



world revolution

Obama, NATO, Bin Laden, Gaddafi – are all our enemies

After NATO bombings on a building in Tripoli killed a son and three grandchildren of Muammar Gaddafi, there were revenge attacks on the cities of Benghazi and Misrata, and attacks on the British and Italian embassies, among other targets. The killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan by American special forces was supposedly undertaken in revenge for the 3000 9/11 murders. When the anti-Gaddafi forces in Libya heard of bin Laden's death they called for Gaddafi to face the same fate.

This spiral of murder and destruction is further evidence of capitalism's appetites in an era where every state, every capitalist faction that aspires to power, is compelled to follow the military option and the path of terror.

In this capitalist world the antagonists go under many flags, but they are all pursuing the same goals. Gaddafi is favoured by many who call themselves socialists, despite being at the heart of a regime for whom repression is second nature and vicious retaliation comes automatically. Barack Obama is supposed to be a 'friend of freedom', yet his military campaigns, from the bombing of Pakistan within the first few days of taking office, just continue from where George Bush left off. Bin Laden is seen by some as an 'anti-imperialist' hero, but his ultimate dream of a multi-national caliphate is one of the oldest imperialist projects going. And as for the Libyan 'rebels' of the National Transitional Council, they can be marked down as enemies of the exploited and oppressed on a number of counts, from the backing of the US, the calls for the return to a monarchy, and the basic fact that so many of them were not so long ago integral to Gaddafi's state apparatus.

Following the killing of bin Laden there were commentators in the US who spoke about the possibility of 'closure' for the victims of 9/11. With the continuing wars in Afghanistan, Iran and Libya there is clearly no closure for those who have been caught up in and become victims of the American 'war on terror.'

As Obama said in his first speech celebrating the killing of bin Laden "his death does not mark the end of our effort. There's no doubt that al-Qaida will continue to pursue attacks against us." Indeed it will, and if one terrorist force is diminished then others can easily take its place. Obama asserted that "we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to". American imperialism, however it is minded, cannot impose its will in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, despite being the world's biggest military power. On the contrary, all its actions tend, in Obama's words not to "make the world a safer place" but exacerbate conflicts and chaos across the face of the planet.

Some things have changed since 9/11. In the Middle East, for example, despite the fantasies of Gaddafi, al-Qaida has never really got a foothold, whatever its strengths in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the recent social movements in various Arab countries, whatever their confusions, there has been no sign that protesters have been going in the direction of al-Qaidaist ideas, adoption of

sharia law or other Islamic tenets. On the contrary, many of the demonstrators have explicitly rejected the vicious sectarian and gender divisions which al-Qaida stands for. A bigger obstacle to the movements in North Africa and the Middle East has been the myth of democracy, which serves to prevent the working class from acting as an independent force in society.

All the figureheads of capitalism, whether in the White House, in a tent in the desert, in a cave in the mountains, or in the affluent suburbs, stand for a world of war and destruction and against the liberation of humanity. **Car 2/5/11**

No bailout for world capitalism



In 2007, when the debt bubble burst, it was the big banks that were on the verge of collapse. They only kept going thanks to massive infusions of credit from the treasuries of the world's states. This was done not because governments do what the greedy bankers tell them to do, but because the capitalist system could not tolerate the implosion of its global financial machinery.

But the bail-out of the banks did not solve capitalism's problems. On the contrary: in the space of a few years we have gone from the bail out of banks to the bail out of entire states. First Greece, then Ireland, then, in April 2011, Portugal. Unable to meet its sovereign debt obligations, Portugal

has had to appeal to the European Union to rescue it to the tune of 80 billion euro. Speculation is rife about who will be next: the most likely candidate is Spain, but Britain, whose government is taking desperate preventive action with its programme of savage cuts, looks equally shaky in the eyes of the world's economic think-tanks. The need to keep the weaker members of the EU afloat is putting an enormous strain on the stronger economies, like Germany, and is threatening to undermine the stability of the euro and of the EU itself. And it's not just in Europe: Japan, whose national debt is twice the size of its GDP, and even the mighty USA, are heading in the same direction. A spokesman

for the International Monetary Fund, Jose Vinals, recently expressed the view that US government bonds are no longer without risk. And who will bail out the USA if it too defaults on its gigantic debts?

There could hardly be a more graphic illustration of the bankruptcy, not of this or that company, this or that country, but the entire capitalist system. In an article in this issue, 'The demise of credit' we look at the causes of the present world economic crisis, which has opened up a new chapter in the long historical decline of the capitalist system. It is vital to understand that the capitalist system has no route out of this crisis, not least because it means that the capitalist class, whatever the country and whatever the shade of government, has no alternative but to attack the living standards of the vast majority of us, to force us to accept austerity, poverty and sacrifice – not because they are 'ideologically driven', but because they are driven by the very material needs of a dying system of production. **WR 1/5/11**

Inside this issue

Class struggle and its obstacles (Resolution on the British Situation part 2)	2
NHS: Defend jobs and healthcare, not the capitalist state	3
World economic crisis: the demise of credit	4
Middle East: For massive struggle against the dictatorship of world capital	5
Bristol 1980/2011: repression and revolt	5
Notes on internationalist anarchism in the UK, part one: from the late 19th century to the end of World War Two	6
Meetings, subscriptions, pamphlets	7
Militant workers' meeting in Alicante, Spain:	8

Class struggle and its obstacles

World Revolution held its 19th Congress in November 2010. One of the responsibilities of any territorial section of the ICC is to discuss the national situation. It has to analyse the economic crisis, the class struggle, and role played by British imperialism on the world stage. The following article is part of the *Resolution on the British Situation* adopted by the congress, specifically the section concerning the life of the bourgeoisie and the class struggle. The first part, on economic crisis and inter-imperialist rivalries, was published in *World Revolution* 340.

Globally the material condition of the working class has further deteriorated since the autumn, as many national capitals continue to struggle with the multiple problems of weak growth, rising public deficits, stubbornly high unemployment, particularly amongst the youth, and relatively high inflation. As a result the working class is seeing the erosion of pay as wages lag behind inflation, attacks on pensions and the wider effects of cuts in the social wage as benefits and government services fall under the axe of various austerity programmes. Despite the rising stock markets and soothing words of the bourgeoisie the world economy remains extremely fragile, with the spectre of sovereign defaults continuing to stalk Europe, especially with the bailout of Portugal in April.

Given the terrible situation facing the working class, one might well ask why is the level of class struggle in Britain so low? Why aren't workers taking to the streets en masse to protest as they have in Greece, France, Spain, Wisconsin etc.? As the Resolution points out, there have been several important industrial disputes in Britain over the past 2 years, but the working class in Britain has to confront a number of historical weights, especially the strength of the trade unions and the legacy of the defeats of key sectors of the class

in the 1980s, such as the miners. This has been further reinforced by the bourgeoisie's ensuing ideological assault on working-class identity and the pressures of decomposition that further undermine social cohesion and a common sense of class solidarity. So, the key point to remember that there is no mechanical link between the depth of the economic crisis and the levels of class struggle and class consciousness.

These difficulties have been illustrated in particular by two key events over the past 6 months. First, the student protests in late 2010, which broke out soon after the resolution was written. This movement was sparked by proposed steep increases in tuition fees for students entering higher education in 2012, and the scrapping of the Educational Maintenance Allowance for students in further education - an important weekly benefit of £30 for those students from low income families. While the 'student body' itself is not a social class, many young people from working class families have no option but to stay in education for as long as possible to avoid unemployment and to gain skills and qualifications in order to stand a better chance of getting those jobs that are available. Increasingly, even those young people from better off middle-class backgrounds face being proletarianised during and after education, having to work part-time while studying to survive and then joining the labour market where very few full-time jobs with decent conditions and pensions are being created. A report in February from the NIESR found that only 3% of new jobs created were full time since the UK economy came out of recession.

The student movement was thus strongly animated by a proletarian spirit. There was a strong element of spontaneity to many of the protests and demonstrations, which the NUS, Labour

Party and leftists had to chase to catch up with. There was a clear sense of solidarity with future generations of students too: many of those protesting wouldn't be affected by the increases in fees and cuts to benefits but were protesting on behalf - and often with the involvement of - those children still at school. The demands raised were of an economic nature, and the methods used in many of the occupations - mass meetings and debates - expressed a tendency to unity and self-organisation that could have lent itself to wider involvement from the working class, as happened in 2005 in France when students and workers there protested against the reforms to the CPE.¹ In the end the student movement was unable to gather a sufficient momentum to change the coalition government's decisions and by the spring the relevant legislation had been passed in Parliament. Nevertheless, the lessons and experience gained in the struggle were important for the future as and when the most militant minorities of those involved enter the workforce and participate in the coming struggles.

