

Workers of the world, unite!

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MASSACRES IN SYRIA, CRISIS IN IRAN

The threat of an imperialist disaster

In 1982 the Syrian army bloodily crushed the rebellious population of Hama. The number of victims has never been reliably counted: estimates vary between 10.000 and 40.000⁽¹⁾. At the time nobody talked about intervening to protect the population; nobody demanded the resignation of Hafez el-Assad, the father of today's Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

Since then the world has changed: the collapse of the old bloc system and the weakening of US 'leadership' have given free rein to the imperialist appetites of regional powers like Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Israel and the deepening of the crisis is more and more reducing the populations to poverty. The growing exasperation is fueling revolt against the existing regimes.

For Syria, it began with several months

¹ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hama_massacre

of demonstrations against unemployment and poverty, involving the exploited from all kinds of backgrounds: Druze, Sunni, Christian, Kurds, men, women and children all together in their protests for a better life. But the situation Syria has taken a sinister turn. The working class in this country is very weak and this has allowed the social protests to be recuperated into a struggle for power between factions of the ruling class.

For the government and the pro-Assad armed forces, the stakes are clear. It's a question of staying in power at any price. For the opposition, it's a question of taking power for themselves. But the opposition is a mishmash of bourgeois cliques, each one rivalling the other, united only by hostility to Assad. The Christians look askance at the Islamists and fear that they will suffer the same fate as the Copts in Egypt; some of the Kurds are trying to negotiate with the

regime; and the latter holds onto the support of the Alawite religious minority, to which the presidential clique belongs.

The opposition coalition, the National Council, would have no significant political or military existence were it not supported by outside forces, each with their own imperialist objectives. These include the countries of the Arab League, with Saudi Arabia at the front, and Turkey, but also France, Britain, Israel and the USA.

The struggle between the backers of the various factions is also being waged at the UN. Russia and China have twice vetoed draft resolutions on Syria. The most recent one proposed by the Arab League calls for nothing less than the ousting of Bashar al-Assad. After several days of sordid negotiations, on March 21 the UN Security Council, with the accord of Russia and China, adopted a declaration which aimed to put a stop to the violence through the dispatch of a famous special envoy, Kofi Annan, leading a delegation which, it was clearly understood, had no power to constrain anyone.

But why have none of these foreign imperialist powers involved in this conflict not

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ARIZONA IMMIGRATION CONTROVERSY

Highlights the Bourgeoisie's Impasse

Although a ruling is not expected until June, the large measure of support shown by the Supreme Court in the initial *Arizona v. the United States* hearings for the state's independent enacting of immigration policy, the political crisis facing the ruling class in the United States has reached a new level. Despite US state capitalism's serious need for comprehensive federal immigration reform (which hasn't been enacted since 1986, despite drawn-out attempts made in 2007 and again in 2010), no faction of the ruling class has been able to unite the others around a federal immigration reform policy—and a growing segment are engaging in out-and-

out obstructionism for purely political and ideological reasons. In the absence of federal action, states have begun enacting their own immigration policies, Arizona being the first of five so far. From the perspective of state capitalism, matters so closely affecting the health of the national economy as immigration policy cannot be decided differently across different states. Yet the difficulties of rationalizing the system, and the increasingly ideological motivations of a part of the ruling class, have not yet allowed for the passage of any comprehensive reforms.

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Massacres in Syria, crisis in Iran

yet intervened directly as was the case for example in Libya a few months ago? This is mainly because the opposition factions themselves realise that visible reliance on foreign powers would make it impossible for their own regime to have any legitimacy.

But this is no guarantee that the threat of all-out imperialist war, which is knocking at Syria's door, won't break out in the near future. According to Iranian media, Turkey is massing troops and materiel at its Syrian frontier. The Syrian regime, backed by China, Russia and Iran, is preparing its arsenal of Russian-built ballistic missiles in underground bunkers in the region of Kamechi and Deir ez-Zor, near the frontier with Iraq.

We need to ask why this country is attracting such interest from the imperialist powers. The Syrian conflict cannot simply be understood on its own terms but is part of a far wider regional confrontation with Iran.

Iran at the heart of the world imperialist torment

On February 7 last year the New York Times declared: "Syria is already the beginning of the war with Iran": a war which has not been unleashed overtly but which lurks in the shadows behind the Syria conflict.

The Assad regime is Tehran's main ally in the region and Syria is an essential strategic zone for Iran. The alliance with this country gives Tehran a direct opening to the strategic space of the Mediterranean and Israel, with military means directly on the borders of the Zionist state. But this potential, hidden war has its roots in the fact that the Middle East is once again a focus for all the imperialist tensions built into capitalism.

This region of the world is a great crossroads between east and west. Europe and Asia meet in Istanbul. Russia and the northern countries look across the Mediterranean to the African continent and the major oceans. And, above all, oil is a vital economic and military weapon. Everyone has an interest in controlling it. Without oil, no factory can run and no plane can take off. This is one of the key reasons why all the imperialisms are involved in this part of the world.

In this struggle for domination, the rise to power of a nuclear Iran, imposing itself across the whole region, is quite unacceptable for its rivals. Iran is completely

encircled militarily. The American army is installed on all its frontiers. As for the Persian Gulf, it's so stuffed full of warships that you could cross it without getting your feet wet. The Israeli state doesn't cease proclaiming that it will never allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons and fears it will have the capacity to build one within the next year. Israel's declaration to the world is terrifying because this is a very dangerous situation: Iran is a country of over 70 million people with a 'respectable' army. A direct confrontation between the two would be catastrophic.

Catastrophic consequences

Economic

Iran's political and religious leaders have asserted recently that they would respond with all means at their disposal if their country was attacked. For example, it has threatened to sink its own ships in the Straits of Hormuz, using the wrecks to create navigational hazards that would effectively close the channel. This means a major part of world oil production would not be able to reach its destination. The damage to a capitalist economy, already in an open crisis, would be enormous.

Ecological

The ecological consequences could be irreversible. Military assaults on nuclear reactors have obvious dangers and it would require tactical nuclear weapons to seriously damage certain Iranian installations which are buried under thousands of tons of concrete and rock⁽²⁾. Such an assault, nuclear or not, would almost certainly provoke Iranian counter strikes against Israeli reactors. Use of even tactical nuclear weapons (still many times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb) would cross an important Rubicon and give free reign to other nuclear powers to employ theirs.

Humanitarian

Since the outbreak of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, total chaos rules in these countries. There are daily murderous bombings and shootings. The populations desperately try to survive from day to day. The bourgeois press says it openly: "Afghanistan is suffering from a general lassitude. The fatigue of the Afghans is met with the fatigue of the westerners" (*le Monde*, 21.3.12). But while for the bourgeois press the world is simply tired of the

war in Afghanistan, for the population itself it's more a matter of exasperation and despair. If war against Iran took place, involving larger populations and heavier weapons, the human catastrophe would be even more widespread. And it's unlikely the conflict would remain contained between the initial belligerents. The wider repercussions (including the potential for a wider war) could threaten the population of the whole region.

Divided national bourgeoisies, imperialist alliances on the verge of a major crisis

Just considering some of the possible consequences of an attack on Iran scares those sectors of the bourgeoisie who are trying to maintain a minimum of lucidity. It's a well known fact that many in the Israeli ruling class do not want this war. Meir Dagan, former head of Mossad, has said that "the perspective of an attack on Iran is the stupidest idea I have ever heard". The former director of Shin Bet agrees and even the current military chief has joined in the chorus of disapproval. But it's also well-known that the clique organized around Netanyahu is determined to forge ahead, sowing the seeds for a deep political crisis in the ruling class.

But the most spectacular split is between the US and Israel. The US administration does not, at the present time, want open war with Iran. Bruised by their experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US ruling class would prefer to rely on increasingly heavy sanctions. Despite enormous US pressure Israel is affirming loud and clear that there is no way it will allow Iran to get nuclear weapons, whatever the opinion of its closest allies. The grip of the American superpower continues to weaken and even Israel is now openly challenging its authority. For certain bourgeois commentators, we could see the first real breaks in the hitherto unquestioned US/Israel alliance.

The other major player in the region on the immediate level is Turkey, which has the most significant armed forces in the Middle East (more than 600,000 in active service). Although in the past Turkey was a reliable ally of the US and one of the few local allies of Israel, the rise of Erdogan has subtly altered relations. The Erdogan regime represents the most 'Islamist' sector of the Turkish bourgeoisie and is trying to play its own card of 'democratic' and 'moderate' Islam. It is trying to profit

² Cf. <http://rt.com/news/american-super-conventional-bomb-951/>

Welcome to the new ICC sections in Peru and Ecuador

from the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and is playing the same game in Syria. There was a time when Erdogan took his holidays with Assad, but once the Syrian leader refused to bow to the demands of Ankara and negotiate with the opposition, the alliance broke down. Turkey's efforts to export its model of 'moderate' Islam are also in direct opposition to the efforts of Saudi Arabia to increase its own influence in the region on the basis of ultra-conservative Wahabism.

The possibility of a war over Syria, and then in Iran, is serious enough to persuade the two biggest allies of these countries, China and Russia, to react with increasing strength. For China, Iran is of considerable importance because it supplies it with 11% of its energy needs⁽³⁾. Since its industrial take-off, China has become a new major player in the region. Last December, it warned of the danger of a global conflict around Syria and Iran. It thus declared through the Global Times⁽⁴⁾:

3 Cf. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-china>

4 The international current affairs journal be-

“The West suffers from an economic recession, but its efforts to overthrow non-Western governments due to politics and military interests culminate. China, as well as its mammoth neighbour Russia, should keep on high alert and adopt countermeasures if necessary.

China should not shrink before a possible showdown with the West but seek a solution favouring itself. China will adopt concrete measures to show its determination to take its own path. Such a choice is important for China's interests”⁽⁵⁾.

Even if a direct confrontation between the world's big imperialist powers can't be envisaged in the current global context, such declarations show how serious the situation is.

Capitalism is heading straight for the abyss

The Middle East is a powder-keg and there are some who would be willing to

longing to the official People's Daily in China.

5 Cf. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/686912/China-not-obliged-to-besiege-Iran.aspx>

put a match to it. The military means are already in position and even the most lucid factions of the ruling class are ready to fight at the moment the benefit outweighs the cost. But in today's decomposing capitalism the atmosphere is favouring the more openly irrational bourgeois factions. The 'messianic' warmongering of Netanyahu in Israel is perfectly mirrored by Ahmadinejad's invocation of Imam Madhi, a prophesied redeemer in Islam.

Imperialist war amounts to a real self-destruction of capitalism, but the trajectory of this senile and obsolete system makes such an outcome look more and more likely. Even if the belligerents step back from the brink, this will only be a momentary reprieve. The tensions will remain and heighten and as long as capitalism remains the insane logic of the system will continue its remorseless drive to war.

