



world revolution

Faced with repression and austerity **The future belongs to the class struggle**

The bread and circuses of the Olympics is over. The circus did a great job of – momentarily - creating a sense of euphoria and national unity, of helping us forget the growing signs that the society we live in is irretrievably breaking down. And for that very reason, there's not much bread. Not just because the Olympics was a big disappointment as far as most local and national businesses were concerned, and will leave in its wake a major addition to UK's already gigantic debt mountain. But because the economic crisis is continuing remorselessly, and the rul-

ing class has no alternative but to attack our living standards at every level. In short, to make us eat less and work more.

No country on the planet is spared by recession and unemployment. In Europe the rate of unemployment has already gone past 10% and is hitting young people with particular force. In Greece and Spain it's up to 50% - and at the same time the European bureaucrats and capitalists are calling for them to work harder, proposing a return to the 6 day week for those 'lazy' Greeks. Whole families are being thrown out onto the streets, are unable to

feed themselves adequately, but that's not enough: if any of them have a job, they've got to sweat even harder to pay off the national debt.

This is why the ruling class is more and more being obliged to talk tough and show its brutal, repressive nature more openly. If workers aren't going to knuckle down, and even worse, if they begin to band together and resist this austerity drive, they must be shown who's boss. This was certainly the aim of the savage slaughter of the miners in South Africa in August. In the more established 'democracies' like Britain, we have not yet reached the stage where workers' demonstrations are crushed with live ammunition. But there are plenty of indications that our rulers are again baring their teeth. We've had our summer holiday of Jubilee and Olympic celebrations. Now it's time to get to work. You saw all those thousands who volunteered to make the Olympics a success? Well, now get ready to work longer hours for less – or even nothing.

The make-up of the new cabinet was one sign that the style of government is going to change. Cameron and Co. used to talk green, now they are putting a climate change sceptic in charge of the environment and are going full steam ahead for airport expansion. No more concessions to 'diversity' – three women sacked, one of them the only 'ethnic' in the cabinet village. The least popular ministers – Osborne, May and Hunt, who all got booed at the Paralympics – are still very much at the core of things. All this is going to cause more problems for the Lib Dems, who seem helpless to block the coalition government's shift to the right.

But perhaps more significant are the concrete measures of intimidation taken against minorities who are vulnerable to being isolated and blamed for the problems of the national economy. Like the homeless: squatting has been definitively criminalised, despite the huge number of buildings left unused as a result of the recession and of unrestrained property speculation. Foreign students are also being picked on as their visas are revoked: a number of smaller colleges are affected, but London Metropolitan has been selected as a test case for other universities. The logic behind this is less than clear, given the exorbitant fees that are wrung out of these students, but it seems

to be part of the state's general drive to reduce immigration figures. In other words, it's another case of scapegoating minorities, a more refined version of the brutal expulsions of gypsies that have been stepped up in France, Italy, Greece and elsewhere. And let's not forget those who have also been supposedly given such a new and improved image by the Paralympics: the disabled. The very firm that was sponsoring the Paralympics, Atos, has been the government's muscle in its efforts to force thousands of people off disability benefit and get them back to work.

Another category that was painted in such glowing colours at the Olympics opening ceremony, the healthworkers, are also under the cosh. With new plans threatening to cut wages by up to 15% while increasing the working week and reducing sick pay, 68,000 health workers in the south west of England are being used to test the waters for further pay cuts and increased rates of exploitation across the NHS and the public sector.

The working class has learned to its cost in the past that it cannot escape harm when parts of its body – whether immigrants, the homeless, ethnic minorities, women, gays, or particular trades and sectors – are singled out and attacked. In a situation where we are all facing massive reductions in our living conditions, the sowing of divisions in our ranks can only weaken our ability to resist effectively. If we are going to defend ourselves from capitalist repression and austerity, we are going to have to affirm our solidarity and unity across all divisions. **Amos 8/9/12**

South Africa massacre of miners **The bourgeoisie uses its police and union guard dogs against the working class**



On 16 August, above the mines of Marikana, north west of Johannesburg, 34 people were killed by the bullets of the South African police, who also wounded 78 others. Immediately, the unbearable images of these summary executions went around the world. But, as always, the bourgeoisie and its media tried to distort the class character of this strike, reducing it to a sordid war between the

two main unions in the mining sector, and bringing up the ghosts of apartheid.

South Africa is not being spared by the world crisis

Despite investments of several hundred billion euros in the economy, growth is weak and un-

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No Olympic performance from the British economy

As the blizzard of patriotism that surrounded the Olympics/Paralympics begins to subside, the crisis of the economy comes back in to view. And, unlike the sporting heroism of TeamGB, it's increasingly difficult for the ruling class to find anything to celebrate in the face of lengthening stagnation.

The UK has now suffered three consecutive quarters of contraction, but the tendency to stagnation is more deeply embedded than this implies; "output has declined in five of the last seven quarters"¹. UK output is still "4.5% lower than it was when the economy peaked in early 2008"².

Pressure on George Osborne to 'change course' and initiate a 'plan for growth' is increasing from all quarters. Most recently, some among the 20 economists who supported Osborne's deficit-reduction programme in the run-up to the last election have begun to break rank³. In reality the latest figures show government borrowing up because of the decline in tax receipts.

Naturally, there is no shortage of helpful suggestions on how growth can be restarted. Ministers reportedly want to extend the 'temporary' relaxation of Sunday trading laws in the hope this will boost consumption. As expected, this provoked a chorus of criticism from various interest groups: unions talking tough to increase their control over shop workers; Christians worried about further degradation to the Sabbath; Tory MPs concerned about both the religious implications and disruption to 'family life', not to mention their irritation at being lied to about ministers' intentions; small shops (who already can open on an unrestricted basis) afraid of being destroyed by competition with the big supermarkets; and lastly by Big Retail itself in the form of the chief executive of Sainsbury's.

Could the idea work? One objection is that customers won't have any more money to spend so simply opening longer won't make any difference. This isn't entirely true – longer opening would increase supermarkets outlay on wages, thus pumping a limited amount of demand into the economy. But as it would take a while for this to filter through the economy and the impact would be limited, the most immediate result would be declining profitability for the supermarkets that are already under pressure. Contrary to ruling ideology, capitalism has no intrinsic interest in consumption or production as ends in themselves but only in so far as they generate profit. An increase of consumption that leaves profits stagnant is detrimental to the system.

This underlying rule of the capitalist economy is vital to remember when assessing the worth of the other measures touted as offering a route out of the crisis. Critics of measures such as the above often critique the 'lack of demand' in the economy. Is this true? On the face of it, stagnating retail demand, difficulty in capitalists of all types to sell their goods, the general 'crisis of overproduction' would seem to support this. And yet, corporate cash reserves in the UK are reported to have reached £750 billion⁴! This is equivalent to twice the total cash pumped out under the Bank of England's Quantitative Easing programme and is just under half a year's total GDP. If even part of this reserve could be mobilised in the form of investment, the 'problem' of demand could be solved.

So why are businesses hoarding cash rather than investing it? To put it simply, once again, there is no profit in it. Part of the debate within the ruling class is therefore how to persuade business to mobilise their reserves. The irony, of course, is that the reason business supposedly won't invest is because there is no demand in the economy.

We thus arrive at one of the central contradictions of the capitalist economy. Demand is insufficient because of a lack of investment; there is a lack of investment, because there is no demand! The critics of Osborne lay the blame at his door

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/jul/25/shock-gdp-fall-deepens-double-dip-recession>

2. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/jul/25/george-osborne-under-pressure-economy?intcmp=239>

3. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/georgeosborne/9477918/George-Osborne-no-longer-enjoys-faith-of-former-prominent-economist-backers-over-deficit.html>

4. http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_GB/uk/about/

as the cuts have 'sucked demand out of the economy'.

This can be overcome, they argue, by the government investing in infrastructure (new motorways, runways at Heathrow, etc.): money is pumped into the economy, increasing demand and thus motivating business to invest. Where does the government get this money? It can borrow it (ironically, from the very banks who hold these stacks of cash) or it can get it from directly taxing business and workers.

Although something of a simplification, we can see that government spending is actually a forced mobilisation of cash reserves that business won't invest due to lack of profitability. Such actions certainly create economic activity and will raise demand. But, once again, is this demand accompanied by an increase in profit? Certainly companies that win government contracts are happy – but at the expense of those companies who had their profits taxed in order to pay for it.

The contradiction can be partially overcome where the government borrows the money as the companies – through the intermediary of the banking system – receive a promise from the government to pay it back with interest. But the government's capacity to pay back the money it borrows is dependent on future taxes that it can leech from the economy i.e. tomorrow's profits and wages.

The capitalist economy is based on the extraction of profit from the labour force in the form of surplus value i.e. the value produced by the worker beyond what is needed for him to carry on working which returns to him in the form of wages. Crisis occurs when this ratio or the proportion of labour employed as opposed to capital investment (plant, raw materials, etc.) becomes too low. It is this core mechanic which induces crisis and manifests in overproduction.

