



world revolution

On all continents, capitalism sows war and chaos

A hundred years ago, in August 1914, the First World War broke out. The human balance sheet of this planetary slaughter is officially 10 million dead and 8 million wounded. When 'peace' was signed, the bourgeoisie swore with hand on heart that this would be the 'last of all wars'. A lie, obviously. In fact it was only the first bloody conflagration marking the opening of the decadence of capitalism. The history of the 20th century and of this young 21st century has been riddled by incessant imperialist confrontations. The First World War was followed by the Second, the Second by the Cold War, and the Cold War by the numerous and unending theatres of conflict which have been spreading across the planet since the 1990s. This last period, if it doesn't have the same spectacular aspect of a confrontation between two blocs, between two super-powers, contains no less of a threat to the survival of humanity because its dynamic is more insidious, leading not to world war but to the generalisation of wars and barbarism. The war in Ukraine, which marks the return of war to Europe, the historical heart of capitalism, is a qualitative step in his direction.

War returns to Europe

After the Second World War with its 50 million dead, Europe was straight away torn by the brutal rivalry between the eastern and western military blocs. During the long and murderous period of the Cold War, the slaughter took place at the peripheries of capitalism, through proxy wars between the USA and Russia. The bloody war in Vietnam was a clear illustration of this. But as soon as the Berlin Wall came down, a new period of conflicts began.

In 1991, the USA, at the head of a powerful but reluctant coalition, used the pretext of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to launch a war. The main aim was to stop the tendency towards the break-up of its old bloc through a demonstration of military force that would reaffirm its global leadership. The idea was to ensure the birth of a 'new world order'. At the cost of a human and material disaster (more than 500,000 dead), above all through

massive aerial bombardments and the explosion of depression bombs that destroy the lungs, this so-called 'surgical war' was to bring a new era of peace and prosperity. But this lie was very rapidly exposed. Almost simultaneously, a new war broke out at the very gates of Europe, in ex-Yugoslavia. An atrocious conflict a few hours from Paris, an accumulation of massacres, such as the one at Srebrenica, carried out with the complicity of the French Blue Helmets, where between 6000 and 8000 Bosnians were murdered.

And today, once again, the gangrene of militarism has reached the gates of Europe. In Ukraine the bourgeoisie is being torn to pieces. Armed militia, more or less controlled by the Russian and Ukrainian states, confront each other with the population as their hostage. This conflict, based on nationalisms which have been cultivated for decades, is one for the vultures: the main actors, as always, are the great powers, the USA, Russia, France and other western European countries.

The dramatic situation in Ukraine clearly marks a qualitative step in the agony of this system. The fact that that this conflict is being pushed forward by divergent interests and is so close to Europe, the focus for the world wars of the previous century, shows the level of disintegration the system has reached.

The development of every man for himself

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the USSR shattered the old bloc discipline and opened a real Pandora's Box. Despite the short-lived illusions that followed the first Gulf war, the USA has been forced to carry on intervening, more frequently and in more places, and very often on its own: Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. This imperialist policy is the expression of a historic impasse and has clearly failed. Each new display of force by this declining super-power has resulted in an increasingly open loss of control over the war zones in which it has intervened. With the master in decline, we have entered a realm of disorder, of growing imperial-



ist appetites, exacerbated nationalisms, spreading religious and ethnic conflicts.

The centrifugal forces fuelled by these appetites have engendered conflicts which demonstrate the reality of social decomposition, resulting in the break-up of states, the rise of the worst kinds of warlords, of mafia-type adventurers engaged in all varieties of trafficking. This process has been incubating for several decades. In the second half of the 1980s, a succession of terrorist attacks took place in major European cities like Paris, London and Madrid. These were not the work of isolated groups but of fully-formed states. They were acts of war which prefigured the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York. The darkest expressions of barbarity, previously confined to the edges of the system, had begun to return to the centres, to the areas where the presence and civilising potential of the proletariat stands as the only obstacle to a real plunge into nightmare.

Mounting barbarism

Every day, refugees fleeing from war-torn countries are dying in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean. Packed like cattle in unseaworthy boats, they are in desperate flight from the unspeakable. According to the UN's Refugee Agency, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers, of people displaced within their own countries, has gone past 50 million for the first time since the Second

World War. At the end of last year the war in Syria alone had produced 2.5 million refugees and 6.5 million displaced people. And all continents are affected by this.

Far from weakening the general tendencies of decadent capitalism, decomposition has strengthened imperialist ambitions and exacerbated their increasingly irrational aspects. The doors have been opened to the least lucid factions of the bourgeoisie, fed by the putrefaction of society and the resulting nihilism. The birth of Islamist groups like al Qaida, the Islamic State and Boko Haram are the result of this process of intellectual and moral regression, of unprecedented cultural devastation. On 29 June, IS announced the re-establishment of a 'Caliphate' in the regions under its control and proclaimed the establishment of Mohammed's successor. Like its counter-part Boko Haram in Nigeria, it has distinguished itself by the murder of captives and the kidnapping and enslavement of young women.

These obscurantist organisations don't obey anyone and are guided by a combination of mystical madness and sordid mafia interests. In Syria and Iraq, in the zones controlled by Islamic State, no new national state has any viability. On the contrary, the main tendency is towards the disintegration of the Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi states.

Continued on page 7

Inside this issue

Anarchism and imperialist war:	
Nationalism or internationalism?	2
The war in Spain in the 1930s:	
An internationalist voice from the US	3
The first shop stewards' movement: From proletarian response to trade unionist obstacle	4
Chancellor's autumn statement: The state is not being rolled back, it is leading the attack	6
From the ICC online Forum: Police shootings	7
<i>Life of the ICC</i>	7
Immigration: xenophobia right and left	8

Australia A\$2.25, Canada C\$1.50, Europe €1.3, India 10 rupees, Japan ¥300 USA 90¢

Anarchism and imperialist war: Nationalism or internationalism?

“But German Social Democracy was not merely the strongest vanguard troop, it was the thinking head of the International. For this reason, we must begin the analysis, the self-examination process, with its fall. It has the duty to begin the salvation of international socialism, that means unsparing criticism of itself. None of the other parties, none of the other classes of bourgeois society, may look clearly and openly into the mirror of their own errors, their own weaknesses, for the mirror reflects their historical limitations and the historical doom that awaits them. The working class can boldly look truth straight in the face, even the bitterest self-renunciation, for its weaknesses are only confusion. The strict law of history gives back its power, stands guarantee for its final victory.

Unsparing self-criticism is not merely an essential for its existence but the working class's supreme duty”.

Thus wrote Rosa Luxemburg in 1915, in *The crisis in German Social Democracy*, better known as the *Junius Pamphlet*, her searching examination of the betrayal of the majority of the German SPD, and other Socialist parties, faced with the supreme test of world imperialist war. In this passage she clearly lays out a central element of the marxist method: the principle of constant, “*unsparing self-criticism*”, which is both necessary and possible for marxism because it is the theoretical product of the first class in history that can “*boldly look truth straight in the face*”. During and after the First World War, this attempt to go the roots of the collapse of the Second International was a demarcating feature of the left currents which had been born out of the social democratic parties, but who now went on to form a new and explicitly communist International. And as the new International in turn slid into opportunism with the retreat of the post-war revolutionary wave – a regression most symbolically expressed in the policy of the United Front with the social democratic traitors – the same work of criticism was carried on by the left communist fractions within the Third International, in particular the German, Italian and Russian lefts.

In 1914, the anarchist movement also entered into crisis following the decision of the much-revered anarchist Peter Kropotkin and a group around him to declare their support for Entente imperialism against the bloc led by Germany, and the adoption of the same policy by the French ‘revolutionary syndicalist’ union, the CGT¹. Within the ranks of the anarchist movement there were many who remained loyal to internationalism and who fiercely denounced the attitude of Kropotkin and other ‘anarcho-trenchists’. Probably a majority of the anarchists refused to participate in the imperialist war effort. But in contrast to the response of the marxist left, there was little attempt to undertake a theoretical analysis of the capitulation of a significant wing of the anarchist movement in 1914. And while the marxist left was able to call into question the underlying method and practice of the social democratic parties in the whole period before the war, no such capacity for “*unsparing self-criticism*” was displayed by the anarchists, who do not adhere to the historical materialist method but base themselves on more or less timeless and abstract principles and who are impregnated with the notion of being a kind of family united around the struggle for Freedom against Authority. There can be exceptions, serious attempts to go deeper into the problem, but generally they come from those anarchists who have been able to integrate certain elements from the theoretical method of marxism.

This inability to question itself in real depth derives from the original class nature of anarchism, which emerged from the resistance of the petty bourgeoisie, especially of independent artisans, to the process of proletarianisation which was disintegrating the class structure of the old feudal societies of 19th century Europe. The French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the clearest embodiment of this current, with his rejection of communism in favour of a society of independent producers linked by equivalent exchange. It’s cer-

1. See the article on the CGT from our series on anarcho-syndicalism: http://en.internationalism.org/ir/120_cgt.html. The link for the whole series is here: <http://en.internationalism.org/series/271>

tainly true that the Proudhonists also expressed a movement towards ‘going over’ to the proletariat by joining the First International, but even with the most explicitly proletarian anarchist currents, such as the anarcho-syndicalists who developed towards the end of the 19th century, the incoherent, idealist and ahistorical political conceptions typical of the petty bourgeois world outlook were never fully overcome.