The second significant event was the national demonstration against cuts organised by the TUC on 26 March in London. The Lib-Con coalition government has been walking a tightrope. On the one hand it hasn't shied away from planning the scale of cuts it feels is necessary to avoid 'the market' losing confidence in their determination to deal with the deficit. On the other it is keenly aware of the response that a brutal, frontal assault on the working class might provoke. In the face of this dilemma the British bourgeoisie has demonstrated its historic intelligence and strength by phasing in the cuts over a much longer term than

1. 'Movement against CPE: a rich experience for future struggles', *World Revolution* 294, May 2006. http://en.internationalism.org/wr/294_cpe

was originally expected, while relying on the trade unions and leftists to organise 'anti-cuts' groups and demonstrations to keep what indignation and resistance there is in safe hands. Thus the 26 March demonstration, while very well attended, was essentially a pointless exercise in 'marching from A to B'.

Should the lack of an explosive, massive response from the working class in Britain to the deepening economic crisis be a cause for concern? While the development of the class struggle here has lacked the spectacular expressions seen in other countries, such as France and Greece, there is no doubt that the crisis will continue to deepen and the material condition of the working class will continue to deteriorate. The '70s and '80s saw much higher levels of class struggle in Britain, but one of their weaknesses was the insufficient politicisation of the struggles, especially in the form of the emergence of a politicised minority whose class consciousness had been raised through struggle and reflection on the wider historic dimension of the class movement. While the ICC and other organisations of the communist left were products of this era, these forces were incomparably weak and isolated compared to the demands of the historic situation. The emergence over recent years of a new generation of people concerned with the need to discuss and clarify is thus historically significant. In Britain we are seeing the emergence of widespread political discussion outside of the confines of the capitalist left, through internet forums and small discussion groups, as well as efforts of these minorities to coordinate their participation in the class struggle. These efforts face many weaknesses but they are a sign that future workers' struggles in the UK will be able to develop much more rapidly in an openly political direction. **Colin 1/5/11**

Resolution on the British Situation from WR's 19th Congress (part 2)

Life of the bourgeoisie

13. The bourgeoisie remains the dominant class and there is no likelihood of this being challenged in the short term. However, it increasingly finds difficulty in keeping control over the functioning of society at all levels and has to work harder to maintain both its material and ideological domination.

14. The economic crisis poses the most immediate threat to the bourgeoisie because it can neither control nor understand it. The worsening of the crisis increases the risk of divisions emerging both between and within the national bourgeoisie about the most effective approach. While the first response to the open crisis of 2007-9 showed that the bourgeoisie still remembers the lessons of the 1930s, once the immediate threat had been contained differences began to emerge. One area of difference is between Europe, where most countries adopted austerity measures to reduce their deficits, and the US where the emphasis remained on using debt. In part this reflects the different positions of these countries where the US is most able to sustain a policy based on debt because the continuing position of the dollar as the global reference currency allows it to increase debt by printing more money. A second area of difference is between the debtor and creditor countries, essentially that is between the US and China where friction over China's policy of keeping its currency low in order to promote exports has been long-standing but is likely to increase, particularly if the US seeks to use manufacturing to help climb out of recession. More widely, there is an increased risk of countries engaging in competitive devaluations to favour their exports, which is one step on the road towards protectionism. Within the British bourgeoisie there is little evidence of real division at present. Those differences that are reported over what to cut, when to cut and how far to cut are part of the strategy to keep questioning within the framework of capitalism.

15. Divisions over imperialist strategy have played a significant role in the life of the British bourgeoisie over the last two decades. They undermined the dying days of the Conservative government in the mid-1990s and were one of the reasons for putting New Labour into power. They reappeared over Blair's turn towards the US after 2001, were expressed in public through some of the inquiries into the Iraq war and ultimately resulted in Blair being forced from office early. In recent years the dominant part of the bourgeoisie has sought to reassert the independent line it favours and to develop this in the light of the current situation. If the pressure put on Blair was the most dramatic, developments within the Tory party were no less significant. While both Cameron and Foreign Secretary Hague have previously made strong Euro-sceptic comments, their more recent policy statements have stressed the need to take a more independent line from America and to develop links within Europe. This last has been most strikingly shown in the treaties signed with France in late 2010. The reception given to this by parts of the Tory party show that the Eurosceptic faction remains but also that it has been subdued for at least the time being. At the moment a certain level of unity has been restored in the British ruling class; however, the difficulties facing British imperialism as it attempts to develop a new strategy mean that there is a real possibility of divisions reappearing with renewed force in the future.

A key issue for the bourgeoisie in the recent election was its ability to get the workers to accept the massive attacks that every faction of the ruling class knew were unavoidable. The immediate task was to draw the electorate in to give democratic credibility to the attacks to come. Key moments in this were the debates between the party leaders and the rise of the Liberal Democrats that were used to inject some drama into the campaign. This was successful in slightly increasing the turnout compared with recent elections, although it did not reverse the long-term decline. Following the election the drama continued with the talks to

form the first coalition since the Second World War. The coalition has given a strong boost to the ideological strategy of working together in the national interest, which is the main method currently being used to get the working class to accept the cuts. It has also helped to reduce the distrust of the Tories that still remains after the experience of Thatcher. The Liberal Democrats have continued to provide cover while the attacks are introduced. The Labour Party has played its part in this strategy with the new leader Ed Milliband limiting the argument to points of detail about the extent and timing of cuts while promising to support the government when it is in the national interest. While it is not clear that the result of the election was what was wanted by the bourgeoisie, it has certainly been effective in using the situation to its advantage, as the high rates of support for the government show.

The main challenge for the ruling class in managing the working class is to get it to accept the attacks rather than resist them. There are a number of strands to this strategy, the principal one being that referred to above of working together in the national interest, while another is that of 'fairness'. At the same time it has also sought to introduce the attacks gradually, targeting one or two sections of the working class at a time and taking care to prepare the ground by presenting these sections as privileged or lazy and so not working in the national interest. It has also decided to offer some protection to services such as health and education that large parts of the population use and value. Further ahead, the bourgeoisie is ready to target particular groups, who are identified as being outside or against the 'national interest'. It is also preparing for a more direct challenge from the working class by positioning the unions as the protectors of the working class and focusing on the violence and 'inconvenience' of the recent actions in Greece and France.

Class struggle

16. At the international level the working class is responding to the deepening of the crisis by gradually engaging in struggle with the ruling class. At present this remains at a low level overall, although there are important differences between the situation in the developed economies and the emerging and underdeveloped ones. In the latter the exploitation is more brutal while in the former it is more hidden and limited to some extent by the historical power of the working class. In a minority of struggles workers have sought to control the strike themselves, to spread it to other workers and show class solidarity. This challenge to the unions tends to be implicit and spontaneous rather than considered in advance but, nonetheless, it creates the basis for a development of consciousness with the potential to take the struggle to a qualitatively new level.

17. In Britain, the objective situation of the working class has become more difficult over time with a permanent level of hidden unemployment and growing numbers of workers in temporary or part time work with the resulting low levels of pay. Outside work the proletariat is confronted with all the pressures arising from a social system in decline, including crime, drug abuse and violence. At the subjective level the working class has to deal with the consequences of the objective situation, such as unemployment and poverty. It is recognised, for example, that losing a job can lead to mental health problems. Secondly, it has to deal with the ideological offensive launched by the ruling class described above. Thirdly it is also marked by the weight of its own history and, in the present period by the continuing legacy of the miners' strike in particular. Before the strike the British working class was frequently at the forefront of the waves of class struggle that marked the late 1960s, the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s; afterwards

Continued on page 3

NHS

Defend jobs and healthcare, not the capitalist state

More than 50,000 health service jobs are due to be lost, including doctors, nurses, midwives and ambulance personnel. In fact Trusts plan to shed 12% of qualified nursing posts over the next 4 years, while the NHS already relies on their unpaid overtime, carried out by 95% of nurses with more than 1 in 5 doing this every shift. Small wonder that the RCN Chief Executive notes this “could have a catastrophic impact on patient safety and care” (*Nursing Times*, 12/4/11). At the same time NHS staff are not just facing the public sector pay freeze but also a threat to “allow employers to agree locally with their trade unions to freeze incremental pay progression for all staff groups, in return for a commitment to provide a guarantee of ‘no compulsory redundancies’ for all staff in bands 1 to 6” (www.nhsemployers.org), along with plans to allow more health care providers to ignore national scales and set their own pay. In other words, there is an attempt to drive down pay, as well as changes to the pension scheme.

The key to understanding the changes going on in the NHS today is cost-cutting. According to the Public Accounts Committee “under the previous government, only £15bn of £35bn savings promised in Labour’s 2007 comprehensive spending review had been achieved... and of those reported savings, just 38 per cent were definitely legitimate value for money savings” (www.publicservice.co.uk/news_story.asp?id=14649). It’s not about this or that Labour or coalition government, or ideology, but – like the pensions, like benefits – simple cost-cutting.

