



# world revolution

## The spread of war shows capitalism is at a dead end

The situation in Syria continues to worsen. Israel has attacked a military facility outside Damascus. Both government and opposition stand condemned for their use of poison gas. The Syrian government is accused of having used at least 200 chemical missiles. A UN expert has said that the opposition has used sarin, the very potent chemical nerve agent. Since March 2011 more than 70,000 people have died in the conflict. More than a million refugees have fled the country.

Not for nothing has CNN (10/5/13) described the conflict as “a vicious whirlpool dragging a whole region toward it.”

A question that has been posed is whether any of the great powers can influence the situation. The CNN article suggests “Many analysts believe the United States can do little to influence -- let alone control -- the situation. And it could make things worse. Fawaz Gerges of the London School of Economics argues against the United States ‘plunging into the killing fields of Syria ... because it would complicate and exacerbate an already dangerous conflict.’”

Others contend that if the United States remains on the sidelines, regional actors will fight each other to ‘inherit’ Syria, and hostile states such as Iran and North Korea will take note of American hesitancy. They say inaction has given free rein to more extreme forces.”

So, while the US Congress has introduced legislation that would allow the administration to “provide lethal aid to the Syrian opposition - weaponry that could tilt the balance on the ground” (BBC 8/5/13), against that “The bottom line is that the US administration does not want the rebels to win ... the risk attendant on beefing up support for the rebels and prolonging the conflict is that it could lead to an uncontrolled regime collapse and chaos, with all kinds of radical groups possibly moving in”. As we’ve said elsewhere<sup>1</sup> the opposition includes all sorts of forces including the al-Nusra Front which is related to al-Qaida.

As for major powers such as Russia, China, France, or Britain, any support they can give to government or opposition will only further fuel the conflict and its potential for inflaming the whole region. The exposés about the use of chemical weapons<sup>2</sup> are used as part of propaganda campaigns, but they are a useful reminder of the brutal and ruthless way the factions of the bourgeoisie

combat each other, with the population of the area as victims in the crossfire.

The Middle East historically has, for economic and strategic reasons, been the focus of imperialist confrontation and conflict, with the ever-present threat of war. There is potential for Israeli intervention against Iran, imperialist interventions in Syria, the war between Israel and the Palestinians, instability in Libya, Egypt and Yemen, tensions between the Gulf monarchies and Iran. The region has become an enormous store-house for armaments with the escalation of arms purchases by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman. Imperialist powers of many scales confront each other in the region: the USA, Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, with more and more armed gangs at the service of these powers, alongside the warlords acting on their own account. Overall, the situation in the region is explosive and tending to escape the control of the major imperialisms. The withdrawal of western forces from Iraq and Afghanistan will further accentuate the destabilisation, even if the US will try and limit the danger by trying to restrain Israel and cultivate closer relations with the current regime in Egypt.

The spread of war and instability is not confined to the Middle East. Elsewhere in the world you can see the development of imperialist confrontations. In the Far East, for example, the presence of the world’s second and third economic powers, China and Japan, taking more and more military forms (for a historical background to the situation in the region we recommend our online special *International Review, Imperialism in the Far East, past and present*)<sup>3</sup>. In the present period, it’s the development of the economic and military power of China that’s a concern for the rival imperialisms in the region. China also intervenes across Africa and in the Middle East and has been clearly identified by the US as the most important potential danger to its hegemony.

The growth in Chinese power is not only a concern for countries in Asia like Japan, India, Vietnam and the Philippines; it has provoked a counter-strategy from the US. America has developed a strategic alliance to contain Chinese ambitions, which echoes the encirclement of the USSR in the Cold War. The cornerstones of this alliance are Japan, India and Australia, but it also engages South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore.

3. <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/2012/5305/november/international-review-special-issue-imperialism-far-east-past>  
See also our article on the more recent sharpening of tensions between China and Japan: <http://www.en.internationalism.org/icconline/201304/7514/imperialist-conflict-between-china-and-japan>



In this confrontation between super-powers, with the involvement of lesser imperialisms, the stand-off between the two Koreas (the North backed by China, the South by the US) is one of the clearest demonstrations of the menace of war. Our statement “Against the threat of war in Korea”<sup>4</sup> shows the dangers facing the working class, while giving a proletarian perspective against capitalism’s war drive.

It’s in Africa that capitalism’s descent into militarist barbarity is most clearly pronounced. In continuing conflicts, in the fragmentation of capitalist states, the wearing away of frontiers, the role of clans and warlords in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Mali, or the Congo, it’s possible to see fragmentation and chaos extending across a continent, giving us an idea of what the decomposition of capitalism could have in store for the whole of humanity.

In Europe, where arms budgets have declined and where there are no open conflicts, it might appear that different forces are at play. However, if you look at the economic forces at play you can see the potential for future antagonisms. On the one hand there is a strong tendency toward centralisation in order to face up to the potential for economic collapse. But against this there is the tendency for each for themselves, for national bourgeoisies not wanting to be swallowed by bodies such as the EU, for the growth of anti-Germanism – tendencies exacerbating the tensions between states.

More and more we are witnessing the historic impasse of capitalism. Not every conflict has a direct economic motive, although energy sources such as oil and gas, minerals for the construction of communication technology or weapons, diamonds and precious metals have often been the

4. <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201304/7513/against-threat-war-korea>

loot over which imperialist gangs large and small have ravaged whole regions of the globe. And there is no mechanical link between an immediate dip in economic performance and the rise of military conflicts. Rather, the link can be seen on a more historic and global level: the more world capitalism sinks into its economic contradictions, the more it is facing a brick wall in its search for economic solutions, the more the world’s imperialist states and proto-states are driven towards the military option: seizing the resources of your rival, striking out to avoid being attacked, using proxy wars to destabilise your rival’s authority or weaken its alliances. And even though we are no longer living under the shadow of two huge military blocs as we did between 1945 and 1989, today’s chaotic chessboard is in many ways even more dangerous and unpredictable, an even greater menace for the future of humanity. The alternative between socialism and barbarism announced by Rosa Luxemburg in 1916 is even clearer today.

Car, 11/5/13

### Inside this issue

Attacks on benefits are an attack on us all	2
Bedroom tax cannot be fought on its own	2
Syria descends into imperialist hell	3
Chemical weapons: winding up war rhetoric	3
Legacy of Chavez: defending capital and deceiving the impoverished masses	4/5
Cyprus: tax haven for rich, poverty for the rest	6
Bangladesh: the industry of murder	7
Life of the ICC - including a day of discussion	7
Union parades versus the mass strike. Declaration on the general strike by a workers’ group in Alicante, Spain	8

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1. “Syria descends into imperialist hell” <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201305/7640/syria-descends-imperialist-hell>

2. See “Chemical weapons in Syria: winding up the war rhetoric” <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201305/7641/chemical-weapons-syria-winding-war-rhetoric>

# Attacks on benefits are an attack on us all

Even before the measures brought in this April food bank use more than doubled in the UK last year. Average earnings rose 0.8% in the year to February, far lower than inflation, particularly for food and other essentials. Teachers will no longer get automatic pay increments, while the schools they work in become more dilapidated due to lack of maintenance. Public sector pay is capped. Doctors and nurses have to sit in meetings to discuss how to manage with ever tighter resources...

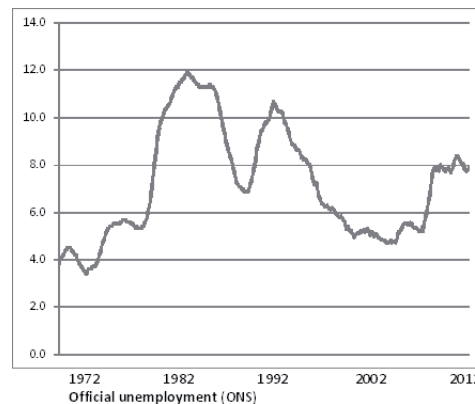
No wonder the only way to “make work pay” is to introduce cuts in benefits. Capped below inflation for the next 3 years; an overall benefit cap related to average pay that will cost 40,000 households, 89% with children, an average of £93 a week; disability living allowance to be taken away from 170,000; council tax rebate cut; the “bedroom tax”; and so on.

All these measures are being prepared and brought in very carefully to undermine any working class response.

*Labour would ensure that no adult will be able to be live on the dole for over two years and no young person for over a year. They will be offered a real job with real training.... People would have to take this opportunity or lose benefits*. All the politicians of left and right use the same phrases and make the same allegation that unemployment is voluntary.

So the Labour Party wants to have its cake and eat it, to divide the working class by allegations of unemployment as a lifestyle choice, and to provide an alternative to the nasty Tories who divide the working class; to ‘make work pay’, and to be fair to those on benefits; to ‘responsibly’ cut the deficit by attacking the working class, as they did in government, and to pose as the workers’ friend.

For all the bluster about getting benefits down by getting the unemployed back to work, they and the long term sick only take a minority of benefits. In 2009-10, Job Seekers Allowance (3%), Income Support and Employment and Support Allowance



petitively and at a profit. To do so, and to steal a march on their competitors, they need to produce more cheaply, more with less workers, and when they can't do this by technical innovation they do it by pushing the employees to work harder or longer. Either way more is produced by fewer workers and the market becomes saturated with products that cannot be sold. Workers are laid off, enterprises close. We saw this with steel and shipbuilding in the 1970s and 1980s and with the car industry more recently. Unemployment goes up and increased competition tends to drive down wages. States that found a welfare system useful in times of labour shortage start to cut, cut and cut again – as we have seen since the 1970s.

