



# world revolution

## The Trump election and the crumbling of the capitalist world order

What can the world expect from the new Trump Administration in the USA? Whereas the traditional political elites across the globe are full of anxiety, the Russian government and the right-wing populists in America and throughout Europe see history on their side. And while big world-wide operating companies (such as in the car industry) fear reprisals now if they do not produce in the United States, the stock exchanges and economic institutes were initially confident, expecting increased growth for the US and even the world economy under Trump. As for Mr. President himself,

he regularly contradicts not only his own new administration, but also himself. Thus NATO, free trade or the European Union can in one sentence be “essential” and in the next “obsolete”.

Instead of joining in with this crystal ball gazing about the near future of American state policy, we will try here first of all to analyse why Trump was elected president, although the traditional established political elites did not want him. Out of this contradiction between what Trump represents, and the interests of the US ruling class as a whole, we hope to win

firmer ground for giving some first indications of what can be expected from his presidency, without falling into too much speculation.

### The dilemma of the Republican Party

It is no secret that Donald Trump is looked on as a foreign body in the Republican Party which nominated him for election to the White House. He is neither religious nor conservative enough for the Christian fundamentalists who play such an important role in that party. His economic policy proposals, such as a state organised infrastructural programme, protectionism, or the replacement of

“Obamacare” by a state-backed social insurance for everyone – are anathema to the neo-liberals who still play a central role in Republican circles, as they do in the Democratic party. His plans for a rapprochement with Putin’s Russia pit him against the military and intelligence lobby which is so strong both in the Republican and Democratic parties.

The presidential candidature of Trump was made possible by an unprecedented revolt of the Republican membership and supporters against

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## Russia 1917 and the revolutionary memory of the working class



Delegates to the 4th Congress of Soviets, Venevsky district, April 12, 1918

For all those who still consider that mankind’s last best hope is the revolutionary overthrow of world capitalism, it is impossible to greet the beginning of the year 2017 without recalling that it is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian revolution. And we also know that all those who insist that there is no alternative to the present social system will recall it in their own way.

Many of them will ignore it of course, or downplay its significance by telling us that this is just ancient history. Everything has changed since then – and what is the point of talking about a

working class revolution when the working class no longer exists, or has been so degraded that the term ‘working class revolution’ can even be assimilated to protest votes in favour of Brexit or Trump in old industrial centres decimated by globalisation?

Or if the upheaval which shook the world in 1917 is brought to mind, in the majority of cases it is painted as a kind of horror story, but one with a very definite ‘moral’: behold, this is what happens when you challenge the present system, if you fall for the delusion that a higher form of social life is

possible. You get something much worse. You get terror, Gulags, the omnipresent totalitarian state. It began with Lenin and his fanatical band of Bolsheviks whose coup d’Etat in October 1917 killed off Russia’s fledgling democracy, and it ended up with Stalin, with the whole of society transformed into a forced labour camp. And then it all collapsed, which demonstrated once and for all that it is impossible to organise modern society other than by the methods of capitalism.

We are under no illusion that, in 2017, explaining what the Russian revolution really meant is going to be easy. This is a period of extreme difficulty for the working class and its small revolutionary minorities, a period which is dominated by feelings of hopelessness and loss of any perspective for the future, by the sinister growth of nationalism and racism which serves to divide the working class against itself, by the hate-filled demagoguery of the populists on the right, and on the left by clamorous appeals to defend ‘democracy’ against this new authoritarianism.

But this is also a moment for us to recall the work of our political ancestors, the left communist fractions who survived the terrible defeats of the revolutionary movements sparked off by the events in Russia 1917 and tried to make sense of the resulting degeneration and demise of the very communist parties which had been formed to lead the way to revolution. Resisting both the open terror of the counter-revolution in its Stalinist and fascist forms, and the more veiled deceptions of democracy, the most lucid left communist currents, such as those grouped around the reviews

*Bilan* in the 1930s and *Internationalisme* in the 40s, began the enormous task of drawing the ‘balance sheet’ of the revolution. First and foremost, against all its denigrators, they reaffirmed what had been essential and positive about the Russian revolution. In particular, they insisted

- That the “Russian” revolution only had a meaning as the first victory of the world revolution, and that its only hope had been the extension of proletarian power to the rest of the globe;
- That it had confirmed the capacity of the working class to dismantle the bourgeois state and create new organs of political power (most notably the soviets or councils of workers’ delegates);
- That it demonstrated the necessity for a revolutionary political organisation defending the

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# We, Daniel Blake

Ken Loach’s latest film, *I, Daniel Blake*, has already generated a lot of ink. First because it is the work of a very expressive film-maker who is well-versed in criticising the capitalist world. Second, because the film won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes film festival, to widespread surprise. Since then there have been numerous articles in the press, praising or attacking the film, seeing it either as a real social thermometer or as an alarmist tear-jerker.

We don’t intend to portray Ken Loach as a new Eisenstein<sup>1</sup>, or his film as a new equivalent to the Communist Manifesto, or to see it as a sentimentalist apology for the British Labour Party, as one or two reviewers have claimed. Even though Loach denounces the “conscious cruelty” of David Cameron and has all kinds of illusions in the new Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, none of this really effects the quality of the film: it sometimes happens that a work of art escapes its author and takes on a life of its own.

In this film, Loach inveighs against the destruction of whole sectors of the economy and sides with the unemployed who are told to go out looking for non-existent jobs. This reality of de-industrialisation and this approach by the state are certainly realities. Ken Loach has the merit of showing this while going beyond observing how miserable everything is, pushing his audience towards a real indignation against the current state of affairs. He has the rather rare quality of providing a lucid and dynamic image of the consequences of the capitalist crisis in Britain – consequences which can easily be transposed elsewhere – and of exposing the totalitarian face of the state through its practice of social exclusion, repression, and dehumanisation.

All the passages in the film showing the “treatment”, via the telephone, of the unemployed by “healthcare professionals” who are made to function as the guard-dogs of the system, would be laughable if they were not so realistic. This facet of the democratic state – in fact its dictatorship – is no fiction: the capitalist system, its democratic institutions, including those which are supposed to

1. Eisenstein was a Russian film-maker of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who has had a major influence in the history of cinema. His work was able to give form to the tide of revolution after 1917, although his compromises with Stalinism later made him a pioneer of cinema as propaganda.

support or protect vulnerable, elderly, sick or unemployed people, function like a juggernaut and like tools of exclusion. Trying to get the minimum needed to live on becomes a real battle where you pay heavily for the least slip in writing, the slightest sign of the “wrong” attitude, and often end up starving. Daniel’s partner Katie is more or less cornered when she falls hungrily on a tin of beans after going with him to a food bank.

But what’s really at stake in this “social” movie, as with all the others, is whether it can envisage a perspective of resistance, of struggle against the crisis and the capitalist Moloch. Is such a struggle possible? Who could lead it? It’s on this level that you have to judge the real qualities of this kind of film and few are up to it. Most remain at the stage of merely recognising powerlessness or retreating into ethereal ideals.

On the first question, Ken Loach’s film expresses all the difficulties of the working class to fight back and confront the state. Today, most attempts to resist, to keep your head above water, are limited to the level of the individual or to narrow networks of mutual aid. The title of the film, *I, Daniel Blake*, is a clue in itself: individual self-assertion as the only possibility.

Here we are very far indeed from a collective, offensive class solidarity, which is a real weapon in the struggle and in developing a long-term perspective of going beyond capitalist society. This is not in the frame of the film and none of its characters gives any sign of raising it. The only situation where we catch a glimpse of something more collective is when Daniel reacts by daubing graffiti on the walls of the job centre. Enthusiastic reactions and applause from passers-by: they understand his action and perhaps live in the same situation, but at no point do they express solidarity by coming to talk to him or opposing the cops who come to arrest him. They are no more than impotent spectators. Only one individual reacts more openly: a homeless person, who you imagine to be marginalised, probably alcoholic – a whole symbol of powerlessness.

But the film does have some small, limited moments, where we see human reactions, people listening to each other, helping each other, taking pleasure in sharing. Between Daniel and Katie, her children, with a former work-mate, a neighbour, an employee at the job centre who really wants to help but whose initiatives come to nothing



ing – all this is a source of humanity, even if none of them can see how to go any further.

Clearly, behind the immediate incapacity to change anything, we feel that there are sparks of life, possibilities that contain the basis of really human social relations. This is not at all like the film by Stéphane Brizé, *La loi du marché*, where behind the same observation of social problems and the reality of unemployment the most awful nihilism is advertised, without a trace of hope, without any perspective, a totally static vision of society, which can give rise to nothing but “no future”, to death<sup>2</sup>.

Another aspect emerges very strongly from this film: the dignity of the characters, their sense of self-worth. This is definitely one of the qualities of the film. The key to any proletarian’s self-worth is to hold on to moral values, to defend their dignity whatever the circumstances. The defence of this proletarian morality is what reveals the possibility of a future in which humanity can go beyond barbarism, beyond each-against-all. Daniel Blake expresses this when he discovers that Katie has had to resort to prostitution to avoid dying of hunger. This devastates him more than anything, even more than his own drama. Dignity again when Daniel insists that “*When you lose your self-respect you’re done for*”.