Reform at the service of ‘efficiency savings’

The heart of the current reforms is to transfer control of 60% of the NHS budget to consortia of GPs, abolishing the Primary Care Trusts, many of whose staff have already left or been made redundant. “One underlying political goal is to hand

hard decisions about the rationing of care to GPs, the most trusted part of the health service” (*The Economist*, 9/4/11). This effort to make GPs feel responsible for the NHS budgets wasn’t invented by Andrew Lansley, the health secretary, but was already implicit in fundholding in the 1980s and in ‘commissioning’ of services by the PCTs with GPs elected to their boards, as it is in the software that invites doctors to prescribe the cheapest medication, in the encouragement to refer to the least expensive hospitals, in the effort to standardise and reduce the number of referrals to hospital. And with the new reorganisation NHS organisations will no longer allowed to overspend – unlike the banks they will be allowed to fail, to go bankrupt – rationing will be tighter and tighter. Putting GPs in charge won’t make the choices any better; they will be determined by the resources the state allocates, not who is nominally responsible.

There is already a deterioration in services as a survey of 500 GPs showed (*Guardian* 19.4.11). 54% said waiting times had gone up for musculo-skeletal conditions with 30% seeing a restriction in orthopaedic services, 42% that waiting times had gone up for neurology. Three quarters noted cuts in fertility treatment, 70% in weight loss treatment – during an epidemic of obesity, and 40% noted restrictions in ophthalmology. Not surprisingly they are more likely to refer privately for those patients with insurance. And that is before the next £20bn savings are made!

At the moment there is a ‘pause’ in the Health and Social Care legislation, and a government ‘listening exercise’. This is an exercise in which the public has to listen to government PR, as when Cameron addressed various healthcare charities “Your organisations, which are hugely trusted and understood by the public and by users of your organisations, can help us make the argument that change, that choice, that diversity is not about privatisation, it’s actually about improving

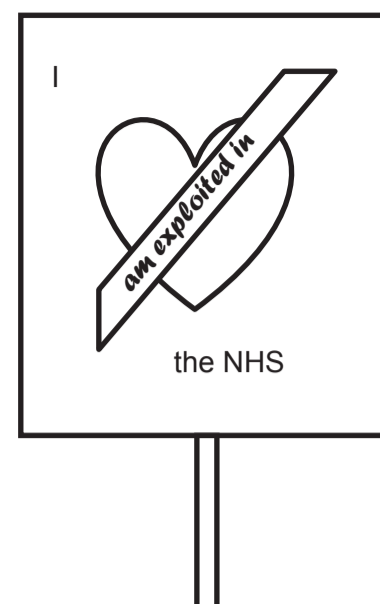
healthcare” (www.politics.co.uk). It is likely that the consortia in charge of 60% of NHS spending will have slightly wider representation, but there is no chance whatsoever that the reorganisation will be put in question.

Privatisation = more state capitalism

Another aspect of the NHS reforms is the increase in the number of private companies involved in delivery of services, with the use of “any willing provider” instead of seeing the NHS organisations as preferred, even more private companies will come in. For many this is seen as an ideologically driven effort with the aim of “Handing the entire NHS budget across to the private sector ...” (Dr Kambiz Boomla, East London GP, *Socialist Worker* 22/1/11). First of all we need to understand what the private sector offers the NHS, as an example of how state capitalism works. First of all we must never forget that the whole point is to drive down costs, and in the long term, because there is an economic crisis. The aim of bringing in more competitors is to get cheaper services, as it was with competitive tendering for ancillary services back in the 1980s, as it was with the internal market. Cheaper services, as always, on the back of increased exploitation of the workers in them.

Introducing more private companies also has added benefits when pay and working conditions are being attacked and services cut. On the one hand the private business can take the blame rather than the NHS or the government. On the other, when workers struggle to defend themselves the law and the unions will tell them to confine their action to those who have the same employer – for instance a particular private provider – and this will be even worse if pay and conditions starts to vary between various providers.

Dr Boomla goes on to say “it will fundamentally undermine the founding principles of the NHS”.



This is not so. The fact of a two tier health service was never even put in question by the NHS as those who could afford it have always been able to buy themselves prompter treatment in better surroundings with better staffing ratios. And these days that includes those who cannot afford private treatment here, but can find the money for cataract surgery in India. If you visit a dentist in Eastern Europe it is cheaper than on the NHS – many do.

The NHS has never excluded private businesses at any time since it was founded in 1948. GPs have always remained ‘independent contractors’ with a local franchise, as did pharmacies. Larger private enterprises have made money through interest on bank loans, selling drugs, building hospitals etc. What has changed with the need to reduce costs is not just the increase in exploitation of staff, but the fact that less of them are directly employed by NHS bodies and there is more internal competition. This isn’t weakening state control but strengthening it – through better control of budgets; through better integration of the NHS and private healthcare providers into the bureaucracy as the directors of the various companies sit on the boards of the trusts and consortia; ever tighter control of what healthcare can be offered.

We need healthcare, but that doesn’t mean we have to defend the NHS or its mythical ‘founding principles’. On the contrary, to defend our hospitals, our health, our jobs or our conditions, means to come up against one of the many heads of the NHS hydra, and through it, the capitalist state.
Alex 29/4/11

Continued from page 2

it fell back sharply and has remained at historically low levels ever since. The bourgeoisie prepared thoroughly for the strike, stockpiling large quantities of coal and acted ruthlessly to crush it, not only to break the militancy of the miners, who were at the vanguard of the class struggle in Britain throughout that period, but also to teach the working class a lesson it would not forget. The strike had a high level of support within the working class so the defeat was felt all the more widely and deeply. The failure of the struggle also had international repercussions – as the British miners were seen throughout the world as the most militant sector of the working class in Britain; and it was followed a few years later by the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the reflux in the class struggle that this ‘victory of capitalism’ produced. This reinforced the defeat. The material legacy of the strike still exists in many former mining towns and the ideological legacy weighs on the working class in Britain to this day

18. This situation does not mean that the working class has not responded to the crisis. Three distinct responses can be identified: capitulation, survival and struggle. In the first, part of the working class is overwhelmed by its situation and falls into a lumpen mass where it may resort to crime, preying on other members of the class, or it may become lost in drugs and alcohol or become fodder for racist and other extremist groups. There are many variations in the individual route taken but they are all marked by the absence of a sense of being part of a class defined by the qualities of solidarity and collective struggle.

The second response, of survival, is that currently taken by the majority of the working class. This is expressed in the willingness to accept wage freezes, increases in the rate of exploitation and reduced hours in order to keep a job. It is driven, as always in the history of the working class, by fear of unemployment and poverty. The policies of the coalition reinforce this by holding out the prospect of reducing benefits below the level at which it is possible to survive, while its

ideological offensive vilifies those cast aside by capitalism. With the worsening of the objective situation this response becomes harder to sustain and pushes more and more of the working class towards either capitulation or struggle. The atomisation and war of each against all that underpins capitalism favours the former; the position of the working class, whereby the individual can only struggle against their exploitation by participating in the collective struggle against all exploitation, favours the latter.

19. At present only a minority of the working class has taken the path of struggle. At the quantitative level the number of workers involved in strike action and the days lost as a result have both fallen since the start of the recession and are close to the lowest levels recorded. However, behind these figures there have been some important struggles marked by solidarity, workers taking the initiative and challenging the dead hand of union control. The most significant of these were the two strikes of construction workers in January and June 2009. These strikes were controlled through mass meetings and efforts were made to extend them to other workers. They also saw a struggle within the working class against the weight of bourgeois ideology expressed in the nationalist slogans that especially marked the start of the first strike. Towards the end of the first and during the second strike the nationalist dynamic was openly challenged and solidarity with workers from other countries working in the UK was seen. Moreover, these strikes both succeeded in winning their immediate aims. Other significant actions were the occupations of the Visteon and Vestas plants in the face of redundancies where objectively, despite their subjective acceptance of the role of the unions they were led to challenge that role, at least briefly. This illustrates an important point about this period: in order to struggle effectively the situation requires workers to take matters into their own hands. The objective necessity to go beyond the union framework based on the acceptance of capitalism if struggles are to have any chance of success means at times that the objective action of the working class goes ahead of its subjective

understanding, which creates the possibility of a sudden development of consciousness appearing as if from nowhere.

20. The state does not sit idly by while this happens however and in the latter part of 2009 and throughout 2010 the unions have reasserted their control. The strikes that have taken place during this period have tended to end in acceptance of the bosses’ terms and conditions despite the militancy of the workers involved. The BA strike and postal strikes were of particular significance. In both actions workers showed great determination and militancy; in the former this was in the face of threats and victimisation by management. However in neither strike did the workers challenge the control of the unions. In the BA strike the union led workers through legal hoops and ballots while the postal workers’ union dissipated the workers’ energy in dispersed rolling strikes and on/off negotiations

21. In Britain as elsewhere the objective conditions for the development of the class struggle have developed over the last two years and it is probable they will continue to do so during the two years ahead. However the pace in Britain has been slower than elsewhere thanks in part to the efforts of the bourgeoisie to control the economic crisis. This situation may begin to change as the cuts take affect, but it should be noted that the bourgeoisie is still trying to target one or two groups of workers rather than the class as a whole in order to pursue the strategy of divide and rule that has long been its watchword. The subjective conditions will also continue to hold back the development of the struggle until greater parts of the working class begins to gain confidence in itself and in the possibility of getting rid of capitalism and replacing it with something better. Here the example of action in other countries can have a significant impact, which is why the bourgeoisie always has and always will continue to seek to impose a blackout on such news or to distort its message.