How long will it last? The mechanisms that allowed capitalism to recover in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, opening up new markets in new areas of the world, emigration of the ‘surplus’ population to

the colonies, no longer exist. China is often hailed as the engine that will get the world economy going again, but its high rates of growth and low wages make it a competitor rather than a market. In the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century state intervention has been used, either by nationalisation or by subsidies, but over the last 40 years states have had to pump in more and more money with less and less benefit to the economy. Now debt, and particularly state debt, is one of the key problems in this crisis. Lastly there have been little booms based on speculation, such as the dot.com bubble and the recent subprime housing bubble that burst in 2007-8. Throughout it all unemployment has remained persistently high. Figures for GDP will go up and down but we won't see any reversal in the general trend of worsening crisis or high unemployment, whatever the politicians promise.

This situation makes struggle against the attacks necessary, but extremely difficult. Difficult both because of the threat of unemployment against workers who resist attacks, and because unemployment itself tends to drive down wages. It means constantly fighting against worsening conditions, resisting one attack only to see another pushed through instead, or the same one introduced later, until the working class is able to pose the question of ending capitalist exploitation once and for all. We must begin by rejecting every attempt to divide us up between employed and unemployed, public sector and private sector, born locally or immigrants. The whole working class is under attack and we can only fight back in solidarity with each other. **Alex 7.5.13**

## Bedroom tax cannot be fought on its own

The introduction of the bedroom tax is a cruel and massive attack against workers. Designed deliberately to hit a massive section of benefit claimants and the very poorest sector of the working class - it has been deliberately built in as part of the austerity measures to reduce the welfare budget. As an example the minimum amount lost will be 15% for one extra bedroom, very often moving to 25% for those the state deems to have two extra bedrooms. Among those who will lose are:

- those with a family member working abroad (except in the armed forces) who needs a room for visits;
- sick or disabled adults who need an extra room for medical equipment;
- those who need an extra room for visiting family members (children in separated families, parents);
- couples with no children or children who have left home.

Overall, it is thought that this will affect more than 660,000 or 31% of working age benefit claimants in the UK, costing an average of £14 a week nationally, and £21 in London where accommodation is notoriously expensive.

Like all the measures in this round of austerity, the bedroom tax is designed to sow divisions among the victims. With so many in crowded or inadequate housing the government wants to be seen as ‘fair’, even ‘reforming’, which is absolutely not the case. With the lack of ‘social’ or ‘affordable’ housing, the lack of building of homes, this measure will do nothing but take money away from the poorest in society, whether working or unemployed, for the benefit of capital.

In addition, housing benefit is administered by local authorities, so it is an attack carried out at one remove from central government; at the same time, it is designed to push people to resist it on the basis of their own individual claims, unlike the poll tax in the 80s, when the Thatcher government made the mistake of attacking everyone ‘equally’. This makes it much more difficult to resist, although there have been a few scattered demonstrations against it, generally well-marshalled by the left and the unions.

Only by understanding this measure as one among many hitting all of us – employed, unemployed, pensioners, students – can we develop the solidarity necessary to begin to build resistance to any one of these attacks. **M and A, 11.5.13**

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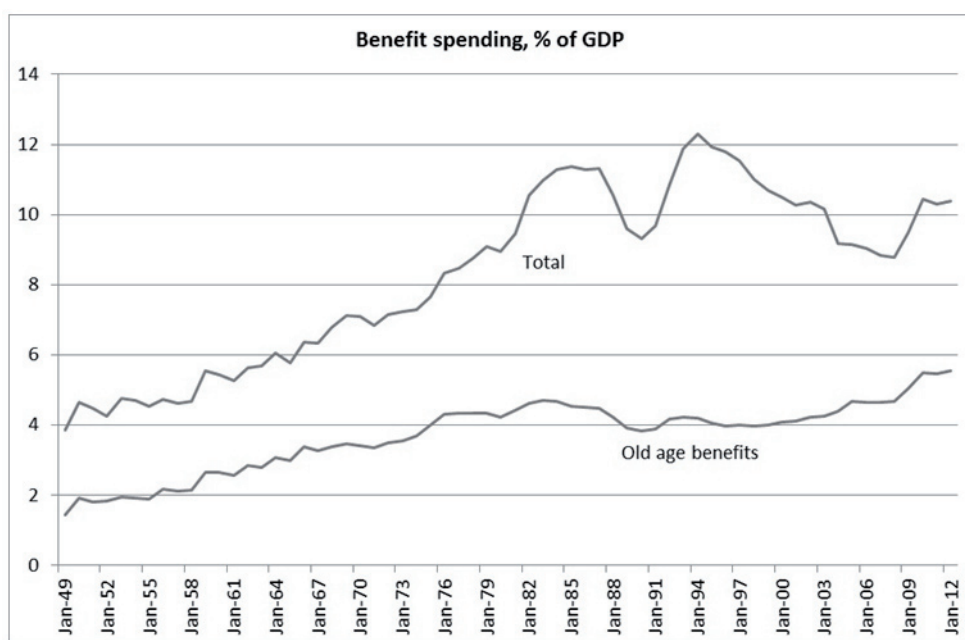
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### Those whom capital needs to impoverish its media first makes unpopular

“Vile product of welfare UK” screamed the *Mail* (3 April), “I think there is a question for government and for society about the welfare state, and the taxpayers who pay for the welfare state, subsidising lifestyles like that ...” echoed chancellor George Osborne. This is the most nauseating extreme of the campaign to divide the working class that wants to stir up real hatred against those on benefits, particularly the unemployed, using the tragedy of a couple who set fire to their house killing six children. Have these people never heard of insurance fraud? Of landlords who destroy their property because it's more profitable to get rid of tenants? Of businesses in Bangladesh where workers are burned or crushed to death when capital cuts corners? Or indeed of businesses in Waco, Texas, or clubs where young people go to dance, where people are tragically, and negligently, killed?

The more ‘reasonable’ side of the campaign wants to create a division between the “striving” who go to work and those who are “rewarded” for being unemployed by a “broken system” that traps people on benefits and in poverty. All very reminiscent of Gordon Brown’s “hand up, not hand out” from the early days of the last Labour government, as it brought in the benefit cuts of the time. In fact it is the same argument, and one the Labour Party is still making. For all the criticism by Liam Byrne, shadow work and pensions secretary, of Tories who “want to play ‘divide and rule’”. To distract the public from their failure to get the economy growing and control the rising bill for unemployment”, when push comes to shove, he argues: “First, people must be better off in work than living on benefits. We would make work pay by reintroducing a 10p tax rate and supporting employers who pay the living wage. Second, we would match rights with responsibilities.

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/apr/06/liam-byrne-tory-benefit-cuts>

(4% each) only took up 11% of benefits, whereas tax credits (child tax credit 10% plus working tax credit 4%) for people in work took up 14%. These benefits, as well as other means tested benefits such as housing and council tax benefit, also go to those on low incomes whether or not they are in work. They are used to maintain those on wages permanently below the minimum needed (see ‘We are all scroungers now’, *WR* 258). Far from allowing ourselves to be divided against each other, blaming the unemployed, we need to see that the benefit cuts, like the attacks on those in jobs, are attacks on the whole working class.

### The inevitability of unemployment in capitalism

Unemployment in the UK has been counted in the millions since the end of the 1970s, more, often much more, than 1 in 20 of the working population. This was a great shock to the baby boomer generation who were brought up when 1 or 2%, or half a million, out of work was considered high in the 1960s. It's not that there wasn't unemployment in the post war decades, but that most of it was in the periphery while Western Europe had a shortage of labour. The current figure of 2.56 million unemployed, 7.9%, comes after the statistics have been massaged many times, and particularly after a policy of transferring as many as possible onto incapacity from the late 1980s. So we know that a proportion of the 2 million on long term sickness and the 2.24 million economically inactive are really unemployed. 900,000 have been unemployed for over a year and half of these for over 2 years. 979,000 of the unemployed are age 16-24, giving them an unemployment rate of 21%: a generation blighted. We see a similar picture in other countries. The USA has a similar jobless rate to the UK, and in the Euro area it is 11.9%.

So unemployment is a long term international phenomenon, but how is it inevitable? Each capitalist business needs to produce and sell both com-

2. <http://www.leftfootforward.org/2012/03/budget-2012-breaking-down-the-benefits-bill/>



# Syria descends into imperialist hell

Just how quickly a modern capitalist state can descend into a devastating imperialist hell-hole is demonstrated by the war in Syria. With horror we view the growing death and mutilation of men, women, children, endless atrocities and the destruction of whole areas on televised reports; these are followed by the thoughts of “experts”, the think-tanks that inform the governments, then the nauseating speeches and policy decisions of politicians; and not only is there no end to all this carnage and the hypocrisy surrounding it, but it threatens to get worse. The social revolt in Syria of March 2011 is buried under the debris and devastation of this country and the present bloody stalemate of the military forces involved, as well as their different imperialist backers, threatens not just more of the same but increases the dangers of this war spreading - an extension of war and instability that is already underway.

One of the factors explaining this stalemate is, against all the propaganda to the contrary, the cohesiveness of the Syrian military, fear-driven support from large elements of the population for the Assad regime, and the military support to the latter from Russia and Iran. On the other side, the Free Syrian Army and the jihadists have been strengthened by the military support of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France, Britain, the USA, Jordan and Turkey. Britain and France have been particularly active in stepping up economic, military and diplomatic support recently, with both looking to alter the terms of the UN arms embargo, and Foreign Secretary Hague saying at the beginning of March that Britain was “considering” arming the rebels in order to “save lives”. In a sign of its growing weight Germany has, for the moment, firmly blocked any attempt to ease any restrictions of arms to the “rebels” wanted by France and the UK. In fact Britain, along with France, the USA, Turkey, via Jordan, as well as the arms deliveries by Qatari and Saudi forces, are already providing lethal assistance to opposition forces along with direct military training. Britain has also shown a propensity to support the Muslim Brotherhood in various Arab countries in the past and throughout the “Arab Spring” and we should assume that the same is happening here as they are a significant

element in the Syrian opposition forces.