But this proletarian dignity is also contradicted

2. See our article (in French) “A propos du film *La loi du marché*: une dénonciation sans réelle alternative” <https://fr.internationalism.org/icconline/201506/9226/a-propos-du-film-loi-du-marche-denonciation-sans-reelle-alternative>

by the words attributed to him and read out at his funeral:

“*My name is Daniel Blake, I am a man, not a dog...I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more, nothing less*”. Daniel sees himself as a citizen rather than a proletarian. But to be a citizen means belonging to a nation, not a social class. The difference is fundamental, above all for the proletarians. It’s always in the name of citizenship or the defence of democracy, or the Republic, that the ruling ideology tries to mobilise us for the interests of our exploiters. This can only be the logic of the bourgeoisie. The defence of citizenship is not the logic of the proletariat. It leads to competition and division and the perpetuation of the capitalist world.

As Daniel Blake expresses it, his situation is shared by millions of exploited proletarians, thrown into precariousness, excluded by the capitalist system. Whether it’s in Britain, France, China or anywhere else, the same capitalist laws of wage labour exert their violence on us. Even when it wears a democratic mask, capital divides us, grinds us down, kills us.

Real class solidarity, which is a necessity for the future of humanity, must above all be expressed by struggle: a conscious, collective struggle which goes beyond frontiers. The phrase from the Communist Manifesto, “the workers have no country” is no dream. It’s the key to transforming the world. **Stopio, 15.12.16**

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## Russia 1917 and the revolutionary memory of the working class

principles of internationalism and working class autonomy.

At the same time, the revolutionaries of the 1930s and 40s also began the painful analysis of the costly errors made by the Bolsheviks in the teeth of an unprecedented situation for any workers’ party, in particular:

- The growing tendency for the party to substitute itself for the soviets, and the fusion of the party with the post-October state, which undermined not only the power of the soviets but also the capacity of the party to defend the class interests of the workers, even in opposition to the new state;
- The recourse to the ‘Red Terror’ in response to the White Terror of the counter-revolution – a process which led to the Bolsheviks implicating themselves in the suppression of proletarian movements and organisations
- The tendency to see state capitalism as a transitional stage towards socialism, and even as being identical with it.

The ICC, from its inception, has attempted to carry on with this work of drawing the lessons of the Russian revolution and the international revolutionary wave of 1917-23. We have over the years developed quite a library of articles and pamphlets dealing with this absolutely vital era in the history of our class. In the coming year, and beyond, we will be making sure that these texts are more accessible to our readers, by compiling

an updated dossier of our most important articles on the Russian revolution and the international revolutionary wave. Each month or so we will headline articles which most directly correspond either to the chronological development of the revolutionary process or which contain responses to the most important questions posed by the attacks of bourgeois propaganda or by discussions in and around the proletarian political milieu. So this month we will be ‘promoting’ to the front page of our website an article on the February revolution first written in 1997. It will be followed by articles on Lenin’s April Theses, the July days, the October insurrection, and so on; and we intend to keep this process going over a long period, precisely because the drama of the revolution and counter-revolution lasted for a number of years and was by no means limited to Russia, but had its echoes all across the globe, from Berlin to Shanghai, from Turin to Patagonia, and from the Clydeside to Seattle.

At the same time, we will be seeking to add to this collection with new articles which deal with issues that we have not yet examined in depth (such as the onslaught against the revolution by the ruling class at the time, the problem of ‘Red Terror’, and so on); articles which respond to the current campaigns of capitalism aimed against the revolutionary memory of the working class; and articles which will look at the conditions for the

proletarian revolution today – at what they have in common with the time of the Russian revolution, but also and above all at what significant changes have intervened over the past 100 years.

The aim of this publishing venture is not simply to “celebrate” or “commemorate” long-past historical events. It is to defend the view that the proletarian revolution is even more of a necessity today than it was in 1917. Faced with the horrors of the first imperialist world war, the revolutionaries of the time concluded that capitalism had entered its epoch of decline, posing humanity with the alternative between socialism and barbarism; and the even greater horrors – symbolised in place-names like Auschwitz and Hiroshima – that followed the defeat of the first attempts to make the socialist revolution starkly confirmed their diagnosis. A century later, capitalism’s continued existence poses a mortal threat to the very survival of humanity.

Writing from her prison cell in 1918, and on the eve of the revolution in Germany, Rosa Luxemburg expressed her fundamental solidarity with the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party, despite all her very serious criticisms of the errors of the Bolsheviks, in particular the policy of the Red Terror. Her words are as relevant to our own future as they were to the future she herself confronted:

“*What is in order is to distinguish the essential*

*from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescences in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten: ‘I have dared!’*”

*This is the essential and enduring in Bolshevik policy. In this sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labour in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in this sense, the future everywhere belongs to ‘Bolshevism’.*”<sup>1</sup> ICC

1 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch08.htm>



# British capitalism struggling to limit the damage

After replacing David Cameron as British Prime Minister Theresa May said “Brexit means Brexit”. She repeated this mantra, with variations, for many subsequent months. This didn’t help any understanding of what direction British government policy would go. It mostly contributed to the multiplication of uncertainties.

The ruling class in Britain was not prepared for the Brexit result. That there was no plan in place has become evident in the subsequent months. The Cameron government had no measures prepared. Those who campaigned to Leave the EU have gone back on slogans such as ‘£350 million a week to be spent on the NHS’ but not suggested anything in their place. The British bourgeoisie had partly lost control of its political apparatus and was looking for strategies to limit the damage to the economy, to stabilise a situation in which, especially after the advent of President Trump in the USA, instability and uncertainty are rapidly spreading.

**May’s “brighter future”**

The government’s February 2017 White Paper spends nearly 25,000 words trying to resolve a raft of contradictions. In a speech in January Theresa May said that the *“British people ... voted to shape a brighter future”*. The White Paper aims at paving the way for a *“smooth, mutually beneficial exit”* and wants to *“avoid a disruptive cliff-edge.”* Whether this future will be ‘brighter’ remains to be seen.

You can read that *“We will not be seeking membership of the Single Market, but will pursue instead a new strategic partnership with the EU, including an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and a new customs agreement.”* So, the UK is going to leave the Single Market and then come to some arrangement with the 27 remaining countries. To leave the EU there need only be the agreement of 20 of the remaining countries, whereas a trade deal may need the backing of all the remaining 27 EU states. With trade, the government thinks that *“An international rules based system is crucial for underpinning free trade and to ward off protectionism.”* At a time when the US under President Trump seems to be going in a protectionist direction, putting America First, and renegotiating trade deals, this is not a welcome prospect for British capitalism as the US is the UK’s single biggest export market on a country-by-country basis. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has suggested that, while the UK’s contributions to the EU budget will cease, the loss of trade will have a much bigger impact on the British economy.

May proposes an alternative to the Single Market *“If we were excluded from accessing the single market – we would be free to change the basis of Britain’s economic model.”* Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, speaking to *Welt am Sonntag* (15/1/17) said *“If we have no access to the European market, if we are closed off, if Britain were to leave the European Union without an agreement on market access, then we could suffer from economic damage at least in the short-term. In this case, we could be forced to change our economic model and we will have to change our model to regain competitiveness. And you can be sure we will do whatever we have to do.”* The proposal to do *“something different”* has been greeted with much speculation. Will the UK become a tax haven? Will it get stuck into a trade and tariff war? There are only so many options, one of which is certainly not Britain undergoing a revival of manufacture on any significant scale, despite vague promises in this direction.

One reason that British access to the single market seems impossible to many commentators is that it would involve a commitment to freedom of movement for EU citizens. May has said *“We want to guarantee the rights of EU citizens who are already living in Britain”*, but at the same time her government is prepared to use these nearly 3 million people as bargaining chips. Liam Fox was reported as describing EU nationals in the UK as one of the *“main cards”* in Brexit negotiations. A leaked document from the European parliament’s legal affairs committee said there could be an EU backlash against this.

The contradictions in the British government’s position reflect the position that British capitalism is stuck in. *“We will take back control of our laws”*, says May, but, at the same time, *“as we translate the body of European law into our domestic regulations, we will ensure that workers’ rights are fully protected”*. The goal is to have everything ‘beneficial’ about the EU, plus every advantage of ‘independence’. The British bourgeoisie will employ any and every manoeuvre it can. It will blame the EU for every difficulty. But it’s not starting from a position of strength.

**Adapting to crisis**

The British bourgeoisie has historically been noted for the ability of its political apparatus to act in defence of the interests of the national capital. The result of the referendum showed a growing loss of cohesion within the ruling class, but it also showed the capacity of the British ruling class to adapt to its difficulties. This was demonstrated after the referendum when May was quite evidently ‘selected’ as Tory leader to resolve a temporary government crisis. Similarly, subsequent legal and parliamentary battles, and the role of the media, have to be seen in this context. The case brought against the government, to stop it acting on its own and insisting on a role for parliament, produced a wave of populist media rage against the judges of the Court of Appeal: the *Daily Mail* branding them as *“Enemies of the People”*, while the liberal media defended the ‘independence of the judiciary’.

But what was being touted as a ‘constitutional crisis’ soon subsided. When the government’s appeal to the Supreme Court was also dismissed there was far less hysteria. The House of Commons performed its duty and rubber stamped the proposals of the executive, despite the majority of MPs having been in favour of remaining in the EU. The Labour Party was particularly helpful. Jeremy Corbyn imposed a three-line whip on MPs to ensure they supported the latter stages of Brexit legislation. Corbyn was loyally supported by the Trotskyists of *Socialist Worker* (9/2/17) *“He had rightly insisted that Labour MPs vote for a bill that would begin the process of leaving the European Union”*. For all Corbyn’s attempts to pose as a ‘radical’ he remains a very conventional participant in the battles over Brexit, as he said in a speech on 10 January 2017. *“Labour is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle”*. Labour principles start from the defence of British capital and the manoeuvres of bourgeois democracy.