The price for this failure to draw the real lessons of 1914 was paid in full in the new crisis which swept the anarchist movement in reaction to the events in Spain in 1936-37. Important elements of the anarchist movement which had not betrayed in 1914 – above all the Spanish CNT – now plunged into support for a new imperialist war, in which a conflict between two capitalist factions, the Republican regime dominated by the bourgeois left, and the right wing forces led by Franco, was part of a wider inter-imperialist battle, most openly between the fascist states of Germany and Italy and the newly emerging imperialism of the USSR. Under the banner of anti-fascist unity, the CNT rapidly integrated itself into the Republican state at all levels, including the Catalan and Madrid governments. Most importantly, the CNT’s central role was in diverting what had initially been an authentic proletarian response to the Franco coup, a response which had used the methods of the class struggle – general strike, fraternisation with troops, factory occupations and arming of the workers – into the military defence of the capitalist Republic. Given the strength of this initial proletarian reaction, not only the anarchists but also numerous marxist currents outside of Stalinism were also drawn into support for the anti-fascist front in one way or another; and this included not only the more opportunist tendency around Trotsky but important elements of the communist left, including a minority within the Italian Left Fraction. On the other hand, within anarchism there were certainly class reactions to the betrayal of the CNT, such as the Friends of Durruti Group and Camillo Berneri’s *Guerra di Classe*. But real clarity about the nature of the war only emerged from a small minority of the marxist left, above all the Italian Fraction which published *Bilan*. The latter was almost alone in rejecting the claim that the war in Spain was in any way a war for the interests of the proletariat: on the contrary it was a kind of dress rehearsal for the approaching world imperialist massacre. For *Bilan* Spain was a new 1914 for the anarchist movement in particular². And in 1939, faced with the new world war which *Bilan* had predicted, it was now a majority of the anarchists, intoxicated by anti-fascism, which followed the road of capitulation to the Allied war effort, either as part of the ‘Resistance’ or directly as part of the official allied armies: at the head of the ‘Liberation’ parade in Paris in 1944 was an armoured car festooned with the banners of the CNT, which had been fighting inside the Free French army division led by General Leclerc. Again, there were anarchist groups and individuals who remained true to internationalist principles in 1939-45, but once again, there is little evidence that they carried out a systematic examination of the historic betrayal of the majority of the movement to which they still claimed adherence. The result has been

2. See in particular these articles: http://en.internationalism.org/ir/2008/132/spain_1934; http://en.internationalism.org/ir/133/spain_cnt_1936; <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201409/10367/war-spain-exposes-anarchism-s-fatal-flaws>. A sequel to the last article, dealing with the dissident anarchists in Spain and elsewhere, will appear shortly.

that there has been, as after the betrayals of 1914, a failure to draw any class lines between the internationalists and the anarcho-patriots: in many cases, the latter were simply reintegrated into the “affinity group” which is the anarchist movement once things went back to “normal” after the war. Behind this incapacity to defend class principles in an intransigent manner is not only a profound intellectual weakness but also a lack of moral in-

dignation: all is forgiven as long as you stay inside the family.

Today the question of war is once again facing the world proletariat. Not a world war around already constituted blocs, but a more general, more chaotic descent into military barbarism across the planet, as exemplified by the wars in Africa, the Middle East and the Ukraine. These wars are again imperialist wars, in which the bigger capitalist states vie against their rivals through various local or national factions, and they are all expressions of capitalism’s increasing descent into self-destruction. And once again, a part of the anarchist movement is openly participating in these imperialist conflicts:

- In Russia and Ukraine, there has been a growth of anarcho-nationalist or “ethno-anarchist” groups who openly function as a “libertarian” wing of the war drive in each country. But a more “respectable” anarchist group such as the Autonomous Workers’ Union, which publishes material on libcom and held a meeting at the annual Anarchist Bookfair this year, has also revealed its deep ambiguities on the current war: in some official statements it appears to take a position of opposition both to the Ukraine regime and the pro-Russian separatists, to NATO as well as the Russian Federation, but Facebook statements by some of its leading members tell a very different story, apparently defending the Kiev government and its war against Russian incursion and even calling for NATO support³;

- In Rojava or Syrian Kurdistan, the Kurdish Anarchist Forum and the Turkish DAF (Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet) support, participate in, and carry out global propaganda on behalf of the so-called ‘Rojava revolution’, claiming that the local population is organising itself in independent communes in its fight against the Syrian government and above all against the brutal jihadists of Islamic State. The DAF offers its services to participate in the fighting around the besieged city of Kobane near the Turkish border. In reality, these ‘communes’ are tightly controlled by the Kurdish nationalist PKK, which in the last few years has carried out a ‘turn’ away from Maoism towards the ‘libertarian municipalism’ of Murray Bookchin⁴. And in its conflict with IS, the PKK has been more or less openly acting as the ground forces of the ‘western’ coalition led by the USA

- anarchist elements in the west are also drawn into the campaign of ‘solidarity with Kobane’, which is effectively a campaign in solidarity with the PKK. The anarchist celebrity David Graeber has published an article in *The Guardian* ‘Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary

3. See the threads on libcom started by foristaruso, a member of the Russian anarcho-syndicalist group, KRAS, section of the IWA: <http://libcom.org/news/about-declaration-awu-confrontation-ukraine-23062014>; <http://libcom.org/news/when-patriotic-anarchists-tell-verity-02072014>; <http://libcom.org/forums/news/ukrainian-crisis-left-necessary-clarification-28092014>

4. <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201304/7373/internationalism-only-response-kurdish-issue>

Kurds in Syria?”⁵ which describes the PKK’s experiment in ‘direct democracy’ as a “social revolution”, compares it with the anarchist collectives in Spain in 1936 and calls for the “international left” to prevent a repetition of the same tragic defeat. A similar outlook is taken up by the poster who signs as Ocelot on libcom, although his arguments in favour of antifascism and the “revolutionary Kurds” offer a more sophisticated version of the same thing, since he is well aware of what he calls the “Bordigist” position on the question of fascism, and is vehemently opposed to it⁶. But perhaps more important is the response of some of the established anarchist organisations. In France, for example, the CNT-AIT⁷ participates in ‘solidarity with Kobane’ demonstrations behind a banner which says: “*Arms for the Kurdish resistance, Rojava is hope, anarchists in solidarity*” (see picture). The flags of the French Federation Anarchiste can also be seen behind the same banner, while the International of Anarchist Federations, to which French FA and the Anarchist Federation in the UK are both affiliated, and which lists the DAF and KAF as friendly organisations, publishes most of the DAF’s articles on the situation in Rojava without critical comment.

There are of course elements within anarchism who have been very consistent in their rejection of this support for nationalism. We have already published the internationalist statement by the KRAS, the Russian section of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers’ Association, against the war between Russia and Ukraine⁸, and we have pointed out above that a member of the KRAS, who posts as foristaruso, has posted some very strong

5. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/08/why-world-ignoring-revolutionary-kurds-syria-isis>. A response by the ICT can be found here: <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2014-10-30/in-rojava-people%E2%80%99s-war-is-not-class-war>. This text clearly defends an internationalist position against Graeber’s leftist ideology, but it does make a concession to anarchism: the idea that there was a “social revolution” in Spain in 1936. “*The military coup of July 18 1936 against the Second Spanish Republic came after years of class struggle. The Popular Front government of socialists and liberals did not know how to respond but the workers did. When the liberal ministers refused to arm the workers they attacked the barracks of the regime and armed themselves. This unleashed a social revolution which in various parts of Spain was almost as Graeber describes it. However it did not touch the political power of the bourgeois Spanish Republic. The state was not destroyed*”.

The last point is correct but the idea of a “social revolution” was not shared at the time by the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left (which published *Bilan* and from which both the ICC and ICT claim descent) – rather it seems closer to the position of the minority of the Fraction who went off to fight in the militias of the POUM “in defence of the Spanish revolution”. *Bilan* certainly recognised July 1936 and May 37 as workers’ uprisings but never used the term social revolution to describe the events in Spain precisely because the bourgeois state had not been destroyed and the workers had not taken power or even established a dual power situation; the result being that all the “social measures” (collectivisations of farms and factories, etc) undertaken by workers and peasants were very rapidly integrated into a new form of war economy geared to serve an imperialist conflict, with the anarcho-syndicalist CNT being the principal instrument both for diverting the initial proletarian response into an anti-fascist front, and for administering the war economy “under workers’ control”. The minority ‘Resolution on Spain’ submitted by Eiffel in the US group the RWL in 1937 - published in this issue – has the same starting point as that of *Bilan*.

This question is important because while there are many internationalists in the anarchist movement who have taken a clear position on the current war in the Middle East, left communists need to encourage these comrades to make a thorough analysis of why anarchism has so often failed the test of imperialist war, above all in 1936. The idea of a “Spanish revolution” in 1936 represents a kind of sacred icon for nearly all anarchists, but until they are prepared to go to the roots of why such a significant part of the anarchist movement crossed the class line at that time, they will not be able to consistently defend internationalist positions today and in the future.

6. <http://www.libcom.org/forums/news/isis-17062014>

7. AIT is the Association International des Travailleurs is French for International Workers Association.

8. <http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201403/9565/internationalist-declaration-russia>

The war in Spain in the 1930s

An internationalist voice from the US

criticisms of the positions of the AWU on libcom (see footnote 3). In one of the main libcom threads about the situation in the Middle East, individual comrades have argued forcefully against the pro-PKK line, notably a member of the UK branch of the IWA (Solidarity Federation) who posts as AES. The collective that runs the libcom site has featured two articles on the PKK and Rojava written from a left communist perspective: the ICC's 'warning' against the PKK's new libertarian face-lift (footnote 4), and the article 'The Bloodbath in Syria: Class war or Ethnic war'⁹ written by Devrim and first published on the website of the Internationalist Communist Tendency. In the comments that follow the latter article there are furious and slanderous replies by posters who seem to be members or supporters of the Turkish DAF.

At the time of writing the AF in the UK has published a statement which has no illusions in the leftist, nationalist nature of the PKK and shows that the turn towards Bookchinism and 'confederal democracy' was initiated from above by its great leader Ocalan, who has also made similar approaches to the Assad regime, the Turkish state and towards Islam¹⁰. The AF has the courage to admit that the position it is taking up will not be popular given the large number of anarchists being drawn into the support for the 'Rojava revolution'. But here again we see a total incoherence within the same 'international' tendency. The AF statement contains no criticism whatever of the DAF or the IAF and in its list of 'concrete' actions proposed at the end of statement is the call to "provide humanitarian aid to Rojava via IFA, which has direct contact with DAF". This seems to be a concession to the pressure of "we must do something now", which is very strong in the anarchist milieu, even if the aid (whether military or humanitarian) organised by a small group in Turkey would inevitably play into the hands of bigger organisations, such as the PKK. And this is in reality what the DAF is proposing, since it has offered volunteers to fight in the PKK-controlled 'Peoples Protection Units' or YPG. The AF also writes that it aims to "encourage and support any independent action of workers and peasants in the Rojava region. Argue against any nationalist agitation and for the unity of Kurdish, Arab, Muslim, Christian and Yezidi workers and peasants. Any such independent initiatives must free themselves from PKK/PYD control, and equally from aid by the Western allies, from their clients like the Free Syrian Army, Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, and the Turkish state". But it could hardly do so without also arguing against the pro-PKK positions of the DAF itself.