10/11/10

Out soon

International Review 145

Social revolts in North Africa and the Middle East, nuclear catastrophe in Japan, war in Libya
Only the proletarian revolution can save humanity from the disaster of capitalism

What’s happening in the Middle East?

What are the workers councils?
(V)
1917-21: the Soviets and the question of the state

Decadence of capitalism
The Comintern and the virus of ‘Luxemburgism’ in 1924

The Communist left in Russia
The Manifesto of the Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist party (IV)

The demise of credit

If lying was a mortal sin, the ruling class would have died a long time ago.

Everywhere it's been shouting from the rooftops, on the TV, the radio, in its newspapers and journals: Look: there it is – a light at the end of the tunnel! The proof: unemployment is falling. Or so it seems. In the US and in France, in the last few months the unemployment rate has had its biggest drop since the outbreak of the crisis of 2007. In Germany, it's fallen to its lowest since 1992! And the big international institutions have been parading their optimism. According to the IMF, in 2011, world growth will reach 4.4%. The Asian Development Bank is predicting growth rates of 9.6% for China and 8.2% for India. Germany, France and the US will reach 2.5%, 1.6% and 2.8% respectively. The IMF even predicts a growth rate of 1.7% for Japan this year, despite the earthquake and the nuclear disaster!

A decisive argument for the return of better times: the stock exchanges are soaring...

So, do these gleams of light announce an imminent resurrection of the economy? Or is this the classic hallucination of a dying creature?

Poverty, poverty

In the US, then, things have been getting better. Gone is the spectre of the 1929 crash. No chance of seeing interminable queues outside the employment offices like in the nightmarish 1930s. It's just that...at the end of March, McDonald's announced an exceptional recruitment of 50,000 jobs in one day. On 19 April, there were three million people waiting to apply at the doors of the restaurants! And the firm hired 62,000.

The reality of the present crisis is revealed in the suffering inflicted on the working class. Unemployment in America is officially falling, but the state's statistics are a huge trick. For example, they exclude everyone classed as "NLF" (Not in the Labor Force). These includes older people who have been laid off, long term unemployed discouraged from looking for work, students and the young, unemployed people on job-seeking schemes... in short, in January 2011, 85.2 million people. The state itself has been obliged to recognise that the number of poor people makes up 15% of the American population and is continuing to grow.

The explosion of poverty on the soil of the world's leading power shows the real state of the international economy. All over the planet, living conditions are becoming more and more inhuman. According to the estimates of the World Bank, around 1.2 billion people live below the poverty line (1.25 dollars a day). But the future is even more sombre. For an increasing proportion of humanity, the return of inflation will mean that it is getting harder and harder to keep a roof over your head or even to eat. World prices of food products have risen 36% above their level a year ago. According to the last issue of *Food Price Watch*, produced by the World Bank, every 10% rise in world prices pushes a minimum of another 10 million people below the poverty line. 44 million people have thus officially fallen into poverty since 2010. Concretely, the prices of basic necessities are becoming more and more prohibitive: maize up by 74%, grain by 69%, soya 36%, sugar 21%.

The decadence of the system

A new chapter in the historic crisis of capitalism is opening up in front of us

Since the summer of 2007 and the bursting of the 'sub-prime' bubble in the USA, the world crisis has worsened inexorably, at an increasing pace, without the bourgeoisie being able to come up with the merest shadow of a solution. Worse, its efforts to deal with the problem are preparing the ground for further convulsions. The economic history of the last few years resembles a sort of infernal spiral, a downward pulling whirlpool. And this is a drama that has been in gestation for the past 40 years.

From the end of the 1960s to the infamous summer of 2007, the world economy has only kept going through a systematic and increasing resort to debt. Why is this? A short theoretical detour is required here.

Capitalism produces more commodities than its markets can absorb. That is almost a tautology:

Capital exploits its workers - in other words their

wages are lower than the real value they create through their labour.

Capital can therefore sell its commodities at a profit. But the question is: to whom?

Obviously, workers buy these commodities...as far as their wages allow. There remains therefore a good part which is not sold, corresponding to what is not paid to the workers when they were producing them, the part containing an added value, a surplus value, which alone has this magic power to create profit for Capital.

The capitalists themselves also consume things, and in general we know they are not too badly off...But they alone can't buy all the commodities containing surplus value. It would make no sense for Capital as a whole to buy its own commodities to make a profit: this would be like taking money from its left pocket and putting it in its right pocket. Any poor person can tell you that you can't get rich that way.

To accumulate, to develop, Capital therefore needs to find buyers others than workers and capitalists. In other words, it is imperative that it finds outlets outside its system, otherwise it will find itself weighed down with unsold goods and a market that has become engorged. This is the celebrated 'crisis of overproduction'.

This 'internal contradiction', this natural tendency towards overproduction and this ceaseless obligation to find external outlets is also one of the roots of the incredible dynamism of this system. Capitalism has had to trade with all economic spheres without exception: the former ruling classes, the peasants and artisans of the whole world. The history of the late 18th century and the entire 19th century is the history of colonisation, of the conquest of the globe by capitalism. The bourgeoisie was ravenous for new territories on which it forced, through multiple means, the populations to buy its commodities. But in acting this way, it was also transforming these archaic economies; little by little, it was integrating them into its system. The colonies slowly became capitalist countries themselves, producing according to the laws of the system. Not only were their economies less and less susceptible to being outlets for the commodities produced in Europe and the USA: they too were generating their own overproduction. To develop, Capital was therefore again and again forced to seek out new territories.

This could have been a never-ending story but our planet is only a round ball: to its great misfortune, Capital had hardly taken 150 years to complete its conquest. At the beginning of the 20th century, all the main territories had been taken, the great historic capitalist nations had divided up the world. From then on it was no longer a question of new discoveries but of taking the possessions of rival nations. Germany, the poorest in colonies, was thus put in the position of the aggressor and unleashed the hostilities of the First World War, driven by the necessity which Hitler formulated openly in the lead up to the Second World War: "Export or Die".

From then on, capitalism, after 150 years of expansion, became a decadent system. The horror of the two world wars and Great Depression of the 1930s is the dramatic and irrefutable proof. However, even though, during the 1950s, it destroyed the extra-capitalist markets which still existed (like the French peasantry), capitalism did not fall into a mortal crisis of overproduction. Why? We return to the initial idea we were trying to demonstrate: if "*Capitalism produces more commodities than its markets can absorb*", it has been able to create an artificial market: "*From the end of the 1960s to the infamous summer of 2007, the world economy has only kept going through a systematic and increasing resort to debt*"

The last forty years can be summarised as a series of recessions and recoveries financed by credit. With each open crisis, Capital has increasingly resorted to debt. And it's no longer a question of just supporting 'household consumption' through state aid...no, whole states have themselves plunged themselves into debt to artificially maintain the competitive edge of their economy faced with other countries (by directly financing investment in infrastructure, by loaning to banks at the lowest possible rate of interest so that they

in turn can lend to households and enterprises...). In short, by opening up the sluice-gates of credit, the world is awash with money and all sectors of the economy are in the classic position of the debtor: every day new debts are taken out to pay for yesterday's debts. This dynamic inevitably leads into a dead-end.

And here the summer of 2007 opened a new chapter in the history of capitalist decline. The capacity of the world bourgeoisie to slow down the development of the crisis by an increasingly massive recourse to debt has reached its limits. Today, convulsions follow each other in quick succession without any respite or real recovery. The powerlessness of the bourgeoisie in front of this new situation is patently obvious. In 2007, with the bursting of the sub-prime bubble, and in 2008 with the collapse of the banking giant Lehman Brothers, all the states of the world were only able to do one thing: pump up the finance sector and let public debt explode. And this was not just a one-off. Since 2007, the world economy, the banks and the stock exchanges have only kept going through a permanent transfusion of public money derived from new debts or simply from printing money. One example: the USA. In 2008, to save the financial sector from generalised bankruptcy, the US Federal bank launched an initial phase of money-printing – QE1, or Quantitative Easing 1 – amounting to more than 1400 billion dollars. Just two years later, in January 2010, it had to renew the whole operation by launching a QE2: 600 billion injected thanks to printing off more dollars. But this is still not enough. Hardly 6 months later, in the summer of 2010, the Fed had to renew the buy out of debts that had reached their deadline, at a rate of 35 billion a month. In all, since the latest stage of the crisis began, that's over 2300 billion dollars coming out of the pocket of America's central bank. It's the equivalent of the GNP of a country like Italy or Brazil! But obviously history doesn't stop there. In the summer of 2011, the Fed will be obliged to launch a QE3, then a QE4!...

The world economy has become a bottomless pit, or more precisely, a black hole: it is absorbing increasingly astronomical quantities of money/debt.