Tino, 4/12

(adapted from an article in *International Review* 149)

Welcome to the new ICC sections in Peru and Ecuador

We are very pleased to announce the formation of two new sections of the ICC, in Peru and Ecuador.

The constitution of a new section of our organization is always a very important event for us. First because it is further evidence of the capacity of the world proletariat, despite its difficulties, to give rise to revolutionary minorities on an international scale; and secondly because it means that our organization is able to strengthen its global presence.

The formation of two new sections of the ICC is taking place in a situation where the working class has, since 2003, begun to recover from the long period of retreat in its consciousness and its militancy that followed the events of 1989⁽¹⁾. This recovery has been expressed by a whole series of struggles which show a growing awareness of the impasse facing world

1) The collapse of Stalinism which gave rise to huge bourgeois campaigns which, once again, fraudulently identified communism and the form of state capitalism which developed in the eastern countries in the wake of the degeneration of the Russian revolution.

capitalism and by the emergence, on an international scale, of internationalist minorities looking for contact among themselves, posing many questions, searching for a revolutionary coherence and debating the perspectives for the development of the class struggle. Part of this milieu has turned to the positions of the communist left and some of these elements have joined our organization. Thus in 2007 an **ICC nucleus was created in Brazil**. In 2009 we greeted the creation of **two new sections of the ICC in the Philippines and Turkey**.

The two new sections are also the product of a sustained effort by our organization and its militants to take part in political discussion and clarification, to make links wherever there are groups or individuals searching for communist ideas, whether or not they enter our organization.

Our new sections were, before joining us, groups of this kind, whether they turned straight away towards political clarification around the positions of the

ICC, as in Ecuador, or whether they came from different political backgrounds, as in Peru. In both cases, they developed through discussion with other political forces as well as through systematic discussion with the ICC on the basis of its platform. They always had a commitment to taking position on the major events of the international and national situation⁽²⁾. Today, they continue to evolve in a milieu which is very rich in contacts.

Based in South America, these two new sections will reinforce the intervention of the ICC in the Spanish language, and its presence in Latin America where the ICC was already present in Venezuela, Mexico and Brazil.

The whole of the ICC send a warm and fraternal greeting to these new sections and the comrades who form them.

ICC, April 2012

2) Some of these statements have been published in *Accion Proletaria*, the ICC's paper in Spain, and on ICC Online in the Spanish language

Highlights the Bourgeoisie's Impasse

Until recently, the ruling class had opted for a somewhat porous border policy, separating the different enforcement duties between the state and federal governments to allow a stream of illegal immigration into the country and maintain the flow of cheap labor whilst partially enforcing immigration policy for the purposes of repression and the fear it creates amongst these laborers ⁽¹⁾.

This of course has become increasingly chaotic over the years, as the population of undocumented immigrants living in the United States swelled to 12 million in 2007, and was still estimated at 11.2 million as of March 2010 ⁽²⁾. For state capitalism it is completely unacceptable to have such a large portion of the population totally unaccounted for, unable to vote, fearful of cooperating with law enforcement, and totally alienated from the state. Furthermore, in the context of the crisis, states see the need to streamline health care costs, regulate the costs of social programs, and strengthen the border to control the influx of more immigrants. While Arizona's SB 1070 law effectively exacerbates many of these problems, it presents itself as complementary to existing federal law—which is specifically what was challenged by the Obama administration's lawsuit against Arizona. SB 1070 explicitly criminalizes the obstruction of information sharing about immigration statuses but also mandates that any "reasonable" suspicion that someone is in the country illegally be "reasonably" investigated ⁽³⁾. These

1) At one point during the April 25 hearings, Chief Justice John Roberts summarized this by speculating, to the administration's solicitor, Donald Verrilli, "It seems to me that the federal government just doesn't want to know who is here illegally or not." Mears, Bill. "High court appears to lean toward Arizona in immigration law dispute." *CNN.com*. 25 April 2012.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/25/justice/scotus-arizona-law/index.html>>

2) Passel, Jeffrey & D'Vera Cohn. "Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010." Pew Hispanic Center. 1 Feb 2011.

<<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/02/01/unauthorized-immigrant-population-national-and-state-trends-2010/>>

3) SB 1070, Section 2.

more controversial parts of the law, which even allow unwarranted arrest of persons suspected of offenses making them eligible for deportation, and have rightly been criticized as encouraging racial profiling, were explicitly left un-discussed in the Supreme Court hearings ⁽⁴⁾. But even the administration's argument that Arizona was overstepping its jurisdiction was, according to Justice Sonia Sotomayor "not selling very well" ⁽⁵⁾.

While net immigration from Mexico has effectively flat-lined with the collapse of the job and housing construction markets, increased repression, and a spike in deportations (in fact, record numbers have been deported each subsequent year under the current administration), the deepening of the crisis means the issue of immigration reform is not going to disappear ⁽⁶⁾. The challenge for the bourgeoisie is to balance their need to integrate 11 million undocumented immigrants into US society, while maintaining their ideological campaigns to create a culture of resentment and scapegoating among the working class in order to have a freer hand in pushing through the cuts in social spending and other austerity measures the crisis will demand, one demographic at a time. As we wrote in *Internationalism* 155: "It would be even better for the bourgeoisie if they could

4) Before the solicitor general even began, Chief Justice John Roberts stated, "I'd like to clear up at the outset what it's not about. No part of your argument has to do with racial or ethnic profiling, does it?" To which the solicitor agreed. Mears, Bill. "High court appears to lean toward Arizona in immigration law dispute." *CNN.com*. 25 April 2012.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/25/justice/scotus-arizona-law/index.html>>

5) De Vogue, Ariane. "Conservative Justices Receptive to Parts of Arizona's Immigration Law." *ABC-News*. 25 April 2012.

<<http://abnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/04/conservative-justices-receptive-to-parts-of-arizonas-immigration-law/>>

6) Drum, Kevin. "Net Immigration From Mexico Now at Zero." *Mother Jones*, 24 April 2012. <<http://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2012/04/net-immigration-mexico-now-zero>> & Bennet, Brian. "Obama administration reports record number of deportations." *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 2011. <<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/18/news/la-pn-deportation-ice-20111018>>

keep this group of people in their current condition—cowed, desperate, and afraid to struggle—as well as countable and regulated. This reflects the need of the bourgeois state to bring all social life under its oversight. ...to turn a useful and exploitable group into a useful, exploitable, and controllable group, is at the heart of any bourgeois immigration strategy."

However it is proposed, there can be no gain for the working class as a whole from any immigration reform. The myriad ideological campaigns about immigrants taking jobs from "native" workers and the attempts to integrate this population into state structures must be carried out with the design to keep the working class divided and fighting amongst itself as separate demographic units begging for ever-shrinking crumbs from the ruling class' table.

Yet the systematization of what was intentionally left nebulous in the past, on the federal level, has proved increasingly difficult as a part of the bourgeois right continues to act increasingly out of ideological rather than political or economic concerns, taking their own demagoguery at face value ⁽⁷⁾. What is novel about *Arizona v. The United States* is the degree to which the Supreme Court seems to be prepared to uphold the state-level initiatives around immigration law, regardless of the consequences to national capitalism and the ability of the federal government to assert its authority over the states in matters of dire consequence for national capitalism. With more than 5 states already taking up Arizona's example and pushing through their own immigration policy, the ruling class' lack of perspective and inability to take united action can only push toward more and more problems for state capitalism in the US further down the road.

JJ

7) For example, by constantly inferring that the president is pushing for amnesty, or that any attempt to provide a path to legality for 11 million "lawbreakers" amounts to selective enforcement or the erosion of the rule of law.

PART II

The Unemployed and Workers' Struggles of the 1930's

In *Internationalism* 161 we published the first part of this two-part series on the employed and unemployed workers' struggles of the 1930's. The first article examined the unemployed and workers' struggles of the 1930's in the context of the American workers' movement of the time and the international defeat of the Russian Revolution and the ensuing counter-revolution. In this article, we want to draw the lessons of the weaknesses of the 1930's mobilizations in order to contribute to strengthening the present and future struggles of the working class, employed and unemployed, precarious or otherwise. With this aim in mind, we want to pay particular attention to the movements of social protest, which in the U.S. have been expressed in the Occupy Movement.

IT WAS AGAIN during the Great Depression and the mobilizations of the unemployed and employed that the American bourgeoisie became the most unified in the recognition that collecting bargaining arrangements can secure internal discipline in the factories at a time of great and disruptive social and industrial unrest. In spite of the fact that periodically a faction of the American ruling class seems to forget the services the unions have offered since their passage into the enemy camp and advocate the dissolution of the unions, it has always united in the face of massive class unrest. The spontaneous work stoppages and solidarity spreading from the jobless to the employed threatened to create the conditions for a politization of the struggles and the necessity for a political organization which the American left had avoided until then. But by the time the IWW had disbanded in 1921, what was left of the workers' movement in America was to prove incapable of overcoming its congenital weaknesses. The ages-long confusion about the role of a political organization, the unitary organization of the class, and the unions cropped up again and again among revolutionaries of the time. The Left Wing of the Socialist Party, disillusioned by the reformist and chauvinist activities of the latter, could not agree on whether the time had arrived for a decisive split with the Socialist Party and the formation of the Communist Party, or whether to wage a struggle from within the Socialist Party to win over as many delegates and members as possible. There were also endless disputes as to who should be at the head of a newly-constituted Communist Party: the foreign-speaking affiliations—who in-

sisted on the priority of forming a party not on the basis of a greater membership, but rather on the basis of agreement on organization and the principles of a platform—or the English-speaking ones, who favored the policy of not splitting from the Socialist Party without winning over a majority of its delegates and members. These disagreements are at the heart of the eventual split within the Left Wing itself and the formation of two parties: the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party. The former advocated a policy of compromise and cooperation with the unions and the Socialist Party, when the unions had gone over to the camp of the ruling class already at the time of WWI. The latter engaged in a policy of expulsions of elements of the Left Wing and cooperation with the states' repressive apparatus against revolutionary organizations. Therefore, the massive mobilizations of the workers and unemployed of the 1930's took place in the context of a fragmented and politically unclear leadership, which helped doom this tremendous upsurge of class struggle to defeat. It was again the work of sabotage by the union which, by 1937, made it possible for GM and U.S. Steel collective bargaining contracts signed to prohibit local strikes.

