



world revolution

Faced with the global economic crisis Struggling behind the unions leads to defeat

There is no evidence for an economic recovery in the UK.

In a few days at the end of June a range of High Street names showed what effect the continuing crisis is having. Thorntons is closing 120 and maybe up to 180 shops. Carpetright is closing 94 stores. Jane Norman is shutting 33 shops. TJHughes is looking at going into administration. Habitat is going into administration and closing most of its shops. Clinton Cards is to be restructured. Lloyds TSB is cutting another 15,000 jobs, making more than 40,000 since 2009. Inflation is running at 4.5% (5.2% on the higher RPI measure), there's a public sector pay freeze, the state pension age is rising. Council workers in Southampton, Shropshire and Neath Port Talbot have faced the 'choice' of pay cuts or job losses.

And it's not just here in Britain. While no-one can be unaware of the draconian austerity plans in Greece and mass unemployment in Spain, the working class faces the same worsening conditions in economic giants such as Germany where real household incomes have fallen over the last 10 years. No section of the working class is spared.

So how do we respond to this situation? Specifically, how does the working class respond faced with not just inflation but also declining real wages, the threat of job losses, working harder and longer when in work?

After the public sector protest strikes on 30 June can we draw any lessons about how to struggle, or how not to struggle? 750,000 teachers and civil servants from 4 unions, NUT, UCU, ATL and PCS, on strike, 30,000 marching through London, many of them on strike for the first time in their lives. Following on from the student struggles against increased fees last winter and the demonstration of half a million on 26 March we can see there is real discontent in the working class. When you hear Dave Prentis saying that the disputes on pensions are the "biggest since the general strike" it sounds impressive – until you realise that Union, the union he runs, was not striking and so was instructing its members to cross picket lines. The unions are dividing us.

We reject the idea that we fight among ourselves over the declining resources the ruling class is willing to spend to maintain the working class (pay, pensions, benefits, education, health). For instance, the division between public and private sector workers, the question about whether private sector employees should pay more tax to maintain public sector pensions. Unions do not reject this notion, they negotiate about it. They have already accepted a move away from final salary pensions for new civil service entrants. We cannot allow our struggles to be reduced to a walk-on part to support union negotiation or they will be able to impose anything they like.

We reject the notion that we should campaign to get rid of this particular LibCon government – whoever is in office will impose the cuts because that is the logic of capitalism in crisis, as the Labour government was doing until May last year.

Developing a sense of being part of the working class

While the unions were in overall control of the strikes and demonstrations on 30 June, workers were trying to understand and draw lessons from

the experience. On the picket lines and demonstrations they were discussing. Those on strike for the first time were gaining experience, those who remembered the strikes of the 1970s and 1980s were remembering what a picket line means. On the one hand it is a real effort to persuade other workers to join the strike, on the other it is a source of strength and solidarity for the workers taking part. All made extremely difficult when the law and the unions enforce token picket lines of no more than 6 people.

At the same time strikers and their supporters were drawing inspiration from the struggles going on elsewhere in the world. However distorted the media reporting, workers remember the struggles about pension reform in France last year, which became a focus for discontent about all the attacks, and have been particularly inspired by the struggles in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain and Greece. At rallies any mention of these struggles got a cheer. The fact is that when workers go into struggle they recognise other struggles on the other side of the world as their own.

In this we see, in embryo, in small scale discussions by a minority on picket lines and demonstra-

tions, two of the most important strengths of the working class – its history and its internationalism.

The lessons of both the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s and the international struggles going on today tell us about the need for the unity of the working class. For instance when we look back at the most important struggles in the 1980s we see that some of the strongest sectors of the working class of the time, with widespread sympathy here and abroad, such as the miners and then the printers at Wapping, were defeated. This was not for lack of militancy and determination, but because they allowed their struggle to be confined within the bounds of their industry, their union, and its demands.

Where workers have been able to extend their struggles across different sectors they have been immensely powerful. In Poland in 1980 price rises were withdrawn and the government fell. In France in 2006 the threat that workers would support the students struggling against the CPE not only made the French government withdraw the measure but the German government withdrew similar legislation. The struggles going on internationally with the holding of assemblies show the importance of discussion among workers, including the unemployed and future workers, all meeting together.

Discussion of the lessons of past struggles here and abroad is the best preparation we can make for future struggles as the present round of austerity measures begins to bite. **Alex 2/7/11**

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"This struggle can and should be pushed forward by the intervention of the widespread minority in the assemblies which is distinguished by its defence of a class positions, the independence of the assemblies and the struggle against capitalism."

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Anti-cuts alliances

Against cuts or against capitalism?

Since Cameron's Coalition picked up the baton from Labour in making brutal attacks on public sector workers and state-funded services a plethora of 'anti-cuts alliances' have appeared around the country. In general, these alliances are conglomerations of leftist groups, trade unions or their representatives, and Labour Party members (in some cases including Labour councillors). In other words, most anti-cuts alliances seem to be a typical attempt to build a 'united front'.

However, in addition to the forces of the capitalist left, people and groups with sincere revolutionary aims are often drawn to these groups in the hope of mobilising a struggle against capitalism. For example, the Anarchist Federation of Bristol is affiliated with the Bristol & District Anti-Cuts Alliance. We think this strategy is deeply flawed and in this article we will attempt to explain the theoretical basis for our position. We hope to present a more concrete analysis of specific anti-cuts groups at a later date.

Political organs and organs of struggle

Throughout its history, the working class has attempted to build two principle types of organisation: organs of mass struggle and political organs. The first type, broadly speaking, attempts to regroup workers on a class basis in order to take common action in their common interest. In the nineteenth century, the typical expression of this tendency was the trade union. Union struggles enabled workers to engage in broad struggles aimed at winning better pay, safer working conditions and reduced working hours.

Alongside unions, class conscious workers also formed political parties and organisations. Ranging from small revolutionary groups such as the Communist League and the First International to the mass parties of the Social Democratic era, these political organs had two specific tasks. Firstly, they were centres of political and theoretical discussion and clarification – the vigorous debates, for example, around Rosa Luxemburg's book *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1913. Secondly, they also took the class struggle directly into the capitalist political arena, fighting for working class representation in bourgeois parliaments in order to win reforms.

In the era of capitalist expansion it was possible, to a certain degree, for the ruling class to accommodate working class demands without this threatening to destabilise the entire economic and political system. This didn't mean that the class struggle was without upheaval. The wave of attempted revolutions across Europe in 1848 demonstrated the potential threat of the working class even if it had not yet acquired the maturity to struggle independently. Moreover, the more lucid factions of the bourgeoisie, especially those around the capitalist state, realised that the system had to restrain its more rapacious appetites in order to avoid literally exploiting the working class to death and thus destroying the basis for its own expansion.

The First World War announced the definitive end of this relatively progressive era for capitalism. From this point onward, capitalism has become more and more unable to accommodate even the most elementary demands of the working class. World wars of unprecedented brutality; protracted local conflicts that destabilise entire regions; the disintegration of nation states; crises that threaten the collapse of entire national economies; these are the visible manifestations of capitalism's historic impasse.

In order to survive these shockwaves, capitalism has concentrated more and more power in its state. The reformist wing of the workers' movement was completely integrated into the capitalist political machine, swiftly followed by degenerating communist parties, Trotskyists et al. The trade unions today, while pretending to represent workers, are really the enforcers of capitalist discipline in the workplace or – in cases where workers' struggle cannot be avoided – act to keep the struggles contained as far as possible.

In these circumstances, the working class has adopted new forms of mass and political organi-

sation. The mass parties of the past have given way to smaller – but far clearer – political organisations that concentrate on the development of consciousness in the working class. Similarly, in a situation where permanent mass organisations are quickly integrated into the state, the working class wages its independent struggle through organs formed directly in the heat of struggle: the soviets of Russia in 1917, the workers' councils in Germany 1918, the strike committees formed across the decades, etc.

Despite these changes, however, the fundamental differences between organs of struggle and political organs remains.