Elsewhere in parliament, a government source said *“If the Lords don’t want to face an overwhelming public call to be abolished they must get on and protect democracy and pass this bill”*. Brexit Secretary David Davis called on peers to *“do their patriotic duty”*. Threats to the House of Lords from the Conservative party are intriguing evidence of the divisions within the bourgeoisie, even though at a deeper level they are united as parts of one state capitalist class

**Britain’s imperialist options are narrowing**

Despite all the declarations of ‘freedom for the UK’, in January 2017 the reality of British imperialism’s position was seen in May’s visit to the US and Turkey. With Trump, she held hands, and clearly grasped at any straws available. The so-called ‘special relationship’ has always been one-sidedly weighted to the US’s benefit and there seems little prospect that the imbalance will be modified in the foreseeable future. In Turkey May *“issued a stern warning to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan about respecting human rights yesterday as she prepared to sign a £100m fighter jet deal that Downing Street hopes will lead to Britain becoming Turkey’s main defence partner”* (*Guardian* 28/1/17).

This is the current international face of the British bourgeoisie. Unsure of prospects outside the EU, desperate for any crumbs from American imperialism, uncertain about the prospects for its financial sector, but at least able to rely on arms sales to a country in conflict. A leaked government document showed the industries that are

set to be prioritised by the government during Brexit talks. High priorities included aerospace, air transport, gas markets, financial services, land transport (excluding rail), insurance, and banking and market infrastructure. Low priorities included steel construction, oil and gas, telecoms, post, environmental services, water, medical, and education. Behind the scenes decisions are being made as to which sectors might survive, or can be sacrificed, and which need more serious backing.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker (*Telegraph* 11/2/17) doesn’t underestimate the abilities of the British bourgeoisie to intrigue and conspire, *“the Brits will manage without big effort to divide the remaining 27 member states”*. And the British government does have a fall-back position as, in May’s words *“no deal for Britain is better than a bad deal for Britain”*. That is the ‘hard Brexit’ position that the British bourgeoisie appears to be rallying round. The ruthlessness of the British bourgeoisie hasn’t vanished, but its ability to function cohesively in a period of growing decomposition has declined.

The problems faced by the working class in Britain echo those faced internationally. In 1989 the momentous transitions in the regimes of eastern Europe were accomplished with the working class just a spectator, not playing any independent role. In the last couple of years, we have seen the spread of terrorism to the streets of western Europe, the EU Referendum, the election of Trump, and the resurgence of Marine Le Pen’s Front National. Again, for all the talk about the tremendous changes that are taking place, and the discontent of the people up against the elites, the working class has not been an active factor in the situation. The bourgeoisie will try and use the decomposition of its system against the working class, whether promoting the populist option or ‘anti-populist’ battles and campaigns. But whereas the bourgeoisie is defending a society in decline, the working class has the capacity to create new social relations based on solidarity rather than exploitation and nihilism. **Car 15/2/17**

**ICC online**

**Migrants and refugees: victims of capitalist decline, Part 4: from the collapse of the Berlin Wall to the new walls around Europe and the US**

**Spain: the Indignados movement five years on**

**President Trump: symbol of a dying social system**

**Trump v. Clinton: nothing but bad choices for the bourgeoisie and for the proletariat**

**On the trade unions: a reply to Mhou**

Some of our recent articles have given rise to discussion on our web forum:  
**February 1917: The workers’ councils open the way to the proletarian revolution**  
*“... I don’t understand the ICC’s position really. Soviets themselves were the state...”*  
*“It’s not possible to say with any precision what form the future Commune state will take, but we can draw certain lessons from the Russian revolution: ...*  
*- necessity for the direct organs of the class to maintain their independence from - and control over - statist organs. So even if it was necessary to form a Red Army in the civil war period, it was an error to dissolve the workers’ militias into it. It was an even greater error that the Cheka almost immediately escaped the control of the councils*  
*- necessity for the workers’ councils to retain independence from the councils dominated by other strata...”* And see pictures of soviets in 1917-18 on this thread, and interesting discussions on other threads as well.

# The working class needs to rediscover its own voice

Today everyone wants to talk about the working class. At the last UK general election Cameron claimed to speak in the name of “hard working people” and Theresa May has gone one better in wanting to represent the working class, while UKIP claims to be able to speak for – and take the votes of – the workers who have become disillusioned with the Labour Party which imposed austerity on them for the 13 years of the Blair and Brown governments.

But when workers struggle for their own interests it is a different story: Mrs May’s spokesperson condemned the strikes called in December as “completely unacceptable” and showing a “shared contempt” for ordinary people.

Although strike days are at a historic low at present, the disputes going on this winter involve many of the concerns all workers face, especially when they are an average of £20 a week worse off than before the financial crash. To take some examples: BA cabin crew taken on since 2010, in the “mixed fleet branch” with worse pay and conditions, have rejected a derisory 2% pay offer and are concerned about cuts in training courses; workers at Crown post offices are concerned about job security, due to closure of offices, as well as pension changes; tube workers also concerned about jobs with closure of ticket offices, as well as bullying management; rail workers are concerned about safety on trains, as well as jobs for guards. These disputes illustrate the fact that what members of the working class sell to the capitalist, their labour power, is not simply a commodity like any other sold at around the minimum cost of production. If supply outstrips demand it results in the suffering of unemployment. And the cost of labour power, the wage or salary, has a cultural and moral component according to what is considered an acceptable standard of living, and according to what the workers can win by struggling. While there is a working class there will be class struggle.

**Trade unions are not the voice of the working class**

Does this mean that the trade unions, which after all are negotiating these disputes, speak for the working class? Not at all. If we take the example of the strikes on Southern Rail over driver operated trains, an issue of safety that affects drivers, guards and passengers, we can see that the unions are not working according to the principles of solidarity that underpin all workers’ struggles. Not only have ASLEF and the RMT kept the drivers and guards separate, when they both face the same issue, but ASLEF, the TUC and Southern Rail cooked up a deal for drivers that would isolate and undermine the guards’ struggle, and actively oppose any tendencies for solidarity. They are acting according to the principles of insurance – pay your dues to ASLEF and we will provide certain benefits – in opposition to the working class principle of solidarity. The vote to reject the deal shows that this principle remains alive in the working class.

At this time it is certainly very difficult to grasp the nature of the working class and its struggle, and the revolutionary potential it carries within it. Not only are the unions able to reduce almost every struggle to a question of their negotiation, over the heads of the workers; not only is almost every politician claiming to defend capitalism and nationalism in the name of the working class; but this comes more than a quarter of a century after 1989 when the fall of the Soviet Union was used for a barrage of propaganda purporting to show that there is no possibility of any better society than capitalism, as the Stalinist counter-revolution performed one last service for capital through its collapse. Nevertheless proletarian struggle still contains the revolutionary perspective it showed 100 years ago in the Russian revolution. The solidarity necessary for any struggle is a small indication of this, contradicting the capitalist principle of “every man for himself”. **Alex 17.2.17**



# The Trump election and the crumbling of the capitalist world order

their leaders. The other candidates, whether they came from the Bush clan, the Christian evangelists, the neo-libs or the Tea Party movement, had all been discredited by their participation in or support for the George W Bush administration which preceded that of Obama. The fact that, in the face of the economic and financial crisis of 2007/08, a Republican president had done nothing to help millions of small property owners and aspiring small property owners – who in many cases lost job, home and savings at one go – while bailing out banks with government money, was unforgivable to traditional Republican voters. Moreover, none of the other candidates had anything else to propose, at the economic level, than more of the same of what had not prevented the 2008 disaster. Indeed, the rebellion of the traditional Republican voters directed itself not only against their leadership, but against some of the traditional “values” of the party. In this way, the candidature of Trump was not only made possible, it was virtually imposed on the party leadership. Of course, the latter could have prevented it – but only at the risk of estranging themselves from their mass basis and even of dividing the party. This explains why the attempts to foil Trump were but half-hearted and ineffective. In the end the “Grand Old Party” was obliged to try and make a “deal” with the intruder from the East Coast.

**The dilemma of the Democratic Party**

A similar revolt took place within the Democratic Party. After eight years of Obama, belief in the famous “yes we can” (“yes we can” improve the lives of the population at large) had seriously waned. The leader of this rebellion was Bernie Sanders, the self-proclaimed “socialist”. Like Trump on the Republican side, Sanders was a new phenomenon in the modern history of the Democrats. Not that “socialists” as such are a foreign body within that party. But they belong to it as one minority among many, who underline the claim to multi-cultural plurality within that party. They are considered a foreign element when they stake a claim for candidature to the Oval Office. Whether under Bill Clinton or Barak Obama, contemporary Democratic presidents combine a social welfare touch with fundamentally neo-liberal economic policies. A direct interventionist state economic policy of a strong “Keynesian” character (such as that of FD Roosevelt before and during World War II) is as much anathema to the Democratic as to the Republican leadership today. This explains why Sanders never made a secret of the fact that on some issues his policies are closer to those of Trump than they are to those of Hillary Clinton. After the Trump election, Sanders immediately offered him his support in the implementation of his “insurance for all” scheme.

However, as opposed to what happened to the Republicans, the revolt in the Democratic Party was successfully crushed, and Clinton safely nominated instead of Sanders. This succeeded, not only because the DP is the better organised and controlled of the two parties, but also because the elite of this party had been less discredited than its Republican counterpart.