On April 10, a BBC report stated that the Syrian al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) has been confirmed from Iraq to be part of al-Qaida in Iraq<sup>1</sup>. Somewhat embarrassingly for the freedom-loving west this has been a fact on the ground for the last six months or more; but backing elements of Islamic fundamentalism has a long tradition from British imperialism, imperialism in general in fact. There’s no doubt that al-Nusra is a well-armed and cohesive fighting force. It has had major successes around Aleppo and is reportedly instrumental in the constant fighting in and around Damascus where it’s used car bombs and rockets against civilian targets. It looks like that it’s also used chemical weapons with devices improvised from chlorine used for water disinfection<sup>2</sup>. Not that there’s any moral high ground in this war which, from the most rabid fundamentalist to the most well-spoken democratic politician, shows their dedication to defending their own sordid and bloody imperialist interests. The external

1. It deserves more than a footnote but we must mention the situation of “liberated” Iraq, which remains an imperialist battleground particularly between the USA and Iran: according to Islamic Relief, facts which have been generally verified, one quarter of Iraqis are living in poverty. The unemployment rate is over 50% and one million children under 5 are suffering from malnutrition; there are at least 2.6 million displaced persons in the country and most of the country is dependent on UN aid. Poverty, disease, rising prices and lack of health facilities, electricity and clean water are rife. Amidst all this misery flourishes the most blatant corruption with billions of dollars disappearing into bank accounts with little or no work being done for it. And the bombs and terror, from the local Sunni and Shia gangs and their political masters, continue to kill on an almost daily basis. Iraq continues to show all the weaknesses and divisions imposed by various factions of the regime’s own making which themselves have emanated from the “regime changers”. Rather than the reconstructed Iraq that was promised us the country is being pulled apart, threatening further instability through the region.

2. The US and its British and French allies here are holding the card of “chemical weapons” in order to intervene. It was one that they used during the first Gulf War in the early 90’s where a single chlorine drum used in water treatment was designated as evidence of large-scale “weapons of mass destruction”.

opposition forces, the “government-in-waiting”, conjured up by the US, France and Britain, and largely based in Turkey, has undergone change to yet another “*legitimate representative of the Syrian people*”. First it was old, long-term Syrian exiles from the US with links to the CIA and various US state organisations, then the President of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, the preacher Moaz al-Khatib, who lectured the US on the merits of martyrdom (he’s gone) and now Ghassan Hillo, another long-term US exile. Hague met Hillo and this new “interim government” on April 10 at the Foreign Office, where he once again talked about what help Britain could give them in order to “*save lives*” (gov.uk, April 10). Increasing killing to “save lives” is part of the normal doublespeak of politicians.

The regime itself has been strengthened by the interests of Russian imperialism which has provided it with diplomatic and military support as well as the diplomatic and economic support that it gets from China. In some sense this echoes the old Cold War proxy wars but it’s much more unstable and chaotic than that, given that we are living in a period of decomposing entities, the weakening of the US and tendencies to everyman for himself. An example of this is the pro-opposition “allies” of Turkey and Saudi Arabia having diverging and opposing interests in the war and their own role as aspiring regional powers. The Syrian ally Iran has recently (Press TV, 16.4.13) reaffirmed its long-term support for Syria and calls for the deepening of “*cooperation between the two countries to boost the resistance front against the Zionist regime of Israel*”. And here Iran is asserting itself, via its Sh’ite identity with Iraq, Hezbollah and the Syrian Baathist Party, against Turkey, Saudi Arabia and, most importantly, the leading military power in the region, Israel.

## Threat of escalation

The potential for escalation is clear. In early April Syrian jets fired rockets 3 miles into Lebanese territory, the first direct attack since the war began. This has further destabilised the fragile state of Lebanon as Sunni-Shia tensions are on the rise and there’s a wider destabilisation in relation

to Israel. Israeli territory has been fired on from the increasingly “hot” area of the Golan Heights, and Israel as returned fire into Syria. Israel was also involved in the bombing of a suspected Hezbollah-bound arms convoy near Damascus on January 30. The Israeli resort of Eilat was also hit by rockets from jihadists active in the similarly unstable region of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula this week where, worryingly for the Israelis, their “Iron Dome” missile protection system failed to respond. And the background to all this is the continuing Iranian-Israeli tensions which this week were expressed in threats of the latter to attack the former with Israeli Chief of Staff, Lt. General Gartz saying “*we have our plans and forecasts... if the time comes we will decide*” (on military action) (AFP, 16.4.13). Israel is concerned about weapons going into and coming out of Syria, about threats against it from all sides; and a further concern must be, if it needed any, the backing of the Muslim Brotherhood from elements such as Britain.

The US is “leading from behind” in this war and just to make its position clear NATO’s top commander, US Admiral James Stavridis, on a visit to Turkey this month, described Turkey as “*Nato’s border with Syria*” (Reuters, 17.4.13). On the same day, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 200 US military officials would be going to Jordan, where the British army has a presence, and adds that plans have been made for the extension of this force. In the meantime Assad’s artillery and jet bombers are pounding civilian areas, often populated by refugees who are fleeing previous attacks (when the war started there were already two million Palestinian and Iraqi refugees living in Syria). Similarly, when they are not carrying out direct massacres of civilians as al-Nusra have done, the “rebels” have ensconced themselves in civilian areas from which they launch attacks, inviting retribution from the regime’s forces. And for these civilians there is no end to their misery, hunger and terror which, if anything, threatens to spread beyond the borders of Syria with the complicity of the local, regional and global imperialist powers, all of which contains no perspective whatsoever for the working class. **Baboon 19.4.13**

# Chemical weapons: winding up the war rhetoric

The verbals around the question of the use of chemical weapons in Syria by the Assad regime and its possible consequences have been wound up by the western wing of the “international community”, i.e., Britain, America, France, followed by some of the Gulf States, Israel and the wings of the Syrian opposition. Last week, US Secretary for Defence, Chuck Hagel, said that Sarin had been used in some attacks in Syria by the regime. Without at all underestimating the brutality of this regime, why would they use chemical weapons when their positions are consolidating and they are on the offensive? Maybe that’s why the west is raising the stakes. Dr. Sally Leivesley, a chemical and biological analyst who has worked for western governments said, in *The Independent*, 27.4.13: “*There are things here which do not add up. A chemical attack using Sarin as a battlefield weapon would leave mass fatalities and very few people alive*”. But, as our leaders insist “with caution”, some elements of some chemical and biological agents have been found. In the southern town of Daraya on April 25, two rockets released a gas that affected about a hundred people, according to the opposition, and there were reported attacks in other areas. There was a report from Alex Thomson on Channel 4 from the Al-Bab district close to Aleppo, where the al-Nusra Front is in control, that Syrian soldiers were among the 26 killed from a chemical attack. There are a number of secret services and special forces here with all their various agendas, including the Qataris who were particularly ruth-

less in Libya. It’s possible that some elements of the regime have used chemical weapons, as have the rebels.

Overall, this current farce echoes the tragedy of Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction and the blatant lies of the British government and US Secretary of State Colin Powell to the UN just over 10 years ago about the “evidence” thereof in order to justify the invasion of Iraq. Great parts of Syria are now being destroyed in an imperialist war. Bombs are falling on factories, rockets fired at utilities and all sorts of toxic combinations are brewed up by the explosives, which people have no choice but to breathe in. Building material dust can be toxic in the atmosphere and there’s plenty of that about. And this is quite apart from the destructive power of the explosives themselves - the chemical fall-out is a sort of imperialist bonus.

There’s no doubt that the Syrian regime has one of the largest, if not the largest arsenal of chemical weapons in the Middle East. The town of al-Safira, close to Aleppo, holds one of Syria’s main facilities for the production of chemical weapons, including the nerve gas Sarin. Commentators in the west say that there is a “concern” that these will fall into the “wrong hands”, that is into the hands of “rebels” who are being directly or indirectly supported by the west and the Gulf States. Weapons falling into the “wrong hands” has been one of the consequences of the actions of west-

ern imperialism from Afghanistan in the 1980’s to the spread of decomposition in Mali this year. Prime Minister Cameron, despite his “caution”, has already decided that Assad has committed a “war crime” (*Telegraph*, 26.4.13). The Obama administration has been more circumspect but says it “*retains the ability to act unilaterally*” and talks about “red lines” and “game changers”. The Israeli government has said that Assad has used chemical weapons and a “red line” has been crossed. Israel has an interest in US imperialism adhering to “red lines” in relation to the war it’s building up for against Iran. The US and Britain are demanding, through their spokesmen in the UN, that the Assad regime grant “*unconditional and unfettered access*” to test for WMD in Syria. Such an inspection would be nothing less than an American and British spying mission, which is exactly what it was in Iraq with its cover of lies and misinformation.

And there’s the hypocrisy of it all: Israel with its use of phosphorous against the tightly-packed civilians of Gaza. Witness the use of the same chemical weapons by the US in Fallujah, Iraq, where birth defects are still on the rise. Another example is “Desert Storm” in 1991, where napalm, fuel-air explosives, cluster bombs and uranium-tipped shells were used by the British and Americans. And before that, when Britain and the US were supporting Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran in the 1980’s (and he was a “*good friend*” of France), they looked the other way

when he used chemical weapons (most of them provided by the west) against the Kurds, killing at least five thousand in Hallabjah alone. But Britain had already found that dropping chemical weapons from warplanes on the Kurds was very useful in the 1920’s.