The unemployed struggles of the 1930's—their major weaknesses

Since 1921, the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party had been trying to organize the unemployed into "Councils of Action" and in 1929 they organized many jobless people in the Unemployed Councils. Notwithstanding their energy, dedication, and defiance, they could not seize on the tremendous

agitation spreading within the ranks of the working class, employed or unemployed, to help give an organized form and an orientation for the struggles, and turn the anger and indignation into a political, revolutionary act. The legacy of revolutionary syndicalism played a significant role, as did the fragmentation of the political forces of the left in America. In addition, theoretically the left had not drawn all the lessons of the change of historic period from the ascendance to the decadence of capitalism. Failing to recognize the epoch of decadence as the epoch of war or revolution, the IWW (formed in Chicago in 1905 by Eugene Debs of the American Railway Union, Daniel De Leon of the Socialist Labor Party, and William D. (Big Bill) Haywood of the western Federation of Miners) failed to see itself as a political, revolutionary organization and instead insisted on the practice of direct action and union building. Even after the IWW was disbanded in 1921 and most of its leaders imprisoned after the conclusion of WWI, this legacy continued to haunt the remaining left forces. The legacy of revolutionary syndicalism was directly responsible for the illusions in the New Deal for which many a 'radical' later fell. For the Communist Party's theoretical journal, *The Communist*, those out of work were not a political force that could be helped to unite with the rest of the working class to advance the development of class consciousness. Instead, they were merely the tactical key to the present state of the class struggle. Their activities concentrated on putting pressure on the existing bourgeois bureaucracy and political forces for immediate relief, rather than focusing on the unification and autonomy of the struggles, neglecting to establish formal and organizational links among the different groups.

The consequences of the obsession with tactics and direct action, and the theoretical weakness about the nature of capitalism in decadence are perhaps the clearest in the program of A.J. Muste, which emphasized self-help. Muste groups worked for the local organization of the unem-

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ployed particularly in the rural areas of West Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. Their focus was the immediate relief of the need of the jobless. The Muste-ite Seattle Unemployed League had 12,000 members in that city alone in 1931 and 80,000 state-wide by the end of 1932. They emphasized barter and working for farmers in exchange for produce. When the harvest season of 1931 was over, leaving great numbers of League members again without relief, the League turned to the city of Seattle for help. The city council appropriated half a million dollars for relief and gave it to the league to administer. In the spring of 1932 the League supported the candidacy of John F. Dore, who ran with the promise of taking fortunes away "from those who stole them from the American workers". Once elected, Dore took the administration of relief away from the League and threatened to use machine guns against the unemployed demonstrations. Sensing the weaknesses in the left—their illusions in democratic mystifications and their theoretical and organizational weaknesses—the bourgeoisie prepared its counterattack. It organized a formidable electoral campaign at the head of which stood Roosevelt and his message of 'sympathy' for the dispossessed. For the Communist and Socialist Parties of the time, and for the Muste-ites, a political movement of the working class would represent such massive voting numbers as to compel Congress to pass fundamental radical reforms. This belief was also shaped by the Comintern policy of 1935, which, with the rhetoric of anti-fascism, the threat that fascism posed to world communism, encouraged the Popular Front, or the alliance with the liberal and social chauvinists factions of the bourgeoisie in the context of a working class that world-wide was reeling from the defeat of the revolutionary wave. The period of counterrevolution had opened up. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of a theoretically and organizationally grounded political organization of the working class. The direct result of channeling social unrest and workers and unemployed struggles onto a reformist terrain was the decline in protests and disruptions. With social peace thus acquired, social relief was quickly withdrawn, and, by 1936, when 10 million people were still unemployed, the Works Progress Administration pro-



vided just about 2.5 million jobs while direct federal relief was abolished. The mobilizations of the working class under the onslaught of the Great Depression into the electoral and union bureaucratic machinery put in place by the AFL with the blessings of section 7a of the NRA—which gave the unions a free hand in organizing the workers—were the result of lessons the bourgeoisie had already learned about how to confront the rising unrest and anger of the working class and how to prevent it from building its own unitary and autonomous organizations.

In the first article of this series we described the ad-hoc, spontaneous form of organization that sprouted up everywhere in response to the conditions of unemployment and impoverishment unleashed by the Great Depression. The historic lesson of the passage of the unions into the enemy camp was a long, difficult, and painful one to learn for the workers' movement. It was hard to believe that the union form of organization as it existed in the XIX century, a genuine proletarian expression of the search for politicization and struggle, had lost its proletarian nature and become integrated in the state apparatus. But so it was. In the period of decadence, the state can no longer tolerate forms of social and political organization that challenge it. The state has a need to channel social discontent through institutions it can trust will work in its defense, not against it. The illusion in unions that can be 'reformed' to make them return to their original proletarian nature is one of the obstacles the class still has to face today, and in its future struggles. The experience of the struggles on the 1930's prior to their diversion onto the reformist

terrain operated by the unions is one that the American workers will have to reappropriate in the struggles to come, as they attempt to give birth and life to the only genuine forms of proletarian unitary organizations: its councils, generated by the general assemblies and the principle of immediate revocability of delegates.

The perspectives for today lessons from the OWS movement

Just as in the 1920's and 1930's, the bourgeoisie will have to rely on the unions in order to preempt and derail the future working class struggle. To do so, the ruling class needs to be prepared to occupy the social terrain by strengthening its lieutenants, the unions. Exacerbated by the factional disputes between Republicans and Democrats this is proving no easy task (See the article on health care in the present issue of *Internationalism* and our articles on Wisconsin and Governor Scott Walker's policy of 'union busting'), but it is one that the ruling class cannot avoid. Whether the class struggle will prove powerful enough to push the ruling class to unite at least in the face of the social threat, remains to be seen. However, it is clear the ruling class cannot just wait around until the last moment.

In the context of the present economic crisis, the Occupy movement erupted. What can it learn from the lesson of the history of the workers movement in America and abroad? How can it contribute to the political strengthening and theoretical clarification the class needs to take on the capitalist state? The ruling class has shown its intentions toward the movements of protest with its intelligent use of the repressive apparatus: it has

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withdrawn it when there was a danger that its use would further fuel the anger and the determination to resist, and made merciless and brutal use of it when it became clear no such danger existed. However, it cannot just wish away the eruption in the streets, in the squares, in the public places of an indignation that in the eyes of the working class is totally legitimized. It has mobilized major who unions symbolically participated in the Occupy movement's more important actions.

But the Occupy movement itself has so far answered the questions about its role and responsibilities with ambiguity. Like other protest movements elsewhere, it is to a large extent a response to the depth and length of the crisis, the immeasurable suffering it causes. It expresses the anger at the arrogance and dismissive attitude of the ruling class. The endemic nature of the economic crisis is reflected in the social composition of its participants— mostly young unemployed and precarious workers. Often unemployment today is just one moment in an already precarious condition of existence: precariousness among the youth is rampant, and periods of sometimes long-term unemployment have become expected and quite regular in one's life. In this sense, it is impossible to compare the struggles of the unemployed in the 1930's with contemporary movements of protest. Then, unemployment happened suddenly, massively, and in a context in which the separation from the class at the point of production and the process of production itself did not have the more or less permanent nature of contemporary society. The economic crisis can help to reveal that the wage system is not a matter of legal declarations, but a social relationship that involves opposing classes with

opposing interests. However, the nature of unemployment today makes this realization more difficult. At the height of its mobilizations, especially at the time of the call for the general strike in Oakland when it attempted to forge links of unity and solidarity with the long shore workers, and also in sporadic attempts at avoiding evictions from people's houses, Occupy showed an embryonic understanding of the need to link up with the rest of the working class. However, it has not formulated this understanding clearly enough to either pose a serious threat to the bourgeois order or a pole of reference and clarity for the working class. To do so, it needs to go beyond the identification of the working class as a tactical tool for the confrontations with the enemy class through direct action tactics. Failing to understand the central role the working class has to play in the confrontations with the ruling class, Occupy opened itself up to the manipulations of the leftists and the unions. Occupy's early resistance against the influence and manipulations of official parties and unions was a healthy statement as to the need for autonomous organization and showed an insightful distrust of such organizations. However, it failed to turn toward the only source of real support it can have in society, i.e., the working class because it refused to polarize its debates and discussions around the central issue of demands. It is the formulation of demands that could have opened up the Occupy movement to a clearer understanding that its grievances are not dissimilar from those of the working class, and thus could have helped it see the need for a conscious search for solidarity. The refusal to polarize keeps the real nature of capitalism mystified, and opens the way toward reformist ideas.

Occupy's insistence on the possibility of creating 'islands of humanity and peace' within capitalism seems to be an echo of the Muste-ites' ideology, linked to illusions in reformism. To go beyond the errors and confusions of the past, there must develop an understanding that the working class can build its own political organizations aiming at the seizure of power. Occupy's 'borrowing' of the ad-hoc forms of organization of the working class, i.e., its use of and reliance on the General Assemblies demonstrates the beginning of the understanding of the need for the extension of discussion and the autonomous form of organization. This is positive and needs to be extended and deepened. There can be no illusions in 'reforms' and negotiation with the enemy under the union's control. Indeed, as we have written elsewhere in our press, "*... we need to make the debate as open as possible, which means rejecting passive rallies and instead organizing all kinds of public meetings where everyone can speak their mind. And it can't all be focused on one day. We are faced with a prolonged period of crisis, and therefore with a growing assault on our living and working conditions... But that emphasizes that not only do we need to find better ways to fight back here and now – we also need to develop a long term perspective. The capitalist system is on its last legs and can offer us only depression, war, and ecological disaster. But the working class can use its struggles to form itself into a real social power, to develop its political understanding of the present system, and create a different future: a global community where all production is organized for human need and not the inhuman laws of the market.*"

Ana, May 26, 2012

Continued from page 18

The communist left and the continuity of marxism

bourgeois campaigns about the death of communism, part of which have involved direct attacks on the communist left itself, falsely reviled as the source of the "negationist" current which denies the existence of the Nazi gas chambers.

The difficulties of this whole process have in turn placed many difficulties in the path of the revolutionary milieu it-

self, retarding its growth and hindering its unification. But despite these weaknesses, the "left communist" movement of today remains the only living continuation of authentic marxism, the only possible "bridge" to the formation of the future world communist party. It is thus vitally important that the new militant elements which, come what may, continue to de-

velop all over the world in this period, engage with the groups of the communist left, debate with them, and ultimately join forces with them; in doing so, they will be making their own contribution to the construction of the revolutionary party, without which there can be no successful revolution.

ICC, September 1998

CLASS TENSIONS IN CANADA

The Working-Class Struggles to Overcome the Tactic of the “Left in Opposition”

It has now been just over one year since the Conservative Party won a majority government in the last federal election⁽¹⁾. A Conservative majority government was not the preferred electoral outcome for the main factions of the bourgeoisie. The Conservative Party -under the stewardship of Prime Minister Stephen Harper- had suffered a long string of political scandals that threatened to depress the enrollment of the younger generations behind electoral politics. However, despite failing to produce a new ruling team, the Canadian bourgeoisie emerged from the elections poised to enact the classic ideological division of labor in times of rising working class unrest by engendering a vocal “left in opposition” through the rise of the New Democratic Party (NDP) to official opposition status for the first time in history.