It is certainly significant that the most consistent responses to the situation in Rojava have been written from within the tradition of left communism. What characterises the more general response of the anarchists is their total lack of coherence. When you look at the websites of the IWA, the CNT-AIT, or Solidarity Federation, they remain relentlessly focused on immediate and local workers' struggles which they have been involved with¹¹ - rather in the style of the Economist current which Lenin criticised a hundred years ago. The great economic, political and social events in the world are hardly mentioned, and there is no sign of any debate about such a fundamental questions as internationalism and imperialist war, even when there are obviously profound differences within this current, ranging from internationalism to nationalism. This lack of debate, this avoidance of confronting differences - which we can also observe in the IAF - is far more dangerous than the crises which hit the anarchist movement in 1914 and 1936, when there was still a much greater reaction to the betrayal of principles within the ranks of the movement.

9. <https://libcom.org/blog/bloodbath-syria-class-war-or-ethnic-war-03112014>

10. <http://www.libcom.org/news/anarchist-federation-statement-rojava-december-2014-02122014>

11. The picture of the CNT-AIT banner featured in this article is typical of the style of many of these articles, which whenever possible show pictures of the IWA contingent or picket to show the crucial role they have played in the struggle - an approach consistent with their notion of organising the class into revolutionary unions.

"The events in Spain have put every organisation to the test". In 1936-7 the entire international revolutionary movement was faced with the necessity to affirm the absolute incompatibility between proletarian class struggle and imperialist war, since the one can only advance to the detriment of the other. The class struggle either prevents or disrupts imperialist war; the working masses can only be mobilised for imperialist war by renouncing the class struggle. As we argue in the article on anarchism and imperialist war in this issue, significant parts of the anarchist movement failed this test in 1914, and even more spectacularly over the war in Spain; and the same pattern of capitulation to capitalist war is being repeated today in relation to Ukraine and the Middle East today. But the war in Spain also precipitated a crisis in the Marxist currents which had initially tried to resist the Stalinist counter-revolution, and it was only a small minority which was able to remain loyal to internationalism during that dark period.

The text we are republishing below¹, written by Eiffel, was a resolution on the war in Spain submitted by the minority of the Revolutionary Workers' League in the USA. It was published in the November 1937 issue of *The Fourth International*, the RWL's journal. As we recount in our book *The Italian Communist Left*, the RWL was one of the groups to the left of official Trotskyism which the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left engaged in discussion following the Fraction's own exclusion from Trotsky's International Left Opposition. Its best-known militant was Hugo Oehler. It had rejected the 1934 'turn' towards entryism in the Socialist Parties and with regard to the events in Spain again stood on the left of the Trotskyists. But it also retained key elements of the Trotskyist platform, such as the defence of the USSR, and it was never able to make a clean break from the opportunist methods and habits of Trotskyism. Eiffel's resolution is aimed at the fatal ambiguities of the RWL on the question of Spain, since in the final analysis its position offered a variety of critical support for the Republican war effort against Franco.

Eiffel was the pseudonym of the German anthropologist Paul Kirchoff, who had been a member of the left communist KAPD until 1931. After arriving in the USA in that year, he was involved first in the milieu of the Left Opposition in New York and then became a member of the RWL, primarily because of his opposition to the entryist policy. Expelled from the USA in 1937, he went to Mexico and, following his break from the RWL, formed the Marxist Workers' Group whose documents on the wars in Spain and China, and on the reactionary nature of the nationalisations carried out by the leftist government in Mexico, were warmly welcomed by the Italian Fraction. We have published some of the MWG's key documents in the *International Review*².

1. Our thanks to the comrade who signs as fbrill on libcom, who sent us this and other texts written by the minority in the RWL. As can be seen from this thread on libcom (<http://www.libcom.org/forums/history/us-bordigists-19092014>), the comrade is currently researching the American 'Bordigist' group of the 1930s and 40s.

2. <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/197707/2552/texts-mexican-left-1937-38>; <http://en.internationalism.org/node/2739>

Anarchism remains a family which can easily accommodate bourgeois and proletarian positions and in this sense still reflects the vagueness, the vacillation of social strata caught between the two major classes of society. This atmosphere is a real obstacle to clarification, preventing even the clearest, most firmly internationalist individuals or groupings from going to the roots of this latest example of anarchist collaboration with the bourgeoisie. To take their positions to their conclusion would demand a thorough re-examination of past crises in the anarchist milieu, above all the one in 1936 where, as we argue in our recent articles in the *International Review*, the fatal flaws of anarchism were revealed most tellingly. In the final analysis, it would demand a fundamental critique of anarchism itself and a real assimilation of the marxist method. **Amos 3/12/14**

Resolution on Spain

The events in Spain have put every organisation to the test. We have to admit that we have not stood it. Seeing this, our first and foremost duty is to study the roots of our failure; our second duty is to admit our failure in all frankness before the national and international proletariat. Only thus can we hope to rehabilitate ourselves as a Marxist vanguard organisation.

The following resolution is very far from being a sufficiently searching analysis of the real significance of the events in Spain and of our attitude towards them. It aims to be nothing more than a first admission of our failure in the face of these events, and an introduction to the discussion which the whole organisation must at this late hour begin immediately.

The evolution of the position of our organisation with respect to the events in Spain has followed on the whole a line which seems to indicate that underlying all our mistakes there is a healthy and solid Marxist base; that line of evolution has steadily, although hesitatingly, moved away from the initial false position and has progressively approached a correct one. But this process has been exceedingly slow and to a large extent shamefaced or even unconscious. Not once during the past seven months, the most crucial months not only in the recent history of the proletariat, but of our organization as well, has the question of the correctness or incorrectness of our fundamental line on Spain been squarely posed by any of the leading comrades as the life or death question for our organization. Those who, like comrade Eiffel, had from the very beginning fundamental differences with the majority of the PC on this question, but did not make this difference the center of a principled struggle for a different line, have failed to carry out one of the most elementary duties of a leading member.



Paul Kirchoff

While the gradual evolution of our line on Spain seems to indicate that there is at bottom a really Marxist base in our organization, our initial failure and the false manner in which we have subsequently corrected it in part, are grave symptoms of the youth and immaturity of our organization. If the organization pulls through this crisis, i.e. analyses to the bottom its failure to meet a historical test, and corrects it completely, it will be essentially a new organization, having outgrown the weaknesses of its childhood days. It will then be one of the very few organizations on an international scale that have weathered the Spanish storm. In fact it will be stronger than before, as are those who are capable of correcting themselves even when that correction touches the very essential of their position.

The essential significance of the events in Spain is this: the workers' reaction to the attempt of the bourgeoisie, to shift from corruption to brutal oppression, induced the latter to embark upon a new road of driving the workers off their class line, a method never used before in such a thorough and systematic manner: WAR! The struggle in Spain began as a civil war, but was rapidly concerted into a capitalist, i.e. an imperialist war. The whole strategy of the Spanish and international bourgeoisie has consisted in carrying this transformation through without a change in the outward appearances and without the workers of Spain and the

world noticing it. To achieve its end, the bourgeoisie had by all means at its disposal to keep alive the belief of the workers that they were fighting for their own class interests, i.e. that it was a civil war.

Those who did not recognise in time this transformation had already taken place (who saw it only after many months) or who did not radically change from the moment they recognized this (again we belong to this category), objectively played the game of the bourgeoisie. Radical workers' organizations which combatted the open forms of class betrayal, but who at the same time prolonged the illusions of the workers that this war had anything to do with their class interests, that it was "at bottom" a civil war, were in fact indispensable to the plan of the Bourgeoisie. The most concise formula of this objective support to the Spanish and world bourgeoisie is contained in a leaflet published by the PC in the second half of February, that is in the seventh month of the war in Spain: "The Spanish working-class must march together with the People's Front against Franco, but must prepare to turn their guns against Caballero to-morrow".

To say this at a time when we had already understood and declared openly that civil war had been converted into imperialist war, is the very opposite of what Marxists have to tell the workers during imperialist war; sabotage! Fraternalism with the "enemy"! desert! Revolutionary defeatism! Turn imperialist war into civil war! - It is only necessary to compare these slogans of Marxists during the world war with our slogans, to see the full depth of our failure to analyse the situation correctly and to draw the correct conclusions from it. To speak of imperialist war (beginning of article in January number of Fourth International) and then to end the same article with the statement; "It is necessary to fight at the front" - is proof what we really did not understand what "imperialist war" means in Marxist language. The following words (in that article mentioned) sound revolutionary, but in reality are left support to the schemes of the bourgeoisie, because they try to bring together what never can be brought together; class war and the imperialist war. ("... if power is not consolidated in the rear ... the fight at the front is transformed into a fight to defend private property etc etc.")

It is obvious that power can be won (for it is a question of winning, not "consolidating" it) only by strictly class methods, employed both in the rear and at the front; strikes, sabotage, fraternization, desertion, revolutionary defeatism. But not one of their (these) slogans was ever raised by us! Without them our slogans for the creation of soviets and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat (abstracting from the question of the existence of non-existence of a class party of the proletariat) objectively had the same effect as the slogan "Turn imperialist war into civil war" WITHOUT THE SLOGAN OF REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM, - a point we had well understood theoretically and even made a central point in our propaganda, but which we failed to apply in PRACTICE when the first historical test came. In fact we did not even raise the slogan "Turn the imperialist war into civil war", which would probably have led to the logical conclusions: if this is the task, then we must be for the defeat of the People's Front armies just as well as the armies of Franco.