None of the above strategies actually attack this root cause of crisis, acting only on the surface level of demand. This can certainly keep the economy functioning but unless there is a sufficient change in these core ratios, the underlying crisis is not resolved. Although overproduction is temporarily solved, the crisis manifests in the accumulation of unpaid (and eventually unrepayable) debts. The increasing complexity of capitalist finance kept this staggering explosion of debt hidden for a long time but when it became clear that they had grown beyond a point of no return, the whole edifice began to collapse like a pack of cards.

There is a way for capitalism to return to growth – assaulting our wages and working conditions to increase surplus value and changing the value ratio of plant to labour (the latter can only be brought about by mass bankruptcies, thus flooding the market with cheap equipment). In other words, a cataclysmic crisis which is the very thing the ruling class are trying to avoid as it threatens the stability of the entire system as we saw at the onset of the credit crunch several years ago.

And we finally arrive at the historical reality that this insane system has to offer humanity: its economic survival is dependent on widespread economic destruction. The increasingly desperate antics of the ruling class as they try and grapple with this reality can, at best, only delay this inevitable rendezvous with calamity. To return to the Olympic metaphor at the opening of this article, the capitalist system and its ruling class may have been able to win gold in its athletic youth but it is now aged and decrepit; it is the working class and its struggle for communism that now has the opportunity to go for a victory that will be shared by the whole of humanity. **Ishamael 1/9/12**

Note: The author of the article defends a minority position within the ICC that considers the rate and mass of profit as the core mechanic behind the economic crisis as opposed to the majority who defend the position of Rosa Luxemburg, which sees the problem of adequate demand as a basic element in the crisis. But although these respective positions differ on how they interpret the factors of profit-rates, demand, overproduction and their implications, both agree on the ultimate futility of ruling class efforts to avoid the decline of their system.

South West NHS: Testing the waters for further pay cuts

In the Summer 68,000 health workers (including junior doctors) in the South West of England learnt that their employers were considering cutting their pay by up to 15%, through possible reductions in basic pay of 1%; a 10% reduction in unsocial hours pay (many hospital nurses earn up to 30% extra due to working nights, weekends, and evenings); an increase of the working week by 1 hour without extra pay; cutting 2 days of annual leave; reducing sick pay to new staff – which will start at only 50% of pay; a 10% cut in annual pay increments, whilst at the same time increasing the power of managers by introducing performance-related pay. Naturally this has caused anger not only amongst those workers affected but amongst other health workers in Britain, who correctly see this as the thin end of the wedge.

The unions reacted with great 'anger' and 'surprise' at this news. Unison and the Royal College of Nurses, the main NHS unions, both issued press statements denouncing this plan, called various demonstrations and protests and said they will no longer cooperate with the South West Consortium or NHS Trusts. Such a response by the unions has come as a surprise to many of those workers effected given their almost total absence on the shop floor, but perhaps it's a case of better late than never? Well, if we look behind all the radical hot air by the unions we will see that they are fully involved in laying the groundwork for this attack.

The Consortium says that their proposal for the introduction of local pay agreements is within the framework of the legal and pay structures already in place. They point to the 2006 Health Act and the Agenda for Change pay structure introduced in the early 2000s, both of which contain provision for local pay agreements. The Health Act was introduced by the Labour Party whilst the unions worked closely with the management to introduce the Agenda for Change, which also contains provision for the performance-related pay that the Consortium want to introduce. The unions have also worked closely with government and management to introduce the £35bn of efficiency and productivity savings put in place by the Labour government in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, and they have carried on participating in the same process with the new government. In their statement denouncing the proposed attacks, Unison made clear that it is willing to work with the same 20 Trusts involved in the South West Consortium: "UNISON is willing to work in partnership with these Trusts to help them deal with their financial pressures in a way that doesn't threaten quality of care. But we will not stand by and let this cartel rip up our nationally negotiated terms and conditions" (<http://www.unionsouthwest.org.uk/campaigns/swnhspaycartel.aspx>). So as long as it is done nationally Unison is willing to participate in the proposed attacks.

As for the protection of quality of care, this will make any health worker laugh given the way the unions have worked with management to impose 3 years of wage freezes, a reduction in the number of health workers – through lay-offs, reorganisations or not replacing those who leave or retire – the increased use of temporary contracts and agency workers, reductions in bed numbers, closure of wards. Throughout the NHS health workers are faced with the daily distress of trying to care for people despite all of the pressures being imposed by the management, with the collaboration of the unions.

The proposed attack is a qualitative development because rather than the hidden cuts of pay freezes, the Consortium is proposing to directly cut pay, increase hours etc. For example if they impose the 1hr a week increase in work this will give them 3,536,000 extra hours a year for nothing! Combine this with the loss of 2 days annual leave, and the bosses will get 13,736,000 hours of labour extra a year for no more money. Each worker will have to work an extra 67 hours a year!

The unions have known about these plans for months; they have been collaborating with the Consortium up until their recent announcement that they will no longer recognise it. But now they are trying to look like they are defending the workers. What are they doing in reality? They are



doing all they can to keep the 68,000 health workers in the region isolated from each other and the rest of the class. They have called protests outside of hospitals (insisting that this is not strike action) and public meetings in this or that city in order to appear to be doing something, but in reality keeping workers confined to their workplace and separate from other health workers who do not work in that hospital or Trust. For example, in Exeter there was a demonstration of local mental health workers outside of a meeting of a board of their Trust, but the union did not tell the workers in the neighbouring general hospital about this demonstration. At the moment beyond some public meetings the unions are doing all they can to not provide any potential meeting places between health workers (such as demonstrations) let alone with the rest of the working class. They are aware of the deep respect and solidarity for health workers amongst the working class, and have organised petitions in local towns and cities to reduce this solidarity to the passive signing of useless pieces of paper but not demonstrations where workers could come to show their solidarity.

In fact the *only* action recommended on the Unison website (under "How can I get involved?") is to sign the petition, write to your MP or a local paper, comment on Twitter or Facebook, and join the union. Of course they are also calling for support for the TUC demonstration on 20 October for 'a future that works' (there's no such thing in capitalism) which is also a way of appearing to mobilise for the working class while actually just spreading illusions in capitalism and its state.

Unison has publicised a leaked document about the proposed regional pay agreement when actually the Consortium has not announced the precise nature of the attacks it wants to make. This looks like a manoeuvre in which the management and union can test the water to see how ready the workers are to resist, and how well the union can control any response, before making a definitive announcement. It no accident that this attack is being proposed in the South West as it has little history of militancy. However, if the bosses and unions can impose this attack here it will be rolled out gradually over the whole of the NHS, in such a way that any region which resists it will be left isolated and thus crushed.

Faced with this it is important that health and other workers seek to try and contact each other, not to allow management and unions to keep us apart just because we work in different departments or hospitals or belong to different unions. Demand that meetings are open to all, regardless of what job they do, whether they belong to any union or none – all workers are under attack and all need to fight back together. Above all an effective struggle means getting together outside the framework of the union to discuss the attack and how to resist it. **Phil 7.9.12**

Egypt: after the revolution that wasn't, workers' struggles continue

In July a wave of strikes in Egypt was a clear reminder that the end of Mubarak and the arrival of Mursi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, has meant no change in the conditions in which people live and work. The involvement of 24,000 workers in the state-owned Mahalla Misr Spinning and Weaving Company and the spread of the strike to seven other factories in Alexandria and Mahalla, alongside other protests and demonstrations, show that the working class is still capable of taking militant initiatives. The repression by the state, in Suez with tear gas fired at workers of the Cleopatra Ceramics company, in South Sinai, with live ammunition to disperse protesting health workers, also demonstrate that the current regime behaves in the same way as its predecessor. The fact that the army was not brought in against the Mahalla workers is testimony to the regime's appreciation of their history of combativity.

While the army is not deployed at every opportunity, it is not the only weapon of Egyptian capitalism. Under Mubarak the official unions were widely recognised as just another arm of the state apparatus. Alongside workers' struggles some 200 independent unions have emerged, claiming to represent 2.5 million workers. Although these unions are not yet officially authorised they still function in the interests of capital rather than labour. The concern with democracy and legality, the sectoral limitations, and all the other means used to undermine and divide struggles are characteristics of unions everywhere.

But if workers have illusions in the new unions, there are also illusions in the new government, and in the possibility of change through parlia-

ment and elections. For analysts outside Egypt there are many questions debated. Does the Muslim Brotherhood have an understanding with the army? Is the MB in conflict with the army? Is it only a matter of time before the army gets rid of Mursi? Inside Egypt, the degree to which different factions of the bourgeoisie act together or are divided is of interest, but, for workers, what is more important is seeing that their class interests are in conflict with all factions of the ruling class.

In this the voice of leftism plays a harmful role. Among the usual variety of views among the leftists there are many who describe what has been happening in Egypt since early 2011 as a 'revolution.' In this the Muslim Brotherhood is portrayed as an 'alternative' and the post-Mubarak state a step forward. In material from the 'Revolutionary Socialists, Egypt' that has been published by *Socialist Worker* there are many statements calculated to mystify reality for the working class. "The Muslim Brotherhood represents the right wing of the revolution. It is not the counter-revolution. ... since 11 February 2011 the Brotherhood has been a conservative organisation. But Shafiq [the 'military fascist candidate' in the presidential election] is the counter-revolution. That is why we are mobilising for protests against the military coup alongside the Brotherhood" (19/6/12). The leftists take their sides, and, as usual, it is not with the working class.