The western bourgeoisies are banging the war drums and feel that they have a free hand to up the ante around the question of “chemical weapons”. What their precise reaction will be can take a number of escalating forms through the already existing military/intelligence set ups that they have in place both within Syria and in the wider region. We can be certain though whatever course is taken it will further exacerbate the immediate and potential instability, just as the misery imposed on the working class and the masses is increasing. The destruction of Syria, as an expression of militarism in decomposition, apart from the immediate death and devastation, is a further attack on the whole working class. **Baboon. 29.4.13**



# Legacy of Chavez: defending capital and deceiving the impoverished

It's not only the hierarchy of the Venezuelan state that lamented Chávez's demise, but also in many Latin American governments and others around the world, who have said their 'last farewells' to the leader of the "Bolivarian revolution". Several of those attending the funeral did so because of commercial and political agreements, such as the members of ALBA<sup>1</sup>, along with those benefiting from oil agreements. But they were all united in their grief at the loss of the state boss in whose name a 'struggle against poverty' and for 'social justice' took place, who, over the course of 14 years, carried out a project in the interests of a good part of the bourgeoisie, aimed at attacking the proletariat's living conditions and consciousness. They, along with the leading representatives of the national capital, whether officials or 'opposition', recognised that this was an excellent opportunity to make propaganda about 'the world's solidarity with the Venezuelan people' and to puff themselves up by exalting the international significance of their 'great leader'.

The proletariat has its own historical experience to draw on in order to reject and unmask this torrent of bourgeois and petty bourgeois sentimentality and hypocrisy. Chávez is a myth created by capitalism, nurtured and strengthened by the national and international bourgeoisie, a figure who came to their rescue with the bourgeois hoax called "21st Socialism". The international bourgeoisie, principally its left tendencies, want to keep this myth alive. The proletariat however needs to develop its means of struggle against Chávist ideology in order to show the most impoverished layers of society the real road to socialism.

## The emergence of Chávismo: a project of the nationalist bourgeois left

Chávez first came to public notice when he led the attempted military coup against the Social Democrat Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992. From then on his popularity underwent a spectacular growth until he was elected President of the Republic in 1999. During this period he capitalised on the discontent and lack of trust across broad sectors of the population towards the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic Parties who had alternated power between themselves since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1958. This discontent was particularly marked amongst the most impoverished masses affected by the economic crisis of the 80s, who were the main protagonists of the 1989 revolt. The two main political parties were undergoing a process of disintegration, characterised by corruption at the highest levels and the neglect of government tasks. This was an expression of the decomposition that had engulfed the whole of society, principally the ruling class, which had reached such levels that it was impossible to cohere its forces in order to guarantee reliable governance and 'social peace'.

Chávez's charisma and his ascendancy amongst the most impoverished masses, his ability to convince them that the state was there to help them, enabled him to strengthen his hold on various sectors of the national capitalism: the armed forces and above all the parties of the left and the extreme left. The latter in particular changed their political programme from one based on 60's 'national liberation' struggles against 'Yanqui imperialism', to one in favour of the creation of a real national bourgeoisie, ideologically supported by the Bolivarian myth of the 'great South American fatherland', and materially sustaining its aims with the important income from the export of oil. To this end various leaders and theoreticians of the Venezuelan left and extreme left (amongst them guerrilla fighters and members of the Venezuelan Communist Party) set about the task of visiting various 'Socialist' and 'progressive' countries in order to understand which model to implement in Venezuela when Chávez came to power: China, North Korea, Libya, Iraq, Cuba etc... There is no doubt that from the very beginning the Chávist project was understood as a bourgeois project by the nationalists of the left, based on civil-military

unity, taking as its reference points the most despotic regimes in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, many of them allies from the old imperialist Russian bloc.



Throughout his 14 years in government, Chávez was developing his government project that came to be known as "21st century Socialism", based on the exclusion of and confrontation with those sectors of national capital that had held power until 1998, and sectors of private capital who opposed him; this went together with an aggressive regional and world geopolitics based on radical anti-Americanism. His great secret, recognised by a good part of the world bourgeoisie, was that he was able to renew the hopes of the immense masses of the abandoned poor in Venezuela, bring them in from the cold, making them believe that one day they would be able to get away from their poverty. In reality, what has happened is that the whole population has become impoverished, the workers above all, through the application of the left's principal of 'levelling from below'. In this way Chávismo managed to contain the social unrest of the mass of the poor, a social layer produced by the course of decadent capitalism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it has been increasingly impossible to incorporate them into productive work. But he also achieved an aim that was the envy of other bourgeoisies: he gained the support of an electoral mass which allowed the new civil and military elites of the ruling class to perpetuate themselves in power. It is not by accident that during 14 years in power the Chávists won 13 of the 15 national elections that took place.

## Chávismo is a product of the decomposition of capitalist society

Chávismo's rise was not due to the failures of the preceding governments, nor to Chávez's charisma (an idea typical of the bourgeoisie which sees personalities as the motor force of history). Rather it was the expression of the decomposition of the whole capitalist system. The collapse of the Russian bloc at the end of the 80s marked capitalism's entry into this new phase in its decline, the phase of decomposition<sup>2</sup>. The events which broke up the imperialist blocs that had been in existence until then had two main consequences: the progressive weakening of US imperialism at a world level and an attack on the proletariat's class consciousness, around the campaign developed by the international bourgeoisie identifying the collapse of the Stalinist bloc with the 'death of communism'. The left wing of capital, in order to be able to carry on their task of containing the working class and the impoverished masses, had to generate 'new' ideologies. This led to the emergence in the 90s of the "third way" in Europe, and left wing movements in the countries of the periphery. It was from this seedbed, the product of the decomposition of the capitalist system, that Chávez and his project emerged, along with other leaders and left movements in different Latin American countries. There was Lula with the support of the Workers' Party, the MST and the Social Forums in Brazil; Evo Morales in Bolivia with the indigenous movement; the Zapatistas in Mexico with the support of indigenous and peasant movements, etc.

The significance of Chávez from the beginning was that his project was seen as a movement for Latin American integration (sustained by Bolivarian thinking) founded upon radical anti-Americanism. From this point of view, he was seen as a second Fidel Castro, but who substituted the 'social movements' of the workers and socially ex-

cluded masses of the region for the 60s ideology of 'national liberation'. Chávez's Venezuela of the 2000s was transformed into the shop window for the benefits of 'real Socialism' that Cuba had been in the previous century. With the importance difference that Chávismo was able to finance the franchise of "21st century Socialism" through the large incomes from oil exports.

The Chávez regime however could not stop the overwhelming advance of social decomposition in Venezuela; rather it was turned into an accelerating factor at the internal and regional level. It replaced the old business and state bureaucrats with a new civil and military bureaucracy who have amassed great fortunes and properties inside and outside the country, who have superseded their predecessors in government in the levels of corruption. Chávismo has bought loyalty for its 'revolutionary project' by sharing out the oil incomes. This method was used to replace the old military High Command and to buy the necessary loyalty of the Armed Forces, principally after the 2002 coup which removed Chávez from power for a few hours. In fact the Armed Forces have been transformed into the regime's 'Praetorian Guard', and it carries a lot of weight in the regime.

The hegemony of the Chávista bourgeoisie is based on the reinforcing of the state at all its levels and through a permanent confrontation with the sections of the national capital that are opposed to the regime, principally against the emblematic representatives of private capital, who have been subject to expropriations and controls. A form of government justified to its followers as a struggle against the 'bourgeoisie', when in reality many of the Chávistas used to be 'leading members' of private capital. Thus the confrontation between fractions of the national capital has dominated national politics throughout Chávez's time in power. In this struggle each fraction tries to impose its own interests, thus dragging down the whole of society and affecting every level of society. At the economic level, the general crisis of the system has inevitably evolved and a high price has been paid for making Venezuela a 'regional economic power'. This can be seen in the abandoning of the industrial infrastructure of the country (even affecting the 'the goose that lays the golden egg', the oil industry); the roads infrastructure and power services (one of the best in Latin America only two decades ago) are practically on their last legs; at the level of telecommunications Venezuela is technologically lagging behind the rest of the countries in the region. The main drama has been at the social level: the deterioration of public health and education services (which Chávez has sold as one of the great 'gains' of the revolution) is much worse than a decade ago; public safety has been practically abandoned (although this has not stopped the police repression of protests by workers and the population); in the 14 years of 'Socialist' government more than 150,000 people have been murdered, which has given Venezuela (above all Caracas, the capital) one of the highest crime rates in the world per 100,000 inhabitants, surpassing Mexico and Colombia<sup>3</sup>.

At the time of the death of the great leader of the "Bolivarian revolution", the homeland of "21st century Socialism" found itself in a serious economic crisis. In 2012 all the indices showed that the economy was as ill as the President: high fiscal deficit (18% of GDP, the highest in the region), the result of public spending reaching 51% of GDP; imports were the highest in 16 years, at \$56 billion, equal to 59% of exports; 22% inflation, the highest in the region. State spending which up until now has been covered by internal and external debt, which have grown steeply in the last years, has reached 50% of GDP; the printing of money has led to the highest inflation rates in the region, seriously undermining workers' wages, pensions and the crumbs distributed by the state. The economic crisis can no longer be hidden and cheated by the state's control of the economy: 2012 began with the devaluation of the Bolívar by 46% in order to try and cover part of the immense public

3. See the article. Incremento de la violencia delictiva en Venezuela: Expresión del drama de la descomposición del capitalismo <http://es.internationalism.org/node/3417>

spending and shortage of products, mainly food items; inflation is estimated to be going to increase to 30%. China, an important lender to the Venezuelan state in recent years, is now making matters worse by refusing to give more resources to an economy that looks like a bottomless pit. Doubts about the health of the economy have made the issuing and realisation of shares more difficult, and the activity that does take place is done at a high price, a premium of 13.6%.

The Chávist project of "21st century Socialism" is another bourgeois failure: a version of state capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that engulfs workers and society in poverty whilst enriching the bourgeoisie, which includes the Chávist elites. It shows that neither right nor left, nor the leftists represent a way out of the poverty and barbarity that capitalism subjects us to.