Almost as if the Canadian bourgeoisie had anticipated what was to come, Canada has been hit by a veritable wave of working class struggles and social unrest over the past year including a series of strikes and job actions affecting a number of central industries at the national, provincial and local level. Moreover, although the Occupy Movement in Canada was much less dramatic than elsewhere, students in Québec have been engaged in a fierce and protracted struggle over the debt burdened provincial government’s plans to raise tuition fees, shutting down traffic flow through Montreal on several occasions and forcing the repressive apparatus of the Québec state to show its ugly teeth once again.

While the Québec student movement seems to be motivated by many of the same factors that have moved the younger generations of workers to launch similar protest movements across the world over the last years, the development of the overall class struggle in Canada has

been greatly hampered by the Canadian bourgeoisie’s skillful use of the tactic of the left in opposition, which has allowed the NDP -and the unions closely intertwined with- to play the role of an “alternative within the state” to the cruel austerity and blatantly anti-working class politics of the ruling Tories.

Although the Tories have not ceased their scandal prone ways, the rise of the NDP has been able to serve as a counterweight by giving all those angered by the Conservatives’ apparent disregard for “democracy”, an alternative to look forward to in the next federal election.

Undoubtedly, the rise of the NDP has acted as a block on the development of the class struggle in Canada, largely trapping it behind the unions and the opposition’s aggressive verbiage against the Tories’ attacks on the “right to strike.” In a way, the cover the NDP gives to electoral democracy and “struggling through the unions” initially allowed the Conservative government to be more aggressive than it otherwise might be. They know that their rivals on the other side of the House of Commons will work to make sure workers’ struggles do not escape their control and that of their union friends.

The Canadian bourgeoisie has been largely successful -although it has certainly seen its share of electoral instability- in enacting the policy of the left in opposition allowing it a much greater flexibility in enacting austerity as it attempts to protect the Canadian economy in a chaotic international environment, a situation that the Canadian bourgeoisie seems to expect will negatively impact its own economy in due course. For example, the Harper government has recently announced a series of changes to Old Age Security, planning to raise the age of eligibility from 65 to 67. Moreover, the existence of the NDP opposition has allowed it to compensate for the continuing political difficulties of the ruling Conservative Party, which has a very hard time avoiding scandals that become one more moment in the overall tactic of empowering the left opposition.

The Canada Post Strike and Lock-Out (June 2011):

Just one month after the Conservative’s won their majority government, labour tensions at Canada Post broke out in a series of strikes across the country. Angered by management’s intransigent approach to contract talks, concern over their pension security and deteriorating work and safety conditions, militancy had been building among the postal workers for some time, obliging the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) to launch rotating strikes in early June of 2011.

Among Canada Post’s contract demands were requiring workers to work an extra five years before qualifying for benefits, establishing a two tiered wage structure with new workers receiving lower pay and rejection of the union’s position on staffing levels. After twelve days of rotating strikes in various cities across the country, Canada Post responded by locking out all 48,000 of its unionized workers in mid-June, completely shutting down mail delivery across the country. Unable to ignore such an event, the bourgeois media jumped into full gear with an intense discussion around the “technological obsolescence” of the post office.

No sooner had the lockout been announced that the Tory government began to make noise about introducing back-to-work legislation in the House of Commons. The tactic was clear: lockout the workers, create a “national crisis” and wait for the federal government to intervene with the legislation passed, and end the impasse in management’s favor, mandating the postal workers to return to work on terms less favorable to them than management’s last offer.

According to Conservative Labour Minister Lisa Raitt, the legislation was necessary to “protect Canada’s economic recovery”. This set-off a veritable campaign on the left against the back-to-work legislation: NDP MPs pundit supposedly favorable to the postal workers lamented the collapse of “Canadian democracy”.

Mobilized behind the unions and the NDP, the postal workers had no idea of how to resist the government’s mandated

1 See our articles, “The Canadian Bourgeoisie Attempts to Revive its Democratic Mystification Once Again” in *Internationalism* #158 at <http://en.internationalism.org/inter/158/canada-elections> and “Canadian Elections: Behind the Talk of the ‘Historic Election’ the Image of the State Remains Fragile” in *Internationalism* #159 at <http://en.internationalism.org/inter/159/canadian-election>

settlement. Under the union straitjacket, no thought was ever given to uniting the postal workers on strike with the simultaneous struggle of Air Canada workers, also under threat of a government imposed back-to-work law. Under the unions, every struggle is isolated in its own corner, in its own sector and thus is doomed to defeat. Clearly, this was the fate of Canada Post workers in June 2011.

Tensions at Air Canada (Spring 2011 to April 2012):

Air Canada was the second major national concern to be hit by labour tensions over the past year. Just as the rotating strikes at Canada Post entered their second week in mind-June 2011, customer service agents at the national airline went on strike angered by the company's insistence on pension changes that would switch them from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan. The customer service agent strike was only the first in a series of struggles to hit Air Canada over the course of the year.

Air Canada workers' frustration had been building since at least 2003 when the company sought bankruptcy protection. In order to "keep the company in business" unions agreed to changes to work rules and a number of layoffs. Customer service agents were particularly hard hit as their union agreed to a 10 percent wage cut, giving up one week of vacation, paid lunch breaks and sick days. In both 2004 and 2005 the union agreed to additional 2.5 percent wage cuts. By 2009 Air Canada was already threatening further by restructuring that meant a wage freeze for 2009 and 2010 (2). The company's plans to launch a new "low cost" airline appear to be the straw that broke the camel's back for many workers, who see this plan as a way to drive down their own wages and benefits.

On June 14th, 2011 some 3800 Air Canada customer service agents walked off the job. In response, the Harper Government did not wait long to start issuing threats of back to work legislation, citing the need to "protect Canada's fragile economic recovery". Faced with the threat of that legislation, the Canadian Auto Workers' Union (CAW) quickly ended the strike after a mere three days referring to the com-

pany's plan to start new hires on a defined contribution retirement plan. How about attempting to settle issue by linking up the struggle with the Canada Post workers on strike at the same time? Of course, such things never occur to union bureaucrats, except as something that must be avoided at all costs!

However, the end of the customer service agent strike was far from the beginning of labour peace at Air Canada. In October, Air Canada flight attendants posed the threat of another strike that could disrupt air travel across the country.

The Harper government had even less inclination to allow a strike to go forward this time around, signaling that it would introduce back-to-work legislation immediately. As it turned out, Labour Minister Raitt didn't even wait for the House of Commons to debate any legislation, unilaterally referring the dispute to the Canadian Industrial Relations Board for arbitration, a move that made any strike by flight attendants illegal. As academics lamented the Tories' attack on collective bargaining –something supposedly integral to the healthy functioning of a "democratic society"– Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) officials stressed to its over 6,800 members that any strike action would be illegal. In a memo it wrote: "*Our strike is suspended indefinitely. Therefore, the union advises you that you cannot strike*". However, just to make sure it still held the workers' confidence, in a separate memo, CUPE wrote, "*Let's call a spade a spade. This government is not your friend. It is trying to take away your right to strike and it will use whatever tools and tricks it can*" (*idem*).

By now the pattern had been set: workers frustrated by years of concessions respond to stalled contract negotiations or inadequate tentative agreements with a strike posture, management digs in, the federal government threatens intervention, the union caves in all the while crying foul about the government's attacks on "democratic rights of collective bargaining". The idea that workers might go on strike anyway –regardless of what the government and unions do, regardless of the strike's legality– was not acknowledged by the union, the leftist politicians, the academics and certainly not by the bourgeois media.

Moreover, these forces never countenanced the notion that workers in one sector or industry might join forces with those in another under similar threats of auster-

ity. In the case of the Air Canada flight attendants, this could have meant joining up with airport security screeners, who simultaneous to their own strike, had launched a coordinated work slow down at Toronto's Pearson Airport, causing massive travel delays for three days in early October. All the more evidence that the union's job is not to spread the struggle, but to keep workers isolated in their own sectoral bunkers and behind the veil of bourgeois legalism.

The next time workers at Air Canada went on strike tensions could not be contained so easily with the threat of government intervention. In late March 2012, Air Canada ground crew launched a wildcat strike at Toronto's Pearson Airport. Although lasting only 12 hours on a Friday morning, the wildcat caused 84 flight cancellations and up to 80 flight delays. Unrest quickly spread to airports in Montreal, Québec City and Vancouver. The wildcat by 150 ground crew workers at Pearson was a response to Air Canada's decision to suspend three workers who had allegedly heckled Labour Minister Raitt as she walked through the airport the day before. In response to the "illegal strike," Air Canada fired 37 workers who had walked off the job. For her part, Raitt didn't miss the opportunity to remind workers that they could be punished for illegal job actions by a fine of up to \$1000 a day.

In response to the wildcat strike, the media went into full attack mode, stoking the public's anger at Air Canada and its workers. The call to end all government subsidies to Air Canada and to fly private competitors instead dominated the talk shows and blogs. A campaign was under way to make sure the public had had enough of labour stoppages at Canada's national airline.

Clearly, a sense is beginning to emerge in some quarters of the Canadian ruling class that the Harper government may be overplaying its hand, while its direct attack on collective bargaining may have initially had the effect of strengthening the image of the bourgeois left, in particular the NDP and the unions.

The example set by Air Canada's ground crew was quickly followed by its pilots, when they launched what the media termed an "illegal strike" in mid-April. With their contract dispute with the airline already subject to a parliamentary order establishing binding arbitration preventing any strikes or lock-outs, pilots launched a

2) Vanessa Lu, "Air Canada facing strike next week" at <http://www.thestar.com/business/companies/aircanada/article/1005163--air-canada-facing-strike-next-week>

Class tensions in Canada

Friday “sick-out” that forced the cancellation of some 75 flights across the country, with delays extending into the weekend. Air Canada quickly won an order from the arbitrator forcing the pilots back to work, but the sense of sheer frustration among the pilots brought them close to a confrontation with their own union.

The best the Air Canada Pilots Association (ACPA) could do was ensure its members it was fighting the law mandating binding arbitration in the courts, but until such time as they prevailed through legal channels no strike was possible. Bourgeois legalism triumphs again! According to the union, no strike can take place until permission is granted from the state! The Harper government may have been taking a heavy hand with the working class, but the unions were clearly the ones enforcing the no strike laws on the shop floor level.

Over the last year, Air Canada has been a focal point for labour tensions across the country⁽³⁾. For the most part these have remained within the union fold, as workers have succumbed to the pressure from their unions to obey the various no strike laws passed by the House of Commons. The continued use of back-to-work legislation and binding arbitration may have initially worked to shore up the image of the unions and give legitimacy to the NDP. However, as the examples of the Air Canada ground crew workers and pilots showed, combativeness has been building within the working-class threatening to escape union control.