Whatever happened to the Arab Spring?

There is no 'revolution' in Egypt, but there has been much unrest which can only be understood

in an international context. The term 'Arab Spring' was used in early 2011 to describe a whole range of phenomena. In Tunisia and Egypt we saw workers' struggles alongside a wider social protest which was more vulnerable to democratic illusions. In Syria, whatever popular protests there were to start with, there is now an inter-bourgeois war which has drawn in a number of imperialist powers. But also in the Middle East in 2011 there was the largest wave of protest in the history of Israel over housing and other aspects of the cost of living.

So what has happened to these movements? In Syria there is war. In Egypt the struggle of the working class is still a factor in the situation and a potential threat to all factions of the bourgeoisie. In Israel the movement split, so that some protests demanded that the ultra-orthodox not be exempt from military service, in opposition to the concerns of others which are still focussed on real social issues. In July, on the anniversary of the first 2011 protests in Israel, there were divided and much smaller demonstrations. At one demonstration a small businessman set himself on fire and died a week later. There followed a whole wave of attempted self-immolations. In late July an army veteran succeeded in killing himself. These futile individual actions show the extent of the diminution of the movement.

Elsewhere in the region, there were anti-government protests in Sudan in June and July. These, typically, were dispersed by the police or fired on with tear gas. It is significant that when the state is concerned with war the population is protesting about its conditions of life.



So, in the Middle East, the movements of 2011 have not been repeated on anything like the same scale in 2012, even though the Egyptian example shows that the combativity of the working class is still intact. But, as we said above, social unrest can only be understood in an international context. That means not just the region but the world. In movements from India to Turkey, in Greece and in Spain, we have seen the struggles of the working class in response to capitalism's austerity regimes. But we have also seen the obstacles workers face in their struggles. Repression, nationalism, illusions in democracy, and the sabotage of the unions are found everywhere. And what is seen in the Middle East more clearly than anywhere in the world is the threat of war. Ultimately the struggles of the working class will not only be against material deprivations, but against a system which has the drive to imperialist war at its heart. **Car 7/9/12**

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South Africa massacre of miners

The bourgeoisie uses its police and union guard dogs against the working class

employment is massive¹. The country's wealth is partly based on the export of mining products like platinum, chrome, gold and diamonds. But this sector, which represents nearly 10% of GNP and 15% of the country's exports, and employs over 800,000 workers, went through a major recession in 2011. The price of platinum, of which South Africa possesses 80% of world reserves, has been falling since the beginning of the year.

The living and working conditions of the miners, already particularly grim, have now got worse: paid miserable wages, housed in shacks, often working more than 9 hours a day in stifling, choking mines, they are now facing lay-offs and unemployment. South Africa has recently seen a large number of strikes. In February, the world's biggest platinum mine, owned by Impala Platinum, had already been paralysed for six months by a strike.

The Marikana massacre, a trap set by the unions

It was in this context that on 10 August, 3000 miners from Marikana decided to stop work and demand decent wages: "We are exploited, neither the government nor the unions have come to help us...The mining companies make money thanks to our work and they pay us practically nothing. We are not offered a decent life. We live like animals because of our poverty wages"². The miners launched a wildcat strike and the two unions, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) jumped on the bandwagon, violently clashing to defend their own interests and trapping workers in a dead-end confrontation with the police.

The NUM is a completely corrupt union which is an integral part of the state run by the president Jacob Zuma. Its open support for the governing party, the ANC, has ended up discrediting it among many workers. This has resulted in the

created of a more radical sounding union, the AMCU, a split from the NUM. But like the NUM, the AMCU is not at all concerned for the workers. After a very aggressive recruitment campaign, the new union took advantage of the strike to pit its goons against the NUM's muscle. The result: 10 miners dead and a number of wounded. But this turf war between the unions led directly to the strike being violently repressed by the state, which used this as a way of blocking the dynamic of the workers' struggle.

After several days of clashes, Frans Baleni, the secretary general of the NUM, called in the army: "We urgently call on the special forces or the South African armed forces before the situation gets out of control"³...and why not call for an aerial attack on the mine, Mister Baleni? But the trap had already been set. The next day, the government sent in thousands of police officers, equipped with armoured cars and two helicopters, to 'restore order'. Bourgeois order, of course.

According to several testimonies which, knowing the reputation of South Africa's forces of repression, are probably authentic, the police proceeded to provoke the miners by firing flash-balls, water-cannon, and tear gas at them, on the lying pretext that the strikers had firearms.

On 16 August, it appears, given the exhaustion of the workers and the excitement stirred up by the 'union representatives' – who, by chance, suddenly disappeared – a group of miners had the nerve to 'charge' the police armed with sticks. What? This vile mob charging the forces of order? What insolence! And what could these several thousand police, with their guns, their riot shields, their armoured cars, their water-cannon, their grenades and their helicopters do faced with a horde of savages 'charging' at them with sticks? Obviously they had to shoot to "protect their lives"⁴.

3. NUM communiqué, 13.8.12

4. Declaration by the police after the massacre. The police spokesman had the nerve to claim: "The police were attacked in a cowardly way by a group using various weapons, including firearms...The police

And this led to the absolutely disgusting, monstrous images which we all now know. But while the working class can only express its indignation in the face of such barbarity, it also needs to understand that the dissemination of these images also had an aim – that of spreading the mystification that the workers in the 'truly democratic' countries are lucky to be able to march freely behind their union banners. This was also a warning to all those who are tempted to rise up against the misery engendered by this system.

The bourgeoisie tries to distort the movement

Immediately after the massacre, voices all around the world were heard denouncing 'the demon of apartheid'. The bourgeoisie wants to distort the meaning of this movement by pushing it towards ethnic and nationalist issues. Julius Malema, who was expelled from the ANC in April, took himself off to Marikana to denounce the foreign companies, demanding the nationalisation of the mines and the expulsion of the 'big white landowners'.

Exhibiting the crassest form of hypocrisy, Jacob Zuma declared to the press: "We must bring out the truth about what happened here. This is why I have decided to set up a commission of inquiry to find out the real causes of this incident". The truth is this: the bourgeoisie is trying to dupe the working class by disguising the class struggle as a racial struggle. But the trick is a bit obvious: wasn't it a 'black' government that responded to the appeal of a 'black' trade union to send in the police? Isn't it a 'black' government which has done all it can to maintain the miners in the most wretched living conditions? Isn't it a 'black' government which is using a police force trained in the apartheid era and which has voted in 'shoot to kill' laws? And this 'black' government, isn't it run by the ANC, the party of Nelson Mandela, celebrated all over the world as the champion of democracy and tolerance?

officers, to protect their lives and in a situation of legitimate self-defence, were obliged to respond with force"

The strike spreads

In the night of 19/20 August, trying to take advantage of the situation, the directors of Lonmin, the firm which exploits the mine, ordered "the 3000 employees on illegal strike to return to work on Monday 20 August, or face possible redundancy"⁵. But the anger of the miners was such that they defied this threat: "Are they going to sack those who are in the hospital and the morgue? In any case, it's better to get the sack because we are suffering here. Our lives aren't going to change. Lonmin doesn't care about our welfare. Up till now they have refused to talk to us. They have sent in the police to kill us"⁶. Lonmin had to retreat, and meanwhile on 22 August the strike spread, with workers in several other mines, owned by Royal Bafokeng Platinum and Amplats, coming out for the same demands.

At the time of writing, after four weeks of the strike, the ANC has signed a deal to return to work, but the AMCU have said they will confront anyone reporting for duty. After the massacre 270 miners were charged with 'public violence' which was then changed to murder based on case law from the apartheid era. Eventually the charges were dropped, but 150 miners said they had been beaten while in custody. There have been a number of demonstrations, and a week's strike at KCD East gold mine. Police fired on pickets, wounding four miners, in a wildcat strike at Modder East gold mine.

Julius Malema has continued to make a name for himself, but his demand for widespread nationalisation is effectively for more control by the capitalist state dominated by the ANC.

But what the Marikana massacre has shown most clearly is the violence of the democratic state. Black or white, all states are ready to carry out massacres against the working class.

El Generico 22/8/12 (additions 8/6/12)

1. The official unemployment rate was 35.4% at the end of 2011

2. Quoted in *Le Monde*, 16/8/12

5. Lonmin declaration 19.8.12

6. Quoted on www.jeunafrique.com. 9.8.12

The organisation of the proletariat outside periods of open struggle (w

For the majority of revolutionary groups today, the trade unions are no longer seen as organisations can defend the most immediate interests of the working class, let alone its revolutionary, historic interests. There is also a high level of agreement that the most effective form for organising and spreading the struggle today is the general assembly of workers, and the elected and revocable committees and coordinating bodies that emerge from the assemblies. But such forms of organisation cannot be maintained on a permanent basis when the struggle dies down, which poses a problem for militant workers who don't want to sink back into atomisation and who want to play an active part in future struggles. This is why there is a tendency, even though it's usually only seen among a small minority, for such workers to form groups, circles, committees and networks, outside the official unions and sometimes explicitly against them. But among revolutionary organisations there are a number of different approaches to such groupings: are they the basis for a revived form of anarcho-syndicalism? Should they be seen as the basis for forming permanent intermediaries between the communist political organisation and the class as a whole?