Summing up we have to admit that we, just as those we have criticised, have fallen victims to the attempt of the world bourgeoisie to use the war in Spain in order to drive the proletariat off its clear class line and that in reality we have acted only as the leftest of the left in the camp of those duped by the bourgeoisie, forgetting during a period of months to mention even once the fundamental class weapon of the proletariat: STRIKE! We, who had built our whole PROPAGANDA on the question of the independence of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, did not know how to concretize this idea in PRACTICE.

The first shop stewards' movement

From proletarian response to trade unionist obstacle

A hundred years ago the world was plunged into the cataclysm of World War I, a vast inter-imperialist conflict in which 20 million died. During the war there were many workers' struggles that went against the spirit of national defence. In Britain the Shop Stewards movement originally appeared as an expression of these struggles, but because they never broke from the trade union framework, they were subsequently integrated into the apparatus for controlling the working class. The article that follows was first published in *WR 4* in August 1975. Written nearly forty years ago there are inevitably some formulations that we would now qualify, change or omit, but we are republishing it as it first appeared because its essential argument remains as valid as ever.

Ω

The aim of this article is to clarify the revolutionary experience of the proletariat in relation to the trade unions. One of the crucial political positions of the International Communist Current is that the trade unions, in the epoch of capitalist decadence, have amply proven their reactionary, anti-working class nature. Their support for imperialist wars and their sabotage of revolutionary upsurges, and other genuine struggles of the class, has made plain their place as a wing of the bourgeoisie.

In Britain, the shop stewards' movement, composed of rank and file trade union delegates may seem to represent a progressive alternative to the unions as a whole. To deepen an understanding of the real nature of the shop stewards, we must lay the basis for examining the apparent contradiction between them and the rest of the trade union apparatus.

We can best do this by looking at the growth of the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement (SS&WCM) during World War I, when it played a part in the waves of revolutionary struggle sweeping Europe from 1917 to 1923. We must also briefly see its role in the subsequent counterrevolutionary period, which has lasted until today's re-awakening of proletarian revolt.

Historical period and class struggle

It is first of all necessary to briefly examine the precise historical period in which the SS&WCM arose. World War I marked the definitive end of the ascendant epoch of capitalism; the finish of the progressive expansion of world capitalism, and the beginning of cycles of imperialist wars and reconstruction periods, which demonstrated that capitalism was now a decadent social system.

The tempo and character of class struggle changed in response to the closure of the ascendant period. Mass strikes occurred in Russia in 1905, and in Germany and other countries, in the decades preceding World War I. This indicated that the protracted sectional and reformist workers' struggles of the ascendant period were over. The working class struggle started to break out of its factory confines, and began to confront the capitalist system as a whole. The massacre of millions of proletarians in World War I, plus the rapid disintegration of working class living standards, accelerated the deepening class struggle into direct revolutionary outbursts throughout Europe. They reached their highest point in October 1917 in Russia, where the class captured power through the soviets under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. Other revolutions for example those in Hungary and Germany, proved abortive, and the revolution in Russia remained isolated, thus preventing the urgent extension, world-wide, of proletarian power. The Russian Revolution degenerated as a result and the Russian regime became itself integrated into capitalist decadence. All the waves of the period were bloodily crushed and for more than fifty years the class had paid dearly for the continuance of capitalist barbarism, from which it is only starting to recover today.

In Britain, the revolutionary waves of 1917-23 found a substantial reverberation. From 1910 onwards an unprecedented period of working class struggle began. In 1910-11 the Cambrian Combine Strike occurred, involving 26,000 miners, to which the bourgeoisie responded with the use of

troops. The militancy of merchant seamen in 1911 sparked off a strike by railway workers, bringing out 250,000 men in total. The Dublin Transport Strike of 1913-14 attracted sympathy strikes in Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham. Altogether between January and July 1914, 9,105,800 working days were lost through strikes. The class struggle regained this intense militancy following a brief lull at the outbreak of World War I caused by the national patriotism in the class. In March 1915, 200,000 mineworkers struck illegally in defence of their living standards, and in 1916 an unofficial strike in Sheffield against conscription was successful. In May 1917, the most significant strike wave of the war erupted in opposition to the effects of imperialist carnage which involved at its climax 200 thousand engineering workers. The Clyde workers in 1919 staged a massive revolt in their attempt to secure a 40-hour week.

But the end of the ascendant period and the era of class struggle associated with it, which these and other struggles inaugurated, also demanded a change in the tactics and organisation previously adopted by the proletariat. The establishment of trade unions had originally been fought for by workers in order to defend and improve their conditions of life within the capitalist system. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth century the impasse facing world capitalism increasingly prevented the trade unions from achieving any real reforms on behalf of the workers. The unions were, as institutions, forced more and more to identify their interests with those of the bourgeoisie in opposition to the heightening revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat. The growing bureaucratisation of the trade unions, in response to capitalist decadence, accelerated the divorce between the trade unions and the proletariat. The mass workers' parties, linked to the trade unions, and similarly dedicated to reformism, as expressed in the minimum programme, represented the proletariat within the institutions of the bourgeoisie, (particularly parliament), gave support to the decaying capitalist system against the deepening struggle of the working class.

In Britain, this capitulation to capitalism by Social Democracy was definitely and irrevocably marked by the support for World War I of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. In August 1914 the Labour Party and the TUC called for existing strikes to end and the prevention of any more for the duration of the war. This summons became lawful command (through the Munitions Act) after the Treasury agreements between the unions and the government in March 1915. Strikes were declared illegal; workers were tied to their place of employment; all restrictive practices were to be ended; objections to overtime, nightwork, and Sunday duty were to be rejected; the dilution¹ of labour was made acceptable; and many Factory Act safety and health prohibitions, successfully fought for by the class in the nineteenth century, were suspended.

In this way the organised expressions of the old workers' movement not only helped mobilise the class for slaughter in the imperialist war, they also helped wipe out all the meagre gains the class had won in the previous epoch of reformist struggle. The offensive against the living conditions, and life itself, of the proletariat was not to last merely for the duration of the war, but was to become a permanent feature of the ensuing counter-revolutionary period. In 1914 the old workers' movement definitively entered the bourgeois camp and became reactionary agents within the proletariat.

The most advanced sections of the world class, in this period, quite quickly created fundamentally new organisations to express the revolutionary interests of the proletariat. Workers' councils emerged in 1905 and in 1917 in Russia, and in 1918 in Germany and elsewhere; the councils challenged the whole of the existing apparatus of capitalism and brought the class together to fight its independent struggle for social revolution. The role of revolutionaries in the new period of capitalist decadence was to help, and play a part in, the seizure of power by the workers' councils, and

1. Dilution was the use of non-skilled or semi-skilled labour in jobs previously reserved for skilled workers.

no longer, as a mass party, to act on behalf of the proletariat, according to the old Social Democratic conception.

In Britain a period of militancy leading up to World War I had already provoked terror in the trade union machines. Following the outbreak of the War the unions had explicitly ceased to express proletarian interests. The class was clearly faced with the immense task of creating new organisations to express its new interests. The entire consciousness and organisation of the previous period was finished and the class had to rapidly develop a revolutionary praxis.

Britain - the limitations of the struggle

The long traditions of reformism and trade unionism within the British proletariat (which were unlike those of the Russian class for example) and the relative weakness of the revolutionary waves in Europe, prevented the British sector of the class from reaching its organisational expression in revolutionary workers' councils. Instead, rank and file unionist and syndicalist organisations, the most important of which being the SS&WCM, were created in an attempt to answer the needs of the new period.

Tom Mann, who had been one of the leaders of the pre-war period of class struggle, helped form the Industrial Syndicalist Education League in 1910. He was a leader of the Seamens' Union, which obtained substantial concessions from the shipping companies in 1911. He believed in militant reformism, was hostile to political struggle, encouraged unionisation along class lines and the amalgamation of existing competing unions. The SS&WCM was directly influenced by the ideas of Tom Mann and other syndicalist and industrial unionists.

Jack T. Murphy, a Sheffield engineer, and one of the leading theoreticians of the SS&WCM, described himself as a "syndicalist socialist". He had been involved in the amalgamation committee movement before the war. He was strongly influenced by the ideas of the famous James Connolly, an industrial unionist and member of the Socialist Labour Party. Connolly saw the struggle for socialism as primarily a question of economic organisation. The organisation of the class within factories and workshops, according to him, would gradually develop and extend its power, and provide the basis for the proletarian revolution: "... the conquest of political power by the working class waits upon the conquest of economic power and must function through the economic organisation."²

The SS&WCM was inspired by these theories. With the capitulation of the unions to the imperialist war effort, industrial organisation of the type described by Connolly was only really feasible at the level of the rank and file of the existing unions. According to Murphy: "all the trade unionists in any shop should have shop stewards, who should form themselves into a committee to represent the workers in that shop regardless of the trade unions they belonged to and thus make the first step towards uniting the unions."³

This notion was derived from the amalgamation committee movement before the war. Similar committees to those envisaged by Murphy sprang up throughout Britain during the war years.

On the Clyde, in Scotland, where the shop steward movement first began, Willie Gallacher, chairman of the Clyde Workers' Committee, echoed the theories of Connolly. He helped produce a pamphlet in 1917⁴ which describes how rank and file industrial organisations of the class would undermine capitalism, merely by means of 'contracts', which would gradually help the class to take over the running of 'industry'.