The role of revolutionaries in mass organs of struggle

If revolutionary political organisations and mass organs of struggle serve fundamentally different functions for the working class, this in no way means that members of the former should avoid working in the latter! Nor should revolutionaries avoid working in such organs simply because they are, at particular moments, dominated by ruling class ideology. When the workers first formed the soviets in Russia, the majority of workers adhered to Menshevik ideology; conversely, the Bolsheviks were in a minority in most soviets. This didn't prevent Lenin from identifying – to the horror of many of his own party – the soviets as the basis of proletarian class power and issued the rallying cry of "All Power to the Soviets" in his *April Theses*.

Similarly, revolutionaries should be prepared to work in any genuine organ of proletarian struggle. In the past, for example, members of the ICC were elected to strike committees in important struggles in the 70s and 80s, often alongside leftists and union functionaries. Refusal to work in such conditions out of 'purism' would have been catastrophic and only have retarded our capacity to prevent the sabotage of the struggle by the leftists.

Anti-cuts alliances: political organisations or organs of struggle?

So what exactly are anti-cuts alliances? In their present form, they are obviously not organs of mass struggle. For one thing, they do not arise directly from the struggle itself but largely pre-empt it. At best, they are able to regroup a minority of politicised workers. Their activity – organising demonstrations, distributing propaganda, etc. – are clearly political activities aimed at establishing a political presence within the working class. While revolutionaries can and should work in mass organisations, the anti-cuts alliances are actually political organisations or alliances between political organisations.

Where these groups are coalitions of leftists or dominated by leftist ideology, they will spread that ideology. Genuine revolutionary positions will, at best, be submerged in a morass of capitalist ideology. Usually, they are eliminated altogether and genuine revolutionaries are either forced out or reduced to serve as a 'critical opposition' to the dominant leftist trend. This can only serve to legitimate leftist ideology and contribute to the ideological domination of the enemy class.

For example, both the Exeter Anti-Cuts Alliance and the Bristol & District Anti-Cuts Alliance encourage people to petition their local councils and local MPs, perpetuating the idea that democracy actually presents a real choice to the working class. The Exeter Anti-Cuts Alliance distributes a pamphlet called "Cuts are Not the Cure" littered with quotations from pro-Keynesian economists such as Paul Krugman, David Blanchflower and Joseph Stiglitz. In other words, they are propagating the idea that curing the crisis simply requires a different economic policy from the ruling class. This flies in the face of the real historical experience of the working class. The Keynesian era of the 1960s and 70s that this ideology harks back to was based on the increasing exploitation of the working class through productivity-linked pay rises and the erosion of real wages through increasing inflation. This ideology denies the reality of the crisis and the nature of capitalism – in order to grow, capitalism must exploit the working class

and the only way to overcome crises is by increasing exploitation. Differing government policies simply change the precise way that this increased exploitation is leveraged from the working class but leftist ideology presents one form of increasing exploitation as being acceptable and even beneficial for the working class.

This doesn't mean revolutionaries should be passive in their approach to such groups. On the contrary. While some within these groups act consciously and openly proclaim their support for state capitalist measures, others (including union activists and leftists) genuinely want to struggle against the attacks of capital. The problem is that, trapped as they are in a capitalist framework, they end up acting against their own intentions. Revolutionaries need to be able to reach such people, show them where leftist ideologies lead, and what the struggle for the interests of the working class consists of.

Revolutionaries should certainly attend the public meetings and demonstrations organised by

leftist anti-cuts group in order to engage in discussion with militants who are searching for an alternative to the capitalist system. They should not, however, affiliate to such groupings or take part in their organising committees, etc.

There is, of course, the potential for groups appearing under the 'anti-cuts' banner that are not specifically leftist (even if leftism may still have its influence). The ICC has long recognised the importance of discussion groups for clarifying class positions and has taken an active role in several in the UK. We have also participated in several 'class struggle' groups that have emerged around the country in the last few years. In London, the 'J30 assemblies' that have formed around the slogan of "generalise the strike" have potential for being a forum where militant workers can discuss how to push forward the struggle.

Just as revolutionaries should beware opportunist involvement with leftist fronts, they should be wary of falling into the opposite error of sectarianism. **Ishamael 30/6/11**

J30 Assemblies How does the working class need to struggle?

In preparation for the recent public sector strikes three 'Generalise the strike assemblies' were held in London. They weren't the only assemblies held throughout the UK at the time; similar events were held in Birmingham, Leeds, Norwich, Bristol and Sheffield. The ICC were only able to attend the second two in London. And what interesting experiences they were.

First of all, the call to generalise the strike expressed in the name shows dissatisfaction with the union proposal for a one-day protest strike, dividing workers up between those called out and those who are not, with union led marches through London and other cities. This feeling that the union action did not answer the needs of the struggle was the one thing that united the people at the meetings, however different and even opposed their views. The fact that such assemblies were held is a step forward in itself. Prior to the 26 March demonstration in London, the ICC called for meetings where those interested in not taking part in another A-B march could come together to pose some questions about alternatives. At the time, this call had very little response from within the politicised milieu.

This time, it seemed that a group of people had determined that we weren't going to be just led around by the unions, and that what was needed was an alternative place to meet to discuss and collectively decide upon action.

It was clear from the people attending the assemblies that this is a very heterogeneous milieu:

- There were unionised and non-unionised workers, as well as students, workers who were called out on strike, and others who would have had to wildcat or take a sickie if they wanted to participate.
- There were members of organised political groups such as the ICC, the AF, Solfed, and members of other organisations, such as People's Assemblies Network – as well as plenty of people not affiliated to any political group.
- In the London assembly some people were warning about the strike as a pre-emptive action by the unions, whereas others were urging people to join unions as a way of fighting for jobs etc.

1. The word 'assembly' has been used in a number of ways. In the movements in North Africa, Spain and Greece an assembly was the public place where people met to discuss and protest, something which developed out of the movement itself. Here, the meeting has been called by a politicised minority. In addition, the 'assembly' intended for Parliament Square is of the 'public' type – a chance for a mass of workers to come together and discuss/listen. It's a much more broad based event than the organising meetings.

The political range was also reflected in the range of ideas put forward for 30 June. Should we go for some kind of a 'spectacular' event that would get media attention, something like blocking roads in Docklands, pulling up the railings outside Parliament, camping in Trafalgar Square, or some other kind of direct action – primarily aimed at 'the bankers'? Or we should be focussing on the fact that this was a *strike* day, and so the focus should be on trying to engage with the strikers?

Other attendees focussed on more local events, putting forward the idea of making connections with pickets and also trying to bring workers on different picket lines outside different workplaces together.

Some, inspired by the assemblies held in Spain and Greece, put forward the idea of assemblies and a camp in Trafalgar Square, while others warned that the struggle cannot simply be transplanted and will need to develop here before we can do that.

The debates at both meetings were lively and organised very well. Speakers were listened to, very rarely interrupted, and a good level of patience (and humour!) was maintained.

Initiatives and proposals arose out of the discussion of the need to pose an alternative to the workers on strike and others supporting them on the day itself, including the idea of holding some kind of an 'assembly' at Parliament Square, as a conscious counter point to the run of the mill speeches given by the union bureaucrats.

Overall we feel this has been a positive experience. The main difficulty in these meetings was that while politicised groups and individuals 'came together' to discuss common work in spite of political differences, the discussion was entirely focused on action, what we could do on the day. For instance we could state opinions on the role of the unions, or on what is positive or negative in the assemblies in Spain, but these were not questions to be taken up and clarified in the discussion. This limited our ability to agree a common approach to the struggle we are all trying to support, and will often prevent it altogether.

One of the last questions posed was how do we keep this momentum going? Outside of periods of mass, open struggle it is highly difficult to maintain a consistent activity. What we can do is discuss the questions raised by this union day of action, and particularly the one that came up again and again on pickets and demonstrations – what can we learn from the experience of the 70s and 80s? – in preparation for future union demos and future workers' struggles. **Graham 27/06/11**

ICC online

Chris Knight: Marxism and Science - Part One

This text is not directly about anthropology, but about the more general relationship between marxism and science. It offers a way of approaching the relationship between the two which is fundamentally revolutionary, affirming the essential internationalism of real science, the dialectical manner in which it moves forward, and its necessary opposition to all forms of ideology.