Other Struggles:

While the strikes at Canada Post and Air Canada have been the most notable events on the national level, a number of others struggles have taken place over the past year showing that the working-class in Canada has developed a certain combativeness that the unions have been obliged to control by agreeing to strike action. While we cannot discuss every one of these strikes in detail, some of the more important ones were:

A fierce contract dispute between British Columbia teachers and the Liberal party provincial government that saw

teachers launch a “limited job action” in September 2011 wherein they refused to write report cards, attend staff meetings, supervise extracurricular activity or perform administrative work. Proving that its not just Tories who can pass back-to-work legislation, the Liberal provincial government passed the now infamous Bill 22 in March 2012, that ordered a six month cooling off period and which made any strike action by teachers illegal on pain of a \$475 a day fine for any teacher participating in job action. The passing of Bill 22 sparked a campaign of resistance among teachers that while it remained mostly within union boundaries, included talk of a possible wildcat strike.

An intense weeks long strike by faculty at Brandon University in Manitoba, marking the second time in four years that faculty at the university were on strike. Faculty went out in October and did not return to work until late November. This strike was marked by a divisive ideological campaign by the university administration and the media to pit students who were effectively locked out of classes against the striking faculty.

The importance of this strike –albeit at small university on the prairies– should not be underestimated. With the threat of student unrest spreading out from Québec, the Canadian bourgeoisie must be fearful of any possible unification of student struggles with those of faculty members.

A series of strikes and threatened job actions by workers on a number of commuter bus lines in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) that snarled commutes in Canada’s largest metropolitan area.

For the most part, these various actions remained under the union fold, but the fact that so many contract disputes have resulted in strikes or threatened job actions is testament to the growing combativity within the working class after years of talk about the fragility of “Canada’s economic recovery”, which dampened the working class’s response to the recession that began in 2008. While workers have generally struggled to escape the grasp of the unions and have had little success linking up with other protest movements, there is a growing sense among the workers that strikes and other job actions are necessary to advance their interests in a political climate dominated by an intransigent state that has dropped any pretense of social neutrality and now appears to be in full league with management and administration.

The Class Struggle and the Canadian Political Situation

Clearly, the Canadian state has emerged from the federal elections of May 2011 with an unexpected strength in the face of the class struggle. Although the Harper Government was re-elected with a majority, the elections produced an NDP official opposition that has allowed the Canadian state to play the card of the left in opposition with a good deal of success over the past year. Each time a particularly threatening struggle arose, the Tory government was able to suppress it with draconian back-to-work legislation, while the NDP and the unions cried fowl from the left, convincing the workers that they had a friend in the House of Commons. As their argument went, “*If the anti-working class Harper government was in power today, perhaps this wouldn’t be the case in a few years when workers could rally around the NDP and elect a truly worker friendly government if they choose.*”

Every scandal involving the Conservative government –from the robo call scandal to the accusations of misleading parliament over the true costs of F-35 fighter jets and announcing plans to raise the age of eligibility for old age pensions in Davos, Switzerland– has for now only played into the overall political tactic of the left in opposition.

For the working class, the lessons of the past year are clear. While it is true that the Harper Government has been particularly aggressive in its approach to the class struggle, this does not mean that the NDP or any other bourgeois party is our friend. Moreover, the past year has shown us that struggling behind the unions always leads to defeat. We must pick-up where the Air Canada workers left off and begin to take our struggles outside of the union strait-jacket. It is only when we take struggles into our own hands and unite across sector that we have a chance to resist capitalism’s attacks. Moreover, it is also true that in today’s climate we must also look to unite our struggles with other protest movements that are resisting the effects of the economic crisis on the conditions of life, such as the resistance by Québec students to tuition increases and the growing burden of student debt. We are all being made to pay for the bourgeoisie’s self-inflicted crisis, but it is only our own autonomous struggles that can finally put an end to the politics of austerity once and for all.

Henk, 23/05/12

3) Of course, an important opportunity has been missed to link the struggle at Air Canada up with the workers at American airlines themselves facing severe cutbacks and layoffs due to that company’s bankruptcy. The difficulty in linking the struggles of workers at these two airlines is enhanced by the fact that there is generally a news blackout of anything happening in Canada in the United States.

STATEMENT ON THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

2011: from indignation to hope

This is an international statement that tries to draw a provisional balance sheet of the social movements of 2011 in order to contribute to a wider debate about their significance.

THE TWO most important events in 2011 were the globe crisis of capitalism ⁽¹⁾, and the social movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Israel, Chile, the USA, Britain...

Indignation has taken on an international dimension

The consequences of the capitalist crisis have been very hard for the immense majority of the world's population: deteriorating living conditions, long-term unemployment lasting years, precarious work making it impossible to have even a minimum of stability, extreme poverty and hunger...

Millions of people are concerned about the disappearance of the possibility of having a stable and normal life and the lack of a future for their children. This has led to a profound indignation, attempts to break out of passivity by taking to the streets and squares, to discussions about the causes of a crisis which in its present phase has lasted more than 5 years.

This anger has been exacerbated by the arrogance, greed and indifference shown towards the suffering of the majority by the bankers, politicians and other representatives of the capitalist class. The same goes for the incompetence shown by governments faced with such grave problems: their measures have only increased poverty and unemployment without bringing any solution.

This movement of indignation has spread internationally: to Spain, where the then Socialist government imposed one of the first and most draconian austerity plans; to Greece, the symbol of the crisis of sovereign debt; to the United States, the temple of world capitalism; to Egypt and Israel, focus of one of the worst and most entrenched imperialist conflicts, the Middle East.

¹ See: The economic crisis is not a never-ending story, <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4744/editorial-economic-crisis-not-never-ending-story>. Along with the global crisis of the system, the serious incident at the Fukushima nuclear power station – Japan – shows us the enormous dangers that humanity is facing.

The awareness that this is an international movement began to develop despite the destructive weight of nationalism, as seen in the presence of national flags in the demonstrations in Greece, Egypt or the USA. In Spain solidarity with the workers of Greece was expressed by slogans such as “Athens resists, Madrid rises up”. The Oakland strikers (USA, November, 2011) said “Solidarity with the occupation movement world wide”. In Egypt it was agreed in the Cairo Declaration to support the movement in the United States. In Israel they shouted “Netanyahu, Mubarak, El Assad are the same” and contacts were made with Palestinian workers.

These movements have passed their high points and although there are new struggles (Spain, Greece, Mexico) many are asking: what did this wave of indignation achieve? Have we gained anything?

Take to the streets! The common slogan of these movements

It is more than 30 years since we have seen such multitudes occupy the streets and squares in order to struggle for their own interests despite the illusions and confusions that have affected them.

These people, the workers, the exploited who have been presented as failures, idlers, incapable of taking the initiative or doing anything in common, have been able to unite, to share initiatives and to break out of the crippling passivity to which the daily normality of this system condemns them.

The principle of developing confidence in each others' capacity, of discovering the strength of the collective action of the masses, has been a morale booster. The social scene has changed. The monopoly of public life by politicians, experts and ‘great men’ has been put into question by the anonymous masses who have wanted to be heard ⁽²⁾.

² It is not without significance that Time Magazine made The Protester as its “Man of the Year”. See http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373,00.html.

Having said all this, we are only at a fragile beginning. The illusions, confusions, inevitable mood swings of the protesters; the repression handed out by the capitalist state and the dangerous diversions imposed its forces of containment (the left parties and trade unions) have led to retreats and bitter defeats. It is a question of a long and difficult road, strewn with obstacles and where there is no guarantee of victory: that said the very act of starting to walk this road is the first victory.

The heart of the movement: the assemblies

The masses involved in these movements have not limited themselves to passively shouting their displeasure. They have actively participated in organising assemblies. The mass assemblies have concretised the slogan of the First International (1864) “*The emancipation of the working class is the work of the workers themselves or it is nothing*”. This is the continuation of the tradition of the workers' movement stretching back to the Paris Commune, and to Russia in 1905 and 1917, where it took an ever higher form, continued in Germany 1918, Hungary 1919 and 1956, Poland 1980.

General assemblies and workers' councils are the genuine form of the struggle of the proletarian struggle and the nucleus of a new form of society.

Assemblies which aim to massively unite ourselves point the way towards breaking the chains of wage slavery, of atomisation, “everyone for themselves”, imprisonment in the ghetto of a sector or a social category.

Assemblies in order to think, to discuss and decide together, to make ourselves collectively responsible for what is decided, by participating together both in the making of decisions and their implementation.

Assemblies in order to build mutual confidence, general empathy, solidarity, which are not only indispensable for taking the struggle forward but can also serve as the pillars of a future society free of class and exploitation.

2011 has seen an explosion of real soli-

2011: from indignation to hope

arity that has nothing to do with the hypocritical and self-serving “solidarity” that the ruling class preaches about. The demonstrations in Madrid called for the freeing of those who have been arrested or have stopped the police detaining immigrants; there have been massive actions against evictions in Spain, Greece and the United States; in Oakland “*The strike Assembly has agreed to send pickets or to occupy any company or school that punishes employees or students in any way for taking part in the General Strike of the 2nd November*”. Vivid but still episodic moments have happened, when everyone can feel protected and defended by those around them. All of which starkly contrasted with what is “normal” in this society with its anguished sense of hopelessness and vulnerability.

The light for the future: the culture of debate

The consciousness needed for millions of workers to transform the world is not gained through being handed down by the ruling class or through the clever slogans of enlightened leaders. It is the fruit of an experience of struggle accompanied and guided by debate on a massive scale, by discussions which take into account the past but which are always focused on the future, since as a banner said in Spain “There is not future without revolution”.

The culture of debate, that is, open discussion based on mutual respect and active listening, has begun to spring up not only in the assemblies but around them: mobile libraries have been organized, as well as countless meetings for discussion and exchange of ideas... A vast intellectual activity has been carried out with very limited means, improvised in the streets and squares. And, as with the assemblies this has reanimated a past experience of the workers’ movement “*The thirst for education, so long held back, was concerted by the revolution into a true delirium. During the first six months, tons of literature, whether on handcarts or wagons poured forth from the Smolny Institute each day, Russia insatiably absorbed it, like hot sand absorbs water. This was not pulp novels, falsified history, diluted religion or cheap fiction that corrupts, but economic and social theories, philosophy, the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, Gorky*”³. Confronted with

this society’s culture that is based on the struggle for “models of success” which can only be a fount of millions of failures, the alienating and false stereotypes hammered home by the dominant ideology and its media, thousands of people began to look for an authentic popular culture, making it for themselves, trying to animate their own critical and independent criteria. The crisis and its causes, the role of the banks etc, have been exhaustively discussed. There has been discussion of revolution, although with much confusion; there has been talk of democracy and dictatorship, synthesized in these two complementary slogans “they call it democracy and it is not” and “it is a dictatorship but unseen”.

The proletariat is the key to the future

If all of this makes 2011 the year of the beginning of hope, we have viewed these movements with a discerning and critical eye, seeing their limitations and weaknesses which are still immense.