The future? Inflation and recession!

It would however be wrong to claim that the immense sums of money injected by all the states of the planet today are having no effect. Indeed, without them, the system would literally implode. But there is a second consequence: the unprecedented increase in the mass of money on a global scale, particularly in dollars, is about to corrode the system, to act on it like a poison. Capitalism has become a dying patient dependent on its morphine fix. Without it, it would die, but each new injection gnaws away at it a little more. So while the injections of the years 1967-2007 allowed the economy to hold, today the doses needed are on the contrary speeding the patient towards its demise.

Concretely, by printing money, the different central banks are consciously producing what the economists call 'funny money'. When the monetary mass grows faster than real activity, it loses its value. As a result prices rise and we have inflation.²

Obviously, in this sphere, the world champion is the US. They know that their currency has been the pillar of economic stability since the end of the

1. However, it will certainly do it unofficially the next time to avoid having to admit the patent failure of all its previous measures!

2. Observant readers will say: "But his monetary mass increased at a huge rate in the period 1990 to 2000 without there being an inflationary surge". It's true and the reason is simple: the saturation of the real market pushed capital to flee towards the virtual economy (the stock exchange). In other words, the monetary mass augmented considerably above all in the financial sphere, so it was not the price of commodities but of shares which shot up. But this speculation, however mad and disconnected it was from reality, is still in the final analysis based on enterprises that do produce value. When the latter are threatened en masse by bankruptcy (in particular the banks that finance them), this whole casino game gets exposed to the light of day. This is what happened in 2008: the crash, and the bigger crashes yet to come. This is why investors are now running after gold and food products in a desperate search for a value 'refuge'. We will come back to this.

Second World War. Still today no one can bypass the dollar. This is why since 2007 it has been the US that has produced the greatest quantity of money to back up their economy. If the dollar has not been put out of commission, it's because China, Japan etc have been, despite themselves, obliged to buy dollars. But this precarious equilibrium is also reaching its end. There are less and less buyers for US Treasury Bonds because everyone knows they are not really worth anything. Since 2010, it has been the Fed itself buying up its own T-Bonds to maintain their value! Above all, inflation is beginning to develop in a significant way in the US (between 2 and 105 according to what source you use, with workers increasingly feeling the pinch in their food shopping). The President of the Fed in Dallas, Richard Fisher, who this year sits on the monetary policy committee, has raised the risk of a hyperinflation comparable to what happened in the Weimar Republic in 1923.

This is a fundamental tendency. Inflation is growing in all countries. And the capitalists are increasingly distrustful of all currencies. The shocks to come, the probable collapse of banks and entire states, are placing a very big question mark over the whole international financial system. The consequence of this is tangible: the price of gold is hitting the roof. After a 29% rise in 2010, the hunt for gold is now beating record after record, for the first time jumping the fence of 1500 dollars – five times what it was ten years ago. The same phenomenon with silver, now at its highest level for 31 years. The University of Texas, which trains economists, has recently put its whole treasury of a billion dollars into gold. We can see from this the confidence that the American big bourgeoisie has in its own currency! And this is not just an epiphenomenon. The central banks themselves have bought more of the yellow metal in 2010 than they have sold, a first since 1988. All this means nothing less than the end of the Breton Woods agreement (not officially but de facto) which after the Second World War set up an international monetary system based on the stability of the dollar.

The bourgeoisie is obviously aware of the danger. Incapable of stopping the flow of credit, to stop the money printing presses from turning, it is trying to limit the damage and to reduce debt by introducing draconian austerity plans which are aimed first and foremost at the working class. Almost everywhere, wages are being frozen or cut in the private and the public sector, health and social benefits are being slashed. In short, poverty is on the rise. In the USA, Obama has announced that he wants to reduce the US debt by 4000 billion dollars in 12 years. The sacrifices which are going to be imposed on the population are unimaginable. But this solution really is no solution. In Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain...one austerity plan comes after the next and yet the deficits continue to grow. The only effect of this policy is to plunge the economy a little deeper into recession. There is only one outcome of this dynamic: after the failure of American households in 2007, of the banks in 2008, it's now the turn of states themselves to sink into bankruptcy. There can be illusion on this score: the defaults on payment by countries like Greece are inevitable. Even American states like California are not immune and questions have been asked about the credit-worthiness of the US economy as a whole. The consequences for the acceleration of the world crisis are incalculable: explosion of the euro zone, deregulation of currencies, hyper-inflation....

It's not possible to make exact predictions, to see when and where the next crack in the world economy will appear. Will the catastrophe that hit Japan (which brought down production in the world's third-ranking economic power by 15% in March) be the detonator? What will be the impact of the destabilisation of the Middle East? Will we see the collapse of the dollar or the bankruptcy of Greece or Spain? No one can tell in advance. One thing is certain though: we are going to see a succession of extremely brutal recessions. After the slow development of the world economic crisis between 1967 and 2007, we are now entering a new chapter in the decadence of capitalism, marked by incessant convulsions in the system and an explosion of poverty. **Pawel 30/4/11**

Middle East

For massive struggle against the dictatorship of world capital

Demonstrations and confrontations have continued in North Africa and the Middle East. Uprisings by oppressed populations, as well as workers' strikes and demonstrations, are still taking place in a number of countries in the region, and there have been growing echoes elsewhere in Africa. At the same time, conflicts and wars between rival bourgeois factions, and the imperialist policies of the powers involved in the region, weigh very heavily on the development of these movements. A mortal danger faces the oppressed classes and the proletariat in all these countries. Alongside the traps of nationalism and democracy, they are also being met with brutal state repression and the 'humanitarian' bombs of imperialism. But the need to feed themselves, to live with dignity, to carve out a future means that our class brothers and sisters cannot just give in. In front of such a situation, what can and should be done by the working class of Britain, France, Germany and all the countries at the heart of world capitalism? The struggle of the oppressed and the exploited in these countries is our struggle; the armies and bourgeois cliques who are massacring them are our common enemies.

Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia: workers' and social struggles persist

In Egypt, the street, the determination of the demonstrators, the militancy of the working class got the better of Mubarak. But after he went, the bourgeoisie could breathe a sigh of relief: Tahrir Square, the central focus of the movement, could again be open to traffic. The population could go home, in many cases 'free' to slowly starve. The provisional government run by the army and its Supreme Council could take up the reins of state, promising free and democratic elections. But their real aims were made clear when, on 23 March the Sharaf cabinet passed a new law promising jail and a fine of £500,000 for "anyone inciting, urging, promoting or participating in a protest or strike that hampers or delays work at any private or public establishments". Of course, strikes and protests are already banned under the hated 'Emergency Law' that has been in force since 1981. One of the key demands of the protesters was that this law be repealed - while this has been promised by the Sharaf government, it still hasn't been dismantled.

However, neither this new law, nor the intervention of the police and the army against demonstrators and strikers have put a stop to the discontent, which has continued despite the 'victory of the revolution'. Indeed the new law has actually provoked a new wave of protests and strikes. On 12 April, the daily *al-Masry al-Youm* wrote about "the permanence of protest movements and strikes in numerous region of Egypt. They are about wages, working conditions, work contracts, etc. These movements involve very diverse sectors". In Alexandria, for example, teachers demanded the suppression of their temporary status and the granting of indefinite contracts. In Cairo, the employees of the fiscal administration offices demanded a wage increase. There have been other strikes in public transport, health, textile, and even the tourism sector.

Mass protests are still taking place across Egypt with thousands of protestors gathering in Tahrir Square on 1st and 8th April demanding faster reform. These protests have been met with typical brutality, with soldiers storming the square and killing at least two protestors. Previously, these protestors had openly been joined by up to 15 - 20 soldiers who joined in the protest against the regime - the crowds made a conscious effort to protect these defectors from arrest by the security forces and this seems to have been what provoked the savage response.

Other political forces are already developing in order to succeed where Sharaf has failed. New 'independent' unions are springing up, while on the political front the Popular Alliance is overtaking Tagammu as the leading standard bearer of 'Socialism'. These new developments perfectly express both the strengths and weaknesses of the movement in Egypt: the elemental rage of the masses at their intolerable living conditions is fuelling a new militancy and determination, but weaknesses

at the level of class consciousness makes it difficult for the workers to channel this militancy into a direct defence of their own interests. Instead, they turn to the forces of the bourgeois left and infuse them with a new dynamism. This leaves the movement deeply vulnerable to sabotage from within.

The situation in Algeria has also been marked by permanent unrest. On 3 April, the paper *al Watan* declared: "The students have not calmed down. The hospital doctors have expressed their defiance against Ould Abbès. Communal guards threaten to 'encircle' the Presidential palace. Paramedics are on strike again". In education, a three day national strike around the issue of pensions is due to take place even though education employees faced repression during a demonstration over working conditions.

In Tunisia, the oil workers employed by SNDP have again come out on strike, rejoining the teachers who have been out for weeks against the most miserable pay and conditions.