'Real Democracy Now!' (DRY): A dictatorship against the mass assemblies

It is increasingly clear that the strategy of DRY, in the service of the democratic state, consists of putting forward the idea of a citizens' movement for democratic reform, in order to try and avoid the emergence of a social struggle against the democratic state, against capitalism....Neither DRY nor the democratic state can stop the development of social discontent and militancy, but they can put all kinds of obstacles in its way.

Repression in Valencia: Solidarity with the outraged!

In the assemblies there has been a lot of talk about "changing this society", about putting an end to this social system and economic injustices. This has expressed the aspiration for a world where exploitation no longer exists, where "we are not commodities", where production is in the service of life and not life in the service of production, where there is a world human society without frontiers.

In the Ivory Coast, an imperialist battle between bloody killers

As to the African Union, it adopts an attitude that's just as wretched as the UN. In fact, taken by the throat by the respective partisans of the butchers involved in the dispute for Ivorian power, it leaves it to its members to support and arm one bloody clique or the other

Explosion at Chevron refinery

Throughout the whole oil industry, as pipework corrodes, oxidises and remains unreplaced, as valves and connections become more vulnerable to dysfunction and decay, maintenance is being cut, safety measures are subverted and cut, vital components are overlooked; and while company and union lawyers get rich over claim and counter-claim, workers are more and more put at risk.

Brixton, Zurich, Amsterdam, Berlin: The spectre of social revolt

The following article, first published in WR 38 in May 1981, analyses the international significance of these events as a response by young people – one of the hardest pressed sectors of the proletariat – to the effects of the crisis and mass unemployment hitting the most advanced capitalist countries. As such they were 'harbingers of the future'.

Capitalism will do nothing about climate change

The issue of climate change never really goes away. Every so often there are big reports and big conferences. Big speeches with big promises are made. Little seems to change. Here are some of the most recent reports.

A report published by the IEA (International Energy Agency) in May said that greenhouse gas emissions from power generation in 2010 were higher than any year in history.

The CCAFS (Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security) have produced their first report into the effects of climate change on food supplies. They set out to predict those areas of the world that would suffer most over the next 40 years. They predicted that western Africa is particularly vulnerable as countries like Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali already rely on drought resistant crops for food production.

HadCRUT3, a joint initiative in the UK has said that global warming between 1995 and 2010 was 0.19C. More importantly the statistical measurements amount to a statistically 'real' trend, i.e. statistically likely between 95%-100%.

We have come to expect rises in global temperatures and warnings of disasters of one shape or another. Every year seems to be the 'worst year' ever recorded for one indicator or another. What is more significant is that all these records are occurring while the world is supposed to be doing something about it.

Take for instance the first report mentioned, the IEA report on greenhouse emissions from power generation setting a new record for 2010. An international carbon emissions trading scheme is in operation.

There is carbon offsetting where companies and financial institutions can create carbon credits by creating schemes where CO₂ is saved, particularly

in the areas of the world which are not covered by the 'cap and trade' system.

This 'cap and trade' system is where big industrial companies are handed out licenses to release CO₂ which can then be traded with other holders to increase or reduce emissions within the limit of the carbon allowance.

The threat to the food supply is a more serious problem. Cheap labour requires cheap food to reproduce itself. The threat from global warming in the long term is for increases in food prices.

The carbon trading system is supposed to reduce the CO₂ requirements of major industries and yet the IEA report says that CO₂ from power generation is at an all time high. This is the paradox of green capitalism.

While the bourgeoisie accepts climate change is a problem, the competition between nation states means that each country is at the same time trying to prevent any serious disadvantage by acting significantly.

The large scale use of fossil fuels in transport has meant that for the first time the bourgeoisie

has had some flexibility to move goods economically on a large scale, including even the most perishable of goods. One TV programme in the UK a few years ago showed prawns fished in the UK, transported by plane to Thailand, sorted and packaged there before being flown back to be sold in British shops. The sourcing of cheap labour in the 'peripheral countries' of capitalism has been motivated by the crisis in the capitalist system rather than its good health. Cheaper labour in the third world has enabled capitalism to reduce further the labour costs of production but this can only continue with the use of relatively inexpensive fossil fuels.

The threat to the food supply is a more serious problem. Cheap labour requires cheap food to reproduce itself. The threat from global warming in the long term is for increases in food prices. This can be seen in recent years with harvest failures contributing to the increase in supermarket prices. The bourgeoisie hasn't worried too much about starvation in the third world as these countries by definition are undeveloped economically and are therefore insignificant within the world economy. What the bourgeoisie worries about is the ability to feed workers at a cheap price.

The analysis of Had CRUT3 is one more addition to the scientific evidence for global warming. It seems that capitalism will pretend to trade its way to sustainability. In reality capitalism will only sustain exploitation and destruction. **Hugin 2/7/11.**

NHS reform Government 'U-turn' continues same cost cutting

The government has made a 'U-turn', as the media calls it, on reform of the NHS. For *Socialist Worker* (18.6.11) changes proposed to the NHS are a "retreat", a "humiliating climbdown" for a government intent on privatising. For the *Guardian* (14.6.11) it is "a compromise that might just heal the coalition". But in all the words written about the changes the government has accepted from the Future Forum and the so-called 'listening exercise' there is often no mention of the driving force behind the reform – the £20bn efficiency savings demanded of the NHS.

The heart and soul of Andrew Lansley's original NHS reform proposals was to inject even more business sense into the NHS through the formation of new bodies better able to control costs than the existing ones. GP practices were to be grouped into 'consortia' to oversee about 80% of NHS spending, holding budgets both *tight* and *inelastic*, and would simply be put out of business if they exceeded them. In other words there would be no room whatsoever for the consortia to test the limits of their budgets – they and any existing or new private health providers would be the fall guys for whatever goes wrong, with the health secretary no longer responsible for providing comprehensive health services. It apparently made financial sense, for as small businesses GP practices have already shown themselves particularly good at keeping costs down at the government's bidding.

One of the important concerns raised was that the increased competition for the cheapest services would undermine joined up care. Now the 'GP consortia' are to be rebranded as 'clinical commissioning groups' and will have 2 members of the public, a nurse and a hospital specialist on the board as well as GPs. So now everyone is going to work together to plan services in their area? Well, no! That's not allowed, the nurse and specialist

"must have no conflict of interest in relation to the clinical commissioning group's responsibilities, eg they must not be employed by a local provider" (government document summarising changes quoted in *The Nursing Times* 21.6.11) although the nurse can be employed by a local GP. The commissioning groups will be advised by clinical senates on how to make patient care fit together. But what of the basic problem of resources?

"The NHS Commissioning Board must be up and running as soon as possible to help with the challenge of saving £20bn through greater efficiency by 2015" (*Guardian* 14.6.11, summarising Future Forum recommendations).

Privatisation is a state capitalist policy

Privatisation has had an increasing role in cost cutting in the NHS since the 1980s, when tendering for hospital cleaning contracts was used to cut staff and pay. But while private enterprises play a part, the state is the driving force. "The myth that competition has been key to cost containment in the Netherlands has obscured a crucial reality. Health care systems in Europe, Canada, Japan, and beyond, all of which spend much less than the United States on medical services, rely on regulation of prices, coordinated payment, budgets, and in some cases limits on selected expensive medical technologies, to contain health care spending." (*New England Journal of Medicine*, NEJM, org 15.6.11). Cost-cutting comes from government policy, and from state bodies such as NICE (National Institute of Clinical Excellence) which has been established to look at the cost efficiency of medical interventions and propose guidelines for their use – or recommend they are not used.

Competition or the threat of it may play a role alongside regulation to keep costs down, but privatisation has a far more important role in hiding the responsibility of the state for any deterioration

of health services. For instance the Unite website carries news items about privatisation dated 10th, 13th and 14th June that do not mention efficiency savings, and a Briefing, 'David Cameron: a personal guarantee of chaos' which only mentions it in relation to whether or not the 18 week target is being enforced. But the NHS would not be alright if only it got rid of private companies, workers are not being laid off because of privatisation but because of the state policy of keeping costs down. Within the NHS each part, each trust, each purchaser or provider, is set against the others in the competition for inadequate resources.