But paradoxically, this success of the party leadership only paved the way for its defeat at the presidential elections. By eliminating Sanders, the Democrats set aside the only candidate who had a good chance of defeating Trump. The DP realised too late that Trump would be the adversary, and that they were underestimating his electoral potential. They also underestimated the degree to which Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. This was above all due to her image as representative of “Wall Street”, of the “East Coast financial oligarchies” - popularly seen as a major “culprit” and at the same time major beneficiary of the financial crisis. In fact, she had become almost as much identified with the catastrophe of 2008 as the Republican leadership itself. The arrogant complacency of the Democratic elite and their blindness towards mounting popular fury and resentment was to characterise the whole of Clinton’s electoral campaign. One example of this was her one-sided reliance on the more traditional mass media, whereas Trump’s campaign team was using the possibilities of the new media to the hilt.

Because they did not want Sanders, they got Trump instead. Even for those within the US bourgeoisie with a strong dislike for a phase of neo-Keynesian economic experimentation, Sanders would undoubtedly have been the lesser evil. Sanders, not unlike Trump, wanted to slow down the process of what is called “globalisation”. But he would have done so moderately and with a much greater sense of responsibility. With Trump, the ruling class of the world’s leading power can not even be sure what it is getting.

**The dilemma of the established political parties**

The United States is a country founded by settlers and populated by waves of immigration. The integration of the different ethnic and religious groups and interests into a single nation is the historically evolving task of the existing constitutional and political system. A particular challenge for this system is the involvement of the leaders of the different immigrant communities in government, since each new immigrant wave begins at the bottom of the social ladder and has to “work its way up”. The alleged American melting pot is in reality a highly complicated system of (not always) peaceful co-existence between different groups.

Historically, alongside institutions such as the religious organisations, the formation of criminal organisations has been a proven means for excluded groups to gain access to power. The American bourgeoisie has a long experience with the integration of the best rackets from the underworld into the upper echelons. This is an oft-repeated family saga: the father a gangster, the son a lawyer or a politician, the grandson or granddaughter a philanthropist and patron of the arts. The advantage of this system was that the violence it relied on was not overtly political. This made them compatible with the existing two party state system. To which side the Italian, Irish or Jewish vote went depended on the given constellation and what Trump would call the “deals” Republicans and Democrats were offering the different communities and vested interests. In America, these constellations between communities constantly have to be dealt with, not only those between different industries or branches of the economy for instance.

But this essentially non-party political integration process, compatible with the stability of the party apparatus, began to fail for the first time in the face of the demands of the black Americans. The latter had come to America originally, not as settlers, but as slaves. They had from the onset to bear the full brunt of modern capitalist racism. To gain access to bourgeois equality before the law, and to power and privileges for a black elite, overtly political movements had to be created. Without Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights Movement, but also a violence of a new kind – the riots in the black ghettos in the 1960s and the Black Panthers – there could not have been the Obama presidency. The established ruling elite succeeded in meeting this challenge by attaching the Civil Rights Movement to the Democratic Party. But in this manner, the existing distinction between the different ethnic groups and the political parties was put in question. The black vote goes regularly to the Democratic Party. At first, the Republicans were able to develop a counterweight to this by gaining a more or less stable part of the Latino vote (first and foremost the Cuban exile community). As for the “white” vote, that continued to go to one side or other depending on what was on offer.

Until the 2016 elections. One of the factors which brought Trump into the White House was the electoral alliance he made with different groups of “white supremacists”. Unlike the old-style racism of the Klu Klux Klan with its nostalgia for the slave system which reigned in the southern states until the American Civil War, the hatred of these new currents directs itself against the urban and rural black but also Latino poor, condemned as criminals and social parasites. Although Trump himself may not be a racist of this type, these modern white supremacists created a kind of voting bloc in his favour. For the first time, millions of white voters cast their vote, not according to the recommendation of “their” different communities, and not for one or the other party, but for someone

they saw as the representative of a larger “white” community. The underlying process is one of increasing “communitarisation” of American bourgeois politics. A further step in the segregation of the so-called melting pot.

**The dilemma of the American ruling class and Trump’s “Make America Great Again”**

The problem of all the Republican candidates who tried to oppose Trump, and then of Hillary Clinton, was not only that they were not convincing, but also that they did seem convinced themselves. All they could propose were different varieties of “business as usual”. Above all, they had no alternatives to Trump’s “making America great again”. Behind this slogan there is not just a new version of the old nationalism. Trump’s Americanism is of a new kind. It contains the clear admission that America is no longer as “great” as it used to be. Economically it has been unable to prevent the rise of China. Militarily it has suffered a series of more or less humiliating reversals: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria. America is a power in decline, even if it remains economically and above all militarily and technologically by far the leading country. But not only this. America is not an exception in an otherwise flourishing world. Its decline has come to symbolise that of capitalism as a whole. The vacuum created by the absence of any alternatives coming from the established elites has helped to give Trump his chance.

Not that America has not already attempted to react in the face of its historical decline. Some of the changes announced by Trump already began beforehand, in particular under Obama. They include a greater priority for the Pacific zone, economically and above all militarily, so that the European NATO “partners” are asked to bear a heavier brunt than before; or at the economic level a more state-directed economic policy in dealing with the 2008 crisis and its aftermath. But this can only slow down the present decline, whereas Trump claims to be able to reverse it.

In the face of this decline, and also of growing class, racial, religious and ethnic divisions, Trump wants to unite the capitalist nation behind its ruling class in the name of a new Americanism. The United States, according to Trump, has become the main victim of the rest of the world. He claims that, while the US has been exhausting itself and its resources maintaining world order, all the rest have been profiting from this order at the expense of “God’s own country”. The Trumpistas are thinking here not only of the Europeans or the East Asians who have been flooding the American market with their products. One of the main “exploiters” of the United States, according to Trump, is Mexico, which he accuses of exporting its surplus population into the American social welfare system, while at the same time developing its own industry to such an extent that its automobile production is overtaking that of its northern neighbour.

This amounts to a new and virulent form of nationalism, reminiscent of “underdog” German nationalism after World War I and the Treaty of Versailles. The orientation of this form of nationalism is no longer to justify the imposing of a world order by America. Its orientation is to itself put in question the existing world order.

**Trump’s Russian roulette**

But the question the world is asking itself is whether Trump has a real political offer in response to America’s decline. If not, if his alternative is purely ideological, he is not likely to last for very long. Certainly Trump has no coherent programme for his national capital. Nobody is clearer about this than Trump himself. His policy, he repeatedly declares, is to make “great deals” for America (and for himself) whenever the opportunity presents itself. The new programme for American capital is, it would seem, Trump himself: a risk-loving, several times bankrupt businessman as head of state.

But this does not necessarily mean that Trump has no chance of at least slowing down the decline of America. He MIGHT at least partly succeed – but only if he is lucky. Here we are approaching the crux of Trumpism. The new president, who

wants to run the world’s leading state as if it were a capitalist enterprise, is ready, in the pursuit of his goals, to take incalculable risks – risks which no “conventional” bourgeois politician in his position would want to take. If they work, they can turn out to be to the benefit of American capitalism at the expense of its rivals, but without too much damage to the system as a whole. But if they go wrong, the consequences can be catastrophic for American and for world capitalism.

We can already give three examples of the kind of Va Banque policies Trump wants to launch into. One of them is his protectionist blackmailing policy. His goal is not to put an end to the present world economic order (“globalisation”) but to get a better deal for America within that order. The USA is the only country whose internal market is so big that it can threaten its rivals with protectionist measures on such a scale. The summit of the rationality of the policy of Trump is his calculation that the political leaders of his main rivals are less crazy than he is, i.e. that they will not risk a protectionist trade war. But should his measures unleash a chain reaction that gets out of control, the result can be a fragmentation of the world market comparable to what happened during the Great Depression.

The second example is NATO. Already the Obama administration had begun to pressure the European “partners” to bear a greater brunt of the alliance in Europe and beyond. The difference now is that Trump is ready to threaten the discarding or side-lining of NATO if Washington’s will is not followed. Here again, Trump is playing with fire, since NATO is first and foremost an instrument to secure the presence of US imperialism in Europe.

Our last example here is Trump’s project of a “great deal” with Putin’s Russia. One of the main problems of the Russian economy today is that it has not really completed the transformation from a Stalinist command regime to a properly functioning capitalist order. This transformation was, during a first phase, hampered by the priority of the Putin regime of preventing strategically important raw materials or the armaments industry being bought up by foreign capital. The necessary process of privatisation was done half-heartedly, so that a large part of Russian industry still functions on the basis of an administrative allocation of resources. During a second phase, the plan of Putin was to tackle the privatisation and modernisation of the economy in collaboration with the European bourgeoisie, first and foremost with Germany. But this plan was successfully foiled by Washington, essentially through its policy of economic sanctions against Russia. Although the occasion of these sanctions was Moscow’s annexation policy towards the Ukraine, it additionally aimed at preventing a strengthening of the economies both of Russia and of Germany.

But this success – perhaps the main achievement of the Obama presidency towards Europe – has negative consequences for the world economy as a whole. The establishment of more classical private property in Russia would create a cluster of new credit-worthy economic players who can vouch for the loans they take with land, raw materials etc. In view of the economic difficulties of the world economy today, where even in China growth is slowing down, can capitalism afford to renounce such “deals”?

No, according to Trump. His idea is that not Germany and Europe, but America itself should become Putin’s “partner in transformation”. According to Trump (who of course also hopes for lucrative deals for himself), the Russian bourgeoisie, which is obviously unable to tackle its modernisation on its own, can choose between three possible partners, the third being the Chinese. Since the latter are the biggest threat to America, it is vital that Washington and not Peking assume this role.