These questions have been the subject of debate for some decades and they are still being raised on internet discussion forums, such as this one: <http://www.red-marx.com/icc-ict-and-the-icp-t695.html>. In a more concrete and practical sense they are being posed in numerous workplaces and localities as a militant minority of workers, students and the unemployed seek to come together to resist capital's austerity offensive.

We think it would be useful to publish a number of articles that look back over different elements in this debate and seek to draw out some perspectives for future activity. We are beginning with a text that was adopted in 1980 by the Third Congress of the ICC's Belgian section, and published in *International Review* no. 21. The text is a good basis for beginning this series because after laying down the overall framework for understanding the nature of the class struggle in the era of capitalism's decline, it aims to elaborate the general lessons that could be drawn from the experience of workers' groups in the 1970s. Future articles will look at other experiences from the 1980s and from the last decade, as well as reviewing some of the debates between revolutionaries on this question.

September 2012

What is to be done outside times of open struggle? How should we organise when the strike is finished? How to prepare the struggles to come?

Faced with this question, faced with the problems posed by the existence of committees, circles, nuclei, etc, regrouping small minorities of the working class, we have no recipes to provide. We cannot choose between giving them moral lessons ('organise yourselves like this or that', 'dissolve yourselves', 'join us') and demagogically flattering them. Instead, our concern is this: to understand these minority expressions of the proletariat as a part of the whole class. If we situate them in the general movement of the class struggle; if we see that they are strictly linked to the strengths and weaknesses of different periods in this struggle between the classes, then, in this way, we'll be able to understand to what general necessity they are a response. By neither remaining politically imprecise in relation to them, nor by imprisoning ourselves inside rigid schemas, we'll also be able to grasp what their positive aspects are and be able to point out what dangers lie in wait for them.

Characteristics of the workers' struggle in decadent capitalism

Our first concern in understanding this problem must be to recall the general, historical context within which we find ourselves. We must remember the nature of this historic period (the period of social revolutions) and the characteristics of the class struggle in decadence. This analysis is fundamental because it allows us to understand the type of class organisation that can exist in such a period.

Without going into all the details, let's recall simply that the proletariat in the nineteenth century existed as an organised force in a permanent way. The proletariat unified itself as a class through an economic and political struggle for reforms. The progressive character of the capitalist system allowed the proletariat to bring pressure to bear on the bourgeoisie in order to obtain reforms, and for this, large masses of the working class regrouped within unions and parties.

In the period of capitalism's senility, the characteristics and the forms of organisation of the class changed. A quasi-permanent mobilisation of the proletariat around its immediate and political interests was no longer possible, nor viable. Henceforward, the **unitary organs** of the class were no longer able to exist *except in the course of the struggle itself*. From this time on, the function of these unitary organs could no longer be limited to simply 'negotiating' an improvement in the proletariat's living conditions (because

an improvement was no longer possible over the long term and because the only realistic answer was that of revolution). Their task was to prepare for the seizure of power.

The unitary organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat are the workers' councils. These organs possess a certain number of characteristics which we must make clear if we are to grasp the entire process which leads to the self-organisation of the proletariat.

Thus, we must clearly show that the councils are a direct expression of working class struggle. They arise in a spontaneous (but not mechanical) way from out of this struggle. This is why they are intimately tied to the development and maturity of the struggle. They draw from it their substance and their vitality. They don't constitute, then, a simple 'delegation' of power, a parody of Parliament, but are truly the organised expression of the whole working class and its power. Their task isn't to organise a proportional representation of social groupings, or political parties, but allow the will of the proletariat to realise itself practically. It's through them that all the decisions are taken. That is the reason why the workers must constantly keep control of them (the revocability of delegates) by means of the General Assemblies.

Only the workers' councils are capable of realising the living identification between the immediate struggle and the final goal. In this liaison between the struggle for immediate interests and the struggle for political power, the councils establish the objective and subjective basis for the revolution. They constitute, par excellence, the crucible of class consciousness. The constitution of the proletariat in councils is not then a simple question of a form of organisation, but is the product of the development of the struggle and of class consciousness. **The appearance of the councils isn't the fruit of organisational recipes, of prefabricated structures, of intermediate organs.**

The more and more conscious extension and centralisation of struggles, beyond the factories and beyond frontiers, cannot be an artificial, voluntarist action. To be convinced of the correctness of this idea, it's sufficient to recall the experience of the AAUD and its artificial attempt to unite and centralise the 'factory organisations' in a period when the struggle was in reflux.¹

1. AAUD: Allgemeiner Arbeiter Union Deutschlands, 'General Workers Union of Germany'. The 'Unions' weren't trade unions, but attempts to create permanent forms of organisation regrouping all the workers outside and against the unions, in Germany in the years following the crushing of the 1919 Berlin insurrection. They expressed nostalgia for the workers' councils, but never succeeded in carrying out the function of the

The councils can only continue to exist when the permanent, open struggle continues to exist, signifying the participation of an ever-growing number of workers in the struggle. Their appearance is essentially a function of the development of the struggle itself and of the development of class consciousness.

The attempts to bridge a gap

But we are not yet in a period of permanent struggle, in a revolutionary context which would allow the proletariat to organise itself in workers' councils. The constitution of the proletariat in councils is the result of objective conditions (the depth of the crisis, the historic course) and subjective conditions (the maturity of the struggle and the consciousness of the class). It is the result of an entire apprenticeship, a whole maturation, which is as much organisational as it is political.

We must be conscious that this maturation, this political fermentation, doesn't unfold in a well-designated straight line. It expresses itself instead as a fiery, impetuous, confused process within a jostling, jerky movement. It demands the active participation of revolutionary minorities.

Since it is incapable of acting mechanically in accordance with abstract principles, preconceived plans or voluntarist schemes detached from reality, the proletariat must forge its unity and consciousness by means of a painful apprenticeship. Incapable of regrouping all its forces on a preordained day, it consolidates its ranks in the course of the battle itself. **It forms its 'army' within the conflict itself.** But in the course of the struggle it forms in its ranks more combative elements, a more determined vanguard. These elements don't necessarily regroup themselves within the revolutionary organisation (because, in certain periods, it is virtually unknown). The appearance of these combative minorities within the proletariat, whether before or after open struggles, isn't an incomprehensible or new phenomenon. It really expresses the irregular character of the struggle, the unequal and heterogeneous development of class consciousness. Thus, since the end of the 1960's, we've witnessed, at one and the same time, the development of the struggle (in the sense of its greater self-organisation), a reinforcement of revolutionary minorities, and the appearance of committees, nuclei, circles, etc, trying to regroup a working class avant-garde. The development of a coherent political pole of regroupment, and the tendency for the proletariat to try to organise itself outside the unions, both issue from the same maturation of the struggle.

The appearance of these committees, circles, etc, truly responds to a necessity within the struggle. If some combative elements sense the need to remain grouped together after they've been struggling together, they do so with the aim of simultaneously continuing to 'act together' (the eventual preparation of a new strike) and of drawing the lessons of the struggle (through political discussion). The problem which poses itself to these workers is **as much one of regrouping with a view to future action as it is of regrouping with a view to clarifying questions posed by the past struggle and the struggle to come.** This attitude is understandable in the sense that the absence of permanent struggle the 'bankruptcy' of the unions, and the very great weakness of revolutionary organisations creates an organisational and political void. When the working class returns to the path of its historic struggle, it has a horror of this void. Therefore, it seeks to reply to the need posed by this organisational and political void.

These committees, these nuclei, these proletarian minorities who still don't understand clearly their own function, are a response to this need. They are, at one and the same time, an expression of the general weakness of today's class struggle and an expression of the **maturation of the organisation of the class.** They are a crystallisation of a whole subterranean development at work within the proletariat.

The reflux of 1973-77

That is why we must be careful not to lock away these organs in a hermetic, rigidly classified drawer. **We cannot forecast their appearance and development.**

oment in a totally precise way. Furthermore, we must be careful not to make artificial separations in the different moments in the life of these committees, getting ourselves caught in the false dilemma: 'action or discussion'.

This said, it must not stop us from making an intervention towards these organs. We must also be capable of appreciating their evolution in terms of the period, **depending on whether we are in a phase of renewal or reflux in the struggle.** Because they are a spontaneous, immediate product of the struggle, and because the appearance of these nuclei is based mainly on conjunctural problems (in distinction to the revolutionary organisation which appears on the basis of the historical necessities of the proletariat), this means that they remain very dependent on the surrounding milieu of the class struggle. They remain more strongly imprisoned by the general weaknesses of the movement and have a tendency to follow the ups and downs of the struggle.

We must make a distinction in the development of these nuclei between the period of reflux in the struggle (1973-77) and today's period of renewed class struggle internationally. While underlining the fact that the dangers threatening them remain identical in both periods, we must, nonetheless, be capable of grasping what differences the change in period implies for their evolution.

At the end of the first wave of struggle at the end of the 1960's, we witnessed the appearance of a whole series of confusions within the working class. We could measure the extent of these confusions by examining the attitude of some of the combative elements of the class, who tried to remain regrouped.