## The myth of reducing poverty

One of the things that the top representatives of organisations such as the UN or the World Bank have stressed since Chávez's death has been his concern for the cause of the poor, which according to them allowed the reduction of levels of poverty in Venezuela. The representatives of the left parties, the leftist groups and social movements, have acted as the mouthpieces for the manipulation of statistics and the well-thought out propaganda of Chávismo in order to show the world the great gains made through a 'redistribution of riches' by orientating the state's food, health, and education resources towards the parts of the population most in need. According to the figures of the INE, the organisation charged with collecting the statistics to show the 'gains of the revolution', the number of households living in poverty in Venezuela was reduced from 47% to 27.4% between 1998 and 2011 (about 4 million people). This in turn is part of the 37 million people who have been lifted out of poverty over the past decade in Latin America, according to the World Bank. The international bourgeoisie need to exalt any countries under the capitalist regime that have been able to 'overcome poverty' and are near to achieving the "Millennium Goals" proclaimed by the UN.

The reality is that the Chávez regime widened poverty, maintaining the poor in poverty, worsening the living conditions of employed workers and the lower layers of the middle class. Chávismo carried out a programme of social engineering, taking part of the mass of surplus value produced by the workers to provide social benefits and directing it towards the most desperate sections of society. What this did was to worsen the precariousness of work that already existed before Chávez came to power: non-official studies from 2011 show that 82% of the employed population are in precarious jobs<sup>4</sup>. The government claims to have increased employment (an increase of 1 million jobs in the public sector) while the official propaganda show how unemployment has grown in the US and Europe. Employment has certainly grown in Venezuela, along with other countries in the region; but it is a question of precarious work, without fixed contracts or only part time, violating the state's own employment laws and depriving workers of basic social benefits (health, help with education for workers and their children, etc). The state has created parallel health, education and other services, whilst worsening workers' living conditions in these sectors and throughout the public sector, to the point where the state accumulated vast debts, to the sum of thousands of millions of dollars. This social engineering has been a real bloodletting for workers in the productive sectors, driving down wages to around the minimum wage (\$300 if the official amount is applied or \$100 in the informal sector).

Chávismo has rejected workers' demands, saying that they will worsen the 'people's' living conditions. But this is the great lie: through states social plans (which to a greater or lesser extent each national bourgeoisie tries to implement in order to maintain 'social peace') the bourgeoisie has tried to redistribute some of the crumbs from oil profits to a limited part of the poor, whilst the majority are left to hope that one day that they too will also

4. See <http://vprimero.blogspot.com/2011/05/826-de-la-poblacion-ocupada-tiene-un-htm>

1. Alternativa Bolivariana para las América, which is formed by Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Cuba and other countries

2. See Theses on Decomposition. [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/107\\_decomposition](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/107_decomposition).



# masses

benefit from this or that plan for social assistance. The reality of this can be seen with the distribution of price-regulated food, which can only be obtained after long queuing and only in limited quantities; or the limited amount of housing built by the state (constructed in high visibility areas in order to show off the 'gains of the revolution'), which are given to a few government supporters and without any deeds. Others receive money benefits, pensions, scholarships etc from the state but this money does not cover the cost of food. On the other hand, inflation (the highest in the region) generated by the incessant costs of the state, make these hand-outs worthless overnight, whilst further undermining workers' wages. According to official figures over the last 14 years of the Chávez government there has been an accumulated inflation of 1500%, which has meant a real cut in wages over this period.

The franchise of "21st century Socialism" which is sold by the left, the leftists and leaders of 'social movements' in the region, has fed the illusions of the weakest parts of the proletariat about the creation of a model of the capitalist state – one that in reality is just as savage as the state in other countries.

## Strengthening the state

Chávez gave a new life to the democratic mystification with the idea of 'participatory democracy'. This has allowed the state to penetrate and place under its control the poorest sections of the population and their social movements, through the use of such organisations as the Bolivarian Circles and more recently the Communal Councils. In this way Chávism appeared to carry out the egalitarianism promoted by the left as 'levelling from below', which means the spreading of poverty to the whole population, above all the working class.

Chávez's government has also brought about a major strengthening of the state against society, which corresponds to the left's vision that 'Socialism' means more state. The state has not only been reinforced at the economic level through the expropriation of businesses and land from sections of private capital opposed to the regime, but it has also fortified the totalitarian state: making it all pervasive in society. Chávez has militarised society and expanded the political character of the state in order to control and repress the population, principally the working class.

At the internal and external level, Chávism, like the Cuban and other bourgeoisies in the region, has used the scapegoat of 'North American imperialism' to justify its own imperialist policies. Historically the Venezuelan bourgeoisie has not hidden its intention to be a great regional power, an orientation intensified by Chávism with the weakening of the USA in the world and in its own backyard. With the excuse of the 'threat of the Empire' Chávism has justified increased arms spending, to such a point that according to the Report on the Tendencies in the Arms Sales 2012 by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Venezuela is the main importer of conventional arms in South America, despite its constant talk about peace and unity. This swelling of the arms sector is part of the growth of militarisation of the bourgeoisies in the region and contributes to regional destabilisation. This arms spending represents greater indebtedness and directs society's riches against society itself. It is more likely to be used for controlling social discontent than for confronting the 'Empire'.

The Chávez regime has carried out a more aggressive geo-political policy than any of its predecessors. With the end of the construction of 'Bolivar's great fatherland' and using oil incomes as the means of penetration, it has become a factor of destabilisation due to its competition with the other aspiring regional 'little' imperialists, principally Brazil and Colombia. With Cuba it has formed the ALBA, which brings together countries who have bought into the "21st century Socialism" franchise; it has set up "Petrocaribe" in order to penetrate the Caribbean and made agreements with the countries of Mercosur, principally with Argentina. These countries receive benefits in the form of oil exports and 'aid' from the Venezuelan state. In this

manner Chávism has bought loyalty at a regional level through investing a good part of oil profits – and this policy has further worsened the living conditions of the proletariat in Venezuela.

## The trivialisation of socialism and the attack on class identity

For over two decades the international bourgeoisie has proclaimed the 'death of Communism' following the collapse of the Stalinist bloc in 1989, with the aim of trying to weaken class consciousness and the proletariat's struggle for a new society. Chávism has reinforced this campaign by trivialising and undermining of the idea of socialism, with the aim of destroying its real proletarian essence. The sections of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie who are opposed to the regime have also contributed to this, calling the regime 'Communist' or 'CastroCommunist'. This is one of the major contributions of the Chávist bourgeoisie and its counter parts in the rest of the bourgeoisie, since it represents a direct attack on the proletariat's class consciousness, not only in Venezuela but at the regional and international level.

This was not the development of a 'revolution',



but the implementation of 'Socialism in one country' by a handful of military and leftist adventurers taking control of the capitalist state and strengthening it. The 'overcoming of poverty' was achieved through state hand-outs, which has been presented as being against capitalism and imperialism because of the regime's diatribes against the US. To present it as a 'revolution' is to repeat in the 21st century the tragedy that was the so-called 'Cuban revolution' and its impact upon the development of class consciousness amongst the proletariat in Cuba, Latin America and the world. Thus it is no surprise that Chávism has close links with the Castro brothers and their clique. The Chávist regime has been maintaining them in their 50 year rule through paying for their 'advice' in oil.

The so-called "Bolivarian revolution" has nothing to do with socialism. The *Communist Manifesto*, the first political programme of the proletariat, in 1848 proclaimed "the proletariat has no homeland or national interests to defend", whereas Chávism is a patriotic and nationalist movement. The Chávist 'revolution' dreams of going back to pre-Colombian society and is based on the thinking of Bolivar, which was already reactionary at the time since his struggle against Spanish rule could only replace it with a creole oligarchy. It is a bourgeoisie project that has nothing to do with the workers' struggles, but everything to do with sections of the leftist, civil, military and petty bourgeoisie, who are full of social resentment for having been excluded from power following the fall of the dictatorship in 1958. It has also been sustained by the impoverished masses and the weakest sections of the proletariat who the Venezuelan bourgeoisie have manipulated for decades through a policy of hand-outs and cronyism, since they are vulnerable to the crumbs thrown to them by the state and the illusions that go along with this. The organisation of the Bolivarian Circles and the Communal Councils, which can be mobilised against the employed working class worse (whom they accuse of being the 'aristocracy of labour'), and even confront them with armed gangs, are the continuation of this policy. The Chávist project is an integral part of the 'social movements' promoted by the left and leftism which use the most impoverished masses, those who are accustomed to living in poverty and precariousness, and who are not united with the struggles of the proletariat – a class which produces in an associated way, which uses strikes as the means for confronting capital, which can become conscious of the social force

it represents and which is capable of struggling to overcome the poverty that capitalism subjects it to.

Chávism has used the full strength of the state in order to confront the workers' struggles, which have been obscured by the intense political polarisation introduced by the bourgeoisie. It has had recourse to the most barbaric means to attack the proletariat: in 2003, following the strike in the oil industry promoted by bourgeois fractions opposed to Chávez, a veritable pogrom was unleashed against the workers, using unemployed workers and supporters of the government. Not content with laying off 20,000 oil workers, the government made it impossible for them to find work inside or outside the state enterprises and subjected them to permanent harassment. This has been an important attack on class solidarity amongst the proletariat in Venezuela, which has accentuated divisions and polarised politics within the working class. Chávism has weakened class solidarity and consciousness.