However, none of Trump’s projects have provoked such bitter resistance within the US ruling class as this one. The whole phase between the election of Trump and his arrival in office was dominated by the joint attempts of the “intelligence community”, the mainstream media and the Obama administration to sabotage the envisaged rapprochement with Moscow. Here they all think



## Continued from page 4

that the risks Trump wants to take are too high. Even if it is true that the main challenger today is China, a modernised Russia would constitute a considerable additional danger to the USA. After all, Russia is (also) a European power, and Europe still the heart of the world economy. And Russia still has the second largest nuclear arsenal after the US. Another possible problem is that, if the economic sanctions against Russia were lifted, the sphinx in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin, is considered perfectly capable of outwitting Trump by re-introducing the Europeans into his plans (in order to limit his dependence on America). The French bourgeoisie, for instance, is already getting ready for this eventuality: two of the main candidates for the coming presidential elections there (Fillon and Le Pen) have made no secret of their sympathies for Russia.

For the moment, the outcome of this latter conflict within the American bourgeoisie remains open. Meanwhile, Trump's argument remains one-sidedly economic (although it is not at all excluded that he can extend his adventurism to a policy of military provocation against Peking). But what is true is that an effective long term response to the Chinese challenge must have a strong economic component, and cannot take place solely at the military level. There are two areas in particular where the US economy has to bear a much heavier burden than China does, and which Trump would have to try to "rationalise". One of them is the enormous military budget. Concerning this aspect, the policy towards Russia also has an ideological dimension, since, in recent years, the idea that Putin wants to re-establish the Soviet Union has been one of the main justifications given for the persistence of astronomic "defence" spending.

The other budget Trump wants to significantly reduce is the social welfare budget. Here, in attacking the working class, he can however count on the support of the ruling class as a whole.

### Trump's promise of violence

Alongside an attitude of irresponsible adventurism, the other major feature of Trumpism is the threat of violence. One of his specialities is to threaten internationally operating companies with reprisals if they do not do what he wants. What he wants, he says, are "jobs for American workers". His way of harassing big business by tweet is also aimed at impressing all those who live in constant fear because their existences depend on the whims of such giant companies. These workers are invited to identify with his strength, which is allegedly at their service because they are good obedient honest Americans who want to work hard for their country.

During his electoral campaign, Trump told his challenger Hillary Clinton he wanted to "lock her up". Later he declared we would show clemency towards her – as if the question of when other politicians land in prison depended on his own personal whims. No such clemency is foreseen for illegal immigrants. Already Obama deported more of them than any American president before him. Trump wants to jail them for two years before evicting them. The promise of bloodshed is the aura through which he attracts the growing multitude of those in this society who are unable to defend themselves but who thirst for revenge. People who come to his meetings to protest he has beaten up under the eyes of the TV nation. Women, outsiders, so-called misfits are made to understand that they should count themselves lucky if it is only his verbal violence they are exposed to. Not only does he want to have a wall built to keep the Mexicans out – he promises to make them pay for it themselves. To exclusion is added humiliation.

These threats have obviously been a calculated part of Trump's demagogic election campaign, but on assuming office he lost no time pushing through a number of 'executi

ve orders' aimed at proving that he, unlike other politicians, is going to do what he says. The most spectacular expression of this - one which has caused enormous conflict both within the bourgeoisie and within the population as a whole – has been his "Muslim ban", suspending the right of travellers from a selected number of Muslim-majority countries to enter or re-enter the US. This is above all a statement of intent, a sign of his willingness to target minorities and associate Islam in general with terrorism, however much he denies that this measure is aimed specifically at Muslims.

What America needs, Trump tells the world, is



Obama's Wall

*"President Barack Obama has already earned the damning nickname "Deporter in Chief" for kicking out of the country more than 2.5 million undocumented people during his two terms in office. Fear of deportation has sharply escalated since Trump's election".*

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/multimedia/The-Global-Rise-of-Xenophobia-20161216-0023.html>

more guns and more torture. Our modern bourgeois civilisation produces no shortage of such bragging thugs and bullies, just as it admires and acclaims those who take for themselves whatever they can get at the expense of others. What's new is that millions of people in one of the world's most modern countries want such a thug as head of state. Trump, like his model and would-be friend Putin, are popular not in spite of but because of their thuggery.

In capitalism there are always two possible alternatives, either equivalent exchange or non-equivalent exchange (robbery). You can either give someone else an equivalent for what you get, or you don't. In order for the market to function, its subjects have to renounce violence in economic life. They do so under threat of reprisals, such as prison, but also on the promise that their renunciation will pay off for them in the long run in terms of securing their existence. However, it remains the case that the basis of economic life in capitalism is indeed robbery: the surplus value the capitalists gain from the unpaid surplus labour of the wage workers. This robbery has been legalised in the form of capitalist private property of the means of production; it is enforced every day by the state, which is the state apparatus of the ruling class. Capitalist economy requires a taboo on violence at the market place. Buying and selling are supposed to be peaceful actions – including the buying and selling of labour power: workers are not slaves. Under "normal" circumstances, working people are ready to live more or less peacefully under such conditions, despite realising that there is a minority which refuses to do the same. This minority is composed of the criminal milieu, which lives from robbery, and the state, which is the biggest robber of all, both in relation to its "own" population (taxation), and in relation to other states (war). And although the state represses the criminals in defence of private property, at the upper echelons the top gangsters and the robber state tend to collaborate rather than oppose each other. But when capitalism can no longer credibly offer even the illusion of a possible improvement of the living conditions for society as a whole, the compliance of society to be revoked.

Today we have entered a period (not unlike that of the 1930s) where large sectors of society feel cheated and no longer believe their renunciation of violence pays off. But they remain intimidated by the threat of repression, by the illegal status of the criminal world. This is when the longing to be part of those who can rob without fear becomes political. The essence of their "populism" is the demand that violence against certain groups be legalised, or at least unofficially tolerated. In Hitler-Germany, for example, the course towards world war was a "normal" manifestation of the "robber state" which it shared with Stalin-Russia, Roosevelt-America etc. What was new in National Socialism was the systematic robbery, organised by the state, against part of its own population. Scapegoating and pogroms were legalised. The Holocaust was not first and foremost the product of the history of anti-Semitism or of Nazism. It was a product of modern capitalism. Robbery becomes the alternative economic perspective for sectors of the population sinking into barbarism. But this barbarism is that of the capitalist system itself. Criminality is as much part of bourgeois society as the stock exchange. Robbery and buying-selling are the two poles of advanced modern

society based on private property. The profession of the robber can only be abolished by abolishing class society. When robbery starts to replace buying and selling, this is at once the self-realisation and self-destruction of bourgeois civilisation. In the absence of an alternative, of a revolutionary communist perspective, the longing to exercise violence against others grows.

### The fish stinks from the head downwards

What happens when parts of the ruling class itself, followed by some of the intermediary layers of society, start to lose confidence in the possibility of sustained growth for the world economy? Or when they start to lose hope that they themselves can benefit from whatever growth still takes place? On no account will they want to give up their aspirations to a (greater) share of wealth and power. Should the wealth available no longer increase, they can still fight for a bigger share at the expense of the rest. Here lies the connection between the economic situation and the growing thirst for violence. The perspective of growth starts to be replaced by the perspective of robbery and pillage. If millions of illegal workers were to be expelled, so the calculation goes, there would be more jobs, housing, social care for those who remain. The same goes for all those who live from the system of social benefits without paying into it. As for ethnic minorities, some of them have businesses which could pass into the hands of others. This kind of thinking seeps up from the very depths of bourgeois "civil society".

However, according to an old expression, the fish begins to stink from the head downwards. It is first and foremost the state and economic apparatus of the ruling class itself which produces this putrefaction. The diagnosis made by the capitalist media is that the Trump presidency, the victory of the Brexiters in Britain, the rise of right wing "populism" in Europe, are the result of a protest against "globalisation". But this is only true if violence is understood as the essence of this protest, and if globalisation is understood, not only as an economic option among others, but as a label for the extremely violent means through which a declining capitalism has, in recent decades, kept itself alive. The result of this gigantic economic and political offensive of the bourgeoisie (a kind of war of the capitalist class against the rest of humanity and against nature) was the production of millions of victims, not only among the working populations of the whole planet, but even within the apparatus of the ruling class itself. It is this not least this latter aspect which, in its dimensions, is absolutely unprecedented in modern history. Unprecedented also is the degree to which parts of the American bourgeoisie and its state apparatus itself fell victim to this devastation. And this is true even though the United States was the main instigator of that policy. It is as if the ruling class was obliged to lop off parts of its own body in order to save the rest. Whole sectors of the national industry were closed down because their products could be produced more cheaply elsewhere. Not only these industries themselves had to shut down – whole parts of the country were laid waste in the process: regions and administrations, local consumer, retail and credit branches, providers of parts, the local building industry etc. were all shattered. Not only workers, but big and small businesses, civil servants and local dignitaries were among its victims.

Unlike the workers, who lost their livelihoods, these bourgeois and petty bourgeois victims lost their power, privileges and social status.

This process took place, more or less radically, in all the old industrial countries over the past three decades. But in the US there has been, in addition, a kind of earthquake within the military and so-called intelligence apparatus. Under Bush Jr. and Rumsfeld, parts of the armed and security forces and even of the intelligence services were "privatised" - measures which cost many high-ranking leaders their jobs. In addition, intelligence had to face the competition of modern media concerns such as Google or Facebook which in some ways are as well informed, and as important for the state, as the CIA or FBI. In the course of this process, the balance of forces within the ruling class itself has shifted, including at the economic level, where the credit and finance sectors ("Wall Street") and the new technologies ("Silicon Valley") are not only among the main beneficiaries of "globalisation" but also among its main protagonists.