We saw develop:

- **the illusion in fighting unionism and the distrust of anything political** (OHK, AAH, Komiteewerking²). In many cases, the committees that came out of struggles transformed themselves, categorically, into semi-unions. This was the case for the workers' commissions in Spain and the 'factory councils' in Italy. Even more often they just disappeared.

- a very strong **corporatism** (which itself constitutes the basis for the illusion in 'fighting unionism').

- when attempts were made to go beyond the limits of the factory, the result was **confusion and a great political eclecticism.**

- a very great political confusion was present, rendering these organs very vulnerable to the manoeuvres of the leftists, and also allowing them to fall prey to illusions of the type held by the PIC (cf. their 'bluff' about workers' groups)³. Also, in the course of this period, the ideology of 'workers' autonomy' developed, bringing with it an apology for immediatism, factoryism and economism.

All of these weaknesses were essentially a function of the weaknesses of the first wave of struggle at the end of the 60's. This movement was characterised by a disproportion between the strength and extension of the strikes and the weakness in the content of the demands made. What especially indicated this disproportion was the absence of any clear, political perspective in the movement. The falling-back of the workers, which happened between 1973 and 1977, was a product of this weakness, which the bourgeoisie utilised to demobilise and ideologically contain the struggles. Each of the weak points of the first wave of strikes was 'recuperated' by the bourgeoisie to its own profit:

"Thus the idea of a permanent organisation of the class, at one and the same time economic and political, was transformed later into the idea of 'new unions' to end finally in a return to classical trade unionism. The vision of the General Assembly as a form independent of any content ended up — via the mystification concerning direct democracy and popular

2. These were all workers' groups in Belgium.

3. The French group PIC (Pour Une Intervention Communiste) was for several months convinced - and tried to convince everyone else - that it was participating in the development of a network of 'workers' groups' which would constitute a powerful avant-garde of the revolutionary movement. They based this illusion on the skeletal reality of two or three groups largely made-up of ex-leftist elements. There's not much left of this bluff today.

Workers' groups, nuclei, circles, committees)

power - re-establishing trust in classical bourgeois democracy. Ideas about self-management and workers' control of production (confusions which were understandable at the beginning) were theorised into the myth of 'generalised self-management', 'islands of communism' or 'nationalisation under workers' control'. All this caused the workers to put their confidence in plans to restructure the economy, which would supposedly avoid layoffs or caused them to back national solidarity pacts presented as a way of 'getting out of the crisis'.

(Report on the Class Struggle presented to the IIIrd International Congress of the ICC).

The renewal of struggles since 1977

With the renewal in struggle since 1977, we have seen other tendencies delineate themselves. The proletariat matured through its 'defeat'. It had drawn albeit in a confused way, the lessons of the reflux, and even if the dangers represented by 'fighting unionism', corporatism, etc remain, they exist within a different general evolution in the struggle.

Since 1977, we have seen the hesitant development of:

- a more or less marked will on the part of the avant-garde of combative workers to develop political discussion (remember the General Assembly of Co-ordinamenti in Turin, the debate at Antwerp with the workers of Rotterdam, Antwerp, etc, the conference of dockers in Barcelona⁴);

- the will to enlarge the field of struggle, to go beyond the ghetto of factoryism, to give a more global political framework to the struggle. This will expressed itself through the appearance of the 'co—ordinamenti', and more specifically in the political manifesto produced by one of the co-ordinamenti situated in the North of Italy (Sesto San Giovanni). This manifesto demanded the unification of the combative avant-garde in the factories, spelt out the necessity for a politically independent struggle by the workers and insisted on the necessity for the struggle to break out of factory limitations;

- the concern to establish a link between the immediate aspect of the struggle and the final goal. This concern was particularly expressed in workers' groups in Italy (FIAT) and in Spain (FEY-CU, FORD). The first of these groups intervened by means of a leaflet to denounce the dangers of layoffs made by the bourgeoisie in the name of 'fighting terrorism', and the second intervened to denounce the illusion of parliamentarism;

- the concern to better prepare and organise the struggles to come (cf. the action of the 'spokesmen' group of dockers in Rotterdam calling for the formation of a General Assembly).

We must repeat that the dangers of corporatism, 'fighting unionism' and locking-up of the struggle on a strictly economic terrain continue to exist even within this period. But what we must take into account is the **important influence of the period** on the evolution of the committees and nuclei that appear both before and after open struggles. When the period is one of combativity and resurgence of class struggle, the intervention of such minorities takes on a different sense, as does our attitude toward them. In a period of generalised reflux in the struggle, we have to insist more on the danger of these organs becoming transformed into semi-unions, of falling into the clutches of the leftists, of having illusions in terrorism, etc. In a period of class resurgence we insist more on the dangers represented by voluntarism and activism (see the illusions expressed in this connection in the manifesto of the co-ordinamento of Sesto San Giovanni), and by the illusion which some of these combative workers may have about the possibility of forming the embryos of future strike committees, etc. In a period of renewal in the struggle, we will also be more open to combative minorities which appear and regroup with a view to calling for strikes and the formation of strike committees, General Assemblies, etc.

The possibilities of these organs

The concern to situate the committees, nuclei, etc, in the cauldron of the class struggle, to understand them in terms of the period in which they appear, doesn't imply, however, abruptly changing our analysis in the wake of the different stages in the class struggle. Whatever the moment that gives birth to these committees, we know that they **constitute only one stage in a dynamic, general process**; they are one moment in the maturation of the organisation and consciousness of the class. They can only have a positive role when they give themselves a broad, supple framework to work within, in order not to freeze the general process. This is why these organs must be vigilant if they are to avoid falling into the following traps:

- imagining that they constitute a structure which can prepare the way for the appearance of strike committees or councils;

- imagining themselves to be invested with a sort of 'potentiality' which can develop future struggles. (It isn't the minorities who artificially create a strike or cause a General Assembly or a committee to appear, even though they do have an active intervention to make in this process).

- giving themselves a platform or statutes or anything else that risks freezing their evolution and thus condemning them to political confusion.

- presenting themselves as intermediate organs, half-way between the class and a political organisation, as if they were an organisation that is at one and the same time unitary and political.

This is why our attitude towards these minority organs remains open, but at the same time tries to influence the evolution of **political reflection** in their midst, and this whatever the period in which we find ourselves. We must try our hardest to ensure that these committees, nuclei, etc. don't freeze up, either in one direction (a structure which imagines itself to prefigure the workers' councils) or another (political fixation). Before all else, what must guide us in our intervention is not the interests and the conjunctural concerns of these organs (since we can't suggest to them any organisational recipes nor any ready-made answers), **but the general interests of the whole class**. Our concern is always to homogenise and develop class consciousness in such a way that the development of the class struggle happens with a greater, more massive participation of all workers, and that the struggle is taken in-hand by the workers themselves and not by a minority, no matter what type it may be. It is for this reason that we insist on the dynamic of the movement and that we put the combative elements on their guard against any attempt at substitutionism or anything that might block the later development of the struggle and of class consciousness.

In orientating the evolution of these organs in one direction (reflection and political discussion), rather than another, we can give a response which will be favourable to the dynamic of the movement. But let it be well-understood that this doesn't signify that we condemn any form of 'intervention' or 'action' undertaken by these organs. It is obvious that the instant a group of combative workers understands that the task isn't to act to constitute themselves as a semi-union, but rather to draw the political lessons of the past struggles, this doesn't imply that their political reflection is going to happen in an ethereal vacuum, in the abstract, without any practical consequences. The political clarification undertaken by these combative workers will also push them to act together within their own factory (and in the most positive of cases, even outside their own factory). They will feel the necessity to give a material, political expression to their political reflection (leaflets, newspapers, etc). They will feel the need to take up positions in relation to the concrete issues that face the working class. In order to defend and disseminate their positions, they will thus have to make a **concrete intervention**. In certain circumstances they will propose concrete means of action (formation of General Assemblies, strike committees...) to advance the struggle. In the course of the struggle itself, they will sense the necessity for a concerted effort to develop a certain orientation for the struggle; they will support demands that will permit the struggle to extend itself and they will insist on the

necessity for its enlargement, generalisation, etc.

Even though we remain attentive to these efforts and don't try to lay down rigid schemas for them to follow, nonetheless it is clear that we must continue to insist on the fact that what counts the most is the active participation of all the workers in the struggle, and that the combative workers should at no time substitute themselves for their comrades in the organisation and co-ordination of the strike. Moreover, it is also clear that the more the organisation of revolutionaries increases its influence within the struggles, the more the combative elements will turn toward it. Not because the organisation will have a policy of forcibly recruiting these elements, but quite simply because the combative workers themselves will become conscious that a political intervention, which is really active and effective, can only be made in the framework of such an international organisation.

The intervention of revolutionaries

All that glitters isn't gold. To point out that the working class in its struggle can cause more combative elements to appear doesn't mean affirming that the impact of these minorities is decisive for the later development of class consciousness. We must not make this absolute identification: an expression of the maturation of consciousness = an active factor in its development.