Chávist ideology seeks to trivialise the class struggle, presenting it as a struggle of the 'poor against the rich'. In his frequent speeches on TV and radio Chávez constantly repeated that "to be rich is bad", with the intention that workers should passively accept a precarious life, whilst at the same time the hierarchy and the state bureaucrats, along with their families, disport themselves as the new rich. Chávez constantly went on about how he was struggling against 'the bourgeoisie', presenting his government as being the government of the poor, because he came from a poor background. In this way he tried to hide from the workers that the capitalist system is based on antagonistic social relations between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and that those who govern the state are part of the bourgeois class.

## The response of the proletariat

Chávez's death does not mean the end of Chávism. Chávez has not been nor will he be the only populist leader in Latin America. The 20th century gave birth to various leaders with a similar profile, which were thought to now be an extinct species. The bourgeoisie needed Chávez in order to maintain control of and spread illusions amongst the most impoverished masses, including the weakest and most atomised sectors of the proletariat, sectors which will inevitably continue to grow as long as the capitalist system sinks into decadence and decomposition.

This drama poses a historic challenge to the proletariat, to develop its struggles and transform them into a reference point for the masses that have placed their hopes in the state and the Messiah Chávez. The proletariat in Venezuela has struggled, despite the weight of ideological poison and state repression, and the political polarisation created by the different factions of capital. Workers in the industrial and public sectors have used the strike weapon and protests in order to confront the state; despite many of them being sympathetic to Chávism, they have thus shown a lack of trust in the State-boss. The constant attacks by the 'Socialist' state have obliged them to resist, and they have had no other road<sup>5</sup>. This has also happened in sections of the most impoverished where the proletariat is weakest, although to a much more limited extent due to their atomisation and not being integrated into the productive apparatus.

Faced with the Leftist ideology of Chavism and the other ideologies that are generated and will be generated in order to preserve the system, the proletariat in Venezuela and internationally need to develop their struggle against capital, going beyond immediate demands, developing their consciousness and organisation as an autonomous class, which also means a development on the theoretical level, based on historical materialism. This task places a great weight on the most politicised minorities of the class – those who have already recognised that our struggle is for communism on a world wide scale.

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5. See <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2010/05/guayana>

Continued from page 8

## Declaration on the general strike by a workers' group in Alicante, Spain Union parades v. the mass strike

departure" and thus tends to eliminate all the divisions within the proletariat

3) The trade unions only organise a minority of the working class, whereas the mass strike draws together all the different layers of the class, unionised and non-unionised.

## The decadence of capitalism

The struggle is linked to the reality within which it unfolds: you can't consider it separately. Since the beginning of the last century, the exhaustion of pre-capitalist markets has put a brake on capital's insatiable drive for growth, provoking a permanent crisis, permanent social disaster (wars and unprecedented misery).

The period since the end of the 1960s has been the culminating point of the permanent crisis of capitalism: the impossibility for the system to expand, the acceleration of inter-imperialist antagonisms, the consequences of which put the whole of human civilisation in danger.

Everywhere, the state, with its formidable repressive apparatus, has taken charge of the interests of the bourgeoisie. It is faced with a working class which, although numerically weaker in relation to the rest of society since the 1900s, is still highly concentrated, and its living conditions have been equalised in all countries to an unprecedented degree. At the political level the ruin of bourgeois democracy is so obvious that it can hardly disguise its real role as a smokescreen for the terror of the capitalist state.

The conditions of the mass strike correspond to the objective situation of the class struggle today, because the characteristics of the present period express the sharpest point of the tendencies of capitalist development over the last century.

The mass strikes of the first years of the last century were a response to the end of the period of capitalist ascent and the beginning of the conditions that mark its decadence. These conditions have become totally obvious and chronic today. The objective push towards the mass strike is a thousand times stronger today.

The "general results of international capitalist development" which determined the historic upsurge of the mass strike have not stopped maturing since the beginnings of the 20th century.

## What can we do?

How can we facilitate the development of the mass strike, of the international self-organisation and unification of the proletariat? Our contribution can only be that of a conscious section of the working class – neither more nor less.

One of the forms of this contribution is criticising mistaken forms of activity which are a barrier to self-organisation and to the deepening of consciousness. Even with the best intentions of their militants, activism, base unionism, leftism... are part of these barriers which the workers will have to throw down to attain their class autonomy.

Another contribution is to encourage reflection, clarification on what we have lived through. But it also means working for the extension of real struggles, their coordination, the spread of information about them, as well as the coming together and organisation of the revolutionaries themselves. It means above all recovering the memory of our struggles and their fundamental weapons, such as the mass strike

**Indignant, self-organised assemblyist workers for a working class and anti-capitalist 15-M<sup>4</sup>**

4. 15-M refers to the movement which began in Spain in May 2011

# Cyprus: tax haven for the rich, poverty for the rest

On the morning of Saturday 16 March, the radio informed the million inhabitants of the island of Cyprus that a European aid plan had been agreed for the country that included the introduction of a tax of 6.75% on bank deposits up to €100,000 and 9.9% for deposits above that amount. Obviously, everyone rushed to the banks to withdraw their money. In vain! Banks and markets were closed, withdrawals from ATMs were limited. For more than a week, the country was at a standstill, with the population not knowing what tomorrow would bring. Finally, after many twists and turns (a rejection of the European plan in the Cypriot parliament, many official, behind-the-scenes negotiations...), the tax targeting the small investors was cancelled, but instead, accounts of more than €100,000 were hit harder (eg those of the *Bank of Cyprus* - the first bank in the country - would lose amounts between 30 and 40%) and the second largest bank, *Laiki Bank*, was declared bankrupt.

We have had no end of explanations to explain this disaster. 'It's Merkel's fault!' 'It's the fault of the European Union!' 'It's the fault of the IMF!' That's what the victims (and those who showed solidarity with the families of workers affected) were told. And 'It is the fault of irresponsible Cypriots!' 'It is the fault of international capital laundering its money!' 'It's a healthy and necessary fight against harmful excesses of the financial world!' These explanations for the catastrophic state of the Cypriot economy were offered elsewhere.

In reality, all these explanations are not only crude and pathetic lies, they are particularly poisonous for working class consciousness and struggles because accepting them would imply that:

- either the fight is against Merkel, the EU or the IMF;
- or the fight is against 'irresponsible leaders', 'corrupt financiers' or 'capitalist excess'.

In either case, the anger and reflection are deflected away from what is the real root of the current dramatic situation: capitalism. And worse! By blaming only certain parties (this individual, that government or that institution), by making believe that a more humane form of capitalism is possible, the bourgeoisie ultimately leads the exploited into defending the system that is attacking it!

To support its propaganda, the bourgeoisie draws on the appearance of things, on what seems obvious, on basic common sense. Or, in the words of Albert Einstein, "*What we call common sense is actually all the ideas we have been taught up to the age of 18*" (and even later, we should add). So, we must make a real effort theoretically to go beyond appearances to discover the real cause of the current downturn that's not just in Cyprus but all over the world.

## The history of Cyprus<sup>1</sup>

Owing to its geographical position, Cyprus has always been a highly coveted and fought over transit point. So the island was one of the first points of contact between East and West in pre-historic times. It was independent in the Middle Ages and it became successively the flagship for the republics of Genoa and Venice. In 1571, Cyprus came under Ottoman domination.

There then followed a long period of decline until, in the nineteenth century, a new master, Great Britain, arrived. Cyprus was added to Gibraltar and Malta on the maritime route leading to Egypt and the Levant. It took advantage of this, waking from its torpor, but without really making a big leap forward. It gained its 'independence' in 1960.

In 1963 and 1964, the Turkish community was the victim of atrocities. On 6 August 1964 the Turkish air force bombed Tillyria. In the context of the Cold War when American forces were based in the area of their Turkish and Iranian or Iraqi allies, there could be no question of letting Cyprus become the Cuba of the Mediterranean.

Washington and Ankara, fearing a Soviet intervention on the island, agreed to the unification of Cyprus with Greece, provided that the Turkish

army had a base there the same size as the English bases. But against all odds, President Makarios, who had, in the 1950s, defended the idea of *enosis*, the union of Greece and Cyprus, but had become a staunch defender of the independence of his country, refused to play ball. The Turkish army intervened, communities were uprooted and populations relocated. Shortly afterwards, the United States, worried about the weakness of Greece and always fearing a Russian intervention, colluded in deposing the monarchy, establishing a military dictatorship on 21 April 1967.

However, these same generals, supporters of a Cyprus united with Greece, did not go along with Makarios's desire for independence and, moreover, the Americans didn't trust him, fearing that he took his reputation as the 'Castro of the Mediterranean' too seriously. On 15 July 1974, the 'colonels', with no opposition from Makarios, launched a coup d'état. Then, fearing Cyprus's integration with Greece, Turkey landed 7,000 soldiers on the island on 20 July to 'protect' the Muslim community. The Turks wanted to have two geographically and ethnically distinct states, united under the authority of a federal government with limited powers, and organised the removal of the Christians to the south and the Muslims to the north. The southern Christian part claimed to represent the whole of Cyprus and was recognised by the international community. The northern Muslim part, took the step, in 1983, of declaring itself independent, but the international authorities consistently ignored this decision.

Thus, since 1989, Cyprus is the last European country with a dividing line and a capital divided by a wall. Cyprus would 'benefit' from another regional conflict, the Lebanon war. Lebanese capital, fleeing the war-torn country, invested in and dramatically transformed the southern region for a decade. When peace returned to Lebanon, Cyprus was fearful of a decline in foreign investment, but Soviet Perestroika and the revival of the Russian economy would provide new financial support.