The stewards were not only averse to the political struggle of the class, they rejected the notion of leadership as such in reaction to what they saw as

2. Cited in Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-21*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1969, p.162

3. *Ibid*, p.153

4. William Gallacher and J. Paton, *Towards Industrial Democracy; a Memorandum on Workers' Control*, Paisley Trades and Labour Council, 1917. Cited in Ken Coates and Tony Topham Eds, *Workers' Control*, Panther, London 1970, p.107

the 'betrayal' of union leaders. Rank and file miners produced a pamphlet, *The Miners' Next Step*, which influenced the SS&WCM, in which they argued that "A leader implies ... some men who are being led ... self-respect which comes from manhood, is taken from the men, and consolidated in their leader... the order and system he maintains is based on the suppression of the men, from being independent thinkers into being 'the men' or 'the mob'."⁵

There is here a failure to account for the objective reasons why there existed a chasm between leaders and union members (ie the working' class). The division between leaders and led had become in fact an expression of a division of class interests. The union leaders, as representatives of the unions as a whole were defenders of bourgeois interests against those of the proletariat. Without understanding the class nature of the unions, the rank and file miners were reacting to bureaucracy within the context of trade unionism. As an indirect result they were also rejecting the inherent ability of the working class to elect and mandate 'leaders' to defend proletarian interests within workers' councils. Murphy sympathised with the abstract rejection of leadership held by the rank and file miners: "Government by officials ... is steadily eroding trade union members' rights whereas ... real democratic practice demands that every member of an organisation shall participate actively in the conduct of business." "If one man can sway the crowd in one direction, another man can move them in the opposite direction."⁶

However the SS&WCM could not claim to have completely broken with the union officials. At the Manchester national conference of the SS&WCM in 1916, it was proclaimed: "We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them..." And their statement of aims included a further directly unionistic statement: (We aim at) "the furtherance of the interests of working class organisation as a partisan effort to improve the position in the present and to ultimately assist in the abolition of the wages system."⁷

The SS&WCM's consciousness and organisation, in essence, remained within the boundaries of trade unionism. It was undeniably a militant, proletarian reaction to the capitulation of the trade unions to capitalist barbarism, but it was severely limited. It did not fully appreciate the class forces and historical change in the capitalist system which had caused the degeneration of the old workers' movement, and which required new, directly revolutionary tactics and forms of organisation by the proletariat.

Confusion about the trade unions

The problem of the trade unions was not fundamentally that they were based on trade and craft rather than on the level of the whole class, although this did express the backwardness of the unions. The amalgamation of existing unions, for example, could not change their reactionary content, it rather expressed the tendency of capitalism to centralise and bureaucratise the trade unions; the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, for example, capitulated with little trouble to the war effort. The industrial unionist idea that the industrial organisation of the class could gradually prepare for the proletariat to assume economic power, which would then burst the political shell of the state, was a complete misunderstanding of the character of union organisation. The function of the unions had been to defend the workers' immediate interests, not to engage in an economic attempt to dismantle capitalism. The attempt by the SS&WCM to give the unions, or rank and file trade unionist organisations, a revolutionary content occurred in a revolutionary period when the immediate task of the proletariat was to seize political power, not to organise itself unionistically, in however radical a manner. The SS&WCM's theories described an unconscious desire to channel the revolutionary aspirations of the class into forms of organisation which were completely unsuited to these aspira-

5. Cited in Kendall, p.161

6. *Ibid*, p.161

7. *Ibid*, p.156

tions. The above-mentioned pamphlet by Gallacher spells out the content of attempts at encroaching control over capitalist industry - a workers' management of capitalism which would leave political and military power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, to be used whenever it became necessary to suppress this confused objective of the class.

Without fully understanding the reasons for the degeneration of the trade unions, the SS&WCM reacted on a formalistic level. This was one of the reasons preventing the SS&WCM from escaping the framework of unionism. The essence of the union question was not, as Murphy asserted, that they had leaders who were out of touch with the rank and file, because of their different surroundings to those of the shop floor workers. The reactionary leaders were a product of the reactionary organisation of the trade unions themselves. This resulted from the changing historical conditions of capitalism and the resulting change in the direction of the class struggle.

By making a fetishism out of abstract democracy, which remained within the context of trade unionism, the shop stewards prevented themselves from appreciating and expressing the new needs of the workers' movement. 'Democracy' has never existed independently from material conditions; it always has a content which represents a particular class interest. The bureaucrats in the trade union leadership were not opponents of democracy in the abstract, but of proletarian democracy, which could only genuinely exist outside of and against the unions. They were on the other hand keen supporters of capitalist democracy.

The SS&WCM was thus restricted by these false premises and particularly by its support for many conceptions made obsolete by the imperialist war. The most significant symptom of such structural backwardness was the failure of the SS&WCM to oppose the war along revolutionary lines, ie to express the need of the class to use the war to take offensive against capitalism as a whole. Many shop stewards were 'opposed to the war' but they did not agitate against it in the factories and mines. They restricted their activity within the proletariat mainly to industrial matters and grievances. The attempt in January 1918 to answer the call of the Bolsheviks to force the ending of the war came to nothing partly because the SS&WCM failed to make a clear call to the class on the issue. It failed to live up to its responsibilities, as an advanced sector of the proletariat, to proclaim the vital interests of the class in a systematic and effective way.

Lack of political initiative by the SS&WCM was also to be seen in its response to the wave of strikes of May 1917, which demanded that dilution be banned from non-military work, and that the Trade Card system, exempting some workers from conscription be restored. The strike "... spread throughout England, factories in Leicester, Rugby, Liverpool, Birkenhead, Leeds, Newcastle, Rotherham, Derby, Crayford, Erith, Woolwich and London ... Before the strike was over it had extended to forty-eight towns, involving over two hundred thousand men and a loss of one and a half million working days - more than the combined total of days lost in engineering and shipbuilding since the outbreak of war."⁸

This wave, which was a revolt against the barbarism of the whole war, as well as a product of immediate causes, placed the shop stewards at its head. Yet a national conference of strikers' delegates did not meet until at least two weeks after the strike wave began. And the outcome of the meeting was merely a "request that the Minister of Munitions should meet a deputation".⁹ Instead of such a conciliatory stance as this taken by the shop stewards a movement was needed to call explicitly for the extension of the strikes, and the deepening of their content. The objective of such class struggle should have been made explicit: an assault against the capitalist state, the extension of the revolution to the world arena, which were the only methods of linking up with the Russian proletariat. The strike was eventually defeated.

Obviously the failure of the strike to extend itself was not solely a result of the shop stewards' inadequacies. It was the product of the immaturity of the whole class. The proletariat had been torn out of a long epoch of reformism, forced to confront capitalism in a revolutionary way, yet did not have the experience to fully comprehend or realise its objective tasks. The shop stewards, to a greater

or lesser extent, expressed these inadequacies by their vacillations and indecisiveness.

Other limitations

Further negative characteristics of the SS&WCM were its localism and sectionalism. The movement was confined mainly to the engineering industries, which had been given importance by capitalism's need for armaments. When the importance of these industries for British capital sharply declined after the war, followed by lack of demand for labour, employers were then able to throw militants out of the factories with impunity. One of the pillars of the stewards' strength was thus knocked aside after the war.



The miners did not develop any independent rank and file unionistic organs, and although they militantly defended their living standards, their struggle was confined within the miners' union. This helped prevent any linking up between miners and other sections of the class. An attempt to unify the SS&WCM and the rank and file committees in the miners' and railwaymen's unions at a March 1919 conference proved unsuccessful. The committees in the latter unions were content to work within the union structure, unlike the engineering shop stewards.

Although the shop stewards' movement was nominally co-ordinated nationally by the National Administrative Council, there was little deliberate sympathy action between different sections of workers and little overall central direction. For example, during the May strikes, the Clyde workers remained at work. And paradoxically when the Clyde workers struck for a forty hour week in January 1919, the NAC proved unable to secure any sympathy action from English workers. Similarly in March 1917, wildcat strikes in Barrow involving 10,000 workers failed to bring out workers in other districts, and the strike was defeated.

We are not, however, criticising the stewards simply for lack of unification and centralisation, as leftist commentators on the shop stewards' movement invariably do. To do so would be to criticise them within the terms of unionism and would therefore imply the need for more effective union struggles. Our criticisms are based on the conception that the shop stewards' movement was in the main an historically obsolete organisational form, with a consciousness linked to the ascendant period of capitalism. Our criticisms aim at showing the weakness of the SS&WCM in the face of the revolutionary tasks of the class. The essential need of the British sector of the class at the time, was for its most advanced elements to develop an organisation capable of defending the revolutionary programme within the entire proletariat; a party which could, as the Bolsheviks were able to do, clarify the urgent fact that the international class would have to create revolutionary workers' councils in order to mount an assault on the capitalist system itself.

It is true that the SS&WCM identified their workers' committees with the Russian Soviets, supported the October Revolution, and sympathised with the Bolshevik regime. But the workers' committees were organised on the level of the factory only, and primarily for reformist struggles.

They were essentially a type of union structure. The Russian Soviets, although by no means perfect, revolutionary forms of class organisation, were clearly expressions of the proletariat's new historic needs. The Soviets were class-wide political organs which grouped the class to challenge the whole capitalist order, in however confused a manner. The Soviets, under Bolshevik leadership, secured the political, social and military overthrow of the bourgeois state machine, the dictatorship of the proletariat and gave impetus to the extension of the world revolution. The workers' committees, on the other hand, were radical trade union-like organs, with a reformist mentality and an economic theory of revolution, based on the notion of 'workers' control'.

It is also true that the shop stewards were instrumental in the creation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920: "Of the eight members of the National Administrative Council elected in August 1917, six, MacManus, the chairman, Peet, the secretary, Murphy, the assistant secretary, T. Hurst, W. Gallacher and T. Dingley, joined the Communist Party by the time of the Leeds Unity Convention in January 1921."¹⁰

They therefore apparently helped create a revolutionary party, capable of linking up with the Communist International, to defend the revolutionary programme within the class. Yet, by this time, the revolutionary waves throughout Europe were ebbing and the Communist International, (Comintern), founded in Moscow in 1919, was compromising more and more with left factions of the bourgeoisie - the Social Democrats and the trade unions - in a desperate attempt to reverse the counter-revolutionary upswing. Ironically and tragically, the shop stewards were overcoming their limitations and taking part in a revolutionary regroupment just as the Comintern was ceasing to express the goal of world revolution. The Comintern was already encouraging work with in the trade unions, ie supporting tactics from the ascendant period of capitalism which had now become completely reactionary.