In reality the influence which these nuclei can have in the later unfolding of the struggle is very limited. Their influence entirely depends on the general combativity of the proletariat and of the capacity of these nuclei to pursue without let-up this work of political clarification. In the long-term, this work cannot be followed except within the framework of a revolutionary organisation.

But here again, we've no mechanism to drop in place. It's not in an artificial manner that the revolutionary organisation wins these elements. Contrary to the ideas of organisations like Battaglia Comunista or the PIC, the ICC does not seek to fill-in, in an artificial, voluntarist manner, 'the gap' between the party and the class. Our understanding of the working class as a historic force, and our comprehension of our own role prevents us from wanting to freeze these committees into the form of an intermediate structure. Nor do we seek to create 'factory groups' as transmission belts between the class and the party.

This presents us with the question of determining what our attitude to such circles, committees, etc should be. Even while recognising their limited influence and their weaknesses, we must remain open to them and attentive to their appearance. The most important thing that we propose to them is that they open up widely to discussions. At no time do we adopt toward them a distrustful or condemnatory attitude under the pretext of reacting against their political 'impurity'. So that's one thing we should avoid; another is to avoid flattering them or even uniquely concentrating our energies on them. We mustn't ignore workers' groups, but equally we mustn't become obsessive about them. We recognise that the struggle matures and class-consciousness develops in a process.

Within this process, tendencies exist within the class that attempt to 'hoist' the struggle onto a political terrain. In the course of this process, we know that the proletariat will give rise to combative minorities within itself, but they won't necessarily organise themselves within political organisations. We must be careful not to identify this process of maturation in the class today with what characterised the development of the struggle last century. This understanding is very important because it permits us to appreciate in what way these committees, circles, etc are a real expression of the maturation of class consciousness, but an expression which is, above all, **temporary and ephemeral** and not a fixed, structured organisational rung in the development of the class struggle. The class struggle in the period of capitalist decadence advances explosively. Sudden eruptions appear which surprise even those elements who were the most combative in the proceeding round of struggle, and these eruptions can immediately go beyond previous experience in terms of the consciousness and maturity developed in the new struggle. The proletariat can only really organise

itself on a unitary level within the struggle. To the extent that the struggle itself becomes permanent, it causes the unitary organisations of the class to grow and become stronger.

This understanding is what allows us to grasp why we don't have a specific policy, a special 'tactic' in relation to workers' committees, even though in certain circumstances it can be very positive for us to begin and systematically continue discussions with them, and to participate in their meetings. We know that it is possible and increasingly easy to discuss with these combative elements (particularly when open struggle isn't taking place). We are also aware that certain of these elements may want to join us, but we don't focus all our attention on them. Because what is of primary importance for us is the general dynamic of the struggle, and we don't set up any rigid classifications or hierarchies within this dynamic. Before everything, we address ourselves to the working class as a whole. Contrary to other political groups who try to surmount the problem of the lack of influence of revolutionary minorities in the class by artificial methods and by feeding themselves on illusions about these workers' groups, the ICC recognises that it has very little impact in the present period. We don't try to increase our influence among the workers by giving them artificial 'confidence' in us. We aren't workerist, nor are we megalomaniacs. The influence which we will progressively develop within the struggles will come essentially from our **political practice** inside these struggles and not from our acting as toadies, or flatterers, or as 'water-carriers' who restrict themselves to performing technical tasks. Furthermore, we address our political intervention to all the workers, to the proletariat taken as a whole, as a class, because our fundamental task is to call for the maximum extension of the struggles. We don't exist in order to feel satisfied at winning the confidence of two or three horny-handed worker but to homogenise and accelerate the development of the consciousness of the class. It's necessary to be aware that it will only be in the revolutionary process itself that the proletariat will accord us its political 'confidence' to the extent that it realises that the revolutionary party really makes up a **part** of its historic struggle.

ICC Online

Imperialism

Imperialist powers fuel war in Syria

World economic crisis

June 2012 euro summit: behind the illusions, a new step in the catastrophe
BRICS don't float

Bourgeois attacks, class struggle and protest

Leaflet by the Spanish section of the ICC: The worst attacks on our living conditions (up till now): How far will they go? How can we respond?

Wildcat strike in Antep, Turkey: "We want to wive like human beings"

Airline strike in Turkey: militant workers expose the unions

Persecution of gypsies in France and Europe

Demonstrations in Japan after the nuclear disaster at Fukushima: Indignation is spreading

USA: Recent Supreme Court rulings on "Obamacare" and the Arizona anti-immigration Law

Increasing exploitation from Taylorism to Toyota and Lean

ICC Day of Discussion, June 2012

Synthesis of the discussions on Islam and on art

Art and social issues

Success and failure of the Bauhaus

Women's condition in the 21st century

Revolutionary movement

Homage to Il Jae Lee of the Left Communist Group in Korea

Public meeting of the International Communist Party: Discussion is the lifeblood of the revolutionary movement (isn't it?)

4. These are organised meetings regrouping delegates from different workers' groups, collectives and committees.

In Syria, the big powers gesticulate, the massacres continue

For more than a year and a half the politicians and media in the west have been displaying their deep sympathy for the people of Syria. The litany is incessant: Bashar al-Assad is guilty of 'crimes against humanity'. And indeed, the slaughter being carried out by the Syrian regime has mounted up at a terrifying pace, and has even further accelerated this summer, despite all the UN appeals for a cease-fire. The dictator of Damascus continues his project of wiping out the Syrian 'rebellion' with considerable determination, declaring recently that "this will take some time still" and that the growing desertion by senior regime officials amounts to "a self-cleansing operation by the state first of all, and by the nation in general".

Since 15 March 2011, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 23,000 have been killed. And how many of the 200,000 injured will not be maimed for life, or will not survive their wounds? Assad certainly leaves little to chance, because he has even been bombing hospitals and sending in his troops to terrorise them and murder his enemies. Al-Qoubir, Damas, Rifha, Aleppo, Dera, Daraya, all these martyred towns are symbols of the extreme brutality that has descended on the country.

We should add to this a situation of humanitarian disaster. Food, milk for children, medicines, care for the wounded, water – there is a catastrophic lack of all these things in most towns and regions. Houses have been destroyed en masse and there is a serious shortage of shelter. Electricity cuts often last 4 to 5 days and supplies may only be resumed for an hour or so, as in Aleppo.

Fleeing the fighting and the exactions of Assad's army, but also from the Free Syrian Army, which is increasingly being accused of certain massacres, nearly 300,000 people have gone into exile, whether to the south of Syria, towards Lebanon and Jordan, or north towards Turkey and even to Iraq. Masses of refugees are being kept in miserable camps in the hope of one day being able to return home...where everything has been destroyed.

In total, according to the UN, we are talking about over two and a half million people, women, children, the aged, in a 'situation of distress'.

Tears of the crocodile

These alarming figures have drawn tears from the leaders of the planet, but they are tears of the crocodile. Fabius, the French foreign minister, said that this was "an intolerable and unacceptable situation". And we would applaud these brave words as the expression of a legitimate revulsion against such horror – if they weren't part a cynical masquerade.

On 27 August, François Hollande declared: "I solemnly declare that along with our allies we will remain very vigilant about preventing the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, which for the international community would be a legitimate cause for direct intervention". This intervention would follow in the footsteps of Barak Obama who not long before said that the use of chemical weapons would mark a "red line" and would be a reason for sending in troops against the Syrian regime. In other words, as long as the killing is done with 'traditional' weapons, that's OK, but watch out for crossing that "red line".

In fact the western bourgeoisie has been threatening to intervene for months, but it's in no position to do so, and diplomatic initiatives have come and gone, each one more hypocritical than the one before. And even if they did intervene, this would not at all be in order to support the population but to open the door to a new free-for-all, a new escalation of horror whose first victim would again be the Syrian population.

This war of so-called 'liberation', this 'struggle for democracy', is an imperialist war pure and simple. All the regional and global powers are involved in it, with the USA, Russia, China, France and Britain in the front line. The involvement and responsibility of these gangsters is not restricted to their gesticulations in the UN or elsewhere, but through the arms and cash they are supplying to both camps¹.

1. We should note the brazen cheek of Russia which has been supplying Assad with combat helicopters but which offered this excuse: "We are now finishing the fulfilment of contracts that were signed and paid for a long time ago. All of (the contracts) are solely for means of air defence" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/13/us-claim-syria-russian-civilians>).

The talk of setting up a buffer zone on Syria's border with Turkey, to offer shelter to the tens of thousands of refugees in the area, is a vast smoke-screen, because it's not viable given Assad's opposition to it. It would more or less require open war with Damascus because it would serve as a launch pad for most of the imperialist sharks, flying the flag of 'peacekeeping', with all the attendant risks for the refugees. We should remember how the UN, and France in particular, allowed thousands of people to be massacred in Srebrenica by troops under Milosevic.

If the UN did intervene, we would have to recall the solicitude with which the Afghans, and then the Iraqis, have been treated since 2001 in the name of the 'war against terror' or 'for democracy'. Both countries have been shattered by these interventions, leaving the population prey to rival warlords, each one more backward than the one before.

We should also keep in mind the intrigues and the violence which presided over the establishment of French and British protectorates in this region of the Middle East when the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of the First World War. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 carved up Syria and Iraq while promising 'freedom' to the Arab peoples. The bourgeoisie always makes a great show of its good intentions while hiding its real aims under a mountain of lies.