Following the Future Forum recommendations the government has eased off its privatisation rhetoric. Monitor, one of the NHS regulatory bodies, will no longer be there to promote competition, but will also be concerned with 'choice' and collaboration, while still policing the same rules on competition. Meanwhile the private sector will not be able to 'cherry pick' the most profitable services – how much this comforting incantation actually means when there are already private companies offering limited services at competitive prices, for instance routine but not urgent medical investigations, is a moot point. They cannot offer a comprehensive service, but one which is cheaper in the short term – which is what the state wants – since they are not contributing to long term needs such as nursing and medical education.

The rebranding of NHS reforms may have rubbed off some of the rough edges, and dropped some of the more incredible notions – no-one was ever going to believe the health minister no longer responsible for the NHS – but it is no retreat. To make the ruling class do that will require a much deeper level of class struggle that threatens to overflow the bounds of legality and union control. **Alex 29.6.11**

The evolution of the situation in Spain since the 19 June demonstrations

On Sunday 19th June there were massive demonstrations in more than 60 cities across Spain. According to some figures there were 140,000 in Madrid, 100,000 in Barcelona, 60,000 in Valencia, 25,000 in Seville, 8000 in Vigo, 20,000 in Bilbao, another 20,000 in Zaragoza, 10,000 in Alicante and 15,000 in Malaga.

The strength of numbers is impressive enough, but even more important was the context. In the last two weeks, politicians and the media, with the help of Real Democracia Ya from within, have been putting pressure on the movement to come up with ‘concrete proposals’, with the aim of sucking it into the swindle of democratic reforms, but on Sunday the 19th the organisers had to give this mobilisation a ‘social content’ and the demonstrations themselves showed this tendency; in Bilbao the most used slogan was “violence is not being able to make it to the end of the month”. In Valencia the lead banner was “The future is ours”, while in Valladolid it was “Unemployment and evictions are also violence”. In Madrid the demonstration was called by the Assemblies of the Neighbourhoods and People of South Madrid - the area where unemployment is most concentrated. The banner was “All together against the crisis and Capital”, and its demands were “NO CUTS IN THE WORKFORCE, PENSIONS OR SOCIAL SPENDING; AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT; WORKERS’ STRUGGLE; DOWN WITH PRICES, UP WITH SALARIES; INCREASE TAXES ON THOSE WHO GAIN THE MOST; DEFEND PUBLIC SERVICES, NO TO THE PRIVITISATION OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, SAVINGS BANKS AND OTHERS NO MATTER WHERE THEY ORIGINATE, LONG LIVE THE UNITY OF THE WORKING CLASS”

A collective in Alicante adopted the same manifesto. In Valencia the Autonomous and Anti-capitalist Bloc, composed of collectives active in the assemblies, defended a manifesto which said “We want an answer to unemployment. The unemployed, those in temporary employment along with those working in the black economy meeting in the assemblies give our collective agreement to the following demands and their implementation. We want the withdrawal of the Law on Labour Reform and the atrocious ERE and the reduction of redundancy payments to 20 days. We want the withdrawal of the Law on Pension Reforms since behind this is a life of privation and poverty and we do not want to be thrown into yet more poverty and uncertainty. We want the stopping of evictions. The human need for housing goes beyond the blind laws of business and the maximum profit. We say NO to cuts in education and health, to the new layoffs which are being prepared in the regional and city administration following the recent elections”

The Madrid March was organised into various columns composed of the people from 7 towns or neighbourhoods on the periphery. It gathered up increasing numbers of people as they went along. These “snakes” took up the proletarian tradition of the strikes between 1972-76 (as well as in France in May 68) of starting out from proletarian concentrations – such as the “beacon” Standard factory in Madrid. The demonstrations would then draw in growing masses of workers, neighbours, the unemployed and young as they converged on the centre. This tradition re-emerged in the struggles in Vigo in 2006 and 2009.

In Madrid, a manifesto was read to the gathering calling for the “Assemblies to prepare for a general strike”, and was greeted with massive cries of “Long live the working class”.

A moment of transition

In the article ‘From Tahrir Square to the Puerta del Sol’, we said that “Although it has given itself a symbol, the so-called 15M movement, this mobilisation did not create the movement but rather simply give it its first shell. But this shell in reality contains a utopian illusion around the idea of the ‘democratic regeneration’ of the Spanish State”. Significant sectors of the movement have tried to break from this shell, and the demonstrations of the 19th June went in this direction. We have en-

tered a new stage. We do not know how and when it is going to manifest itself concretely but it is orientating itself towards the development of the assemblies and struggle on a class terrain against spending cuts; towards the unity of all the exploited, breaking down barriers between sectors, firms, origins, social situation etc, an orientation that can only fully move forward within the perspective of the international struggle against capitalism.

It is not going to be easy to concretise this. Firstly, this is due to the illusions and confusions about democracy, about citizenship and ‘reforms’, which weigh heavily on many parts of the movement; and they are reinforced by the pressure of the DRY, politicians, and the media, who are taking advantage of the existing doubts, the immediatist search for ‘quick and real results’, the fear faced with the magnitude of events, in order to keep the movement imprisoned in ideas about ‘reforms’, ‘citizenship’, ‘democracy’; ideas about being able to gain a ‘certain improvement’, a ‘truce’, faced with the savage unleashing of the attacks hitting us all.

Secondly, the mobilisation of the workers in the workplace will be something heroic, given the level of fear, the fact that the loss of income can be the difference for many families between an acceptable life and one of poverty or even between eating or not. In these conditions, the struggle cannot be the fruit of ‘individual decisions’, as the unions and democratic ideology try to pose it. It has to come from the development of collective strength and consciousness which can see the role of the unions who at present appear to ‘disappear in the struggle’ only to be very much in evidence in the workplace spreading their corporatist poison, struggling to keep this or that sector or firm imprisoned, opposing any attempts at open struggle.



It is probable that we are already heading towards the explosion of more or less open struggles, which will be confronted with considerable obstacles. The best contribution we can make to this process is to try and draw up a balance sheet of the unfolding situation from the 15th May to the 19th June and to draw out some perspective for the future.

These are our strengths

In the last few years a much repeated phrase has been: how is it possible that nothing has happened given everything that has happened?

When the present crisis broke out we underlined that the first struggles “would probably, in an initial moment, be desperate and relatively isolated struggles, even if they may win real sympathy from other sectors of the working class. This is why, in the coming period, the fact that we do not see a widespread response from the working class to the attacks should not lead us to consider that it has given up the struggle for the defence of its interests. It is in a second period, when it is less vulnerable to the bourgeoisie’s blackmail, that workers will tend to turn to the idea that a united and solid struggle can push back the attacks of the ruling class, especially when the latter tries to make the whole working class pay for the huge budget deficits accumulating today with all the plans for saving the banks and stimulating the economy. This is when we are more likely to see the development of broad struggles by the workers. This does not

mean that revolutionaries should be absent from the present struggles. They are part of the experiences which the proletariat has to go through in order to be able to take the next step in its combat against capitalism” (Resolution on the International Situation, 18th International Congress of the ICC).

This “second stage” is beginning to mature – not without difficulty – with a series of movements, such as those in France against Pension Reforms (October 2010), that of the youth in Britain against the increase in tuition fees (November/December 2010), the big movements in Egypt and Tunisia to which can be added the present struggles in Spain and Greece.

For more than a month, assemblies and demonstrations have shown that we can unite, that this is not some utopia but rather on the contrary is a great stimulus, an immense joy. A search on the internet has brought up the following eloquent testimonies about the 19th June: “The atmosphere is that of a real festival. We marched along together, people of every age: twenty somethings, retired, families with children, those that are not in those groups... and at the same time neighbours standing on their balconies applauding us. We return home with a smile from ear to ear. Not only having the sense of having taken part in something, but something that went very well indeed”.

Faced with the social earthquake that we have been living through we have read a lot that ‘the workers are not moving’ and this has even taken the extreme form of the radical idea that ‘humanity is evil by nature’, etc. Today we are seeing the birth of solidarity, unity, collective strength. This does not mean underestimating the serious obstacles that arise from the intrinsic nature of capitalism – life and death competition, a lack of confidence between everyone – and that work against unification. This development can only come about through enormous and complicated efforts based on the unitary and massive struggle of the working class, a class that is the collective and waged producer of society’s riches; a class which has within itself the ability to reconstruct humanity’s social being.