As opposed to these sectors, who supported the candidature of Hillary Clinton, the supporters of Donald Trump are not to be located within specific economic fractions, although his strongest supporters are to be found among the captains of the old industries which have declined so much in recent decades. Rather, they are to be found here and there throughout the state and economic apparatus of power. These were the snipers producing the crossfire from behind the scenes against Clinton as the alleged candidate of "Wall Street". They included business tycoons, frustrated publicists and leaders of the FBI. For those among them who have lost hope of making themselves "great again", their support for Trump was above all a kind of political vandalism, blind revenge on the ruling elite.

This vandalism can also be seen in the willingness of important factions of the ruling class – above all those linked to the oil, coal and gas industries – to back Trump's wholesale rejection of the science explaining climate change, which he has famously dismissed as a hoax invented by the Chinese. This is a further manifestation of the fact that significant parts of the bourgeoisie have so lost any vision of any future for humanity that they are **openly** prepared to put their ("national") profit margins above any considerations for the natural world, and thus risk undermining the fundamental basis for all human social life. The war against nature which was vastly intensified by the "neo-liberal" world order will be waged even more ruthlessly by Trump and his fellow vandals.

What has happened is very grave. Whereas the leading fractions of the American bourgeoisie still adhere to the existing economic world order, and want to engage in its maintenance, the consensus about this within the ruling class as a whole has started to crumble. This is firstly because a growing part of it no longer seems to care about this world order. It is secondly because the ruling fractions were unable to prevent the arrival of a candidate of these desperadoes into the White House. The erosion both of the cohesion of the ruling class, and of its control over its own political apparatus, could hardly have manifested itself more clearly. Ever since, with its victory in World War II, the American bourgeoisie took over from its British counterpart the leading role in the running of the world economy as a whole, it has continuously assumed this responsibility. In general the bourgeoisie of the leading national capital is best placed to assume this role. All the more so when, like the United States, it disposes of the military might to lend its leadership additional authority. It is remarkable that today neither the USA nor its predecessor Britain are able to assume this role – and basically for the same reason. This is the weight of political populism, which is taking London outside the European economic institutions. It was a sign of something close to desperation when, at the beginning of the new year the *Financial Times*, one of the important voices of the City of London, called on the German chancellor Angela Merkel to assume world leadership. Trump, at all events, seems unwilling and unable to assume this role, and there is no other world leader for the moment who could replace him. A dangerous phase lies ahead for the capitalist system and for humanity...

(The last section of this article, which can be found in its complete form on our website, looks at the situation of the working class and the prospects for the class struggle in the difficult conditions created by the populist upsurge).

**Steinklopfer, Late January, 2017**



# On the ICC as a ‘fraction’

The first part of our reply to Link’s ICC forum posts was on the ICC’s 40 year balance sheet of its existence<sup>1</sup>. This second part concentrates on the problem of the Fraction and the article in the International Review ‘The ICC as a Fraction’<sup>2</sup>. This is what Comrade Link wanted to ask in his second post:

*“This is an important text giving an orientation for future activities of the ICC. It appears as an organisation statement that significant changes to intervention even from resolutions of recent congresses. It changes the way the organisation is to behave in the coming period. Yet it has been ignored by sympathisers and has not been elaborated by the organisation (as far as I am aware) and the promised second part of this document has not appeared.*

*I must say I am confused by this document as it focuses on long historical justifications without explaining and justifying the change clearly in terms of the period or of a change in the ICCs approach to intervention from relatively recently. The ICC appears to be now adopting a role as a Fraction but I am struggling to understand the reasons and the possible consequences. What does this role mean and what is the political justification for this change ie what is the analysis of current situation leading to this outcome.*

*I have previously made the statement on this forum that the ICC has given up on its role as ‘pole of regroupment’ and drew no criticism or rebuttal. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying its direction. It would appear however to tie in with this new role of the Fraction. I’m afraid I do need this explaining further but it appears to be a role of analysing previous events to determine lessons for the future. OK not a problem, that is always a role for militants but it is presented as a primary role in the context of a downturn of struggle and the inability of a revolutionary organisation to have an impact on the class-*

*So, is it being said that the class has been defeated in the past couple of decades or is this change just a response to a downturn in struggle and if so why has it taken so long to realise this? I’m afraid it remains very unclear what analysis is being made of the current period and how that justifies this course of action. Is this going to be an extended period of balance of the working class and the bourgeoisie where neither can impose its will? Is the class a defeated class and is the Bourgeoisie able to move towards war? Is the perspective of the historic course altered in some way or even rejected.*

*One contradiction I see is that this period of decomposition is still being called the final crisis of capitalism in the texts. However if we now enter a new period where this new role for the organisation is based on recognition of a defeat of the class, then surely for this to be the final phase, the ICC is really denying that neither a period of world war nor a period of revolution can follow. Can this current period of downturn of struggle not be followed by a revolutionary period and what’s more cannot that be following either by a period of working class power or a period of restoration of capitalism (or barbarism)?*

*There clearly are changes in the world that need analysing but I’m afraid that the ideas presented in these texts do not clarify them for me. No one in the 1970s was expected such an elongated period of low class struggle, so does this result void the theory of the historic course to war or revolution or is it just a new wrinkle to analyse.*

*There is clearly a downturn in class struggle that, with hindsight, negates the idea of the 80s as ‘Years of Truth’. I personally would stress the current low level of struggle is a product of enormous impact of nationalist ideologies. The referendum, the hullabaloo around it and the responses to current migration levels demonstrate clearly how the Bourgeoisie has taken the initiative today and sets the agenda for events. In this content there is clearly an impact on the abilities of militants to intervene in class struggle but*

*the text leaves me with the uncertain impression that the the ICC is saying the working class has now been defeated?”*

1) As in the first of Link’s posts about the balance sheet of the ICC’s 21st Congress<sup>3</sup> the comrade is surprised by the dearth of responses from sympathisers or anyone else in the revolutionary milieu to this significant article about the ICC and the fraction. Our response to this important observation is the same as we made to a similar remark by Link about the lack of reaction by the milieu in his first post:

*“Your surprise is understandable, since the fate of the ICC, a significant organisation of the communist left for the past 40 years, is surely of concern for those who espouse the politics of the communist left, even if they disagree with many of our political positions and analyses. More: one would think surely that many of those who disagree with the ICC on whatever question would want to express themselves publicly on the subject as you have done.*

*While from this political point of view the silence about our self-critique is surprising and regrettable, from the vantage point of the past four decades, such indifference has not been that unusual. Ever since the re-emergence of the left communist milieu internationally since the end of the sixties, it has lacked a significant sense of common purpose which, if it had been pursued, despite the disagreements within it, would have strengthened this whole milieu and accelerated its internationalist impact on the working class much more than it actually has. In hindsight the three Conferences of Groups of the Communist Left in the late seventies which had the goal of confronting these often profound disagreements at the necessary theoretical and political level, and making common public statements on vital current questions facing the working class, were a high water mark. The collapse of these Conferences at the end of the decade has led to a long period of dispersal of the left communist milieu – even if polemics and other limited instances of mutual collaboration have sometimes occurred. The emergence of the phenomenon of political parasitism in 1981 has tended to further exacerbate the atomisation of the left communist milieu and reduce the solidarity between its individuals and groups. The low morale of the left communist milieu in general may help to explain the back-ground to the dearth of response to the 40 year self-critique of the ICC.”*

The reasons for this indifference are also related to the recognition of the responsibilities of the fraction.

2) It’s safe to say that the article ‘ICC as a fraction’ has left Link confused. He asks whether it means that the ICC is completely changing course. If so what will be its new tasks? Will it mean an end to intervention and regroupment? Does it mean that the working class is now defeated as far as the ICC are concerned? Has the historic course therefore changed fundamentally?

Let’s try and clarify some of these questions.

a) The article ‘Report on the role of the ICC as a fraction’<sup>4</sup> was part of the 40 year review set in motion by the last international congress of the ICC, re-examining our vision of the function of revolutionary organisation in a necessarily historical way. It wasn’t to proclaim a complete change of course: ‘we are now a fraction’, but to set out the historical parameters - and precedents - of the role of revolutionaries today, not with the aim of reversing our original conception of the role of the ICC, but of restating it from a particular vantage point so that we can better measure our self-critique of the past 4 decades.

In the wake of each of the crises the ICC has overcome in its history, there has been an attempt by the organisation to return to fundamental principles by which to judge the reasons for the crisis. In 1982 for example, after the famous Chenier crisis of 80-81, a text on the function of

revolutionary organisation was published which went back to fundamentals<sup>5</sup>, further elaborating the original vision of the ICC in order to respond to the new problems that had arisen. Is this not an essential historical part of the Marxist method: to judge new situations according to fundamental principles, measuring the new circumstances with the main lessons of the past and thus developing those principles?

This is why the article recapitulates the historical justifications for the existence of the ICC. And the question ‘fraction or party’ is an important part of this recapitulation. It would seem perhaps that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical justifications’ and would prefer to remain in the present. But from the point of view of the Marxist method the establishment of historical reference points are necessary, short or long, in order to understand the present and future.

The way we treat the question of the fraction in this article does not represent a departure from our previous conceptions. One of the defining principles of the ICC is its explicit dependence on the work of *Bilan* from 1928–38 and of the Gauche Communiste de France from 1945-52, both in terms of the political programme developed from the lessons of the defeat of the October Revolution and the fraction conception of function in the counter revolutionary period as opposed to that of a party function. *Bilan*’s vision was opposed to that of Trotsky when he formed the 4th International in 1938 on the eve of the 2nd World War. The GCF strongly criticised the foundation of the Internationalist Communist Party in 1943.