One thing is for sure, what is happening today under our eyes is not just the expression of the madness of Assad, but of this decadent social system. And it is without doubt the prelude to an unprecedented aggravation of the situation throughout the Middle East. The consequences will be disastrous, as we can already see with the extension of the conflict into the Lebanon.

Wilma 31/8/12

But the US is not so different. It claims that it is only supplying the opposition forces with "means of communication" but it is actually using Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait to provide anti-tank weapons. France meanwhile sells thermal cameras to Russia for its tanks, which supposedly will not be used to equip the Syrian army!

Continued from page 8

Is there a danger of fascism today?

new dynamic that could open up towards major confrontations between the classes. While it has certainly experienced very great difficulties since then, the working class has not suffered a major defeat sufficient to open a period of counter-revolution worldwide, similar to the 1930s.

That is the reason why the essential condition for establishing fascism, a proletariat defeated on the global level, ideologically and physically crushed in several key capitalist countries, does not exist at the present.

In the present period what the proletariat has to fear most is not the peril of fascism coming to power directly, but the democratic mystifications and the old workers' parties that have gone over to the class enemy. They function to sabotage every attempt by the working class to defend itself from capital and affirm its revolutionary nature. It is no accident that today these parties are the first to raise the threat of fascism in order to push workers into defending democracy and the left.

In these conditions how can we explain the present rise in populist parties with the same themes as the fascists of the 1930s?

It is the consequence of the difficulties the working class is having in drawing out its own perspective, the proletarian revolution, as an alternative to the bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production.

So, even if the bourgeoisie does not have its hands free to unleash its own response to the crisis of its system - generalised imperialist war - society is rotting on its feet under the effects of the economic crisis. This process of the decomposition of society produces a ragbag of obscurantist, xenophobic ideologies, based on hatred of others who are seen as competitors or enemies. A significant part of the population, including the working class, is influenced by this to a greater or lesser extent.

Faced with this the solution is certainly not a mobilisation or specific struggle against fascism, nor the defence of democracy, but the development of the proletariat's autonomous struggle against capitalism as a whole. ICC 30.6.12

Cosmopolis: a poetical and radical indictment of capitalism



It has to be said that even among cinephiles who are used to small art cinemas, certain films provoke cruel prejudices. Going to see David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis*, it's easy to be assailed by negative feelings when you queue up for tickets. The title itself is a little off-putting: the direct reference to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* can raise doubts about Cronenberg's modesty. Another pretentious film costing 20 million dollars and realised with the aid of dodgy loans? And already there have been some harsh words by the critics, and audiences walking out en masse before the end of the movie. And then the posters feature the film's lead, Robert Pattinson, better known for his role as a teen-idol in vampire movies.

But what is *Cosmopolis*? First of all it's a baroque scenario taken from a book of the same name. The billionaire Eric Packer has but one

aim: to get to his hair-stylist! From inside his armoured limousine, on the long road that leads to this insignificant objective, capitalism can be seen collapsing, the population rises up, riots break out. At the beginning of the film, two people enter the café where the billionaire had stopped for a few minutes. Brandishing dead rats, which serve as a kind of imaginary money, they shout out the first lines of the 1848 Communist Manifesto: "a spectre is haunting the world"...the spectre of capitalism. But nothing seems to divert Packer from his absurd aim, even the abstract and mysterious threat hanging over him.

This film is more than a superficially radical critique of capitalism, which was fairly typical of a number of movies in the 70s, even though they were often very good films. Packer is more than a cynical billionaire, more than a diabolical trader; he is a symbol of capitalism itself. The key to grasping the film is there: like the characters of Carlos Saura in *Ana y los lobos* (*Anna and the Wolves*), who are illustrations of the social make-up of Francoist Spain, the characters of *Cosmopolis* are metaphors, incarnations which go beyond the individual strictly speaking. Packer meets up with his fiancée, an incarnation of the artistic milieu and a promulgator of theories; a doctor, full of the illusions and blindness of bourgeois experts for whom everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds; the body guard, an image of the repressive forces; an unemployed worker, a proletarian who struggles to become aware of his strength and the inconsistency of the flamboyant

slogans of this world, "dead for a hundred years", but on which he had staked so much hope: "I wanted you to save me!"

While the film underestimates the role of the state in decadent capitalism, its author is nevertheless perfectly aware of the vanity of pseudo-revolt, of inoffensive and symbolic actions. An individual, who you think at first is the mysterious threat, arrives merely to throw a custard pie at Packer. Under the camera flashes that ensue, we see a totally simulated brawl. After a ridiculous speech, vaunting his meaningless feats, the pieman can only add pathetically: "right...I've gotta go". Unlike these pseudo-historic gestures, the revolution, for Cronenberg, is a serious thing, a violent confrontation, a radical overturning of bourgeois society.

But the director seems aware of the limits of the exercise; how can you denounce a world in collapse with such a costly film, financed by some of those who have every interest in preserving the system? Through the intermediary of Packer's fiancée, Cronenberg responds very honestly to this question. A very wealthy artist, she plays at being disinherited in a taxi or in shabby bars, and makes superficial criticisms of her lover. In the end, although she decides to publicly take her distance from him, making a show of breaking with him, she can only carry on secretly supporting capitalism. She thus crystallises all the contradictions of the exercise which, while being a vigorous criticism of capitalism, still has to obey its laws. This is an occasion for an interesting reflection on art

under the reign of commerce.

So how do we explain the negative reaction of a large part of the public? First, the film is extremely dense. A bit like the work of Stanley Kubrick, Cronenberg doesn't leave anything to chance. Although he bases the film on the work of Don Lillo for the dialogue, each scene, each phrase, each image makes you think. Each detail is charged with meaning in a coherent whole. It's true that you need to be carrying serious political luggage and several views to grasp all the elements of the film, since there are so many references to the workers' movement and political literature and so many significant details. But it's truly rare, given the price of tickets these days, for spectators to desert the cinema so massively and with such irritation, however bad a film may be. There is no doubt something more fundamental involved here. Many people have probably seen something that they are not used to seeing, or have experienced a kind of slap in the face. *Cosmopolis* is not a simple rigorous demonstration, which can be responded to with other arguments. While it is indeed a radical critique of capitalism, it is first and foremost a poetical one. The strength of great artists is to give their work an emotional dimension which penetrates the spirit and cuts through the cold mechanics of rationality. If such works make people run away or fill them with enthusiasm, if it grates on them or transports them, it's because they are producing something which is complex and hard to explain: emotion.

El Generico, 31/7/12

Discuss with the ICC and others on our online forum

Here are some responses to *WR* going bimonthly so that we can better focus on our online intervention:

Fred wrote on 6.9.12:

"...if we are to reinforce and adapt our web site, we need at the same time to reduce the effort we put into the paper press... Regarding the monthly press: by the time I get it I've already read everything in it on-line a number of times. This doesn't apply to everyone of course. But, although a late-comer to the internet, I find now that I'd rather read your current articles there, than in the old-fashioned paper format. It's the immediacy. Also, if provoked by an article, a swift response is available on the net. (This doesn't necessarily improve the quality of thought in the response I know, but there's also something to be said for seizing the thoughtful, but fleeting moment before it's gone. At least I hope so.) I very much think you should reinforce and adapt your website, but don't really know how, or even exactly why! (Not much help.) But I always feel there's space for a lot more posters, if only they could sense the possibility of speaking what they think, and weren't afraid of saying the wrong thing, of saying something stupid, or of getting bashed by some superior guy of immense revolutionary credentials and an apparently Einsteinian intellect, who might suddenly jump out of nowhere and have them for supper. On the other hand I myself wouldn't want a sudden invasion of vacuous one line posters with little or nothing to say. The Red Marx site seems to have attracted quite a few of them, nor would one welcome the type of vicious attack to be found sometimes on lib.com. But that's enough for now"

Reply from jk21, same day:

"I have mixed feeling about this. On the one hand, it seems like a practical adaptation to a reality we all know to exist. Communication today is almost exclusively carried on through the Internet, etc. In this sense, it is only logical for the revolutionary organization to find ways to adapt and remain relevant in this new environment.

That said, on a substantive level, I think it is also true that these new technologies are not 'content neutral.' They represent more than mere techno-

logical developments. The internet, social media, etc. have dramatically changed the nature of personal relationships, reordered information and knowledge hierarchies, and contributed to a kind of decentering of social life and the production of a new culture of eclecticism to go along with it. In some ways this new culture represents a challenge to traditional authorities and the methods through which capitalist society has often been legitimated. But, I don't think the story is all positive. In some, ways these new communication mediums also play into social decomposition and produce a highly individualized--everyone is worthy of having their own blog--culture that can work to undermine the discipline necessary to construct an organization and promote all kinds of stylized, individualist forms of pseudo-rebellion that do not, in the end, escape the capitalist horizon.

In this sense, the printed press is kind of a bulwark against this tendency. By constituting a defined (and limited) space, the printed press forces a kind of analysis that increasingly gets lost in the cacophony of the Internet today. It forces the organization to focus, to plan, to decide what events are worthy of analysis and reflection in a limited space and to come together on a regular basis to produce a collective product. In this sense, it is good to hear that *WR* will not abandon the printed press altogether. In the end, we must acknowledge and adapt to the new reality, but let's not let this site turn into a blog. There are too many of those already"

Join the discussion!