## First lesson: national economy, a product of the world market

According to some journalists and PhDs in economics, Cyprus's 'delicate' position is due to the irresponsibility of its leaders (and therefore 'the people who elected them') that have transformed the island, out of pure greed, into a place for massive speculation and even into a giant laundry room for dubious capital, especially that from Russia. **In fact, the brief history of this country shows the extent to which the current situation is the product of the history of world trade and imperialism.**

With the Turkish invasion of 1974, some sectors and whole parts of the national economy were lost. With no agriculture, with no heavy industry, the Cypriot bourgeoisie had to find a new sector for capital accumulation, or perish. But which one? As a former colony, Cyprus had had a close historical relationship with Britain for over a century: English, for Cyprus, is still the lingua franca and the language used in education. It is used within and between its major institutions. This British culture is surely what explains why Cyprus spends 7% of its productive capacity on education, putting the country in the top three of the European Union. Lots of Cypriots go to study in universities in the UK or North America: nearly 4 out of 5 Cypriots study outside their island. And 47% have a graduate degree, the highest rate in the EU. Cypriots are an educated and mobile people. This is why they are uniquely positioned to provide accounting, banking and legal services of a high quality. In addition, they are members of the EU with all the benefits that come with the free flow of payments, capital and services, and have an exchange taxation treaty with Russia and low taxes.

Adding all this together, it explains its success hitherto as a European centre for trade and services. 'Yes, but to then become a tax haven!' exclaim all those who refuse to see that it's not this or that leader, this or that financier who is in the dock but the world capitalist system as a whole. If tourism, chartering sea vessels and banking have gained an excessive weight in relation to the real economy

of this small island, if all the banking facilities and charges have been introduced to encourage the development of foreign financial investments, the economy would no doubt have collapsed without it. **If this tax haven had not been created, its current bankruptcy would have been avoided because ... it would have occurred much earlier!**

Moreover, the entire global economy actually needs this 'haven'. Since 1967, capitalism has suffered recession after recession, crisis after crisis. The real economy, industry, has become more and more lethargic. Investing in new plant is more and more risky; investments can be lost. That is why today, many investors are putting their money into loans to states at rates that are zero or negative. In other words, they have nothing to gain! Why? Because by investing elsewhere, they risk losing everything. This means that finding a profitable investment has now become incredibly difficult. Speculative bubbles (property, stock exchanges ...), like sifting money away into the countless tax havens, are a necessary product of the global economic crisis of capitalism. Otherwise, the Cypriot bourgeoisie, like all others, would be unable to make a profit from its capital. This explains the existence of speculation.

But why is the world dotted with major financial centres which respect no law other than the lack of transparency? Is this not, on this occasion, the product of the immorality of the investors and their insatiable greed for money? Well no! Again, this is only how it looks on the surface. So let's dig down a little.

With the real and legal economy being less and less profitable and more and more risky because of the severity of the global economic crisis, financial profits in capitalism tend to come increasingly from illegal activities. Drugs, arms trafficking, prostitution, trafficking in women and even children are all now an important part of the global economy. All funds invested in these obnoxious and inhuman activities must seem to come from out of nowhere and the mass of profits that they bring must be 'laundered' before being put back, when needed, into circulation. But capitalism's greed doesn't end there. All over the planet there are millions of human beings labouring in workshops manufacturing flasks or shoes; a whole multitude of workers reduced to slavery with no 'legal' sanction.

This shameful economy, this hidden economy, is a source of huge profits that get channelled via thousands of invisible links to the largest banks and financial institutions in the world. All the profits from the blood of the exploited must be first of all be carefully hidden and after long cycles of 'cleansing' in laundries like Cyprus, then brought back into general circulation, in the banks on the high streets or in the official stock markets. At this level, the 'skulduggery' of capital holds no bounds. A very large part of global speculation is therefore placed out of view, outside of any regulation, any law, or any control. This hidden and illegal 'black' economy has spread throughout the capitalist economy.

Today, leaders complain when states are facing bankruptcy; because all of the money that is going untaxed. But this also plays a particularly important role in bolstering profits, in the way a drug addict needs a regular supply of drugs. This is why all the slogans such as 'Clean up capitalism!' 'Close the tax havens!' 'Impose stringent regulation!'... are nothing but expressions of outrage! Capitalism is sick, its real economy is not running smoothly; to survive, it is forced to more openly cheat its own laws. The rhetoric of the political leaders on the need for 'economic morality' is therefore a bluff! Neither Cyprus, nor Luxembourg, and even less the City of London is actually going to be forced to stop their speculative activity.

## Second lesson: major imperialist stakes

The endless negotiations between Cyprus, the EU and Russia over an aid package can only be understood through the prism of the imperialist tensions that have shaped this small island. First, its military geo-strategic position is of the

highest importance. NATO has a base there as well as Britain. Moreover, Cyprus is recognised as Europe's Mediterranean aircraft carrier. The only Russian naval base is located in a country which, to say the least, is unstable and looks out towards Cyprus ... Syria! The problem here is that Russia, which supports Bashar Assad, is in danger of having to leave Syria in the event that the current regime is defeated. If the Russians were to leave Syria, Cyprus, located a hundred kilometres away, could make the 'move' much easier by letting Moscow retain a base in the Mediterranean. Europe, dependent to a large extent on Russian gas, would then, in exchange for financial support, be eager to partake (out of necessity) in the exploitation of Cypriot gas resources estimated to be several hundred billion cubic metres. Obviously, the Russian leaders would see this as a threat to their capacity to negotiate with Europe since Cypriot gas would allow Europe to counter any Russian 'blackmail' with regard to gas supplies. Finally, Cyprus has become a haven for twenty years for the more or less secret funds of the Russian oligarchs and manages tens of billions of Russian euros! Russia also has, in this respect, every reason to support Cyprus or to 'buy' Cyprus. Obviously, there is no clear agreed approach within Europe. The Cypriot economy will be 'rolled over' if necessary but Europe will not lose Cyprus or only at the cost of a bitter struggle.

It's always the working class that pays the price. Taxing accounts of more than €100,000 is only one of the consequence of Cyprus's bankruptcy. Taxes and charges of every kind will rise dramatically, austerity will increase sharply, and recession will worsen the economy, unemployment and poverty will spread like the plague. In fact, like those living in Greece or Spain before them, the workers in Cyprus are today suffering the fate that capitalism has in store for the world's working class. One myth, the belief, deliberately cultivated by leaders across the world, has just been toppled: 'Do not worry, whatever happens, the money in your bank is safe!'

The initial proposal to tax all Cypriot accounts has destroyed this illusion. The idea of the EU agreeing to this measure of direct theft was that it was the peculiar product of a tax haven that for years was granting dividends on savings that had been excessive, immoral and unbearable for economy. Cypriots had thus benefited unfairly from the system, and as a result they had to accept responsibility for the 'repairs.' But you can see right through this! Especially in Europe, the dominant idea was not 'Cyprus is an exception' but rather 'It can happen to us too tomorrow,' 'They are thieves', 'They have no right to interfere in our economies'. It was necessary to stem a possible run on the banks on the island and also possible contagion: the EU backtracked and spared the 'small fries'. But the out and out guarantee for the bank accounts has to be taken for what it is: an illusion. This is what is in store for the entire working class tomorrow: in order to replenish the coffers, States, regardless of the colour of the governments in place, in every country, will not hesitate to take money from us, to reduce us to poverty, to throw us into the street. Cyprus is not an exception! If it isn't seizing hold of our bank accounts, we'll be robbed with higher taxes and larger bills, or by soaring prices due to rampant inflation. Under capitalism, all roads lead to poverty. Our trust in the future remains firmly with the struggles of the working class and their increased unity and solidarity in confronting the capitalist state in all the countries of the world. **T and P (20/4/13)**

1. This part is based to a large degree on the work of Alain Blondy, *Cyprus or Europe, at the gateway to the Orient*.



# Bangladesh: the industry of murder

The death toll from the Rana Plaza factory building collapse in Dhaka has gone past 1000. Another 8 people have been killed in a fire in the Mirpur area of the same city – the death toll would certainly have been higher if the fire had broken out during the day, as it did last November at the Tazreen garment factory where 112 workers died<sup>1</sup>.

These ‘accidents’ are nothing short of industrial murder. There is no hiding the fact that there is a total disregard for the safety for the Bangladeshi garment workers who toil in appalling conditions for miserable wages. But this is not a regrettable excess to be blamed on a few rogue employers. It is inscribed into the very structure of the world economy. Cheapening the costs of labour power benefits not only the local gangsters who own the factories, but also the big international clothing companies like Primark who have swelled their profits on the cut-price labour they can find in the ‘third world’.

Furthermore, despite all the alleged reforms and advances of industrial production in the ‘west’, capital everywhere puts profit high above human life. Almost simultaneously with the terrorist attack on the crowds attending the Boston marathon, a fertiliser plant in West, near Waco in Texas, was destroyed in a huge explosion which left 14 dead and 200 wounded and levelled five city blocks. At the time, this was described as an accident. More recently, a paramedic who went to the scene has been arrested on suspicion of causing the explosion. But whatever the truth, the West explosion reveals the profound irresponsibility of capitalist production, since this plant containing such highly volatile materials was situated close to a nursing home, a school and a number of residential buildings. It brings to mind the Toulouse fertilizer factory explosion in early 2000 where 28 workers were killed plus one child. Ten thousand five hundred were injured, a quarter of them se-

<sup>1</sup> See the article written by our comrades in India: <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201302/6431/workers-burn-death-bangladesh>. See also this article the Rana Plaza collapse by Red Marriot on libcom on <http://www.libcom.org/news/house-cards-savar-building-collapse-26042013>.

riously. Total, who ran the plant, was cleared of all responsibility in subsequent proceedings. We could equally point to the siting of the Fukushima nuclear plant in an area highly vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis and again situated far too close to residential areas.....