In contrast to the bitter sense of impotence that predominates, this living experience is forging the idea we can have the strength to face up to capital and its state. “With the collapse of the eastern bloc and the so-called ‘socialist’ regimes, the deafening campaigns about the ‘end of communism’, and even the ‘end of the class struggle’ dealt a severe blow to the consciousness and combativity of the working class. The proletariat suffered a profound retreat on these two levels, a retreat which lasted for over ten years...it (the bourgeoisie) managed to create a strong feeling of powerlessness within the working class because it was unable to wage any massive struggles” (Resolution on the International Situation, 18th International Congress).

As a demonstrator in Madrid said “It is very interesting to see the people in the square, discussing politics or struggling for their rights. Doesn’t this give the sensation that we are retaking the streets?” This retaking of the streets shows that a sense of collective strength is beginning to mature. The road is long and hard, but the bases for the explosion of the massive struggles of the working class are being laid. This will allow the working class to develop confidence in itself and an understanding that it is a social force capable of facing up to this system and building a new society.

The 15th May cannot be reduced to an explosion of indignation. It has provided the means for being able to understand the causes of the struggle and the way to organise of the struggles: the daily assemblies. A demonstrator on the 19th June said “the best is the assemblies, speaking is free, people understand, think at a high level, thousands of people who do not know each other come to common agreements. Isn’t that marvellous?”

The working class is not a disciplined army whose members can be very convinced but whose role is to follow orders from a great leader. This vision of the world must be placed in the museum of history as an old piece of junk! The working class has to be seen as a mass that thinks, discusses, acts, organises in a collective and fraternal manner, combining the best of each in a gigantic

synthesis of common action. The concrete means of implementing this vision are the assemblies. “All power to the assemblies” – this was heard in Madrid and Valencia. “The slogan ‘all power to the assemblies’ which has emerged from within the movement, even if only among a minority, is a remake of the old slogan of the Russian revolution: ‘all power to the soviets’”.

In an even more embryonic way, the movement is posing the necessity of an international struggle. On the demonstration in Valencia there were shouts of “This movement has no frontiers”. Initiatives along these lines have appeared elsewhere, even though still timid and confused. Various camps have organised demonstrations “for a European revolution”; on the 15th June there were demonstrations in support of the struggle in Greece. On the 19th June there were internationalist slogans: a placard declaring “A happy world union”, and another in English “World Revolution”.

In contrast to the bitter sense of impotence that predominates, this living experience is forging the idea we can have the strength to face up to capital and its state.

For years, the so-called ‘globalisation of the economy’ has been used by the left wing of the bourgeoisie to provoke nationalist sentiments, with its talk about ‘stateless markets’, ‘national sovereignty’, that is, calling on workers to be more nationalist than the bourgeoisie itself! With the development of the crisis but also with the growth of the use of the internet, social networks, etc, young workers have begun to question this. A sense that faced with the globalisation of the economy it is necessary to respond with an international globalisation of the struggles, faced with world poverty the only possible answer is a world struggle.

The movement has had wide repercussions. The demonstrations that have been developing over the last two months in Greece have followed the same ‘model’ of concentrations and mass assemblies in the main squares, which have been directly and consciously stimulated by the events in Spain. According to Kaosenlare on the 19th June “thousands of people of all ages have demonstrated this Sunday in Syntagma Square, in front of the Greek parliament, on consecutive Sundays in response to the so-called pan-European movement of the ‘indignant’ in order to protest against the austerity measures”.

In France, Belgium, Mexico, Portugal, there have been regular assemblies, though smaller in scale, which have expressed solidarity with the indignant and tried to stimulate discussion. “About 300 people, in the majority young, marched on Sunday evening to the centre of Lisbon called by the ‘Democracia Real Ya’, inspired by the Spanish ‘indignant’. The Portuguese marched calmly behind a banner which read ‘Europe arise’, ‘Spain, Greece, Ireland, Portugal: our struggle is international’; in France “The French police arrested about hundred “indignant” when they tried to demonstrate in front of Notre Dame, in Paris. In the evening, there was a spontaneous sit down demonstration in order to protest about what had happened along the lines of what happened in Spain”.

Faced with an unbearable situation prepare new struggles!

The sovereign debt crisis worsens by the moment. The supposed experts recognise that in place of the oft-announced ‘recovery’ the world economy could be undergoing a new collapse worse than October 2008. Greece is a bottomless pit: rescue plan leads to other rescue plans and still the state is on the edge of defaulting, a phenomenon that is not confined to Greece but even threatens the USA, the world’s main power.

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Greece: difficulties in the development of the movement

After negotiations with the EU, IMF and the European Central Bank, the Greek government got parliamentary backing for a further array of austerity measures. Following last year's bailout and a previous wave of cuts in jobs, wages and pensions, the new 28 billion Euro package of cuts includes a further 15% cut in wages and 150,000 jobs for public sector workers, cuts in benefits, and in government services. Despite the addition of taxes for lower paid workers who'd previously been excluded, and some other new taxes including a 'solidarity levy', there is still anxiety throughout the bourgeoisie of Europe that Greek state capitalism could default on its loans and that the country might have to leave the Euro.

The responses to the blows from the economic crisis and the attacks by the state have varied. For example, Greece used to be noted for its low suicide rate, but over the last couple of years suicides have gone up 40% as people have failed to cope with debt and unemployment. On the other hand, the initial impulses of those who occupied squares across Greece and held assemblies to discuss what could be done were a healthy response to the situation. However, after the early days of the occupations the assemblies have become more formalised, with more invited speakers and much less discussion. Yes, all politicians are routinely denounced as 'thieves', but the suspicion of politics has not prevented meetings being increasingly influenced by leftist and liberal demagogues.

Even more significantly, the unions (despite their links and support for the governing PASOK party) have been re-establishing their influence. Last year, there were seven one-day general strikes; this year there have already been five, including one 48-hour strike. With the addition of the minority who bring along flares and other weaponry there have been some spectacular confrontations,

but these have been played out as so many theatrical rituals in which the police are prepared to play their part. At the time of key parliamentary votes the police used greater force than usual along with tear gas, while some anarchists attacked the finance ministry and a branch of a major bank. Events outside parliament choreographed to go with the melodrama inside.

The role of the unions is crucial for Greek capitalism. It relies on them to recuperate, divide and divert struggles. There is a great deal of anger in the ranks of Greek workers, but the unions have so far ensured that this anger is not being transformed into anything effective. For example, included in the package of measures are plans for the privatisation of 50 billion Euros worth of assets. This programme is fiercely contested by unions and their leftist supporters. The campaign against privatisation is a classic diversion. Workers are already suffering from the attacks undertaken by public sector institutions, but the left/unions try to persuade workers to defend the state and government employers.

The economic crisis that has driven the ruling class in Greece to attack so brutally the working and living standards of the working class is the same crisis that led to the need to bailout Ireland and Portugal and with it the imposition of their austerity regimes. It's not all a plot by the EU/IMF/ECB; it's a desperate response to a crisis that has an international reality. The working class is also international. The assemblies that occupied squares in Greece were partly inspired by events in Spain. The bourgeoisie is worried about a domino effect if the economy of one country in the Euro should collapse, but they're even more worried that they will not be able to contain any future struggles within the frontiers of a single country. **Car 30/6/11**

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The debt crisis shows the endless crisis of capitalism, which makes it necessary for the ruling class to impose savage austerity plans that mean unemployment, cuts in social spending, wages cuts, increases in exploitation, increase in taxes... all of which leads to a reduction in the solvent market, which means new austerity plans!

This spiral means that there is no other road to take than massive struggle. This struggle can and should be pushed forward by the intervention of the widespread minority in the assemblies which is distinguished by its defence of a class positions, the independence of the assemblies and the struggle against capitalism. The camps are breaking up; the central assemblies are not taking place; there is a contradictory network of neighbourhood assemblies. However, this minority cannot allow itself to become dispersed. It has to maintain its unity, coordinate itself nationally and if possible establish international contacts. The forms of these collectives are very varied: struggle assemblies, action committees, discussion groups.... The important thing is that they provide a means for the development of discussion and struggle. There is a need to discuss the numerous questions that have been raised in the last few months: reform or revolution? Democracy or assemblies? Citizens' movement or class movement? Democratic demands or demands against cuts in social spending? Pacifism or class violence? Apoliticism or class politics? It's a struggle to impulse the assemblies and self-organisation. It is necessary to develop the sense of strength and unity in order to respond to the brutal cuts that the regional governments are preparing in education and health, and the other 'surprises' that the government has hidden up its sleeve.

