseparable and are now at the head of the South African government for the defence of the interests of national capital and against the working class which they oppress and massacre, as in the strike of the miners at Marikana in August 2012.

Apartheid against the class struggle

This barbaric word is hated today worldwide even by its former supporters as symbolising and incarnating the most despicable form of capitalist exploitation

of the layers and classes belonging to the South African proletariat. But before going further, we propose one definition among others of this term: in the “Afrikaans” language spoken by the Afrikaners, apartheid more precisely means “separation.” This includes all kinds of separation (racial, social, cultural, economic, etc.). But behind this formal definition of apartheid lies a doctrine promoted by the “primitive” capitalists and colonialists which combines economic and ideological objectives:

“Apartheid is derived from both the colonial system and the capitalist system; in this dual capacity, it stamps on South African society divisions of racial characteristics in the first place and inherent divisions of class in the second. As in many other parts of the globe, there is almost perfect coincidence between the black races and the exploited class. At the other extreme, however, the situation is less clear. Indeed, the white population cannot be regarded as a dominant class without further ado. It is, certainly, constituted by a handful of owners of the means of production, but also from the mass of those who are dispossessed: agricultural and industrial workers, miners, service workers, etc. So there is no identity between the white race and the dominant class. [...] But, nothing like this has ever happened [the white workforce rubbing shoulders with the black workforce on an equal footing] or will ever happen in South Africa as long as apartheid is in effect. Because this system is designed to avoid any possibility of the creation of a multiracial working class. This is where the anachronistic system of South African power, its mechanisms dating from another era, come to the aid of the capitalist system which generally tends to simplify relationships within society. Apartheid - in its most comprehensive form - came to consolidate the colonial edifice, at the moment when capitalism was at risk of bringing down the entire power of the Whites. The means was an ideology and legislation aiming to annihilate class antagonisms within the white population, to extirpate the germs, to erase the contours and replace them with racial antagonisms.

“By replacing the contradictions of a terrain difficult to control (division of society into antagonistic classes) with ones more easily manageable, the non-antagonistic division of society between races, white power has almost achieved the desired result: to constitute a homogeneous and united bloc on the basis of white ethnicity - a bloc all the more solid because it feels historically menaced by black power and communism - and on the other side, to divide the black population within itself,

by different tribes or by social groups with different interests.

“Dissonances, class antagonisms that are minimised, ignored or erased on the white side are encouraged, emphasised and provoked on the black side. This enterprise of division - facilitated by the presence on South African soil of populations of diverse origins - has routinely been conducted since colonisation: detribalisation of one part of the African population, the retention in traditional structures of another; evangelisation and training of some, denial of any possibility of education of others, establishing small elites of leaders and officials, pauperisation of the great masses; and finally, the putting in place, to great fanfares, of an African, Mestizo, Indian, petty bourgeoisie - a buffer ready to interpose itself between their racial brothers and their class allies.”²¹

We generally agree with this author’s framework for defining and analysing the system of apartheid. We are particularly in agreement when it states that apartheid is above all an ideological instrument in the service of capital against the unity (in struggle) of different members of the exploited class; in this case the workers of all colours. In other words, the apartheid system is primarily a weapon against the class struggle as the motor of history, the only one capable of overthrowing capitalism. Also, if apartheid was theorised and fully applied from 1948 by the most backward Afrikaner fraction of the South African colonial bourgeoisie, it was the British, bearers of the “most modern civilisation”, who laid the foundations of this despicable system.

“Indeed, it is from the early nineteenth century that the British invaders took legislative and military measures to group part of the African population in ‘reserves’, allowing or forcing the other part to leave them to be employed across the country in diverse economic sectors. The area of these tribal reserves was fixed in 1913 and slightly enlarged in 1936 to offer the (black) population only 13% of the national territory. These tribal reserves, fabricated in every way by white power [...] were named Bantustans [...], ‘national homelands for the Bantus’, each theoretically to regroup members of the same ethnicity.”²²

Thus, the idea of separate races and populations was initiated by British colonialism which methodically applied its famous strategy of “divide and rule” by implementing ethnic separation, not only between blacks and whites but even more cynically between black ethnic groups.