In this way the SS&WCM and the advanced sections of the class in Britain were driven back into the trade unions. This took place through the Red International of Trade Unions, the British section of which was the Minority Movement. In the name of revolution, credence had been given to the most dangerous agents inside the working class, agents which had already helped mobilise the proletariat for imperialist butchery and which now proved decisive in defeating its revolutionary aspirations. For the British working class the 1926 General Strike proved to be the final nail in the coffin of its revolutionary potential. This nail had been hammered home by the TUC in collusion with the rest of the bourgeoisie. At the time, the CPGB called for "All power to the General Council" (of the TUC), providing an 'extreme left' cover for the reactionary manoeuvres of the trade union leaders.

While the SS&WCM was being physically smashed directly after the war, through unemployment and wide-spread dismissals from factories, the revolutionary current which animated the wartime movement was defeated by the Social Democrats, the trade unions and the Comintern in its period of counter-revolutionary decline. It was only at the instigation of these capitalist factions that the shop stewards' movement re-emerged during the late thirties, no longer to express an embryonic revolutionary upsurge of the class, as it had during World War I, but to try and contain the proletariat while a second imperialist slaughter was being launched by world capitalism.

The purpose of our analysis is not to dismiss the SS&WCM, despite our deep criticism of it. It was one of the most advanced elements of the proletarian movement in Britain during the 1914-23 period. Its mistakes were those of the working class trying to grapple with the enormous tasks facing it at the onset of the era of capitalist decadence. Its failure resulted from the weakness and inexperience of the whole international proletariat at that time. Our criticisms aim to identify the mistakes of that period from the point of view of the emerging revolutionary movement of the class today. Only by understanding the failures of the first revolutionary period during capitalist decadence, can we comprehend and express how the future revolutionary movement of the class can be victorious. Our criticisms themselves are only possible owing to the experiences of the proletariat, particularly

10. Ibid, p.164

those which were refracted through the clearest elements in the 1917-23 struggles. These elements perceived with the greatest lucidity the needs of the new period and could see the mistakes of other revolutionaries.

John Maclean, and his group in the British Socialist Party, who took a revolutionary defeatist position¹¹ against World War I, were critical of the Clyde shop stewards, particularly their ambitions of workers' control: "We are not for the absolute control of each industry by workers engaged, for that would be trustified caste control ... the final control and destiny of the products of an industry must be in the hands of humanity as a whole."¹²

While this position implied an understanding of the international, political, primacy of the socialist revolution, Maclean was less clear on the need for revolutionary organisation, and was steeped, even during the war, in many old Social Democratic prejudices; for example he tended to overvalue workers' education as an end in itself.

The *Workers' Dreadnought*, a left communist paper, also had an understanding somewhat in advance of the SS&WCM. In its issue of March 9, 1918 it stated that: "It is our intention to make the *Dreadnought* the medium for nationally co-ordinating the (shop stewards') movement."¹³

The *Dreadnought* apparently was aware of the danger of sectionalism and localism in the SS&WCM. WF Watson, a shop steward, who was very critical of the failure of the SS&WCM to take action to end the war, worked closely with Sylvia Pankhurst, leader of the *Dreadnought* group. These elements, like the more important Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD), provide an important historical link with the needs of today's escalating class struggle, and with the present revolutionary minorities.

The shop stewards and the counter-revolution

The absolute victory of the counter-revolution in the mid-twenties meant that the shop stewards could only re-emerge as a weapon of the left agents of capitalism: the trade unions, the Social Democratic Parties, and the Stalinists. The original ideology and practice of the shop stewards, expressed an abortive attempt to come to grips with the revolutionary period in the wake of World War I, but could only become, in a period of counter-revolutionary decline, a means of emasculating the class struggle itself. The fact that the shop stewards had once been expressions of working class interests became a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie as it subjected the proletariat to barbarism, by means of mystification as well as brute force.

The stewards' movement first re-emerged immediately before World War II, when it was dominated by the Stalinists. When Russia entered the war against the Axis powers in 1941, shop steward groups formed joint production committees with the management of factories for the purpose of helping mobilise the class behind one imperialist bloc, and smashing nascent proletarian reaction to capitalist war: "It falls upon us to strain every effort to achieve the maximum production so that arms flow in greater quantity despite the fact that thousands of workers will be transferred from the factories to shipyards to build the vessels whereby our products will be delivered to the fighting front. That is the task of the trade unionist in the factory, that is the responsibility of every anti-fascist worker."¹⁴

11. By revolutionary defeatism we understand: for the defeat of the imperialist war by mass revolutionary action. This was the position held by all the genuinely revolutionary elements which opposed the reactionary opportunism of the Second International. The opportunists in the Second International were known as defencists, because they defended their national bourgeoisie against the bourgeoisie of other countries, or as social-chauvinists because they were "socialists in words and chauvinists in deeds" (Lenin), ie they supported the imperialism of their countries.

12. Quoted in Tom Bell, *John Maclean. A Fighter for Freedom*, Communist Party Scottish Committee, 1944, p.54. Cited in John Maclean, *The War after the War*, Introduction, p.iii, Socialist Reproduction, London, 1973.

13. Cited in James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*, Allen and Unwin, London 1973, Footnote p.268

14. *Joint Production Committees, How to Get the Best Results*, Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards' National Council, 1942, cited in Coates and Topham, p.172

8. Ibid, p.158

9. Ibid, p.164

Chancellor's autumn statement

The state is not being rolled back, it is leading the attack

Changes to stamp duty, making it cheaper to buy an ordinary house but more expensive to buy one costing in excess of £2 million, provides a little cover for the cuts announced in George Osborne's autumn statement. We should have no doubt that the proposed spending cuts are an attack first and foremost on working class living standards, and continue the policies carried out by governments of left or right since the credit crunch, and before.

Let us begin by looking at the effect on pay. Of course the Chancellor's only direct announcements on pay concern the public sector, the 2 year freeze on pay we have already seen, followed by a 1% cap, means an ongoing cut in pay in real terms. In addition the cap on benefits makes lower pay feasible for employers. The success of this policy has led to workers in Britain suffering a continuous fall in real wages since 2008 and the largest fall in real wages of all G20 countries since 2010. New jobs have been mainly self-employed, part time or low paid to such an extent that there is a shortfall in expected tax receipts leading to this year's government borrowing requirement being higher than expected. Result: more cuts are called for.

Cuts in welfare are a constant concern for the Chancellor – and for the whole ruling class – and it is no surprise that they feature prominently in the autumn statement. Given the promises to protect state pensions this will fall predominantly on working age benefits. “*The welfare budget has al-*

ready been cut by between £20-£25bn. [Osborne] wants to do half as much again as what's happened in this parliament – which gives a sense of the scale of the cuts, and their likely impact. The working age welfare bill is currently around £95bn. He wants to cut that by a further £12bn.” (Andrew Hood, research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies quoted in *The Guardian* 5.12.14). The aim is to tighten the cap on benefits from £500 a week to £440. Working age benefits do not only go to those out of work for whatever reason but also to those in low paid jobs – of whom there are now so many more that it is affecting tax receipts. For these workers the state essentially tops up their pay to prevent it falling too far below what's needed given the cost of living and cultural level in this country. Already two thirds of children in poverty have at least one parent in work.

Over the last 5 years spending by government departments has been reduced by 9.5%. This was not a new invention by the coalition government as the majority of the cuts they announced in May 2010 had already been envisaged by the outgoing Labour administration. The autumn statement envisages a further cut in spending of 14.1%. The Office for Budget Responsibility has pointed out that this will reduce the share of GDP spent by the state to the level of the 1930s and the IFS said it would reduce the role of the state to the extent that it would have “*changed beyond recognition*” (*The Guardian* 5.12.14).

So is Osborne rolling back the state? Changing it beyond all recognition? Or is it the same state, carrying out the same functions while taking account of the depth of the economic crisis, and calculating what they can get away with before the working class responds?

Leaving aside the very pertinent question of whether the state changed beyond recognition in the 1940s, let us look at the nature of the cuts that have been announced. Of course as the IFS points out, the chancellor has not explained how the cuts should be carried out beyond the next financial year. If the NHS, education and overseas aid remain protected, other departments will have to face a 40% cut over the next 5 years. But in any case, protected spending in the NHS, for instance, does not mean it is spared ‘efficiency savings’ or cuts, since it is required to provide increased services for the aging population out of the same funds, and staff are currently required to look at what can be done to reduce hospital attendances and look after more sick people at home. In relation to this we can look at the one area of spending that has already suffered a cut in excess of 40% over the current parliament: community and local government. Here we can see what has happened to the non-medical services available to the elderly, disabled and sick who the state is desperately trying to keep out of hospital. Care services are cut to the bone; carers are on zero hours contracts and are often on sub minimum wages once their travel is taken into account; they are limited to a

ridiculously short time to spend with each client, and their services are often paid for or topped up by the clients themselves. This is a cut in living standards, for both care worker and client, not a change in the nature of local government which will continue to carry out the same functions, including collecting council tax, even if there is a substantial risk of some of them failing financially or being unable to carry out all their current statutory functions.

The army has been cut from 102,000 to 82,500, but this does not mean the British state is going to cease to defend its imperialist interests abroad. On the contrary, not only is the MoD trying to build up the Territorial Army of part timers, it has also just announced the first British base East of Suez since the 1970s, a naval base in Bahrain. Cuts to the Justice department do not mean an end to state repression. So far they have meant a swingeing cut in legal aid, in other words greater difficulty for those who aren't well off to get access to the courts. In line with the increased use of the TA the Policy Exchange think-tank has recommended a network of members of the public to help fight crime – it is not clear whether they have in mind special constables or Stasi-style informers.

Cuts to living standards are the only option for the ruling class. How quickly the new cuts are brought in may be an issue after the next election, but they are not any kind of rolling back of the state, they are the state policy of the capitalist class faced with the current economic crisis. **Alex 6.12.14**

Continued from page 5

The first shop stewards' movement

Thus the re-emergent shop stewards' movement was instrumental in the practical and ideological mobilisation of the class for its bloody defeat, behind the mystification of anti-fascism. The shop stewards' movement of this time shared nothing, in terms of its class content, with the movement of World War I, which reacted in an elemental proletarian way to the imperialist carnage – albeit in a confused way.