"The situation today is very different from the one that prevailed at the time of the historic resurgence of the class at the end of the 60s. At that time, the massive character of workers' struggles, especially with the immense strike of May 68 in France and the Italian 'hot autumn' of 69, showed that the working class can constitute a major force in the life of society and that the idea it could one day overthrow capitalism was not an unrealisable

dream. However, to the extent that the crisis of capitalism was only just beginning, a consciousness of the imperious necessity to overturn this system did not yet have the material base to spread among the workers. We can summarise this situation in the following way: at the end of the 1960s, the idea that the revolution was possible could be relatively widely accepted, but the idea that it was indispensable was far less easy to understand. Today, on the other hand, the idea that the revolution is necessary can meet with an echo that is not negligible, but the idea that it is possible is far less widespread." (Resolution on the International Situation, 18th International Congress of the ICC).

In the assemblies there has been much talk of revolution, the destruction of this inhuman system. The word 'revolution' is no longer frightening. The road may be long, but the movement that developed from the 15th May to the 19th June has shown that it is possible to struggle, that it is possible to organise ourselves for the struggle and that this alone will enable us to grow into a force against capital and its state, while at the same time giving us joy, vitality, and allowing us to get out of the terrible hole of daily life under capitalism.

"Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."

In this sense, the movement we are living through is grist to the mill of this change of mentality and attitude. This great change, of society and ourselves, can only take place on a world scale. Through searching for solidarity and unity with the whole of the international proletariat, the proletariat in Spain can undoubtedly develop new struggles and take forward this perspective: the future is in our hands! **ICC 24/6/11**

Protests in China come up against state repression

The Xintang area of Zengcheng, in China's southern Guangzhou province, annually produces 260 million pairs of jeans, 60% of China's and a third of the world's output for more than 60 international brands. Known as the 'jeans capital of the world' it is in some ways symbolic of Chinese economic development over the last thirty years. In June, demonstrations and clashes with the police in angry protests by thousands of workers against the treatment of a pregnant 20-year-old, hint at the reality experienced by workers in the heart of an 'economical miracle'.

Workers attacked government buildings, overturned police cars and battled with police. Against the protests the Chinese state sent in 6000 paramilitary police with armoured vehicles, deploying tear gas as they attacked up to 10,000 workers.

After strikes at Honda last year spread, the company conceded substantial wage increases. In the face of these recent protests by workers, many of whom were rural migrants, the state offered residency rights to anyone who would identify rioters. In Chinese cities those without household registry are not entitled to healthcare, education and other social benefits.

Han Dongfan, an activist who set up a union during the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests ... says ...

"with no real trade union that can articulate those demands, workers are left with little option but to take to the streets"

The days of protests in Zengcheng are not isolated incidents. A week previously "migrants from Sichuan clashed with police and overturned cars in Chaozhou, about 210 miles east of Guangzhou, after a worker demanding two months of back wages was allegedly attacked by the boss of the ceramics factory where he had worked" (Los Angeles Times 13/6/11).

As the *Financial Times* (17/6/11) put it "Although similar demonstrations are relatively common in China, in both cases a standoff between police and angry citizens quickly descended into violence."

The bourgeois press has highlighted the fact that migrant workers have been involved in these conflicts. In China there are 153 million migrant workers living outside their hometowns. Leaving rural areas they go to work on construction sites, factories, restaurants and new projects as they occur. Sixty per cent of them are under 30, and, when questioned in surveys, the younger workers are much more likely to say that they would take part in collective actions than older workers. Workers now working in urban areas mostly have no intention of returning to the countryside, with very few, for example, having any farming experience.

Also, as evidence of the degree of attachment to their place of origin, younger workers "tend to remit less money to home villagers. The National Bureau of Statistics found that in 2009 young migrants sent back about 37.2 percent of their income, while older migrants sent back 51.1 percent" (Reuters 28/6/11).

The response of Chinese capitalism

Whether dealing with strikes or other protests "the first instinct of China's government, at both local and national level, is to use force. Suppression can work for a while. But if the underlying causes are not addressed, China risks an explosion" (FT 19/6/11). This doesn't of course mean that China is going to let up on repression.

Bloomberg (6/3/11) reported that "China spent more on its internal police force than on its armed forces in 2010, and plans to do the same this year; as the government deployed security forces around the country to control growing social unrest". As the article continues "The surge in public security spending comes as so-called mass incidents, everything from strikes to riots and demonstrations, are on the rise. There were at least 180,000 such incidents in 2010, twice as many as in 2006"

according to Sun Liping, a professor of sociology at Beijing's Tsinghua University. The concern of the Chinese ruling class is partly at the proliferation of 'mass incidents' but also "The perception that local protests might be gaining a broader national coherence is deeply threatening to China's Communist Party" (FT 19/6/11). This doesn't mean that the Chinese bourgeoisie can deal with the 'underlying causes' of unrest. What lies behind protests and strikes, fundamentally, are the conditions in which workers live and work. And without the imposition of these conditions China's economic growth would not have been possible.

Chinese capitalism can't offer meaningful material improvements to millions of workers, and that's why it risks an 'explosion'. But it does know it needs something other than repression. As the Bloomberg article notes "Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Communist Party's ruling Politburo Standing Committee who oversees the country's security forces, said in a Feb. 21 article in the People's Daily, the party's official mouthpiece, that the government must 'defuse social conflicts and disputes just as they germinate'".

In general the Chinese bourgeoisie lacks the means to defuse conflict in its early stages. The official unions are inflexible, widely distrusted and rightly perceived as being part of the state. Those 'independent' unions that have existed have been in on a very limited scale. It is interesting, therefore, to note that Han Dongfan, an activist who set up a union during the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, is revising his view of the official unions.

In a *Guardian* (26/6/11) article he says that recent protests and demands for improved wages and conditions show that "with no real trade union that can articulate those demands, workers are left with little option but to take to the streets". He thinks that "This new era of activism has forced China's official trade union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, to re-examine its role and look for ways to become an organisation that really does represent workers' interests". The Chinese ruling class certainly wishes that the official unions had more influence with the working class, but for workers there is no form of union organisation that can answer their needs. For the working class it's not a matter of swapping one sort of union for another but finding the means for the most effective collective action. The fact that strikes and demonstrations so quickly end up in confrontations with the police is one piece of evidence that demonstrates to workers the need for their struggles, ultimately, to create a force that will be able to destroy the Chinese capitalist state. **Car 1/7/11**



Striking Honda workers in China June 2010

Paris Commune of 1871: When the workers first took power

It was 140 years ago that the French bourgeoisie put an end to the proletariat's first great revolutionary experience, with a massacre of some 20,000 workers. The Paris Commune was the first time that the working class had appeared in such strength on the stage of history. For the first time, the workers showed that they were capable of destroying the bourgeois state apparatus, and so stood out as the only revolutionary class in society. Today, the ruling class is trying at all costs to convince the workers that humanity has no perspective for any society other than capitalism, and to infect them with a feeling of impotence in the face of the terrible barbarity and misery of the modern world. Today then, it is necessary that the working class examine its own past, to regain confidence in itself, in its own strength, and in the future that its struggles contain. The formidable experience of the Paris Commune is there to bear witness that even then, despite the immaturity of the conditions for communist revolution at the time, the proletariat showed that it is the only force able to call the capitalist order into question.

For generations of workers, the Paris Commune was a reference point in the history of the workers' movement. The Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 especially were imbued with its example and its lessons, until the 1917 revolution took its place as the principal beacon for the struggle of the world proletariat.

Today, the bourgeoisie's propaganda campaigns are trying to bury the revolutionary experience of October for ever, to turn the workers away from their own vision of the future by identifying communism with Stalinism. Since the Paris Commune cannot be used to spread the same lie, the ruling class has always tried to mask its real meaning by treating it as an event of their own, a movement for patriotism, or for the defence of republican values.