20. Circle Leon Trotsky, Presentation 29/01/2010, website www.lutte-ouvrière.org

21. Lachartre, op.cit. Our emphasis.

22. Lachartre, *ibid*.

However, the proponents of the system could never prevent the breakdown of their own contradictions, inevitably generating the confrontation between the two antagonistic classes. Clearly under this barbaric system, many workers' struggles were conducted by white workers as well as black workers (or mestizo and Indian).

Certainly the South African bourgeoisie was remarkably successful in rendering workers' struggles powerless by permanently poisoning the class consciousness of the South African proletariat. This was reflected in the fact that some groups of workers often fought at the same time against their exploiters but also against their comrades of a different ethnic group, and fell into the deadly trap set by the class enemy. In sum, rare were the struggles uniting workers of different ethnic origins. We also know that many so-called "workers" organisations, namely unions and parties, facilitated the task of capital by endorsing this policy of the "racial division" of the South African working class. For example, the unions of European origin along with the South African Labour Party, defended first (or exclusively) the "interests" of white workers. Similarly, the various black movements (parties and unions) struggled first of all against the system of exclusion of the blacks by claiming equality and independence. This orientation was incarnated principally by the ANC. We should note the particular case of the South African CP which, at first (in the early 1920s), tried to unite the working class without distinction in the fight against capitalism but was soon to abandon the terrain of internationalism by deciding to focus on "the black cause." This was the beginning of its definitive "Stalinisation".

Strike movements and other social struggles 1884/2013

First workers' struggle in Kimberley

By coincidence the diamond that symbolically gave birth to South African capitalism was also the origin of the first movement of proletarian struggle. The first workers' strike broke out in Kimberley, the "Diamond Capital", in 1884, when British-born miners decided to fight against the decision of the mining companies to impose the so-called "compound" system (i.e. forced labour camps) reserved up until then for black workers. In this struggle the miners organised strike pickets to impose a balance of power enabling them to win their demands, while to break the strike the employers on the one hand engaged "scabs" and on the other troops armed to the teeth who were not slow to fire on the workers. There were 4 deaths among the

strikers, who nevertheless continued the struggle with a vigour which forced the employers to meet their demands. This was the first movement of the struggle between the two historical forces in South African capitalism that ended in blood but also victory for the proletariat. Therefore we can say that it was here that the real class struggle began in capitalist South Africa, laying the foundations for future confrontations.

Strike against wage cuts in 1907

Not content with the work rates which they imposed on the workers to improve performance, the Rand employers²³ decided in 1907 to reduce salaries by 15%, in particular those of British-born miners who were considered to be "privileged." As in the Kimberley strike, employers recruited strike breakers (very poor Afrikaners) who, without being in solidarity with the strikers, nevertheless refused to do the dirty work they were ordered to. Despite this the employers were eventually able to wear the strikers down. We should note that the sources we have to hand talk about the strike's extent but do not give a total for the number of participants in the movement.

Strikes and demonstrations in 1913

Faced with massive wage cuts and deteriorating working conditions, miners entered massively into struggle. During 1913 a strike was launched by mine workers against the additional hours the company wanted to impose on them. And it did not take much to generalise the movement to all sectors, with mass demonstrations which, nevertheless, were violently broken up by the police. In the end twenty dead and a hundred wounded were counted (officially).

Railway and coal miners' strike in 1914

At the beginning of the year a series of strikes broke out among both coal miners and railway workers against the degradation of working conditions. But this movement of struggle was in a particular context; that of the preparations for the first generalised imperialist slaughter. In this movement we can see the presence of the Afrikaner fraction, but set apart from the British fraction. Although both were well supervised by their respective unions, each defending its own "ethnic clients."