In countries like Swaziland, Gabon, Cameroon, Djibouti, Burkina Faso and most recently Uganda there have been demonstrations by students, workers and others, influenced by what happened in North Africa. They have frequently been met with savage state violence. The working class in these countries is not very numerous and despite the determination of hungry populations, this makes it much easier for the bourgeoisie to resort to massive repression.

Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya: war between bourgeois gangs undermines social revolt

In Yemen, although the 'official' opposition announced on 25 April its agreement with the plan for resolving the crisis proposed by the Gulf Cooperation Council, envisaging the departure of president Saleh within weeks, the response from the street was unambiguous: "We categorically reject any initiative which does not involve the departure of president Saleh and his family" - the words of a communiqué from a coordinating committee of young people organising the sit-in in the university of Sanaa. The next bit of the communiqué says a lot about the determination of the demonstrators: "the opposition only represents itself", it says, and calls for an end to all dialogue with the regime and for Saleh's immediate departure. Here again the response of the state was the same: during demonstrations in Taëz, Ibb and Al-Baïda, the army used live ammunition against the demonstrators.

When it comes to shedding blood in the street, the el-Assad family in Syria is in the front line. Since 12 March large numbers have been demonstrating on the streets. The reasons are the same: growing poverty and daily oppression. The response of the sinister Bashar el-Assad is brutal in the extreme: according to different estimates, up to 500 people have been gunned down by the army and security services. Tanks, armoured cars and snipers have routinely been positioned outside mosques to crack down on any show of defiance. This has been especially true in the town of Deraa where the movement started. The government's justification? The army entered Deraa "in response to appeals for help from the inhabitants, calling for an end to the acts of sabotage and murder by extremist terrorist groups" (cf the *Orange* site, 26.4.11).

These are indeed hypocritical lies, but no less hypocritical than the attitude of the great powers who claim to be concerned about the situation in Syria and have called for an end to the violent repression. Cameron tells us that this is unacceptable and the Syrian ambassador's invitation to the Royal Wedding was cancelled. The French and the Italians held a summit. The Obama administration is thinking about sanctions. However, president Sarkozy, who led the charge to intervene militarily in Libya, has excluded an intervention in Syria without a resolution from the UN Security Council. A resolution which everyone knows will be impossible to obtain and which no one wants. The Syrian population can just put up with it; Syria is not Libya. Syria is a country of 21 million inhabitants, with a much more formidable army than Libya today or Iraq yesterday; above all, it's an imperialist power which counts in the region. It has some important allies in its anti-American pol-

icies, especially Iran, and diplomatic support from Russia and China. A military intervention in Syria would destabilise the whole Arab-Muslim world and no one knows where it would end. The imperialist powers will have to defend their squalid interests in a different way here.

But there is a real danger facing the insurgent population in Syria. The el-Assad government draws its support from the Alawi religious minority, while 70% of the population is Sunni. In the absence of a sufficiently strong and conscious working class, it could be easy to pull an oppressed and hungry population behind one or another bourgeois faction. This could result in a real civil war as in Libya; and a similar danger is emerging in Bahrain.

For weeks now the population in Bahrain has been demonstrating to demand the departure of the prime minister, Khalifa ben Salman Al Khalifa, the uncle of the king Hamad ben Issa al-Khalifa, part of a Sunni dynasty which has reigned for a hundred years in a kingdom with a majority Shia population. Calling for bread and the right to free speech in this emirate is susceptible to being derailed into a 'Shia' struggle against the corrupt Sunni dynasty.

Meanwhile the imperialist vultures are circling. Already the Saudi army has entered the country to defend the Sunni power; tensions are growing between Iran and its neighbours in the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman). Since the middle of March, Iran has been criticising the repression of a movement which is de facto led by Shiites, if only because they are the majority of the country. The hypocrisy of France, Britain and the USA, who are currently bombarding Libya in the name of humanitarianism, is striking: not a word of protest against the repression in Bahrain, because Bahrain and its Saudi accomplices are their allies, and they all have a common enemy: Iran. The manoeuvres of the imperialists around the situation in Bahrain do not bode well for the development of the protest movement in this country.

In all the countries of the Arab world, populations are rebelling, the economic crisis is raging. But the movements are not all the same and their

prospects are not identical. In countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria it is more difficult for the local bourgeoisies to carry out large-scale massacres, just as it is more difficult for the big imperialist powers to defend their interests by applying direct military force. The difference between them is that in these countries there is a sizeable working class which, while it hasn't been able to take the lead in the movement of revolt, still has a considerable weight in the social situation.

International class struggle: the only remedy for nationalist and democratic poison

The crisis today is not limited to the Middle East. Its effects are hitting home in America, Europe and Asia as well. Struggles involving the young generation of the working class have developed in Greece, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Britain. The working class in these countries has mobilised against the austerity plans which each national bourgeoisie is trying to impose. These reactions are important and necessary. In many of the demonstrations, there has been a real sympathy for the revolts and struggles which have broken out in Egypt, in Tunisia and elsewhere. In the countries at the heart of capitalism, the working class is beginning to sense that the revolts in North Africa and the Middle East spring from the same source as their own struggles. But this is not enough.

To defend themselves against the massive attacks being organised by capital, the workers' struggles also have to be much more massive and unified than they have been up till now. And in taking this step the proletariat in the central countries will be able to offer a concrete solidarity to the workers' struggles and social revolts in the Middle East - not only because the struggles in the belly of the beast will weaken the ability of the beast to aid the repression in the weaker countries or to carry out its military plans, but also because the struggles in the 'democratic west' will help proletarians all over the world understand that the blessing of democracy is a curse in disguise. *T* Based on an article from *Révolution Internationale* 422, May 2010

Bristol 1980/2011: repression and revolt

On 21 April a huge police operation aimed at a squat in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol provoked an angry response from local people. Barricades were set up and the heavily tooled-up police found themselves facing not just a handful of squatters but a long night of skirmishes with the hundreds who turned up spontaneously to join the protest. The police claimed that the squatters were part of a campaign against the new Tesco which had opened on their street, and that they were stockpiling molotov cocktails. The police worked closely with bailiffs to evict the squatters. Later on the squatters denied that they were part of the anti-Tesco campaign, or that they were planning any attacks on the store; but although the shop in question got trashed anyway during the course of the night, it was really not the issue. What happened only makes sense as an expression of growing popular resentment against the police, their heavy-handed methods of 'crowd control' and their increasingly evident role as the armed wing of the government's austerity programme, as shown especially during the militant student movement in the autumn.

This is not the first time that a police raid has sparked off a street battle in Bristol. In 1980 a militaristic 'anti-drugs' bust on a West Indian owned café in the St Pauls area produced similar results, which we wrote about in an article in *World Revolution* 30, now republished on ICCOnline. The article made it clear that although young black residents played a central role in the resistance to the police, this was no 'race riot' "Even the capitalist

media and politicians had to admit it: the street battle in Bristol wasn't a race riot. It was an elemental revolt by a whole sector of the population against bad housing, high unemployment, spiralling prices, the all-pervading boredom of life in today's cities. Above all, it was against the brutality and arrogance of the police, whose high-handed raid on a local café provoked the revolt.

The fact that most of the 'rioters' were young blacks simply expresses the fact that capitalism always hands out slightly different levels of misery to its slaves. Blacks tend to get shoved down to the bottom of the shit-heap. But the disintegration of this vile society is pushing more and more of us down to the same place. That's why the young blacks were joined by young whites - punks, skinheads, etc, etc, most of them unemployed proletarians with about as rosy a future as the blacks".

The fact that the St Paul's rebellion was an expression of much deeper tensions in society was demonstrated in practise about a year later by the riots in Brixton, which in turn spread to many other urban centres, most notably Toxteth in Liverpool, Chapeltown in Leeds, Handsworth in Birmingham and Moss Side in Manchester. This phenomenon of social revolt was international in scope, with comparable movements in Zurich, Amsterdam and Berlin. In *WR* 38 we published an article analysing the strengths and weaknesses of these movements away from the point of production, movements

Notes on internationalist anarchism in the UK (part 1)

From the late 19th century to the end of World War Two

This text is not meant to be a thorough survey of the history of the anarchist movement in Britain as written from a marxist starting point, nor of its relationship with marxist traditions. Such a task is necessary but it will take time, reflection and discussion. The aim of these notes is much more modest: to serve as a basis for recognising and understanding that anarchism in Britain, as elsewhere, has its revolutionary, internationalist wing, thus enabling us to correct certain significant errors we have made towards some of its organised expressions. Its focus on these organised expressions can never give a complete picture of anarchism, which almost by definition contains a large number of 'unorganised' individuals¹, but it is a necessary route to understanding the principal historic currents in the UK anarchist movement.

1. A prime example being the extraordinary Dan Chatterton, who singlehandedly published the *Atheistic Communist Scorchers* from 1884 till his death in 1895.