Closely linked to this distinction between the role of fraction and party that the ICC reprised from *Bilan* and the GCF is the insistence of the ICC at the time of its formation in 1975 that it wasn’t, and couldn’t be, a party in the prevailing conditions, but was a current which had to help prepare the future party, and therefore its tasks were in a sense ‘fraction like’:

*“The end of the period of counter-revolution has modified the conditions of existence of revolutionary groups. A new period has opened up, favourable to the development of the regroupment of revolutionaries. However, this new period is still an in-between period where the necessary conditions for the emergence of the party have not been transformed - through a real qualitative leap - into sufficient conditions”<sup>6</sup>.*

The text ‘ICC as a fraction’ is in continuity with previous ICC texts on the subject. Here are some of them: ‘The Italian Left 1922-37’, *International Review* 59; ‘The Italian Left 1937-52’ *IR* 61; ‘The Fraction-Party Marx to Lenin 1848-1917’ *IR* 64; ‘The Bolsheviks and the fraction’ *IR* 65; ‘Fraction or new party?’ *IR* 85; ‘The Italian Fraction and the French Communist Left’ *IR* 90<sup>7</sup>.

The first four articles in this (non-exhaustive) list are in the form of a polemic with the International Communist Tendency (formerly known as the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party) whose main components are the PCInt - Internationalist Communist Party in Italy (*Battaglia Comunista*) - and the Communist Workers Organisation of Britain. The Italian wing of this trend (The CWO joined it in 1984) parted ways with the Bordigist wing of the party in 1952, with both claiming to be the continuators of 1943.

This series of polemics in the *International Review* brings out - for the ICC at least - the importance of the role of the fractions of the past for the consistent and coherent formation of the revolutionary programme today, and the necessary function and the type of functioning that the revolutionary organisation must adopt in the present historical epoch, the ‘in-between’ period before a party is possible.

We haven’t room to elaborate here on all the political consequences of this distinction between fraction and party. We will only briefly mention two by way of illustrating that the historical justi-

5. [http://en.internationalism.org/specialtexts/IR029\\_function.htm](http://en.internationalism.org/specialtexts/IR029_function.htm),  
6. *IR* 29, ‘Report on the function of the revolutionary organisation’  
7. All these texts can be found online by clicking on ‘ICC press’ at the top of our webpages and then scrolling down to ‘International Review’, which is divided into decades.

fications of the role of the revolutionary organisation are fundamental. To try and create and fulfil the role of a party in a period of counter-revolution, that is to try and be the recognised vanguard of a defeated working class, is fraught with the danger of opportunism. The Italian party softened its opposition to anti-fascism when it allowed Vercesi, and the minority of *Bilan*, which had gone off to fight in the anti-fascist militias in Spain, into its ranks and adopted an ambiguous position toward the anti-fascist partisans in occupied Italy during the Second World War<sup>8</sup>.

Secondly in May 1980 at the Third Conference of groups of the Communist Left, the PCInt and the CWO announced that their further participation in the Conferences was dependent on the closing of the debate on the revolutionary party. The ICC could not accept this new criterion for participation. It was as though for the PCInt the differences between the surviving and dispersed strands of the Communist Left could be decided in advance – the Party after all was already supposedly in existence since 1943 - and there was no longer any need for a forum of debate with other communist left trends, (nor, by the way, was there supposedly any need for a common statement proposed by the ICC on an internationalist denunciation of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan that began at the end of the previous year). For the ICC however the failure of the conferences was a major setback on the road to the formation of the future party which will depend in large part on the greater clarification of outstanding differences through debate and polemic between the disparate elements of the communist left.<sup>9</sup>

Link doesn’t express himself on these questions that have a direct bearing on the article ICC as a fraction; yet, as we have tried to show, they are extremely relevant for the role of revolutionaries today. It would be interesting to know his opinion.

b) Link seems to think that talk about the fraction necessarily implies that the working class is now defeated. It’s true that *Bilan* emerged from the degeneration of the Communist International and the failure of the revolutionary wave that began in 1917. *Bilan* intended to draw the lessons of this defeat and the resulting counter-revolution, and to develop a new ‘system of principles’ for the party of the future. It had a direct and organic link with the left within the Italian Communist Party from which it was excluded.

The reemergence of revolutionary organisations after 1968 did so however in very different conditions. The immense wave of international class struggle that began with the May-June 1968 general strike in France marked a decisive break with the counter revolution; emerging revolutionary groups had no organic link with the parties of the past; and the work of the formation of new class principles was in large part completed.

However there were circumstances of the post-68 era that gave ‘fraction-like’ tasks to the revolutionary organisation despite the undefeated nature of the proletariat. The upsurge in class struggle came from the re-emergence of the world economic crisis which would be necessarily long and drawn out. The working class struggles were mainly of an economic, defensive kind – the proletarian revolution was still a distant perspective. The revolutionary political milieu was minuscule and immature, and unrecognised by the working class, despite the continuing claims of the Bordigist currents to already be the Party. In other words the conditions for both the possibility and necessity for the formation of the party had not yet revealed themselves. The revolutionary organisations no longer had an organic link with the parties of the past as *Bilan* did. However they still had to provide a bridge to the future party. And in that sense their work had to be fraction-like, a work of *preparation* for the future party and not the party itself.

8. <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/197701/9333/ambiguities-internationalist-communist-party-over-partisans-italy-19>  
9. <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/22/third-left-communist-conference>

1. [http://en.internationalism.org/jconline/201610/14137/questions-comrade-link-and-some-replies#\\_ftn1](http://en.internationalism.org/jconline/201610/14137/questions-comrade-link-and-some-replies#_ftn1)  
2. <http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201601/13786/report-role-icc-fraction>  
3. <http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201601/13785/40-years-after-foundation-icc>  
4. <http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201601/13786/report-role-icc-fraction>



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## February 1917: The workers’ councils open the way to the proletarian revolution

It fell to Lenin in his April Theses, two months after the opening of the movement, to unveil an audacious platform to rearm the Bolshevik Party, which had also drifted towards conciliation with the Provisional Government. His theses clearly explained where the proletariat was going, and formulated the perspectives of the party:

*“In our attitude towards the war; ...not the slightest concession to ‘revolutionary defencism’ is permissible...”*

*“No support for the Provisional Government: the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear; particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations. Exposure in place of the impermissible, illusion-breeding ‘demand’ that this government, a government of capitalists, should cease to be an imperialist government...”*

*“Not a parliamentary republic - to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies would be a retrograde step - but a republic of Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the country from top to bottom.”*

Armed with this solid compass, the Bolshevik Party was able to make proposals for action corresponding to the needs and possibilities at each moment of the revolutionary process, keeping in mind the perspective of taking power, and to do this by the work of *“persistent and patient explanation”* (Lenin, op cit). And through this struggle for the masses to take control of their organisations against bourgeois sabotage, after several political crises in April, June and especially in July, it became possible to renew the Soviets, within which the Bolsheviks became the majority.

The decisive activity of the Bolsheviks had the central axis of developing consciousness in the class, based on confidence in the masses’ capacity for criticism and analysis, confidence in their capacity for unity and self-organisation. The Bolsheviks never pretended to make the masses submit to a preconceived ‘plan of action’, raising the masses as one raises an army. *“The chief strength of Lenin lay in his understanding the inner logic of the movement, and guiding his policy by it. He did not impose his plan on the masses; he helped the masses to recognise and realise their own plan.”* (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, ‘Rearming the Party’).

From September the Bolsheviks clearly posed the question of the insurrection in the assemblies of the workers and soldiers. *“The insurrection was decided, so to speak, for a fixed date, the 25th of October. It was not fixed by a secret meeting, but openly and publicly, and the triumphant revolution took place precisely on the 25th of October”* (ibid). It raised an unequalled enthusiasm among the workers of the entire world, becoming the “beacon” which lit the future for all the exploited.

Today, the destruction of the political and economic power of the ruling class is still an imperious necessity. The dictatorship of the proletariat, organised in sovereign councils, remains the only way to open the way to a communist society. This is what proletarians need to re-appropriate in the light of the experience of 1917. **SB** (*Originally published in WR 203, March 1997, and published again in WR 301, February 2007*)

see the latter only in the short or immediate term, and neglect important aspects of its ‘fraction-like’ role. Indeed the article on the balance sheet of the ICC’s 21st Congress underlines the danger of immediatism as a major risk factor in the forgetting of principles (opportunism) which the revolutionary organisation must preserve and transmit to the future party.

c) Examining the role of the fraction in assessing the role of revolutionaries does not mean, as Link fears, abandoning the tasks of intervention - the press, public meetings, leaflets, manifestos etc - nor the regroupment of revolutionaries and the strengthening of organisation, nor turning theoretical research into an academic, contemplative pursuit. The fractions of the past were by no means shy and retiring but intervened to the limit of their capacities even in the darkest days of the counter-revolution, i.e., in periods of dangerous illegality.

Marxism is in essence a militant theory devoted to changing the world and not merely interpreting it as the philosophers have done - but without the activist, immediatist and anti-theoretical spin that is often given to this famous slogan from the Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach.

Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary organisation.

Revolutionary intervention thus has a historical framework, each element of revolutionary activity measured within a long term time frame.