Accordingly the government hastened to impose martial law to physically break the strike and its initiators, imprisoning or

23. The Rand is the common name for the Witwatersrand (White Waters Ridge) region which saw the first discoveries of gold and the first industrialisation of the country.

deporting a large number of strikers, the exact number of whom is still unknown. In addition, we want to emphasise here the particular role of unions in this strike movement. It was in this same context of the repression of the struggles that the union and Labour Party leaders voted for "war credits" by supporting the entry of the Union of South Africa into the war against Germany.

Labour unrest against the war in 1914 and attempts to organise

If the working class was generally muzzled during the 1914-1918 war, some proletarian elements did however try to oppose it by advocating internationalism against capitalism. Thus:

*"In 1917, a poster appears on the walls of Johannesburg, convening a meeting for July 19th: 'Come and discuss issues of common interest between white and indigenous workers.' This text is published by the International Socialist League (ISL), a revolutionary syndicalist organisation influenced by the American IWW (...) and formed in 1915 in opposition to the First World War and the racist and conservative policies of the South African Labour Party and craft unions. Comprising at the beginning mostly white activists, the ISL moves very quickly towards black workers, calling in its weekly newspaper International, to build 'a new union that overcomes the limitations of trades, skin colours, races and of sex to destroy capitalism by a blockade of the capitalist class.'"*²⁴

By 1917, the ISL was organising coloured workers. In March 1917, it founded an Indian workers' union in Durban. In 1918, it founded a textile workers' union (also later formed in Johannesburg) and a horse drivers' union in Kimberley, the diamond mining town. In the Cape, a sister organisation, the Industrial Socialist League, founded in the same year a sweets and confectionery workers' union.

The July 19th meeting was a success and formed the basis of weekly meetings of study groups led by members of the ISL (including Andrew Dunbar, founder of the IWW in South Africa in 1910). These meetings discussed capitalism, the class struggle and the need for African workers to unionise in order to obtain wage increases and to abolish the pass system. On 27th September, the study groups were transformed into a union, the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA), modelled on the IWW. Its organising committee was composed entirely of Africans. The demands of the new unions were simple

24. *Une histoire du syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Afrique du Sud.* (See also 1816-1939: *Syndicalism in South Africa*).

and uncompromising in a slogan: Sifuna Zonke! ("We want everything!").

Finally, here is the expression of the birth of proletarian internationalism. An internationalism taken up by a minority of workers but of great importance at the time, because it was the moment when many proletarians were bound and dragged into the first world imperialist slaughter by the traitor Labour Party in the company of the official unions. Another aspect that illustrates the strength and dynamic of these small internationalist groups is the fact that elements (including the International Socialist League and others) were able to emerge from them in order to form the South African Communist Party in 1920. It was these groups, seemingly dominated by supporters of revolutionary syndicalism, which could actively promote the emergence of radical unions especially among black and coloured workers.

A wave of strikes in 1918

Despite the harshness of the time with martial law suppressing any reaction or protest, strikes could occur:

*"In 1918, an unprecedented wave of strikes against the cost of living and for salary increases, bringing together white and coloured workers, overwhelms the country. When the judge McFie imprisons 152 African municipal workers in June 1918, urging them to continue to "do the same job as before" but now from prison under the supervision of an armed escort, progressive whites and Africans are outraged. The TNT (Transvaal Native Congress, forerunner of the ANC) called for a mass rally of African workers in Johannesburg on June 10th."*²⁵

An important or symbolic fact should be noted here: this is the only (known) involvement of the ANC in a movement of the class struggle in the first sense of the term. This is certainly one of the reasons explaining the fact that this nationalist fraction as a result had an influence within the black working class.

Massive strikes in 1919/1920 drowned in blood

During 1919 a radical union (the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union), consisting of black and mixed race employees but without white workers, launched a massive strike especially among the dockworkers of Port Elizabeth. But once again this movement was crushed militarily by the police backed by armed white groups, causing over 20 deaths among the strikers. Here again the strikers were isolated, which ensured the defeat of the working class in an unequal battle on a military terrain.