1) Anarchism in Britain does claim its specific forebears: Winstanley in the English civil war, William Godwin and William Blake at the end of the 18th century, the poet Shelley. But there are no equivalents to the major figures of anarchism in the ascendant period, such as Proudhon, whose artisan vision was already being left behind by the development of industrial capital and of an organised workers' movement in Britain. Similarly, Bakuninism had little impact in the British sections of the International in the 1860s and 70s. However, a variety of Bakuninism – with its emphasis on conspiratorial organisation and violent insurrectionism shading off into terrorism – did implant itself in the movement in the UK in the 1880s, via 'immigrants' like Johann Most. This type of anarchism was quite strong in the anarchist exile clubs which sprang up in the East End of London in particular, and was to have a largely negative impact on the development of anarchism in Britain. This milieu was a fertile soil for cops and informers of all kinds, as for example in the role played by Auguste Coulon in the 1892 trial and imprisonment of the Walsall anarchists², whom he had lured into a ridiculous bomb-making plot.

2) But there were plenty of anarchists who attempted to relate to the workers' movement, in both its economic and political dimensions, and in the 1880s, both in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, there was not yet a rigid line between anarchists and socialists. Elements like Joseph Lane and Frank Kitz were more or less libertarian communists, who were from the beginning opposed to all forms of parliamentarism. Nevertheless they joined the Social Democratic Federation and then split from it in the company of William Morris, Eleanor Marx and others to form the Socialist League in 1885. The SL was itself soon torn by disagreements between the tendency around Marx and Aveling – supported by Engels – and the anti-parliamentary current which was at first led by Morris but increasingly assumed an anarchist direction. Lane's *Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto* was the most distinctive statement of this tendency. The growing rift between the two tendencies was a classic manifestation of the difficulties in elaborating a clear revolutionary orientation in this period of triumphant capitalist growth. On the one hand, Engels, Eleanor Marx and Aveling rightly insisted on the need for the socialist groups to break with sectarian isolation and involve themselves in the real evolution of the workers' movement, which in the 1880s was above all taking the form of strikes and the formation of more inclusive 'New Unions'. The negative side of this insistence was a difficulty in resisting the growth of reformism and opportunism, which were a particularly strong danger in the parliamentary and municipal spheres, as indicated by the development. This was the period in which the anarchist stereotype of the caped figure brandishing a bomb began to gain credence. It is of course a stereotype: anarchism has never been reducible to its terrorist wing. Nevertheless, John Quail's unique study, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (1978) devotes a good deal of its investigation of the movement in the UK to this form of anarchism and seems to show that the influence of this minority tendency was far wider (and thus more pernicious) than its actual size. On the international level, the 1880s and 1890s was also the period of the Bonnot gang in France and of anarchists in other countries carrying out 'attentats' against hated figures of authority, or simply degenerating into a kind of social banditry.

ment of purely reformist currents like the Fabians. This in turn reinforced the temptation of Morris and others to fall back into a kind of abstract purism which – like today's SPGB – saw its main field of action 'the making of socialists'; parallel to this, a number of the anarchist elements in the League were drawn towards the worst kind of adventurism and violent posturing, which led Morris himself to quit the League in 1890.

3) Alongside these developments, anarchism in the UK in the late 19th century found other expressions. There was the more sober, theoretical anarchist communism of Kropotkin, whose thoughts on evolution in *Mutual Aid* and on the future society in works such as *Fields, Factories and Workshops* are still worthy of consideration. In contrast to Proudhon's 'mutualism', which envisaged a future society founded explicitly on exchange relations, and Bakunin's 'collectivism', which was a kind of half-way house between Proudhon and communism, Kropotkin explicitly advocated a communist mode of production based on the abolition of wage labour and commodity production. Kropotkin and Morris certainly saw eye to eye on the nature of the society they were aiming for and the 'anarchist Prince' was an occasional speaker at the meetings of the Hammersmith Socialist Society in which Morris maintained his militant activity after splitting from the League. Also important was the contribution of the German anarchist Rudolf Rocker whose main field of activity was among the Jewish anarchists of the East End and the publication *Arbeter Frint*. As recounted in William Fishman's book *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914*, the *Arbeter Frint* group was directly connected to real workers' struggles, especially in the great garment industry strikes of the 1900s. Rocker took up an internationalist position on the First World War, openly opposing Kropotkin's views. A further strand of anarchism in the UK is represented by the more artistic and utopian forms represented by figures like Edward Carpenter.

4) The approach of a new epoch in the life of capitalism and the class struggle brought significant developments to the anarchist movement. The

1900s saw a major upsurge in the class struggle and the search for new forms of organisation which could go beyond both the bureaucracy and reformism of the established trade unions, and the arid parliamentarism of groups like the SDF. The answer of many militant workers was to turn towards syndicalism or industrial unionism, although there was no British equivalent to either the CNT in Spain, the CGT in France or the IWW in the USA, which were able to function as real organs of struggle. Groups like the Industrial Syndicalist Education League, formed in 1910, were never really more than groups of propaganda for revolutionary unions. Despite this syndicalism did develop a real presence in some key industries like the railways and the mines, as well as playing a key part in the emergence of the shop stewards' movement during the war. The majority of the elements involved in this movement were definitely internationalist, actively participating in strikes in the arms industry and elsewhere, and came out in support of the October revolution and the Third International in its initial phase.

5) The First World War split the anarchist movement as it did the marxists. Most famously, Kropotkin openly abandoned internationalism, supporting 'democratic' France against German militarism, and inevitably others followed in his wake. The majority of anarchists opposed him, though some from an essentially pacifist standpoint. The pages of *Freedom*, the paper that Kropotkin had helped to found, were given over to violent polemics on the question of the war. It is noticeable, however, that there seems to have been little in the way of an organised, specifically anarchist opposition to the war. The period of the war is glossed over in Woodcock's chapter dealing with anarchism in Britain³, seen as a period of declining fortunes due to state repression, and the Anarchist Federation's quite detailed history of anarcho-communism in the UK⁴ talks mainly about the work anarchists did in groups like the North London Herald League alongside socialists, or the group animated by Guy Aldred. The Solidarity Federation's history of syndicalism in the UK⁵ is even sparser in dealing with this crucial period. This heightens the importance of Aldred's Glasgow-based group which published the *Spur* (and later the *Red Commune*). Within the anarchist movement in Britain, the Aldred group took the clearest position on the war and tried to bridge the gap between anarchism and marxism, working with elements of the Socialist Labour Party and ardently supporting the Bolsheviks in the first phase of the Russian revolution. Aldred can be considered as the UK equivalent of the 'Soviet anarchist' tendency during the revolutionary wave and as a key element in the 'anti-parliamentary

3. George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A history of libertarian ideas and movements*, first published 1962, revised edition 1986.

4. <http://www.afed.org.uk/org/issue42/acbrit.html>

5. <http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=a-short-history-of-british-anarcho-syndicalism>

communist' tradition which united elements of internationalist anarchism and council communism. The Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed in 1921 and maintained activity for over 20 years, although Aldred split with the APCF in 1934 and went off searching for wider unity via the United Socialist Movement, sometimes veering off in rather dubious directions. The APCF, which changed its name to the Workers Revolutionary League in 1941, took up a rigorously internationalist position against the second world war, defining it as imperialist on both sides: this is documented by Mark Shipway's book *Anti-Parliamentary Communism, The Movement for Workers Councils in Britain 1917-1945*, published in 1988, as well as in our own book on the British communist left. This British council communist tradition essentially disappeared after 1945 but it was briefly revived by the publication *Black Star* in the 1980s.

The 1900s saw a major upsurge in the class struggle and the search for new forms of organisation which could go beyond both the bureaucracy and reformism of the established trade unions, and the arid parliamentarism of groups like the SDF. The answer of many militant workers was to turn towards syndicalism or industrial unionism ...

6) The anarchist movement, like the left communists around the *Workers' Dreadnought*, seems to have gone through a period of decline from the mid-20s to the mid-30s, corresponding to the victory of the counter-revolution. The war in Spain led to a revival of anarchist ideas but it is noteworthy that the movement in Britain contained a left wing around Marie-Louise Berneri and Vernon Richards, which was very critical of the errors and outright betrayals of the CNT's higher echelons in relation to the Republican state, and it was this same tendency, through the magazine *War Commentary*, which maintained an internationalist stance during the second world war (this is also recounted in our book on the British communist left)⁶. In 1944, the editors of *War Commentary* were put on trial for sedition. After 1945 *War Commentary* was replaced by a new series of *Freedom* which has continued ever since, although not necessarily with the same class struggle politics. In parallel to this, a clandestine Anarchist Federation of Britain was set up at the beginning of the war; by 1944, the AFB was strongly influenced by a group of anarcho-syndicalists who in 1954 formed the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, publishing *Direct Action* and aligned to the International Workers' Association. This group took a clear position on the Labour Party's post-war nationalisation programme and published one of the few contemporary accounts of the Hungarian workers' uprising from a proletarian perspective. The difficulties of political engagement in the 1950s also led to the shrinking of the SWF to one group in Manchester, but the latter joined with other elements to form the Direct Action Movement in 1979, which in turn became the Solidarity Federation in 1994. Thus, contrary to the article published in *WR* 109, November 1987, which argued that the DAM was at root a form of rank and fileist leftism, Solfed is actually the heir of a workers' tradition which – for all its ambiguities on the trade union and other questions – has its roots in internationalism. **Amos**

To be continued

6. A collection of articles from *War Commentary* was published as *Neither East nor West, selected writings of Marie Louise Berneri* by Freedom Press, 1952.