From World War II until today, the shop stewards' movement has played an openly reactionary role in bourgeois industrial relations. This has been partly due to the decentralisation of wage bargaining during the post war years, which has given shop stewards an increased importance in contrast to trade union leaders. But the more profoundly true reason for their increasing role is the importance of the shop stewards' movement in diffusing the revolt of the class.

The shop stewards are dangerous today precisely because they are embedded in the working class. They are usually elected by workers on the shop floor, they smooth out day-to-day grievances of workers, work in the same surroundings, and even lead strikes. But their task is to ‘represent’ the workers within the framework of trade unionism and legal relations with the bourgeoisie. As a corollary of this, they are also usually influenced by Social Democratic or Stalinist ideology, often being members of the Labour or Communist Parties.

The shop stewards are thus in an extremely good position to demobilise any real working class revolt in the factories, any revolt which threatens to go beyond a sectional framework, becomes autonomous, and starts to understand the real function played by the unions within capitalism. Their position within the rank and file gives them credence which can help divert and contain the struggle. In such a way, illustrated millions of times in the post-war period, the shop stewards' movement has proved itself to be one of the surest guardians of the trade unions, although it may well criticise union leaders from time to time.

The reactionary role of the shop stewards' movement does not mean that every individual shop steward is counter-revolutionary. Many shop stewards are elected because ‘no one else would take the job’, and could easily cease to be stew-

ards and rejoin the mass of other workers. Many militant workers on the other hand become fodder for bourgeois interests (it is one of the tragedies of the counter-revolutionary period that most militant workers who emerge today are immediately swallowed up by the left agents of capital). The question of the role of the shop stewards, however, does not revolve around this or that particular individual case but is determined by the position of the whole movement vis-à-vis contending class forces. As a form of organisation embodying a specific ideology, the shop stewards' movement is undoubtedly a weapon of capitalism today.

The shop stewards and the Left

Leftist factions of the bourgeoisie also try inevitably to harness what was once a proletarian movement to reactionary ends. Trotskyists, libertarians, and ouvrierists of all kinds fawn on the shop stewards, and attempt to recruit and influence them, sensing their importance and power within the class. The International Socialists, for example, a populist-trotskyist organisation, bases its main strategy within the class on recruiting shop stewards, and forming ‘rank and file movements’ within the trade unions. It grounds its policy on a false analogy with the SS&WCM during World War I. For IS the problems of this movement resided not in the consciousness and activity of the SS&WCM but rather in the lack of political direction from outside the movement: “*It is too much to expect that, without the guidance of an interventionist revolutionary (sic) party, an industrial movement led by political militants (a reborn revolutionary shop stewards' movement) can lead a revolutionary struggle to the point of challenging the government for power.*”¹⁵

For such Trotskyists, the fact that the shop stewards remained within unionism was very acceptable; the ‘revolutionary’ party could thus have taken power on its behalf. (This quote also makes clear the ‘revolutionary’ nature of the party for Trotskyists which is to ‘challenge’ the ‘government’ for power. It thus struggles to obtain governmental office, not to destroy the whole capitalist system.) The Trotskyists are incapable of seeing

15. Duncan Hallas, “The First Shop Stewards' Movement”, *International Socialism*, December 1973, p.26

that the working class has the ability to go beyond and destroy the unions by its own efforts, and to develop its own revolutionary organisations: workers' councils and communist minorities.

The danger posed by the Trotskyists lies not in their ludicrous dreams of bourgeois governmental office, but in their avid support for all the left agents of capital, especially the shop stewards. Like them, the Trotskyists and others argue for the repetition of mistakes which the class made fifty or more years ago. However, to encourage and support the shop stewards' movement today is not a mistake but brazen capitalist mystification.

The proletarian way

In the present deepening crisis of world capitalism, the emerging class struggle is forcing the proletariat to confront the shop stewards, and other rank and file union delegates in other countries, as guardians of the existing order. After fifty years experience of counter-revolution, and after the lessons of the previous revolutionary period, the class thus has the capability of going beyond its previous mistakes.

One of the most fundamental lessons learnt by proletarian experience over these fifty years is that the class can have no permanent mass organisations grouping the whole class or sections of the class under decadent capitalism. The shop stewards' movement, despite the fact that it is composed of thousands of workers, is a clear proof of this impossibility, because though it pretends to be the most militant defender of the class, in fact it is a strong defender of bourgeois interests. Indeed any rank and file unionistic organisation which seeks to institutionalise itself in the class struggle becomes a brake on the real battles of the class. Only those committees which are thrown up in the course of struggle, eg during a wildcat strike, existing to develop that battle independently from the unions, and disbanding after the struggle is over, can aid the development of proletarian class organisation and consciousness. Such committees are embryonic precursors of the workers' councils, the historically discovered organisational form through which the whole class smashes the capitalist state and expropriates the bourgeoisie.

Temporary committees thrown up in the course of real workers' struggles can express proletarian

interests because these struggles inevitably tend to go beyond their sectional limits, and attack capitalism as a whole. Temporary committees can therefore be potentially embryonic revolutionary forms. Permanent mass organisations, however, inevitably conform to the everyday circumstances of wage slavery and participate in the exploitation of workers which cannot be ameliorated during capitalist decadence. They are often swallowed up by the unions or leftist organisations.

The anti-working class role of permanent ‘workers’ organisations is made clear when workers' committees stay in existence after the purpose of the struggle for which they were created has disappeared. These committees are then emptied of their content of autonomous struggle and become tools for regulating day to day exploitation within the factory, or for attempting to ‘mobilise’ the rank and file.

The Workers' Commissions in Spain, originally created by workers in struggle, became permanent organisations, and rapidly ceased to defend proletarian interests, becoming left appendages of capital. Similarly the Base Committees of Italian workers, which had a parallel development to the Workers' Commissions, have been integrated into the reactionary apparatus of the unions. Today both these organisations have to be fought when the class develops its autonomous struggle in these countries.

One of the main functions of revolutionaries is to systematically demonstrate to workers in the industrial centres the reactionary role of the trade union apparatus with all its factions – whether the shop stewards' movement or the trade union bureaucracy. The task of revolutionaries is to show that the class struggle, if it is to be successful in the face of the crisis, must sooner or later deepen and develop autonomously against the trade unions and every other capitalist faction. This is the only way for the revolutionary proletariat, the way which leads to the seizure of international political power by the working class, and the preparation of the conditions for a classless society.

Frank Smith, August 1975

Continued from page 1

On all continents capitalism sows war and chaos

This frightening barbarism, embodied in particular by the jihadists, is now serving as a pretext for new military crusades and western bombing campaigns. For the big imperialist powers, this makes it possible to terrorise the population and the working class at low cost to themselves while posing as civilised peacemakers. But Islamic State was at the outset partly armed by the US and factions of the Saudi bourgeoisie, not to mention the complicity of Turkey and Syria. This Islamist organisation has now escaped the control of its masters. Today it is besieging the town of Kobane in Syria, a few kilometres from the Turkish border, in a mainly Kurdish region. Unlike the first Gulf war, the great powers, with the US at the fore, are running after events without any long-term political vision, simply reacting to immediate military imperatives. A heterogeneous coalition of 22 states, with very differing interests from each other, has taken the decision to bombard the parts of the town taken by IS. The US, the top gun in this pseudo-coalition, is today incapable of sending in ground troops and of forcing Turkey, which has a deep fear of the Kurdish forces around the PKK and PYD, to intervene militarily.

All the hot spots of the planet are bursting into flame. Everywhere the great powers are being drawn blindly into the fire. The French army is bogged down in Mali. The 'peace' negotiations between the Mali government and the armed groups have reached a dead-end. There is permanent war in the sub-Saharan region. In the north of Cameroon and of Nigeria, where Boko Haram has its hunting ground, armed conflicts and terrorist actions have multiplied. If we take into account

the growing power of China in Asia, we can see that the same tensions, the same mafia methods are spreading across the entire planet.

Imperialist wars are more and more irrational

In the 19th century, when capitalism was flourishing, wars to form national states, colonial wars or imperialist conquests had a certain economic and political rationality. War was an indispensable means for the development of capitalism. It had to conquer the world; its combined economic and military power enabled it to achieve this result, as Marx put it, in "blood and filth".

With the First World War, all this changed radically. The main powers in general emerged considerably weakened from these years of total warfare. Today, in the phase of the decomposition of the system, a veritable *danse macabre*, a plunge into madness, is pulling the world and humanity towards utter ruin. Self-destruction has become the dominant feature in the zones of war.

There is no immediate solution in the face of this infernal dynamic, but there is a revolutionary solution for the future. And this is what we have to patiently work towards. Capitalist society is obsolete; it's not just a barrier to the development of civilisation but a menace to its survival. A century ago the communist revolution in Russia and its reverberations in Germany, Austria, Hungary and elsewhere put an end to the First World War. In the present historical period, it is still only the struggle of the proletariat which can finish with this rotting world system. **Antonin 5.11.14**

Continued from page 8

Immigration

midst is often the first scapegoat blamed for our miserable conditions.

The working class is often deeply divided by these prejudices and ideologies. But this does not detract from its historically unique nature. It is a class exploited by capitalism and subject to the weight of capitalist ideology. It is also a revolutionary class with the capacity to overthrow capitalism and develop new relations of production based on solidarity. The revolution of the working class is not just a revolt compelled by deprivation and repression; if it is to succeed it must have a

consciousness of the world we must leave and the prospect of communism. As such, the working class view is not just a critique of society; it is also a moral view, in which the immediate needs of sections of the class are subordinated to a wider and more historic goal. Both classic racism and the anti-racism of the bourgeois left create illusions and cause divisions within the working class. For the working class to make a revolution it needs a unity that comes from a consciousness of its common interests internationally. Against racism, nationalism and xenophobia the working class offers a perspective of communism, a society based on association, not on the enforcement of separation. **Car 6/12/14**

ICC Pamphlets

	Prices		Postage		
	£	\$	A/B	C	D
Unions against the working class (new edition)	3.00	5.00	£0.30	£0.75	\$0.75
Nation or Class*	1.25	2.00	£0.30	£0.75	\$0.75
Platform of the ICC	0.50	1.00	£0.30	£0.60	\$0.75
The Decadence of Capitalism	3.00	4.50	£0.30	£1.20	\$1.25
Russia 1917: Start of the World Revolution*	1.00	1.50	£0.30	£1.00	\$1.00
Communist Organisations and Class Consciousness	1.75	2.50	£0.50	£1.40	\$1.00
The Period of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism*	2.00	3.00	£0.50	£1.80	\$1.00

Prices in dollars applicable only to orders from the USA/Canada placed with INTERNATIONALISM, in New York.