The ICC has certainly, like other revolutionary groups, had to reduce the regularity of its printed press and other forms of intervention as a result of a number of factors – the reduction in number of outlets for selling the printed press, the escalating cost of printing and postage, dwindling resources, etc. At the same time we have recognised the growing importance of the internet and of our website as our principal, and most widely read publication. So all this is part of a necessary realism, related to current conditions, and doesn’t amount to abandoning the task of intervention. And despite the general unpopularity of marxism today, there remain individuals who want to join the revolutionary organisation: the regroupment and formation of such militants remains an axis of ‘fraction-like’ activity as does the greater discussion and confrontation of differences within the revolutionary milieu.

We look forward to hearing Link’s response both to this reply and the previous one. **WR 16.2.17**

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The conditions since 1989, a period of the decomposition of world capitalism, has created still more difficulties for the advance of the class struggle beyond a defensive posture, indeed the last few decades have witnessed a decline in the extent of its combativity and consciousness, reversing an upward trend that reached its limits in the 1980s (the Polish mass strike, the British miners’ strike, etc). The ascendancy of right wing populism in the major capitalist countries at the present conjuncture will probably reinforce this decline. However these circumstances do not allow us to conclude that the working class is defeated in the way it was in the 1930s, when its revolutionary attempts in Russia, Germany and elsewhere had been crushed physically and when the bourgeoisie had its hands free to terrorise the entire population and mobilise it for world war.

The onset of the period of decomposition in the late 80s, in our view, was the product, on the one hand, of the changed historic course after 1968, in which the bourgeoisie was unable to mobilise the main battalions of the working class for war; at the same time the working class, despite intense struggles in the period 68-89, had been unable to offer a revolutionary alternative to the crisis of the system. Social decomposition is the result of this impasse in society. In time, it could lead to the overwhelming of the working class and an irreversible slide into barbarism, but we do not think we have reached this point of no return. In that sense, the potential for major class confrontations we announced in the 1970s still remains, despite all the difficulties facing the proletariat; by the same token, the task of preparing the ground for the future party has not been abandoned.

It is not entirely clear what Link’s view of the historic course is, whether he agrees or not with the concept itself or with the ICC’s assessment of it at the present time. It’s worth noting that for the ICC the analysis of the balance of class forces on a historical scale is indispensable to be able to judge from a materialist rather than a voluntarist standpoint whether the formation of the party is possible or not.

The more difficult context of today compared with the 70s and 80s particularly obliges us to recall the long term, historical vision of the role of revolutionaries, and to fight the tendency to

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**The Trump election and the  
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# February 1917: The workers’ councils open the way to the proletarian revolution

The bourgeoisie has made no mistake in spending decades concocting the shabbiest lies about the revolution in Russia in 1917. 100 years after the soviets took power in Russia, the propagandists of the ruling class continue to sing the same hymn to the virtues of bourgeois parliamentary ‘democracy’ and spew out the worst falsifications about the reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. In fact, despite a whole number of quibbles, these historians of the bourgeois order have unceasingly presented the February 1917 revolution as a movement for ‘democracy’, hijacked by the Bolshevik ‘coup d’etat’. February 1917 was an authentic ‘democratic festival’, October 1917 a vulgar ‘coup d’etat’, a Bolshevik manipulation of the backward masses of Tsarist Russia. This shameless brain-washing is the product of the fear and rage felt by the world bourgeoisie faced by the collective work and solidarity, the conscious action of the exploited class, daring to raise its head and put in question the existing order. The shock waves from this proletarian earthquake still haunt the memory of the bourgeoisie, which has done everything possible, then as now, to separate the working class from its historic experience. Today, falsifying the nature of the Russian revolution and degrading the essence of the workers’ councils is part of capitalism’s odious campaign on the ‘death of communism’, identifying the proletarian revolution with its executioner, Stalinism. This is the misleading idea that revolution can only lead to the Gulag. Faced with this torrent of calumnies and mystifying propaganda, the defence of the Russian revolution is a duty for revolutionaries in order to help the working class rid itself of all the ideological muck spilled by the bourgeoisie, and re-appropriate the whole richness of this vital experience.

**February 1917: first episode in the world proletarian revolution**

The workers’ rising in St Petersburg (Petrograd) in Russia did not come like a bolt from the blue. It was in continuity with the economic strikes launched by the Russian workers since 1915 in reaction against the savagery of the world butchery, against hunger, misery, excessive exploitation and the permanent terror of war. These strikes and revolts were in no way a specificity of the Russian proletariat, but an integral part of the struggles and demonstrations of the international proletariat. A

similar wave of workers’ agitation developed in Germany, Austria and Britain. At the front, especially in the Russian and German armies, there were mutinies, mass desertions, fraternisation between soldiers on the two sides. In fact, after allowing themselves to be carried away by the government’s patriotic venom and ‘democratic’ illusions, after being led astray by the treason of the majority of the social democratic parties and unions, the international proletariat raised its head and started to come out of the fog of chauvinist intoxication. The internationalists were at the head of the movement - the Bolsheviks, the Spartacists, all the lefts of the 2nd International who had intransigently denounced the war since its outbreak in August 1914 as an imperialist pillage, as a manifestation of the collapse of world capitalism, and as a signal for the proletariat to complete its historic mission: the international socialist revolution. This historic challenge would be raised internationally by the working class from 1917 to 1923. The vanguard of this vast proletarian movement, which stopped the war and opened the possibility of the world revolution, was the Russian proletariat in February 1917. The outbreak of the Russian revolution was not, then, a national affair or an isolated phenomenon - that is to say, a late bourgeois revolution, limited to the overthrow of feudal absolutism. It was the highest moment of the world proletarian response to the war, and more profoundly to the entry of the capitalist system into its decadence.

**The formation of the workers’ councils: specific organs of the revolution**

From 22nd to 27th February, the workers of St Petersburg launched an insurrection in response to the historic problem represented by the world war. Started by the textile workers - overcoming the hesitations of revolutionary organisations - the strike involved almost all the factories in the capital in 3 days. On the 25th there were 240,000 workers who had stopped work and, far from remaining passive on their shop floors, meetings and street demonstrations proliferated, where their slogans, in the first hours, demanded “bread”, soon reinforced by the calls “down with the war”, “down with autocracy”.

On the evening of the 27th February, the insurrection, lead by the armed proletariat, reigned supreme in the capital, while strikes and workers’

demonstrations were starting in Moscow, spreading in the following days to other towns in the province, Samara, Saratov, Kharkov... Isolated, incapable of using the army, profoundly undermined by the war, the Tsarist regime was forced to abdicate.

Once having broken the first chains, the workers did not want to retreat and, in order not to advance blindly, they revived the experience of 1905 by creating soviets which had appeared spontaneously during this first great mass strike. These workers’ councils were the direct emanation of thousands of workers’ assemblies, who centralised their action through elected and instantly revocable delegates.

Trotsky had, after 1905, already shown what a workers’ council was: “*What was the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies? The Soviet came into being as a response to an objective need - a need born of the course of events. It was an organisation which was authoritative and yet had no traditions; which could immediately involve a scattered mass of hundreds of thousands of people ... which was capable of initiative and spontaneous self-control.*” (Trotsky, 1905). This “finally discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat”, as Lenin said, rendered the permanent organisation in unions null and void. In the period in which the revolution is on the historical agenda, struggles explode spontaneously and tend to generalise to all sectors of production. So the spontaneous way the workers’ councils arise results directly from the explosive, rather than planned or programmed, character of the revolutionary struggle.

The workers’ councils in the Russian revolution were not the simple passive product of exceptional objective conditions, but also the product of a collective coming to consciousness. The movement of the councils itself carried the means for the self-education of the masses. The workers’ councils mingled the economic and political aspects of the struggle against the established order. As Trotsky wrote: “*in that lies its strength. Every week brings something new to the masses. Every two months creates an epoch. At the end of February, the insurrection. At the end of April, a demonstration of the armed workers and soldiers in Petrograd. At the beginning of July, a new assault, far broader in scope and under more resolute slogans. At the end of August, Kornilov’s attempt at an overthrow beaten off by the masses. At the end of October, conquest of power by the Bolsheviks.*

*Under these events, so striking in their rhythm, molecular processes were taking place, welding the heterogeneous elements of the working class into one political whole.*” (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, ‘Shifts in the Masses’) “*Meetings were held in the trenches, on village squares, in the factories. For months, in Petrograd and in the whole of Russia, every street corner became a public tribune.*” (ibid).

**The role of the Bolshevik Party in the workers’ councils**

Although the Russian proletariat gave itself the means for its combat by forming the workers’ councils, as early as February it encountered an extremely dangerous situation. The forces of the international bourgeoisie immediately attempted to turn the situation to its advantage. Unable to crush the movement in blood, they tried to orient it towards bourgeois ‘democratic’ objectives. On the one hand they formed an official Provisional Government with the aim of continuing the war. On the other hand, the soviets were invaded by Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries straight away.

These latter, of whom the majority had passed into the bourgeois camp during the war, enjoyed an enormous confidence among the workers at the start of the February revolution. They were naturally put on the Executive of the Soviet. From this strategic position they used all means to try and sabotage and destroy the soviets.

From a situation of “dual power” in February, a situation of “dual powerlessness” had emerged in May and June 1917, with the Executive of the Soviets serving as a mask for the bourgeoisie to realise its objectives: the re-establishment of order at home and at the front in order to continue the imperialist butchery. Menshevik and Social Revolutionary demagogues made ever more promises of peace, “the solution to the agrarian problem”, the 8 hour day etc., without ever putting them into practice.

Even if the workers, at least those in Petrograd, were convinced that only the power of the soviets would be able to respond to their aspirations, and although they saw that their demands were not being taken into consideration, elsewhere and, among the soldiers, there was still a strong belief in the “conciliators”, in the partisans of a so-called bourgeois revolution.

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## Political positions of the ICC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*.