If there is a growing number of people in the world who are convinced that capitalism is an obsolete system, that “in order for humanity to survive, capitalism must be killed” there is also a tendency to reduce capitalism to a handful of “bad guys” (unscrupulous financiers, ruthless dictators) when it is really a complex network of social relations that have to be attacked in their totality and not dissipated into a preoccupation with its many surface expressions (finance, speculation, the corruption of political-economic powers).

While it is more than justified to reject the violence that capitalism has exuded from every pore (repression, terror and terrorism, moral barbarity), this system will however not be abolished by mere passive and citizen pressure. The minority class will not voluntarily abandon power and it will take cover in its state with its democratic legitimacy through elections every 4 or 5 years; through parties who promise what they can never do and do what they didn’t promise; and through unions that mobilise in order to demobilise and end up signing up to all that the ruling class puts on the table. Only a massive, tenacious and stubborn struggle will give the exploited the necessary strength to destroy the state and its means of repression and to make real the oft repeated shout in Spain “All power to the assemblies”.

Although the slogan of “we are the 99% against the 1%”, which was so popular in the occupation movement in the United

States, reveals the beginnings of an understanding of the bloody class divisions that affect us, the majority of participants in these protests saw themselves as “active citizens” who want to be recognized within a society of “free and equal citizens”.

However, society is divided into classes: a capitalist class that has everything and produces nothing, and an exploited class –the proletariat– that produces everything but has less and less. The driving force of social evolution is not the democratic game of the “decision of a majority of citizens” (this game is nothing more than a masquerade which covers up and legitimizes the dictatorship of the ruling class) but the class struggle.

The social movement needs to join up with the struggle of the principle exploited class –the proletariat– who collectively produce the main riches and ensure the functioning of social life: factories, hospitals, schools, universities, offices, ports, construction, post offices. In some of the movements in 2011 we began to see its strength, above all in the wave of strikes that exploded in Egypt and which finally forced Mubarak to resign. In Oakland (California) the “occupiers” called a general strike, going to the port and gaining the active support of the dockers and lorry drivers. In London striking electricians and the Saint Paul’s occupiers carried out common actions. In Spain certain striking sectors have tended to unite with the assemblies in the squares.

There is no opposition between the class struggle of the modern proletariat and the profound needs of the social layers exploited by capitalist oppression. The struggle of the proletariat is not an egotistical or specific movement but the basis for the “*independent movement of the immense majority to the benefit of the immense majority*” (*The Communist Manifesto*).

The present movements would benefit from critically reviewing the experience of two centuries of proletarian struggle and attempts at social liberation. The road is long and fraught with enormous obstacles, which calls to mind the oft repeated slogan in Spain “*It is not that we are going slowly, it is that we are going far*”. Start the most widespread possible discussion, without any restriction or discouragement, in order to consciously prepare new movements which could make it clear that capitalism can indeed be replaced by another society.

ICC, 11/03/12

3 John Reed: 10 days that shock the world. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/reed/1919/10days/10days/ch1.htm>

ORGANIZATION

How you can help the ICC

The gravity of the situation facing humanity is increasingly obvious. The world capitalist economy, after four decades of trying to deal with an open economic crisis, is breaking down in front of our eyes. The perspectives posed by the destruction of the environment appear more sombre with each new scientific survey. War, starvation, repression and corruption are the daily lot of millions.

At the same time, the working class and the other oppressed layers of society are beginning to resist capitalism's demands for sacrifice and austerity. Social revolts, occupations, demonstrations and strike movements have broken out in a whole series of countries from North Africa to Europe and North and South America.

The development of all these contradictions and conflicts more than ever confirms the need for the active presence of an organization of revolutionaries, able to analyze a rapidly evolving situation, to speak clearly with a unified voice across borders and continents, to participate directly in the movements of the exploited and help clarify their methods and aims.

There is no hiding the fact that the forces of the ICC are extremely limited in comparison to the enormous responsibilities we face. We are seeing the worldwide emergence of a new generation looking for revolutionary answers to the crisis of this system, but it is essential for those who sympathise with the overall aims of our organization to connect with the ICC and make their own contribution to its capacity to act and to grow.

We are not only talking about joining our organization here, although we will come to that. We value any kind of support and assistance that all those who are in general agreement with our politics can offer.

How can you help?

First, by discussing with us. Write to us by letter, email, or take part in our online discussion forum. Come to our public meetings and meetings organized for contacts. Raise questions about our positions, analyses, the way we write, the way our website works, etc etc.

Write for our website and papers,

whether reports on meetings you have attended, what's happening in your workplace, sector, or neighbourhood, or more developed articles, theoretical contributions, etc.

Help us translate from/into the many different languages in which we write: the ICC has web pages of varying size in English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Hungarian, Swedish, Finnish, Russian, Turkish, Bengali, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino. There are always too many articles to translate into all the languages, including some of the most basic texts of our organization. If you are able to translate into these or other languages, let us know.

Participate in our public activities: selling the press on the street, speaking and distributing our press and leaflets at picket lines, demonstrations, occupations. Help us to intervene at political meetings, go along to them yourselves and argue for revolutionary ideas; contribute to the internet discussion forums in which we participate regularly, such as www.libcom.org, or www.revleft.com (in particular the left communist forum on the latter: <http://www.revleft.com/vb/group.php?groupid=9>), www.red-marx.com, etc.

If you know others who are also interested in talking about revolutionary politics and the class struggle, set up discussion circles, class struggle forums or similar groupings, which we would be very happy to help you get going and to take part in ourselves.

Contribute practical skills and resources: photos, artwork, computer skills...

Help increase our very restricted finances by making regular financial donations, subscribing to our press, taking extra copies to sell to those you know, or to place in local bookshops.

Joining the ICC

We enthusiastically welcome requests by comrades who want to raise their support for the organization to a higher level by becoming members.

While not every sympathizer will join the organization, we think that becoming a member means taking part in the history of

the proletarian class struggle in the fullest sense. The proletariat is by nature a class whose strength lies in its capacity for collective organization, and this is above all true for its revolutionary elements, which have always sought to unite in organizations to defend the communist perspective against the huge weight of the dominant ideology. Becoming a member of the ICC enables comrades to participate directly in the reflection and discussions that are constantly underway inside the organization and to make the most effective contribution to our intervention in the class struggle. To shape the analyses and policies of the organization, the individual militant's most useful place is inside it, while for the organization as a whole, the members are an irreplaceable resource which it can count on and through which it can develop its activities on a world wide scale.

Before joining the ICC, it is essential for any comrade to have an in-depth discussion about our fundamental political positions, which are linked by a general marxist coherence and contained in our platform, so that those who become members do so out of genuine conviction and are able to argue for our political positions because they have a real understanding of them. It is equally important to discuss our organizational statutes and agree to the basic principles and rules which guide our functioning: how we collectively organise at the local, national, and international level, the role of congresses and central organs, how we conduct our internal debates, what is expected of members in terms of their participation in the life of the organization, and so on. The basic approach contained in our statutes can be found in this text ('Report on the structure and functioning of the revolutionary organization').

In this sense, we are in the tradition of the Bolshevik party, for whom a member was someone who not only agreed with the party's programme but aimed to actively defend it through the activities of the organization, and was therefore ready to adhere to its method of functioning as embodied in its statutes.

This is not an overnight process and takes time and patience. Unlike the left-

How you can help the ICC

ist groups, Trotskyist and others, who falsely claim descent from Bolshevism, we do not seek to 'recruit' at any price, and therefore end up with members who are no more than pawns in the games of a bureaucratic leadership. A real communist organisation can only flourish if its members have a profound understanding of its positions and analyses and are able to take part in the collective effort to apply and develop them.

Revolutionary politics is not a hobby: It involves both an intellectual and an

emotional commitment to facing the demands of the class struggle. But neither is it a monkish activity, cut off from the lives and concerns of the rest of the working class. We are not a cult, seeking to regulate every aspect of our members' lives, turning them into fanatics incapable of critical thought. Neither do we expect every member to be 'experts' in all aspects of marxist theory, or to enter our ranks with highly developed skills in writing or public speaking. We recognise that individual comrades will have vary-

ing capacities in different areas. We work on the communist principle that everyone contributes according to their means – that it is the task of the collective to harness all these individual energies in the most effective way.

The decision to enter a revolutionary organisation is not one to be taken lightly. But joining the ICC means becoming part of a world-wide fraternity struggling for a common goal – the only goal which really offers a future for humanity.

ICC, November 2011

FRENCH ELECTIONS

The leaders change, but austerity and exploitation remain

From 2007, France had a president, Nicolas Sarkozy, whose arrogance and stupidity knew no limits. His open love of money, his violent tirades against the young people of the poor suburbs and the immigrants, his provocations, his propensity for talking about nothing but himself...all this and more created a very strong feeling of exasperation throughout the population. It was thus no great surprise that the presidential elections ended in his defeat. His replacement, the 'socialist' François Hollande, relied almost exclusively on this anti-Sarkozyism to win. Prudently avoiding any promises of a bright tomorrow, even giving to understand that austerity (renamed 'control of the budget' or 'reduction of the deficit') would be a major axis of his government's policy, Hollande was happy to present himself as a 'normal' president, one who would avoid pointless provocation and bad taste.

This said, it would be a serious error to see this change of colour as no more than the rejection of a particular character, however unpleasant. And it would be even more of an error to hope for a fairer and more just policy now that the left is at the head of the government.

You only have to glance beyond the frontiers of France to see that. Throughout Europe in the last few months, when

elections have taken place, the team in power has been replaced, whether it is of the right or the left. In Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Finland, Slovenia, Slovakia...all the governments have been ejected. Why? Quite simply because since 2007 and the severe aggravation of the world economic crisis, all governments have been carrying out the same policy of 'sacrifices'. There is no difference between right and left, except perhaps in the language they use, the colour of the wrapping paper around their packet of 'reforms'. In Greece, Portugal, and Spain, from 2007 to 2011, the 'socialists' in power beat up on the workers, whether at work or unemployed, retired or still at university. Month after month they imposed increasingly drastic measures, endless attacks on their living standards.

But there is a second point in common in all these changes in government teams. The team that came in didn't get a honeymoon period. Straight away they pushed through brutal austerity policies and straight away faced social discontent. The economic crisis is not a choice for capital, it is something imposed on it. It is the fruit of a world system which is sick, obsolete. Capitalism today is in decline like slavery in the decadence of the Ro-

man empire or the feudal system in the days of absolute monarchy. The 'debt crisis' is only a symptom of this. All those who get elected to parliament, whatever their political party or their country, have to follow the same orientation: reduce the deficit, avoid bankruptcy by pitilessly attacking living and working conditions. The very socialist Monsieur Hollande will be no different.