Sickened by the latest reports from Bangladesh, a sympathiser posted these observations on our discussion forum. We can only say that his anger is totally justified:

*“the Bangladesh situation is reaching grotesque proportions, with horrific disasters - industrial murder - happening with sickening regularity. Why does anybody still bother to go to work in Bangladesh at all? God knows they barely even get paid! So why go? The answer of course is that under capitalism we all need even the most ridiculous and tiny amount of money the bourgeoisie can spare - wages: “a just wage for a just day’s work” or some such crap - just to keep going from day to day. We live on pittances squeezed out of the capitalists in circumstances that often threaten our very lives. And the threats don’t all have to be physical (fires and building collapses, or poisoned polluted surroundings) they can be psychological too, producing appalling miseries and unhappiness. Oh! How grateful we all should be, to the bourgeoisie; its generosity and love of humanity; its endless concern for the planet and the reign of peace world-wide! Where would we be without them? How could we manage without them, enforcing their extortionate mode of life on our existence, just so they can make their profit? And fight their vicious wars! If you don’t get crushed in a collapsing badly built factory, or burned to death locked inside one, there’s always the possibility of slow death at the hands of radioactive tsunamis, sudden extinction by remote bombings, rockets or drones, distasteful and agonizing elimination via chemical weaponry, or sudden erasure at the hands of sharp shooters from one side or another of their perpetually warring gangs: official or otherwise.*

*It isn’t just ‘industrial murder’ the bourgeoisie have invented, they have turned mass murder into an industry. It’s the only thing they’re good at now”.* **Amos 11.5.13**

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## Come to a day of discussion

Following the successful meeting we had last year, the ICC invites you to another day of discussion in London, on 22 June 2013.

The main focus of the day will be a discussion around the theme:

### **Capitalism is in deep trouble – why is it so hard to fight against it?**

In this session, we will consider questions such as: is it accurate to say that capitalism is in terminal decline? What is really at stake in the struggle of the working class to defend itself? What are the main obstacles to the development of the struggle?

We have published a great deal about the crisis in our press but we recommend the following one to give a general overview of the situation confronting capitalism:

**‘The economic crisis is not a never-ending story’, International Review 148<sup>1</sup>**

Regarding the problem of responding to the crisis, we think the following article, and the discussion on our internet forum that it stimulated, provide a good starting point:

**‘Why is it so difficult to struggle, and how can we overcome these difficulties?’<sup>2</sup>**

- [1. http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4744/economic-crisis-not-never-ending-story](http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4744/economic-crisis-not-never-ending-story)
- [2. http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201211/5284/why-it-so-difficult-struggle-and-how-can-we-overcome-these-difficulties](http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201211/5284/why-it-so-difficult-struggle-and-how-can-we-overcome-these-difficulties)

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## Donations

Unlike the bourgeois press, revolutionary publications such as *World Revolution* have no advertising revenue, no chains of news agents and no millionaire backers. We rely on the support of our sympathisers, and those who, while they might not agree with all aspects of our

politics, see the importance of the intervention of a communist press.

Recent donations include:

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## ICC books on the history of the workers’ movement

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# Declaration on the general strike by a workers' group in Alicante, Spain

## Union parades versus the mass strike

We are publishing here a translation of the declaration by a group of workers in Alicante in the south east of Spain, the 'Indignant, assemblyist workers'. It was issued in response to appeals for 24-hour 'general strikes' (for 31 October by the CGT<sup>2</sup> and for 14 November by five other unions headed by the CO-UGT<sup>3</sup>). The comrades of this group, who have been active for the last two years or more, denounce these union parades which serve only to demoralise workers and are the other side to the coin of the repeated blows by the Rajoy government. But they don't limit themselves to this. They put forward a perspective: the combat for the mass strike, the most profound tendency of the class movement for the past century, as clearly illustrated by every significant proletarian struggle since 1905 in Russia.

It is quite false to argue that there is no alternative to the demobilising mobilisations organised by the unions. We think that other groups and collectives should follow the example of the Alicante comrades and develop a discussion about the real alternative to the trade unionist dead end. In Britain, faced with the savage attacks being mounted by the coalition governments, the public sector trade unions (NUT, civil servants' union, etc) are once again talking tough and promising us more days of action and even a one day general strike. But experience has shown that these kinds of 'action' are worse than useless: they are a safety-valve for growing discontent, when the real need of the workers is to focus their discontent into a self-organised, unifying movement that can offer a challenge to this entire social order.

- ICC
1. 'Assemblyist' means those who defend the need for general assemblies to take control of the struggle
  2. The CGT is a split from the CNT. It calls itself anarcho-syndicalist but it basically operates as a small 'radical' trade union
  3. The CO – Workers Commissions – have been historically linked to the Communist Party; the UGT to the Socialist Party. They are the two main trade unions in Spain.

### Against 24 hour 'days of action', what kind of strike do we want? The mass strike!

How does stopping work for 24 hours get called a strike? And an even more important question is this: how can a 24-hour 'day of action' take the struggle of the working class forward?

Our political position is based on internationalism and the need for proletarian autonomy: for us, every action by conscious minorities has to serve to advance the consciousness, unity and self-organisation of the working class.

There have been a lot of mobilisations recently and many efforts by the proletariat to organise itself. A new period of mobilisations began, symbolically, in May 2011. That was the start of a response to the increasingly brutal attacks on the living standards of the whole population. But there is no straight-line progress. This has been a period marked by very diverse moments. There has been a very strong push towards self-organisation in general assemblies, even in a movement that was very embryonic and often diffuse. But then, taking advantage of fatigue and a decrease in mass participation, the unions and the organisations of the left returned to the scene and led the mobilisations along a well-worn path: mobilisations that were well controlled, disunited, sectional, de-motivating, winning nothing and leaving

the participants feeling tired and isolated. In the face of all this, we think that the non-participation of the majority of workers in mobilisations which they saw as foreign to their real interests was perfectly logical. And it is quite normal that we are now in a period of reflection.

We need to reflect, to understand what has happened and to look for the road that leads to our self-organisation, a road that will not be discovered by any 'enlightened' elite or through any kind of conditioned reflex.

The strike which we consider to be effective, which we feel to be necessary, has to be called by the workers themselves and extend to the whole of society, taking control of all public spaces, occupying everywhere, creating new kinds of social relations and forms of communication. This kind of strike doesn't stop life, it begins it anew; this is the mass strike, which throughout the last century appeared on a number of occasions, even though all our enemies (all the bourgeoisies, whether private or state) have done all they can to consign it to oblivion, quite simply because a strike that shows the proletariat's real strength fills them with fear.

A real strike is a massive, profound movement which does not limit itself to one work stoppage. It is the fundamental weapon of the working class, the means for the class to take control of its own

life at all levels of the society it is up against, to express all the aspects of the human society to which it aspires. It is clear that this is not something that can be called by anyone, even with the best intentions; it is part of the process through which the workers become conscious of themselves. The question is not whether it is going to last 24 hours, 48 hours, or whether it's indefinite. Its radical nature is not a question of time. It's a question of being part of the real movement of the working class, of the workers organising and directing their own struggle.

### What is the mass strike?

The mass strike is a result of a period of capitalism, the period which began at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rosa Luxemburg was the revolutionary who grasped it in the clearest way, basing her understanding on the revolutionary movement of the workers in Russia in 1915. The mass strike "is a historical phenomenon that emerges at a certain moment from a social situation on the basis of historic necessity" (*The Mass Strike, the Party and the Trade Unions*).

The mass strike is not something accidental; it's not the result of propaganda or preparations in advance; it can't be created artificially. It is the product of a given period in the evolution of the contradictions of capitalism.

The economic conditions underneath the mass strike are not limited to one country but have an international dimension. It is historical conditions that give rise to this kind of struggle, which is an essential prerequisite for the proletarian revolution. In short, the mass strike is nothing less than "a universal form of proletarian struggle determined by the present stage of capitalist development and of the relations between the classes" (*ibid*).

This "present stage" consisted in the fact that capitalism was living through the last years of its prosperity. The development of inter-imperialist conflicts and the threat of world war, the end of any lasting improvements in the living conditions of the working class – in sum, the growing menace that the working class represented for capitalism, these were the new historical circumstances which accompanied the eruption of the mass strike.

The mass strike was the product of a change in the conditions of life at a historic level – what we can now see as the end of capitalism's ascendant period and the onset of its epoch of decline.

At that time there were already powerful working class concentrations in the advanced capitalist countries, experienced in collective combat, and whose conditions of life and work were everywhere very similar. As a consequence of economic development, the bourgeoisie also became increasingly concentrated and was more and more identifying itself with the state apparatus. Like the proletariat, the capitalists had also learned how to get together to face up to the class enemy. Economic conditions made it more and more difficult for the workers to gain reforms at the economic level, while at the same time the ruin of bourgeois democracy made it increasingly hard for the proletariat to consolidate its gains through parliamentary activity. Thus the political as well as the economic context of the mass strike was not just that of Russian absolutism but the approaching decadence of bourgeois rule in all countries.

On the economic, social and political levels, capitalism had laid the foundations for vast class confrontations on a world scale.

### The form of the mass strike

The aim of the trade unions (obtaining improvements within the system) has become more and more difficult to realise in decadent capitalism. In this period, the proletariat does not enter into struggle with an assured perspective of winning real improvements. The strikes and major movements of today win very little in the way of improvements.

As a result, the role of the trade unions, which was to win economic improvements within the capitalist system, disappeared. There are other revolutionary implications coming from the calling into question of the trade unions by the mass strike:

1) The mass strike cannot be prepared in advance: it arises without a pre-established plan, a set method for the proletarian mass. The trade unions, devoted to their permanent organisation, concerned with their bank accounts and their membership lists, cannot even begin to be up to the task of organising the mass strike, a form which evolves in and for the struggle itself

2) The trade unions have divided the workers and their interests between all the different industrial branches, whereas the mass strike "fuses different causes starting from different points of

Continued on page 5

## Political positions of the ICC

**World Revolution** is the section in Britain of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*.