In 1920, this time it was African miners who sparked one of the biggest strikes in the country affecting some 70,000 workers. The movement lasted a week before being crushed by the police who, armed with guns, liquidated a large number of strikers. Despite its scale, this movement of African workers could not count on any support from the white unions, which refused to call a strike or aid the victims of the bullets of the colonial bourgeoisie. Unfortunately this lack of solidarity promoted by the unions became systematic in each struggle.

In 1922 an insurrectionary strike crushed by a well-equipped army

At the end of December 1921, the coal mine bosses announced massive wage cuts and layoffs aimed at replacing 5000 European miners with indigenous workers. In January 1922, 30,000 miners decided to fight against the attacks of the mining employers. Faced with the procrastination of the unions, a group of workers took the initiative by establishing a committee to fight and declaring a general strike. In this way the miners forced the union leaders to follow the movement, but this strike was not quite "general" because it concerned only the "whites".

Faced with the pugnacity of the workers, the united state and employers then decided to use the utmost military means to defeat the movement. In order to deal with the strike the government declared martial law and mobilised some 60,000 thousand men with machine guns, cannon, tanks and even aeroplanes.

For their part, seeing the extent of their enemy's forces, the strikers began to arm themselves by purchasing weapons (guns, etc.) and organising themselves into commandos. We therefore witnessed a veritable military battle as in a conventional war. At the end of the fight on the workers' side there were more than 200 dead, 500 injured, 4,750 arrests, 18 death sentences. Clearly, this was a real war, as if South African imperialism, which took an active part in the first world butchery, wished to extend its activity by bombing the miners as if it was facing German troops. By this gesture the British colonial bourgeoisie was demonstrating its absolute hatred of the South African proletariat, but also its fear of it.

In terms of lessons learned from this movement, it must be said that despite its military character, the bloody confrontation was above all a real class war, of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, with, however, unequal means. This only underlines the fact that the main power of the working class is not military but

resides above all in its greatest possible unity. But instead of seeking the support of all the exploited, the miners (whites) fell into the trap set by the bourgeoisie with its plan to replace the 5,000 European workers by indigenous workers. This was shown tragically by the fact that throughout the battle between the European miners and the armed forces of capital, other workers (black, coloured and Indian), some 200,000 of them, were working or idle. It is also clear that, from the outset, the bourgeoisie was aware of the weakness of the workers who went into battle deeply divided. The abject recipe of "divide and rule" was applied here with success well before the formal establishment of apartheid (whose main purpose as we recall was to contain the class struggle). But above all the bourgeoisie took advantage of its military victory over the South African proletarians to reinforce its grip on the working class. It organised elections in 1924 from which emerged victorious the populist parties defending "white interests", namely the National Party (Boer) and the Labour Party, which formed a coalition government. It was this coalition government that passed the laws establishing racial divisions, as far as considering a breach of work contract by a black worker as a crime; or again imposing a system of passes for blacks and establishing compulsory residence zones for natives. Similarly there was a "colour bar" aimed at reserving skilled jobs for whites, providing them with a much higher salary than blacks or Indians. To this were added other segregationist laws including one entitled "The Industrial Conciliation Act" to ban non-white organisations. It was on the basis of this ultra repressive apartheid system that the Afrikaner government legally established apartheid in 1948.

In this way the bourgeoisie succeeded in permanently paralysing all expressions of proletarian class struggle and it was not until the eve of the Second World War that we see the working class get its head above water by taking the path of the class struggle. In fact, between late 1920 and 1937, the field of struggle was occupied by nationalism: on the one hand, by the South African CP, the ANC and their unions, and on the other, by the Afrikaner National Party and its satellites.

Lassou (To be continued)

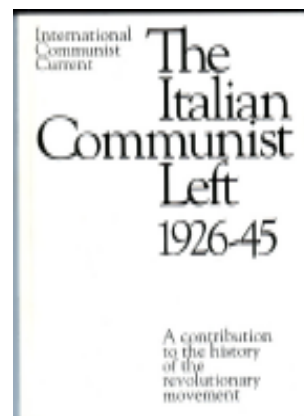
²⁵ <http://www.pelloutier.net>, cited above.

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

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

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

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

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BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

proletariat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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

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