Elections organised by the state are just a moment when the 'citizens' choose who's going to manage the interests of capital. They are entirely inside the system. But today, to put an end to growing poverty for the world's population, there is only one way to go: the struggle for revolution. Capitalism, this inhuman, mortally ill system, has to be replaced by a world without classes, exploitation, profit and competition. Such a world can only be built by the masses, the masses of employees, unemployed, retired, young people in part time work, united in the struggle. If votes are to be used to really change things, it will be the votes organised by us, the exploited – the votes taken in general assemblies where we decide together, collectively, how we should struggle against the state and its representatives.

Pawel 6/5/12

BELGRADE (2011)

Declaration for revolutionary organization

ICC introduction

Throughout the 1990s, the territory of the former state of Yugoslavia was the scene of a series of horrifying massacres justified by the ideology of ethnic chauvinism. The war in the Balkans brought imperialist slaughter closer to the heartlands of capitalism than at any time since 1945. The local bourgeoisies did all they could to whip their populations into a frenzy of ethnic and nationalist hatred, the precondition for supporting or participating in the bloody slaughter of the Yugoslav wars.

These hatreds have not been eliminated by the uneasy peace which now reigns in the region, so it is all the more heartening to see signs that there are those in the region who look for a way forward in the social movement against capitalism and not in any dreams of national aggrandizement. We have seen, for example, a number of struggles by students in Serbia and Croatia, which should be seen as another expression of the same international tendency which we have seen in Western Europe and in the USA with the *indignados* and Occupy movements. And we are now witnessing the development of a genuinely internationalist politicized minority in both countries, a which openly rejects national divisions and seeks cooperation among all internationalist revolutionaries.

One expression of this new movement is the Declaration of the Birov collective in Serbia, which has recently emerged from a growing nucleus there (see their website, <http://www.birov.net/>). We are publishing it here. The most important thing about this Declaration, it seems to us, is the clarity and directness with which it puts forward a series of fundamental class positions:

- affirmation of the revolutionary nature of the working class against all “post-marxist mystifications”;
- necessity for the self-organization of the working class in opposition to the trade unions, defined as organs of the capitalist state;
- insistence that the workers’ assemblies and eventually the workers’ councils are the instrument for the mass struggle against capitalism;

- rejection of all national liberation struggles and capitalist wars, seen as a fundamental “border line between revolutionaries and the patriotic, social democratic left”;
- characterisation of the so-called ‘socialist states’ as capitalist regimes.

The last two points are obviously especially important given the recent conflicts in the region, and the increasing use of nationalist rhetoric by the ruling class.

Underlying these revolutionary positions is a definite recognition that capitalism is no longer in its progressive phase and can no longer provide permanent reforms: in other words, that it is a system in decline ⁽¹⁾.

The Declaration also makes an interesting observation on the transition period, recognizing the problem of the conservative ‘drag’ exerted by certain semi-state organisms.

Clearly there remain areas for discussion and clarification among internationalists, for example on the question of organization, the perspectives for the class struggle, and the meaning of anarcho-sindicalism today. At the very least, we can welcome a healthy realism in the Declaration’s statement that “no revolutionary organization can be larger or stronger than the current workers’ general position dictates”. These and no doubt other questions can only be elucidated through open and fraternal debate.

ICC, February 2012

Declaration for revolutionary organization, Belgrade (2011)

*“If there was hope,
it must lie in the proles”*

George Orwell

Aware of the class divisions inside the capitalist system, the brutal exploitation of which all of us are victims, the state oppression which makes that exploitation possible, and also the unsustainable nature of the current militaristic order which is inevitably heading towards a catastrophe, we organize ourselves into “Birov”, an organization with the goal of radically opposing these social phenomena and of

achieving their final eradication through class struggle.

By realizing that the working class, as the class hit the most by today’s social structure, holds the largest revolutionary potential, “Birov” organizes class conscious, militant workers with the intention of spreading class consciousness within the working class, and directing it towards organized workers’ struggle realized by means of workers’ councils. We reject all “post-Marxist” mystifications which talk about the dying out or non-existence of the working class and therefore negate the class struggle and the crucial role of the workers as an agent of revolutionary change. A member of the working class is anyone who has to sell their labour power to capital : a butcher, a worker in the sexual industry or a girl working in a printing shop alike.

Emancipatory actions must be based on the self-activity of the oppressed, and on autonomous workers’ councils, striving towards the creation of a self-managed society, without a state, without classes and without the involuntary institutions of civil society. Every new attempt at overcoming the old society must be directed towards organizing the council system on an international scale, because only a radical change in the balance of class forces can initiate progressive social changes. The council form set up after the dissolution of the traditional, hierarchical capitalist state machinery is not something that revolution should strive for – here it only exists as a conservative organ which exists during the revolution, and the final self-organization and emancipation of the working class will imminently threaten its power, as well as the existence of that order itself. In this imminent conflict revolutionaries must recognize autonomously organized workers as the revolutionary vanguard in the final and decisive battle against the old order and for the society of free producers.

Only the open and unrestricted opposition to divisions created by this society will unleash the subversive potential which the existing workers’ struggle holds today. Workers’ struggle must be founded on the workplaces, where workers recognize themselves as producers and where

¹ See their FAQ, which also gives more explanation of this and other aspects of the group’s politics.

Declaration for revolutionary organization

class differences are being projected and resolved in their essence. We reject the party as completely inadequate for revolutionary organizing of the working class. Old reform parties which are remembered for winning political freedoms and reduced work hours, weren't that in the first place : their primary purpose was a struggle for economic and political reforms, where an anti-political consciousness was yet to be and where it was still striving towards traditional –hierarchical forms of representation.

We can conclude that “Birov” can be characterized as an anarcho-syndicalist propaganda organization. It addresses workers in struggle and gathers anarcho-syndicalists which act by forming militant class groups at their workplaces. These groups shouldn't be mistaken for trade unions because their intention is not to grow in numbers but to participate in assembly movements. They don't have a formal structure and political programme. These groups are formed at workplaces where there is already a tradition of autonomous workers' organization and where a network of workers tends to continue their activities and develop new ways of struggling.

We consider that today the trade unions cannot have a political program which is not reactionary, and thus the only possible way for the mass of workers to organize can be assemblies; mass organizing in a “permanent” organization isn't possible until the revolution becomes an immediate goal. Trade unions have, as instruments of reform struggle and a separate economic organization, lost their reason of existence in conditions in which they cannot any longer consistently reflect the aspirations of the working class. They are today nothing less than a state incorporated instrument which keeps the workers' struggle depoliticized and within a strictly limited framework They represent a kind of prison for the working class, without which the workers would be free in their tendency towards self-organization. Paid and often corrupt union bureaucrats are nothing but guards and wardens of those

prisons. Therefore, unions are just an arm of a state which implements another kind of oppression of the working class. Capitalism cannot provide permanent reforms anymore: every struggle for the immediate and daily interests of proletariat, where they are not suppressed by trade unions and parties, necessarily evolves towards the revolutionizing of the masses and action against the repressive and exploitative foundations of the capitalist order. Because of that, today, any kind of phenomenon that tends to depoliticize the workers' struggle and keep it in the imposed framework, is necessarily reactionary. Claims about how anarcho-syndicalist organizations should be “non-ideological” are no alternative to the fake divisions imposed by capitalism, but only a re-emergence of the old (unenforceable) idea about separate economic organization, and in practice most often end up as leftist activist networks which reproduce the ideology of the mainstream, nationalist “left”. Opposed to those claims, anarcho-syndicalist organizations are class-militant and political organizations : the only principles of anarcho-syndicalism which are accepted by all members are necessarily political in their content.

We see ourselves not as an organization which necessarily tends towards growth in numbers and thus puts itself as a goal, an idea which often results in radical activism; nor do we consider ourselves as a kind of vanguard of the working class which dictates its interests. Our goal is to develop an organization which will be able to intervene in workers' struggle. We share our accumulated experience with the workers and by that we can increase the capacity of the workers' struggle, thus helping its extension and its further organization. Such a relation creates a mutual dependence and therefore no revolutionary organization can be larger or stronger than the current workers' general position dictates; and because of that we aren't afraid of workers self-organizing and of “loss of control”; it is, on the contrary, our goal. Consequently, the basis for the unification of oppressed groups in

capitalism will not be set by any party or “front”, nor by a mass trade union, or an anarchist group which acts in the preparation phase, the phase of re-grouping of revolutionary forces, but by a mass anti-capitalist struggle organized in workers' councils under whose wing alone can the true emancipatory vision be articulated. Therefore, the best way of expressing solidarity with oppressed groups is the development of our own struggle at the workplace and constant education about the questions of oppression.

We condemn as completely reactionary any stance on the revolutionary character of 'national liberation' struggles. Drawing a parallel with bourgeois-revolutionary national movements is wrong and in this period anti-nationalism is a border line between revolutionaries and the patriotic, social-democratic left. In today's capitalist society every state is imperialist and the growth of national consciousness can only be seen as a means of preserving the capitalist order in conditions of permanent crisis and impending doom. Any acceptance of national, populist discourse can only draw workers towards a bloody imperialist war; it is the prelude to such a historic moment, as we all witnessed during the beginning and the middle of the 20th century.

In total contrast to the ideas of the anti-war movement of the First World War, counter-revolutionary ideology subordinates the workers to the needs of the national bourgeoisie and all in the name of “anti-imperialism” and “peoples' liberation”. The results are historically recognizable and can be seen in the “socialist revolutions” after the end of the October revolutionary period, which were victims of party instrumentation and suppression of any form of workers' self-organization and have resulted in totalitarian imperialist regimes of state capitalism, or so-called “real socialism”.

The liberation of the working class will be carried out by the workers themselves, or it won't be at all.

Belgrade, Serbia, October 2011

usa@internationalism.org

The communist left and the continuity of marxism

The first part of this article was published in *Internationalism* 160.

10. The isolation of the revolution in Russia had, as we have said, resulted in a growing divorce between the working class and an increasingly bureaucratic state machine – the most tragic expression of this divorce being the suppression of the Kronstadt workers’ and sailors’ revolt by the proletariat’s own Bolshevik party, which had become more and more entangled with the state.

But precisely because it was a truly proletarian party, Bolshevism also produced numerous internal reactions against its own degeneration. Lenin himself – who in 1917 had been the most articulate spokesman of the left wing of the party – made some highly pertinent criticisms of the party’s slide into bureaucratism, particularly towards the end of his life; and around the same time, Trotsky became the main representative of a left opposition which sought to restore the norms of proletarian democracy within the party, and which went on to combat the most notorious expressions of the Stalinist counter-revolution, particularly the theory of “socialism in one country”. But, to a large extent because Bolshevism had undermined its own role as a proletarian vanguard by fusing with the state, the most important left currents within the party tended to be led by lesser known figures who were able to remain closer to the class than to the state machine.