A combat against Capital, not a patriotic struggle

The Paris Commune was founded seven months after Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat at Sedan, during the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. On the 4th September 1870, the Parisian workers rose against the dreadful conditions inflicted on them by Bonaparte's military adventure. The Republic was proclaimed while Bismarck's troops camped at the very gates of Paris. From then on it was the National Guard, originally made up of troops from the lower middle class, which took on the defence of the capital against the Prussian enemy. The workers, who had begun to suffer from hunger, joined up in droves and soon made up the majority of its troops. The ruling class tries to paint this episode in the patriotic colours of "popular" resistance against the Prussian invader; very quickly, however, the struggle to defend Paris gave way to the explosion of irreconcilable antagonisms between the two fundamental classes in society: proletariat and bourgeoisie. After 131 days of siege, the French government capitulated and signed an armistice with the Prussian army. Thiers, the new leader of the republican government understood that with hostilities at an end it was necessary immediately to disarm the Parisian proletariat, since it posed a threat to the ruling class. On the 18th March 1871, Thiers first tried trickery: arguing that the weapons were state property, he sent troops to remove the National Guard's artillery of more than 200 canons, which the workers had hidden in Montmartre and Belleville. The attempt failed, thanks to bitter resistance from the workers, and a movement of fraternisation between the troops and the Parisian population. The defeat of this attempt to disarm Paris touched off a powder-keg, and unleashed the civil war between the Parisian workers and the bourgeois government which had taken refuge in Versailles. On the 18th March, the central committee of the National Guard, which had temporarily taken over power, declared:

"The proletarians of the capital, in the midst of the governing classes' defections and betrayals, have understood that the hour has come for them to save the situation by taking charge of public affairs. (...) The proletariat has understood that

it is its imperious duty and absolute right to take its own destiny in hand, and to ensure its triumph by seizing power". On the same day, the committee announced immediate elections for delegates from the different arrondissements, under universal suffrage. These were held on 26th March; two days later, the Commune was declared. Several tendencies were represented within it: a majority, dominated by the Blanquists, and a minority whose members were mostly Proudhonist socialists from the International Workers' Association (the 1st International).

Immediately, the Versailles government counter-attacked, to recover Paris from the hands of the working class - this "vile scum", as Thiers called it. The bombardment of the capital, which the French bourgeoisie had denounced at the hands of the Prussian army, went on continuously for the two months that the Commune survived.

It was not to defend the fatherland from the foreign enemy, but to defend itself against the enemy at home, against its "own" bourgeoisie represented by the Versailles government, that the Parisian proletariat refused to give up its weapons to its exploiters and set up the Commune.

A combat to destroy the bourgeois state, not to defend republican freedoms

The bourgeoisie distils its worst lies from the appearance of reality. It has always relied on the fact that the Commune did indeed base itself on the principles of 1789, to reduce the first revolutionary experience of the proletariat to the level of a mere defence of republican freedoms, for bourgeois democracy against the monarchist troops behind which the French bourgeoisie had rallied. But the true spirit of the Commune is not to be found in the garments the young proletariat of 1871 draped itself in. This movement has always been a vital first step in the world proletariat's struggle for its emancipation, because of the promise it held for the future. This was the first time in history that the official power of the bourgeoisie had been overthrown in one of its capitals. And this immense combat was the work of the proletariat, and no other class. Certainly, this proletariat was little developed, had scarcely emerged from its old craft status, and dragged behind it all the weight of the petty bourgeoisie and the illusions born of 1789: nonetheless, it was the motive force behind the Commune. Although the revolution was not yet a historic possibility (because the proletariat was still too immature, and because capitalism had not exhausted its capacity to develop the productive forces), the Commune heralded the direction that future proletarian combats would have to take.

Moreover, while the Commune took to itself the principles of the bourgeois revolution, it certainly did not give them the same content. For the bourgeoisie, "liberty" means free trade, and the liberty to exploit wage labour; "equality" means nothing more than equality between bourgeois in their struggle against aristocratic privileges; "fraternity" means harmony between capital and labour, in other words the submission of the exploited to their exploiters. For the workers of the Commune, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" meant the abolition of wage slavery, of the exploitation of man by man, and of a society divided into classes. This vision of another world, heralded by the Commune itself, was reflected in the way the working class organised social life during its two months existence. The Commune's real class nature lies in its economic and political measures, not in the slogans it dredged up from the past.

Two days after its proclamation, the Commune confirmed its power by directly attacking the state apparatus through a whole series of political measures: abolition of the police forces dedicated to social repression, of the standing army, and of conscription (the only recognised armed force was the National Guard); the destruction of all state administration, the confiscation of church property, the destruction of the guillotine, compulsory free education, etc, not to mention such symbolic actions as the destruction of the Vendôme column, the symbol of ruling class chauvinism erected by Napoleon 1st. The same day, the Commune confirmed its proletarian nature by declaring that



The cannons of Montmartre during the Paris Commune

"the flag of the Commune is that of the Universal Republic". This principle of proletarian internationalism was clearly affirmed by the election of foreigners to the Commune (such as the Pole Dornbrowski, in charge of Defence, and the Hungarian Frankel, responsible for Labour).

Amongst all these political measures was one which particularly demonstrates how false is the idea that the Parisian proletariat rebelled to defend the democratic Republic: that is, the **permanent revocability** of the Commune's delegates, who were constantly responsible to whichever body had elected them. This was well before the appearance, in the 1905 Russian revolution, of the workers' councils - the *"finally discovered form of the proletarian dictatorship"* as Lenin put it. This principle of revocability which the proletariat adopted in its seizure of power once again confirms the proletarian nature of the Commune. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, of which the "democratic" state is only the most pernicious variant, concentrates the exploiters' state power in the hands of a minority to oppress and exploit the vast majority of producers. The principle of the proletarian revolution on the other hand is that no power should arise to place itself over society. Only a class which aims at the abolition of any domination over society by a minority of oppressors can exercise power in this way.

Because the Commune's political measures clearly expressed its proletarian nature, its economic measures, however limited, could not but defend working class interests: abolition of rent, abolition of night work for certain trades like the bakers, abolition of employers' fines taken out of wages, the reopening and workers' management of closed workshops, the payment of Commune delegates limited to a worker's wage, etc.

Clearly, this way of organising social life had nothing to do with the "democratisation" of the bourgeois state, and everything to do with its destruction. And indeed, this is the fundamental lesson that the Commune bequeathed to the whole future workers' movement. This is the lesson that the proletariat in Russia, urged on by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, put into practice much more clearly in October 1917. As Marx had already pointed out in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *"All political revolutions to date have only perfected the state machine rather than smashing it".* Although conditions were not yet ripe for the overthrow of capitalism, the Paris Commune, the last revolution of the 19th century, already heralded the revolutionary movements of the 20th century: it demonstrated in practice that, *"the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and use it for its own purposes. For the political instrument of its enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of its emancipation"* (Marx, *The Civil War in France*).

Faced with the proletarian threat, the bloodthirsty rage of the bourgeoisie

The ruling class could not accept that the working class should dare to stand against its own order. This is why, when it regained Paris by force of arms, the bourgeoisie aimed not only to re-establish its power in the capital, but above all to inflict a such a bloodbath on the working class that it would serve as a lesson it would never forget. Its rage in repressing the Commune was equal to the fear the proletariat had inspired in it. From the beginning of April, Thiers and Bismarck, whose troops occupied the forts to the North and East of Paris, began to organise their 'Holy Alliance' to

crush the Commune. Even then, the bourgeoisie showed its ability to push its own national antagonisms into the background in order to confront its class enemy. This close collaboration between the French and Prussian armies allowed the capital to be completely encircled. On 7th April, the Versailles troops seized the forts to the West of Paris. Faced with bitter resistance from the National Guard, Thiers persuaded Bismarck to free 60,000 French troops taken prisoner at Sedan, which from May onwards gave the Versailles government a decisive numerical advantage. During the first fortnight in May, the southern front folded. On the 21st, Versailles troops under General Gallifet entered Paris by the North and East, thanks to a breach opened up by the Prussian army. For eight days, fighting raged through the working class districts; the Commune's last fighters fell like flies on the heights of Belleville and Menilmontant. But the bloody repression of the Communards did not end there. The ruling class still wanted to savour its triumph by unleashing its revenge on a beaten and disarmed proletariat, this "vile scum" which had dared to call its class domination into question. While Bismarck's troops were ordered to arrest any fugitives, Gallifet's hordes carried out an immense massacre of defenceless men, women, and children: they coldly assassinated them by firing squad and machine-gun.