Continued from page 5

Bristol 1980/2011: repression and revolt

that involved young proletarians as well as other social strata, but which were above all a reaction to spiralling unemployment, poor housing and omnipresent police harassment. We saw them as harbingers of more powerful reactions from workers in the centres of the capitalist economy, which we did indeed see later on in the 1980s.

Today the crisis of capitalism is far deeper than it was at the beginning of the 80s. The working class has been through many struggles and a lot of defeats since then, but as the recent student movement showed, there is now a new generation ready to take up the fight against the austerity and repression which the capitalist state is seeking to inflict on us.

The raid on the Bristol squat was followed on the day before the Royal Wedding by raids on other squats and on 'anarchists and republicans'

suspected of conspiring to create some kind of disruption during the Nation's Day of Joy, including the arrest of a group of people for conspiring to commit street theatre... These actions had a slightly ridiculous air about them, but they are part of a general preparation by the ruling class to deal with wider and more dangerous social movements in the future. They are quite explicitly political in their targeting of social dissidents and are a means of creating a climate in which repression against political 'outsiders', people who openly question capitalism and the state, becomes commonplace. All the more necessary therefore to defend those who are in the front line of such attacks, and to ensure that organised, collective solidarity against state repression becomes no less commonplace.

Amos 2/5/11

Contact the ICC

Debate is vital to the revolutionary movement. One of the most important elements of our activity, defined in our Basic Positions, is the "Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions". This, we are convinced, is only possible through the confrontation and discussion of differing views and positions within the revolutionary camp.

For this reason, we urge our readers to write to us with their comments, opinions and disagreements on the positions and analyses that we defend in our written press, including our web site.

We will do our best to reply to all serious correspondence as quickly as possible, although given our limited resources we may not always be able to do so immediately. Should the subject matter be of general interest, then we may publish both correspondence and our reply in our press.

While debate amongst revolutionaries is vital, it is equally necessary not to fall into the trap of thinking that our activity is something anodyne and acceptable to the bourgeois dictatorship disguised under the trappings of the democratic state. We will not under any circumstances publish our correspondents' real names, nor their home or e-mail addresses.

**Write to the following addresses
without mentioning the name:**

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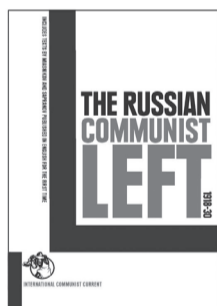
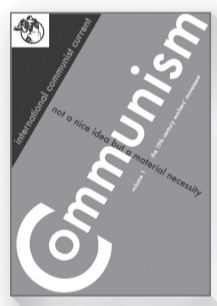
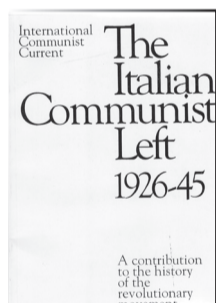
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Militant workers' meeting in Alicante, Spain

“To work together for the development of the class struggle”

Our comrades in the Alicante Encounter and Solidarity Network (Red de Encuentro y Solidaridad) and in the L'Escletxa collective organised a meeting to discuss and support the workers' struggle on 11th and 12th February. They examined the experience of the struggles in France and Barcelona. The declared aim of this meeting was: “*To work together for the development of the class struggle*”.

Below we are publishing the Appeal from this meeting because it reflects the efforts of our class to create places of revolutionary debate and is a living proof of the need for the exploited to build strong bonds of solidarity in the struggle.

The Encounter and Solidarity Network Appeal

JOIN US AND LET'S SHARE our experiences of unity, self-organisation and solidarity.

LET'S SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES AND CONTINUE THE FIGHT

Not long ago, we began one of our leaflets with: “*We want to meet workers (people) who support the same concerns as us.*” We are continuing the search because we know we are not alone in this. We know that a movement exists (still currently a weak and dispersed one) and that it is growing all around the world and has appeared at other moments in history with great force. We can describe it in various ways: proletarian internationalism, workers' autonomy or the self-organised movement of workers. These movements have expressed and still do express the best that humankind can offer:

- Unity: coming together in a fraternal manner to agree what we have in common and being able to act on this, understanding that we have a common interest, one that transcends artificial barriers of race, nation, profession...
- Taking our self-organisation in hand, by ourselves, without depending on intermediaries, creating real ASSEMBLIES which are the best expression of our struggle for a better life.
- Solidarity and cooperation, based on a clear understanding that without these, we would just be solitary beings incapable of defending ourselves.

In the present state of things, it is not easy to see ourselves in the collective sense, when the bosses constantly set out to isolate us from each other so they can rain down attacks on us with the crisis, unemployment, evictions, unpaid wages, in circumstances where we are left with little more to do than complain that “*we can't make ends meet at the end of the month*”, or that “*the future holds nothing for our children*”...

It's very easy to understand when you are actually in such situations, when they affect us in flesh and bone. Have you never stood pondering over your bank account, wondering how long you can survive on the last few Euros in your pocket until you can get a new loan or a deferral of the repayments? Did you ever feel your heart sink when you heard that a mother or a grandfather have realised that they are heading into financial difficulties because they had to divide their pension money between the family's unemployment problems and being in debt up to the hilt...?

Once again we are calling you, we call on ourselves, everyone, workers, unemployed, evicted, students, who are fully aware of the bleak future ahead, the retired with their pensions further eroded, housewives who are forced to manage without wages,... on the PROLETARIANS, on all those for whom this system offers nothing but anxiety, hidden or obvious poverty, the fear of not knowing what will happen from one day to the next, of being powerless spectators, with our own survival resting in the hands of others.

Because, despite everything, LIFE does go on, and the struggle goes on too, for everyone; starting from immediate needs which all of us share, uniting our efforts, striving to build a movement that can change everything. The experiences scattered around the world are small scale, some virtually unknown but they are OUR experiences and we know that sharing them together will make us stronger.

Red de Encuentro y Solidaridad de Trabajadores (Alicante) ptssproleta@yahoo.es
Ateneo Libertario “La Escletxa” escletxa.org

Political positions of the ICC

World Revolution is the section in Britain 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 satiated regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’ were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in

the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

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

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

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

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union

Sharing their experiences in this meeting will be comrades from:

- The neighbourhood committees from the Barcelona Assembly. It's an “assemblyist” experiment that hit the headlines in the media because of the occupation of the former credit bank and the incidents provoked by the police during the evictions (this was on the day of the recent general strike). However, this assembly has carried out a profound work of self-organisation and struggle that didn't succeed in gaining media attention because they didn't consider this newsworthy enough.
- The workers' assemblies in Toulouse that reflect the determination of workers in France today to wage a struggle that they organise themselves. These assemblies are trying to stand up to attacks on workers' living conditions, and to the unions' demobilisation and manipulation.
- the Rupture group, in Madrid. They are comrades who have been active for some time in supporting self-organised workers' struggles and contribute towards this by stimulating debate in their publication.
- The Valencia Workers' Assembly which presents itself as a space for meetings, debates and intervention by the working class and for the working class.
- The Alicante Workers' Encounter and Solidarity Network. This initiative arises from the Platform of the Health Workers in Social Services, evolving from the struggle of its general assemblies, and is based on the certainty that only the unity and extension of the struggles can open up a perspective for us.

What brings us all together is the effort of self-organisation and unity, the principle of solidarity between us and the practice of the general, inter-professional, and open assemblies.

We hope and wish that other people, groups or assemblies, who are able to receive this appeal by whatever means, will join us and participate in our meeting.

From this invitation, you should consider your presence to be essential.

We are waiting for you.

ICC online

Public Forum in New York on the revolts in the Arabic-speaking world

Japan disaster two months on

Eddie Izzard and the Yes to AV Campaign

The Bristol revolt: not colour or community but class
(on the 1980 events, from WR 30)

Film Review: Cave of Forgotten Dreams

From the forum: Marxism or Idealism - Our Differences with the ICC
(on the ICT article)

“...*The ICC been absurd, pathetic and/or “wooden” at various times ... At the same time, having actually seen ALF and others, in the last 10 years make a serious effort opening dialog ...*”

“... *even in 1976, both organizations felt suspicious and uneasy of each other ... I guessed they would grow out of it and come to see all that they had ... of such vital importance to the working class, and which they had in common. But oh boy! was I wrong! ...*”

“... *it is important to create a space where the various tendencies within the communist Left can disagree but still consider each part of the proletarian milieu ...*”

en.internationalism.org

organisation, whether ‘official’ or ‘rank and file’, serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

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

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

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

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

* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 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*.