Already in 1919, the Democratic Centralism group, led by Ossinski, Smirnov and Sapranov, had begun to warn against the “withering away” of the soviets and the increasing departure from the principles of the Paris Commune. Similar criticisms were made in 1921 by the Workers’ Opposition group led by Kollontai and Shliapnikov, although the latter was to prove less rigorous and durable than the “Decist” group, which was to continue to play an important role throughout the 20s, and which was to develop a similar approach to that of the Italian left. In 1923, the Workers’ Group led by Miasnikov issued its manifesto and made an important intervention in the workers’ strikes of that

year. Its positions and analyses were close to those of the KAPD.

All these groups not only emerged from the Bolshevik party; they continued to fight within the party for a return to the original principles of the revolution. But as the forces of bourgeois counter-revolution gained ground within the party, the key issue became the capacity of the various oppositions to see the real nature of this counter-revolution and to break with any sentimental loyalty to its organized expressions. This was to prove the fundamental divergence between Trotsky and the Russian communist left: while the former was to remain throughout his life wedded to the notion of the defence of the Soviet Union and even to the working class nature of the Stalinist parties, the left communists saw that the triumph of Stalinism – including its “left” turns, which confused many of Trotsky’s followers – meant the triumph of the class enemy and implied the necessity for a new revolution.

However, many of the best elements in the Trotskyist opposition – the so-called “irreconcilables” – themselves went over to the positions of the communist left in the late 20s and early 30s. But the Stalinist terror had almost certainly eliminated these groups by the end of the decade.

11. The 1930s were, in Victor Serge’s words, “midnight in the century”. The last embers of the revolutionary wave – the general strike in Britain in 1926, the Shanghai uprising of 1927 – had already burnt out. The Communist Parties had become parties of national defence; fascist and Stalinist terror were at their most ferocious in precisely those countries where the revolutionary movement had risen the highest; and the entire capitalist world was preparing for another imperialist holocaust. In these conditions, the surviving revolutionary minorities had to face exile, repression, and a growing isolation. As the class as a whole succumbed to demoralization and to the war ideologies of the bourgeoisie, revolutionaries could not

hope to have a widespread impact on the immediate struggles of the class.

Trotsky’s failure to understand this was to lead his left opposition in an increasingly opportunist direction – the “French turn” back into the social democratic parties, capitulation to anti-fascism, etc. – in the vain hope of “conquering the masses”. The final outcome of this course, for Trotskyism rather than for Trotsky himself, was integration into the bourgeois war machine during the 1940s. Since that time Trotskyism, like social democracy and Stalinism, has been part of capitalism’s political apparatus, and for all its pretensions, has nothing whatever to do with the continuity of marxism.

12. In contrast to this trajectory, the Italian left fraction around the review *Bilan* correctly defined the tasks of the hour: first, not to betray the elementary principles of internationalism faced with the march towards war; secondly, to draw a “balance sheet” of the failure of the revolutionary wave and of the Russian revolution in particular, and to elaborate the appropriate lessons so that they could serve as a theoretical foundation for the new parties that would emerge out of a future revival of the class struggle.

The war in Spain was a particularly harsh test for the revolutionaries of the day, many of whom capitulated to the siren-songs of anti-fascism and failed to see that the war was imperialist on both sides, a general rehearsal for the coming world war. *Bilan* however stood firm, calling for class struggle against both the fascist and the republican factions of the bourgeoisie, just as Lenin had denounced both camps in the First World War.

At the same time, the theoretical contributions made by this current – which later encompassed fractions in Belgium, France and Mexico – were immense and indeed irreplaceable. In its analysis of the degeneration of the Russian revolution – which never led it to question the proletarian character of 1917; in its investigations into the problems of a future period of transition; in its work on the economic crisis and the foundations of capitalism’s

The communist left and the continuity of marxism

decadence; in its rejection of the Communist International's position of support for "national liberation" struggles; in its elaboration of the theory of the party and the fraction; in its ceaseless but fraternal polemics with other proletarian political currents; in these and many other areas, the Italian left fraction undoubtedly carried out its task of laying the programmatic bases for the proletarian organisations of the future.

13. The fragmentation of the groups of the communist left in Germany was completed by the Nazi terror, even though some clandestine revolutionary activity still carried on under the Hitler regime. During the 1930s, the defence of the revolutionary positions of the German left was largely carried on in Holland, particularly through the work of the Group of International Communists, but also in America with the group led by Paul Mattick. Like *Bilan*, the Dutch left remained true to internationalism in the face of all the local imperialist wars which paved the way to the global slaughter, resisting the temptations of "defending democracy".

It continued to deepen its understanding of the trade union question, of the new forms of workers' organisation in the epoch of capitalist decay, of the material roots of the capitalist crisis, of the tendency towards state capitalism. It also maintained an important intervention in the class struggle, particularly towards the movement of the unemployed. But the Dutch left, traumatised by the defeat of the Russian revolution, slid more and more into the councilist negation of political organisation - and thus of any clear role for itself. Coupled with this was a total rejection of Bolshevism and the Russian revolution, dismissed as bourgeois from the beginning. These theorisations were the seeds of its future demise. Although left communism in Holland continued even under Nazi occupation and gave rise to an important organisation after the war - the Spartacusbund, which initially moved back towards the pro-party positions of the KAPD - the Dutch left's concessions to anarchism on the organisational question made it increasingly difficult for it to maintain any kind of organised continuity in later years. Today we are very close to the complete extinction of this current.

14. The Italian left, on the other hand, did maintain organisational continuity of

a kind, though not without the counter-revolution exacting its price. Just prior to the war, the Italian fraction was thrown into disarray by the "theory of the war economy" which denied the imminence of world war, but its work continued, particularly through the appearance of a French fraction in the middle of the imperialist conflict. Towards the end of the war, the outbreak of major proletarian struggles in Italy created further confusion in the ranks of the fraction, with the majority returning to Italy to form, along with Bordiga who had been inactive politically since the late 20s, the Internationalist Communist Party of Italy, which although opposed to the imperialist war was formed on unclear programmatic bases and with a faulty analysis of the period, deemed to be one of mounting revolutionary combat.

This political orientation was opposed by the majority of the French fraction which saw more rapidly that the period remained one of triumphant counter-revolution, and consequently that the tasks of the fraction had not been completed. The Gauche Communiste de France thus continued to work in the spirit of *Bilan*, and while not neglecting its responsibility to intervene in the immediate struggles of the class, focused its energies on the work of political and theoretical clarification, and made a number of important advances, particularly on the question of state capitalism, the period of transition, the trade unions and the party. While maintaining the rigorous marxist method so typical of the Italian left, it was also able to integrate some of the best contributions of the German-Dutch left into its overall programmatic armoury.

15. By 1952, however, wrongly convinced of the imminence of a third world war, the GCF had effectively disbanded. In the same year, the ICP in Italy was rent by a split between the "Bordigist" tendency and a tendency led by Onarato Damen, a militant who had remained politically active in Italy throughout the fascist period. The "Bordigist" tendency was clearer in its understanding of the reactionary nature of the period, but in its efforts to stand firm in its defence of marxism tended to relapse into dogmatism. Its (new!) theory of the "invariance of marxism" led it to increasingly ignore the advances made by the Fraction in the thirties and to regress back to the "orthodoxy" of the Communist International on many issues. The various

Bordigist groups today (at least three of which call themselves the "International Communist Party") are the direct descendants of this tendency.

The Damen tendency was much clearer on basic political questions like the role of the party, the trade unions, national liberation and state capitalism, but never went to the roots of the errors committed in the original formation of the ICP. During the 1950s and 1960s, these groups stagnated politically, with the Bordigist current in particular "protecting" itself behind a wall of sectarianism. The bourgeoisie had come as close as it ever came to eliminating all organised expressions of marxism, in breaking the vital thread that links the revolutionary organisations of the present to the great traditions of the workers' movement.

16. At the end of the 1960s, however, the proletariat reappeared on the stage of history with the general strike in France in May 68, and the subsequent explosion of workers' combats all across the globe. This revival gave birth to a new generation of politicised elements looking for the clarity of communist positions, breathed new life into existing revolutionary groups and eventually produced new organisations which sought to renew the left communist heritage. Initially, this new political milieu, reacting against the "authoritarian" image of Bolshevism, was deeply impregnated by councilist ideology, but as it matured, it became increasingly able to put its anti-organisational prejudices behind it and see its continuity with the entire marxist tradition.

It is not accidental that today most of the groups in the existing revolutionary milieu are descended from the Italian left current, which has placed such a strong emphasis on the organisation question and the need to preserve an intact revolutionary tradition. Both the Bordigist groups and the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party are the heirs of the Internationalist Communist party of Italy, while the International Communist Current to a large extent is the descendant of the Gauche Communiste de France.

17. The proletarian revival of the late 60s has followed a tortuous path, going through movements of advance and retreat, encountering many obstacles on the way, none greater than the huge

Continued on Page 7

The ICC will hold Public Forums in August in San Francisco, Greensboro, NC, Philadelphia, and New York City. Visit our website for details

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Change of Address for Internationalism

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(without mentioning the section's name in the address)

INTERNATIONALISM WILL HOLD PUBLIC FORUMS THIS AUGUST IN SEVERAL CITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES. THE MAIN FOCUS WILL BE ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROTEST MOVEMENTS OF 2011 AND WILL BE BASED ON THE ICC STATEMENT ON THESE EVENTS, WHICH CAN BE FOUND HERE:

<http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201203/4766/statement-social-movements-2011>

DATES AND PLACES

- GREENSBORO, NC**
Tuesday, August 14, 2012 – 6:00PM
1310 Glenwood Avenue, Greensboro, NC 27403
- PHILADELPHIA, PA**
Thursday, August 16, 2012 – 6:30PM
A-Space, 4722 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19143
- NEW YORK CITY**
Friday, August 17, 2012 – 7:00PM
TRS, 44 East 32nd. Street, 11th Fl, New York, NY

OTHER PUBLIC FORUMS ARE PLANNED IN SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES. EXACT DATES AND VENUES WILL BE POSTED ON OUR WEBSITE. PLEASE CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES. WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

**ICC Books & Pamphlets
Please write to us for costs of postage for multiple items or shipping outside of the US**

Title	Price	Postage US
The Italian Communist Left	\$9.00	\$3.00
The Dutch and German Communist Left	\$21.00	\$10.00
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The British Communist Left	\$9.00	\$3.00
Communism: Not a 'Nice Idea', but a material necessity	\$14.00	\$3.00
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The Decadence of Capitalism	\$4.50	\$1.25
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india@internationalism.org

Internationell Revolution

Box 21106, 100 31 Stockholm, Sweden

Revolução Internacional, Brazil

Write to: brasil@internationalism.org

Political positions of the CCI

Internationalism is the section in the USA of the International Communist Current which defends the following political positions:

- Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.
- The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.
- The stratified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called “socialist” or “communist” were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.
- Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an Political positions of the ICC 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 organizations (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 organization, 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 organization 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 organized 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 nationalization 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 organization constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalization of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to “organize 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. Organized 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 organizations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organizations 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, 1884-1914, 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.