The "week of blood" came to an end in an abominable slaughter: more than 20,000 dead. It was followed by mass arrests, the execution of prisoners "to make an example", transportation to forced labour colonies. Hundreds of children were placed in so-called "houses of correction".

This is how the ruling class re-established its order. This is how it reacts when its class dictatorship is threatened. Nor was the Commune drowned in blood only by the bourgeoisie's most reactionary fractions. Although they left the dirty work to the monarchist troops, it was the "democratic" republican fraction, with its National Assembly and its liberal parliamentarians, which bears full responsibility for the massacre and the terror. Never must the proletariat forget these glorious deeds of bourgeois democracy: never!

By crushing the Commune, which in turn led to the disappearance of the 1st International, the ruling class inflicted a defeat on the workers of the entire world. And this defeat was particularly crushing for the working class in France, which had been at the vanguard of the proletarian struggle ever since 1830. The French proletariat was not to return to the front line of the class combat until May 1968, when its massive strikes opened a new perspective of struggle after 40 years of counter-revolution. And this is no accident: in recovering, even momentarily, its place as a beacon for the class struggle, which it had abandoned a century before, the French proletariat heralded the full vitality, strength, and depth of this new stage in the historic struggle of the working class to overthrow capitalism.

But unlike the Commune, this new historic period opened in May 1968 came at a moment when the proletarian revolution is not only possible, but absolutely necessary if humanity is to have any hope of survival. This is what the bourgeoisie is trying to hide with all its lies, its propaganda campaigns, to falsify the revolutionary experience of the past: the strength and vitality of the proletariat, and what is at stake in its combat today.

Avril (originally published in *Révolution Internationale* no.202, July 1991, and in *World Revolution* 146, July-August 1991).

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.

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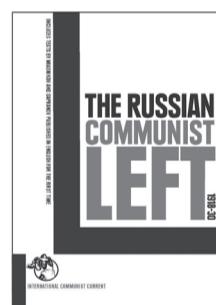
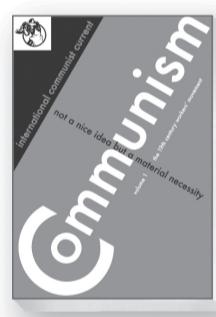
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Danger of worsening chaos in Syria and beyond

In mid-March, in line with the 'Arab spring', the Syrian population began to protest and demand the removal of its leader and a 'democratic' regime. In the face of this popular movement expressing its discontent with the living conditions imposed by the regime of a clique descended from Hafez al-Assad, the "Desert Fox", there has been a violent crackdown that has continued to intensify. There are already 1,600 dead, no one knows how many wounded, and 12,000 refugees principally in Turkey, but also in Lebanon, where hundreds of people have fled recently from the brutality of the Syrian army.

This repression and all-out terror shows the world Bashar al-Assad's will to stay in office, against all odds. Villages and towns are deprived of water and electricity supply to 'set an example', while people are slaughtered as they flee the atrocities of the Syrian army. 'Rebel' cities are bombed. Torture, already common before, and one of the triggers for the revolt because of what was inflicted on five children, is reaching the heights of horror. The police regularly open fire on demonstrations and the suburbs of Damascus are attacked with increasing intensity with military or sniper fire. The situation has become so bad that soldiers are deserting in disgust. These desertions have been met with bloody repression such as at Al-Jisr Chouhour on 5 June where it appears that 120 deserters were shot by the army itself. The government is of course keen to attribute these killings to the "armed terrorists who spread chaos." In its headlong rush into repression this is the Syrian regime's terrorist leitmotiv, which is reminiscent of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, or of Russia in Chechnya, to justify their military abuses. For now the Syrian state plays the card of confusion. So, while spreading repression across the country, Bashar al-Assad promised a programme of reforms for July 10, a programme with no official status. With a catastrophic economic situation, it's not clear whether he will be able to promise much without being shot in the back. In addition, in an attempt to quieten the opposition he tried to organise demonstrations in his favour. It's not clear whether participants were truly voluntary, or there with a gun to the head as with past mass demonstrations in the days of Stalinism. Syria had a long honeymoon with Stalinism during the cold war between the USA and USSR. A sham 'opposition' meeting was held in Damascus on 26 June, under the complacent gaze of the po-

lice who nevertheless continue to beat and kill a whole population of 'opponents'. This fooled no-one, but allowed them to buy some time.

Syria is also threatening to extend the chaos to the surrounding region. The deployment of its massive army to the border with Turkey, and its brutal military incursions into villages increasingly close to the border, while the area is far from the epicentre of the revolt, is a clear message from Assad to the whole 'international community': leave me alone or I will spread disorder. While Turkey is already very concerned with its regions bordering on Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan, the Turkish head of state, Erdogan, is worried about a conflagration on its borders with Syria and the occurrence of a real humanitarian catastrophe that would be the consequence. Damascus has threatened to set fire to the powder keg and open up a new front in military tensions. In this mutually destructive game Syria is in a strong position because Ankara cannot afford any slip. It is obliged, whether it likes it or not, to maintain imperialist order in the north of the Middle East. Pressure is put on Lebanon in the same way, through attacks on Kseir, on Syria's border with the Golan heights, that Damascus claimed historically and was the reason for dozens of years of war and massacres. However, behind Lebanon, there is the huge problem of Israel, which has recently hardened its position on the questions of Palestine and Lebanon. From the stirring of tensions in the south of its territory, Syria has again provoked the threat of war and increased tensions with more risky results, not least because Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has a firmly anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian policy. Developed countries, including those that produced a draft resolution in the UN a month ago (Germany, Britain, France and Portugal) have understood the need to approach the situation with care because, beyond the potential for the chaos of regime change in Syria, the entire region may be thrown into a more barbarous future. The leaders of these countries do not care or think about the population or their well-being, but are trying to contain a situation fraught with danger. There are celebrities who beg for peace but go no further because they know that military intervention in Syria would mean opening a Pandora's box whose outcome would be uncertain when facing a strong, well-trained Syrian army. No one can predict the prospect that awaits the people of Syria, and whether countries like the

US, which has supported the 'opposition' for years, will intervene. However, it is clear that the current evolution of the situation in Syria, whether or not it's the product of direct action by the United States, as some commentators have suggested, will be the centre of a free-for-all between imperialist appetites where the population is left to bear the cost. The formal opposition to any intervention from Russia and China in the UN prefigures this future. And, as the imperialist powers move their pawns to defend their interests, it will not improve the lives of all who live in poverty and suffer the violence of state repression. *Wilma*

28/6/11

From the ICC online forums

Political Decay and Economic Crisis: US Ruling Class Faced With No Easy Options

"... the class will cast off its meek and apologetic timidity in the face of bourgeois demands for more sacrifice, and go on the attack. And all that class consciousness which has been simmering underground for so long now, will burst out like a volcano ..."

"... given the hammering workers are taking internationally, I can't share your confidence. I'm still looking for a convincing explanation of this passivity, too ..."

"... after yesterday's show of passivity (the June 30 processions) you are vindicated. No indication of wind change there ..."

"... The ICC has often written about the disorienting effects of the campaign around the "death of communism" over the last 20 years, but has that really been the most important factor in blocking struggle or has it been the use of consumer debt (in the advanced countries at least)?"

Special Report on the 15M movement in Spain

"... I am curious about the precise nature of the media blackout regarding this movement. Is it really an internationally orchestrated blackout or is it more that the bourgeois media does not have the conceptual tools to understand the movement and its importance?"

"... The higher echelons of the media structures are perfectly integrated into the national interest and will thus represent them as a matter of course - as well as the interests of the bourgeoisie overall. To enact an overt conspiracy over news management would show a weakness in that state capitalist structure ..."

"... Is there a tension between growing decomposition (and its effects on the bourgeoisie) and the bourgeoisie's continuing ability to act in such a consciously Machiavellian frame as you describe Baboon?"

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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*.

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 statified 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