*Out of print pamphlets will be photocopied which may take a little longer to supply.

Bookshops selling ICC press

LONDON

Bookmarks 1 Bloomsbury St, WC1.

Housmans 5 Caledonian Rd, Kings Cross, N1.

Freedom Bookshop Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

OUTSIDE LONDON

Word Power 43 West Nicholson St, Edinburgh EH8 9DB

Tin Drum 68 Narborough Rd, Leicester LE3 0BR

News From Nowhere 96 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY

October Books 243 Portswood Road, Southampton SO17 2NG

AUSTRALIA

New International Bookshop Trades Hall Building, cnr. Lygon & Victoria Sts., Carlton, Melbourne

From the ICC online forum Police shootings

Here are some extracts from the opening post on a recent thread on our discussion forum (<http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056/jamal/11572/hands-don-t-shoot-right-where-they-want-us>) initiated by Jamal, a sympathiser in the USA. It's a first reaction to the latest wave of protests against police brutality in the USA. The media and politicians use the confusions within the movement to hide the class element that is always contained in the question of state repression.

"Hands Up, Don't Shoot": Right Where They Want Us

The video of unarmed father and grandfather Eric Garner being choked to death is terrible and horrific, just like the death of the unarmed teenager Mike Brown...

However there have been serious problems with the response by the general public to these events. For those in America who even do consider it an injustice and aren't taking the side of the police, their position can be summed up by the soundbites and tag-lines "black lives matter", or "we need justice." What we need to do is destroy capitalism, smash the state, and bury racist police forces with them...

It's tragic the majority of people still have not recognized that the role of the police, and the state in general, is and has always been to separate the haves from the have-nots, in the interests of the ruling class.

That should be the main take away; poor people are the victims under capitalism. And instead of sobbing and rioting, the reaction should be focused and conscious. But instead what we hear is "we need justice", go easy on us, "hands up", we surrender.

Meaningful resistance to these situations can only come from one place: an awakened, united and revolutionary working class. However, the slogan "hands up, don't shoot" is representative of a working class which is none of these things. It is instead reflective of a class that does not know it exists, that doesn't know it alone has the power to carry out meaningful social revolution that can stop the police, the greedy bankers, capitalism itself, and create a new society...

We say this: a communist future is the only future worth fighting for. Question what you have heard and start to realize this reality. Or keep getting murdered by the cops.

Subscriptions to World Revolution

Readers will be aware that we have reduced the frequency of the publication of World Revolution.

On the positive side, our website is now our main publication, which we can update as necessary between publication dates giving a proletarian view on significant events in the world. It is also able to reach readers in parts on the world that our papers cannot.

At the same time, the rise in postal charges means that producing and selling papers is increasingly expensive.

From this issue we will be producing World Revolution quarterly, 4 issues a year. Our new subscription prices will appear soon. All existing subscribers will get the full number of issues they have paid for.

ICC books on the history of the workers' movement

The Italian Communist Left
£10

Dutch and German Communist Left £14.95

The Russian Communist Left
out of print

Communism is not a nice idea but a material necessity £7.50

The British Communist Left
out of print

International Review 153

Main articles:
1914: how German social democracy came to betray the workers

1936-37: the war in Spain reveals anarchism's fatal flaws (part one)

Gauche Communiste de France 1948: on the function of the political party of the proletariat

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.

Donations at the day of discussion on 'World War One: how the workers were mobilised for war and how they put an end to it' £131.00

Contact the ICC

Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:
COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALIST POB 25, NIT, Faridabad, 121001 Haryana, INDIA.
WORLD REVOLUTION BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX, GREAT BRITAIN

Write by e-mail to the following addresses:

From Great Britain use uk@internationalism.org

From India use India@internationalism.org

From the rest of the world use international@internationalism.org

<http://www.internationalism.org>

Immigration: xenophobia right and left

Across the globe there is a 'great debate' about immigration. Mostly it consists of arguments about how to restrict it. Immigration is presented as having a harmful effect on vulnerable economies, as undermining a country's culture, as making our lives worse.

Against these arguments there are those who say that economies always get a net benefit from newcomers, that cultural diversity is enriching, and that, in more affluent countries, there is a responsibility to welcome those who are fleeing from persecution, poverty and war.

Every day you can read new headlines that play with these themes.

In the US President Obama proposes to reinforce border security while holding out the prospect of citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

In the UK Prime Minister Cameron outlines further restrictions on and deterrents to potential immigrants.

In Australia the current government adopted the policies of its Labour predecessor (which reintroduced the offshore processing of asylum seekers in Nauru and Papua New Guinea) and extended them, for example by putting the military in charge of asylum operations.

In Switzerland, a referendum rejected proposed measures to severely reduce immigration – the opponents of the restrictions arguing that it would be bad for the economy.

In the Mediterranean there are regular reports of rescues and drowning of refugees and migrants in boats on their way to Italy and Greece

Internationally Amnesty International has criticised the "pitiful" response of the wealthiest countries in the resettlement of the millions of refugees from conflict in Syria.

The ideological campaigns of the bourgeoisie are dominated by the idea of a foreign threat and the need to strengthen frontiers and deter invaders. As a form of nationalism it promotes the idea of a national home which risks impoverishment, alien influences, and cultural dilution. From the openly Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece to the rise of the UK Independence Party in Britain and the electoral resurgence of the Front National in France, there are a range of right wing parties which express racist ideas in ways that were not previously respectable in normal democratic discourse. In return, liberals and the left offer state repression (bans and restrictions on parties, criminalisation in some instances) and their own versions of nationalism. The Scot-

tish independence referendum had international coverage and many of those who supported the proposed split-off of Scotland did so on the grounds of national self-determination. Over the last century this has proven to be just a left version of the same nationalist poison. Bourgeoisies across the world were envious of the way the UK bourgeoisie was able to stage this democratic confrontation between varieties of nationalism.

Is racism only natural?

Admitting that there was a "certain amount of xenophobia" in the 'debate' on immigration, the Mayor of London said that "All human beings are prey to that feeling. ... It's part of human nature. It doesn't mean people are bad people, ok?" While this is a typically off-the-cuff remark it does convey something that the ruling class wants us to believe. It's supposed to be only 'natural' to have prejudices. The lie is that we're born with suspicions of anything that's different or unfamiliar.

In reality, while there have been periods when immigration has been actively encouraged by the capitalist state¹ – and even today the 'talented' or 'hard working' are still nominally welcome everywhere – the competition between national capitals in its current stage has prompted the capitalist class to step up the familiar campaigns against foreigners. Sometimes this takes the form of the immigration 'debate', sometimes blatant racism, and sometimes against the threat posed by other religions.

The arguments that point out the benefits of immigration are still made on the basis of the national economy. Immigrants are not a burden; they are of value to the capitalist economy.

Another aspect of the bourgeoisie's campaign is the trick of ethnicity. While denouncing the nationalism of the capitalist state and its supporters, there are those who encourage people to take refuge within ethnic groups. In practice, most national censuses have questions about ethnic background, showing an appreciation that, while people will not necessarily declare their loyalty to the capitalist state, they are often prepared to declare an identity that separates them from others.

Anti-racism is another phenomenon that the bourgeoisie uses against the development of class

1. For an in-depth article on many aspects of the question of immigration see 'Immigration and the workers' movement' at <http://en.internationalism.org/book/export/html/3448>



Labour and the trade unions are also xenophobic

consciousness. Anti-racism constantly calls on the state to curb racism, tackle racists, and uphold justice. Look at the protests in the US against the killing of black people by white cops. The call is always for justice. And yet the state remains the apparatus of the ruling capitalist class and it's only a united working class that can confront and destroy it.

A classic example of the reality of state anti-racism was the UK Labour government of the late 1960s. People familiar with the period think of Enoch Powell and his 1968 'rivers of blood' speech foreseeing future ethnic conflict. In reality the Labour government had come to power in 1964 with a manifesto commitment saying that "the number of immigrants entering the United Kingdom must be limited" – and showed what this meant in 1968 with draconian restrictions on Kenyan Asians fleeing persecution. Another commitment in the 1964 manifesto was to "legislate against racial discrimination and incitement in public places" which led to the 1965 Race Relations Act and the setting up of a Race Relations Board (subsequently the Commission for Racial Equality). The state could say that it was committed to dealing with racism, while at the same time practising racist policies against different groups of immigrants attempting to settle in the UK. The state could have its cake and eat it.

Morality of the working class

The idea that xenophobia is somehow natural goes against the actual experience of humanity. If you examine the tens of thousands of years of hunter-gatherer society before the advent of farming and social classes, it is clear that relations based on mutual solidarity were at the root of survival in primitive communist society. Furthermore, humanity would not have gone beyond the stage of the horde if particular communities had not developed 'exogamic' relations with other human groups.

But while a social instinct is at the heart of what makes us human, the fragmentation of humanity, the alienation, individualism and nationalism fed by the capitalist system have brought to the fore other aspects of the human personality. Marxists have rightly shown what capitalism is responsible for: a system of exploitation that has led to imperialist wars and genocide. But while we can show the revolts, rebellions and revolutions against capitalist class rule, we also have to recognise the weight of conformity, obedience and acceptance of capitalism and its ideologies. The propaganda campaigns around immigration do have an impact; people often do believe that there is a threat that must be confronted, and the 'foreigner' in our

Continued on page 7

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 stultified 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*.