Donations

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

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New International Bookshop Trades Hall Building, cnr. Lygon & Victoria Sts., Carlton, Melbourne
Gould's Book Arcade 32 King St., Newtown, Sydney

World Revolution to go bi-monthly

"Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another (...) And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years"

So wrote Marx in 1848, in the Communist Manifesto. Capitalism, in the end, has lasted longer than Marx expected – but the class struggle is more than ever present around the world. Where the workers of 1848 relied on railways, which were certainly not created for their benefit, the workers and revolutionaries of 2012 rely more and more on the Internet to spread their ideas, to discuss, and – we hope – little by little to forge that "ever-expanding union" of which Marx spoke. The Internet has profoundly modified the way we work, and above all the way we communicate.

When the ICC was formed in 1975, the Internet of course did not exist: ideas were spread through the paper press, distributed in the hundreds of small radical bookshops that sprouted up in the aftermath of May '68 and similar struggles around the world. Correspondence was carried on through the post, by (often handwritten!) letters. To find revolutionaries in other countries, there was no other solution than to travel physically in the hope that it would be possible to make contact.

Today, everything but the physical contact has moved from paper to electronic media. And where once we sold our paper press in bookshops around the world, today our sales take place above all in demonstrations and at workplaces in struggle.

Our press has always relied on sharing articles across national boundaries, and in this way trying to contribute to the development of an internationalist outlook in the working class. Today, the greater speed of electronic media has made it possible for the ICC's sections to work together more closely, especially those sections that share a common language, and we want to use this to

increase the international unity of our press.

All this has led us to undertake a re-evaluation of our press, and of the relative place of the electronic and paper press in our overall intervention. We are convinced that the paper press remains a vital part of our arsenal – it is through the paper press that we can be present on the ground, directly in the struggle. But the paper press no longer plays exactly the same role as it did in the past: it needs to become more flexible, adaptable to a changing situation.

Given our limited strength, this has led us to the conclusion that if we are to reinforce and adapt our web site, we need at the same time to reduce the effort we put into the paper press: one of the first consequences of this reorientation of our publications is therefore going to be a reduction in the frequency of our paper publications. Concretely, in the case of our press in Britain, this means that we will be moving to a bi-monthly paper.

We are only at the beginning of our reflections on the subject of the press, and we expect over the year to come to make further modifications, in particular to the way our web site is structured. We would like to involve our readers in this effort, and will shortly be publishing a survey on the site to invite you to give your own opinion. In the meantime, we would be more than happy for our readers to pass on their suggestions through the forum.

Everything we have said above applies, of course, to the situation in those areas where Internet access is widespread. There are still regions where the lack or difficulty of Internet access means that a paper press continues to play the same role that it did in the past. This is particularly true of India and Latin America, and we will be working with our sections in India, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Ecuador to determine how best to adapt the paper press to conditions in those countries.

We are writing separately to all our subscribers about what this means for the duration and future of their subscriptions. Obviously we still strongly encourage our readers to support our work by subscribing to our paper publications, as well as taking out extra copies to sell.

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Contact the ICC

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

Write by e-mail to the following addresses:

From Great Britain use uk@internationalism.org

From India use India@internationalism.org

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

<http://www.internationalism.org>

Is there a danger of fascism today?

This article is based on the presentation to our public meeting in Paris on 30 June, written to introduce and stimulate discussion.

The electoral results achieved by the extreme right have for some time been feeding the fear of fascism election after election. And this political fringe really is distinguished by a particularly vicious, xenophobic and racist discourse...

And it is also true that this discourse is reminiscent of the nauseating themes put forward by the fascist parties as they rose to power in the 1930s, particularly in Germany and Italy.

Does this similarity mean that there is a danger of fascism coming to power today as it did in the 1930s?

Our view on this question, and its discussion, are the subject of this public meeting.

A number of things seem to suggest an answer in the affirmative:

- Today, as in the 1930s, the economic crisis is hitting the majority of the population very hard;
- Today, as in the 1930s, the extreme right is searching for a scapegoat for all the ills of society. Yesterday the Jews, portrayed as the representatives of big international capital, or of the danger of Bolshevism; today the Muslims, or Arabs or immigrants who “take our jobs” or “cause the trouble” in the world;

- Today, as in the 1930s, the most receptive to these extreme right ideas are often the small artisans or businessmen ruined by the crisis, but also a part of the working class;
- Today the extreme right is developing in many countries, even more than in the 1930s, and tends to increase its political influence:

- In Holland the euro-sceptic, Islamophobic Freedom Party was in coalition with the Liberal and Christian Democratic Parties under a Liberal prime minister from 2010 until this year;

- In Hungary, the prime minister after the legislative elections in 2010, V. Orban, installed an authoritarian government which, according to his democratic opponents “liquidated democracy”. And it is true that in addition to harsh attacks on the living conditions of the working class he suppressed a number of democratic mechanisms;

- In Austria, the 2008 elections gave the two main parties of the extreme right, the Movement for Austria’s Future and the Freedom Party, 29% of the vote between them;

- In Greece, so badly hit by the crisis, the openly

fascist Golden Dawn won 18 seats with 7% of the vote in the June election. It has also been involved in intimidating immigrants, as well as getting publicity for slapping another politician on live TV;

- In the USA the Tea Party, which has developed some of the most retrograde propaganda, such as the demand to teach creationism in schools, is an influential force on the right.

Even parties that do not claim to be on the extreme right are openly taking up its themes. In Switzerland, for example, the populist Democratic Union of the Centre has a campaign showing a white sheep chasing a black sheep, the latter symbolising the Arabs and Romanians, the two nationalities blamed in this country.

All these examples and elements of analysis seem, at first sight, to support the idea of a fascist danger in the present period.

However, we cannot be satisfied with this level of analysis. To compare two historic periods, in this case the 1930s and the present, we cannot limit ourselves to some elements, however important they are – like the crisis, the push of the extreme right, some success for xenophobic and racist propaganda, etc. We have to place these elements in the context of the dynamic of society and within that the relation of force between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

What produced fascism in the 1930s?

We have already mentioned the crisis. However, to understand the eruption of this particular form of the domination of capitalism in society in a number of countries we must take account of another factor which we consider essential.

This factor is **the heaviest defeat the working class has ever suffered**, that of the revolutionary wave of 1917-23. Remember that it took the form of the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the physical and ideological crushing of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. And that was particularly true in the countries where its revolutionary struggle had gone furthest in putting capitalist order in question. All the Communist parties were transformed into organs for the defence of capitalism in the particular form of state capitalism existing in the USSR.

Such a defeat gave rise to the longest and most profound period of world-wide counter-revolution that the proletariat has ever known. The main distinction of this counter-revolution was that it **rendered the proletariat of the whole world in-**

creasingly subject to the bourgeoisie’s imperatives. The ultimate submission was its enlistment as cannon fodder in the second imperialist World War.

During the Second World War the belligerent countries showed three different models of the organisation of society; all three were capitalist and all three were built around the strengthening of state capitalism, a general tendency affecting all countries in the world:

- Democratic state capitalism,
- Stalinist state capitalism,
- Fascist state capitalism.

The differences between the democratic capitalist state and the others are obvious. With hindsight today it is also obvious that it is more efficient that the two other forms, as much for the management of production as the control of the working class.

Why were some capitalist states fascist at that time?

The fact that the fascist capitalist state (just like the Stalinist) was stripped of all democratic mechanisms destined to mystify the working class was not a problem at the time these regimes were installed in Russia, Germany and Italy. In fact **there was no necessity to mystify the proletariat seeing that it had just been bleed dry in the defeat of the revolutionary wave (particularly in the USSR and Germany). What was needed was to maintain that defeat through the violence of a ferocious open dictatorship.**

In Germany and Italy fascist parties took on the politics of state capitalism in the interests of national capital, in the context of an economy disorganised by the war and driven to the brink by an economic crisis. **The bourgeoisie in these countries needed to prepare a new war.** This was done under the banner of revenge for defeat and/or humiliation suffered at the time of the First World War. From the beginning of the 1920s the fascists were the champions of such an option.

In these two countries the transition from democracy to fascism was carried out democratically, with the support of big capital.

We have said that the profound defeat of the working class was an essential condition for the establishment of fascism in the countries where it achieved power. According to a belief widely

EDL fiasco in Walthamstow

See ICC online

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

spread by the bourgeoisie, it was fascism that defeated the working class in the 1920s and 1930s. That is completely false. Fascism did nothing but complete a defeat mainly carried out by the left of the bourgeoisie’s political apparatus. At the time of the revolutionary wave the bourgeoisie was represented by the social democratic parties which had betrayed the working class and proletarian internationalism. During the First World War they called on the working class to support the bourgeoisie’s war effort in different countries, against the very principles of proletarian internationalism.

Why did the social democratic parties play this role? Was it necessary for them to do so? **Faced with a working class which is not only undefeated, but is also developing its revolutionary struggle, rendering certain repressive forces inoperative, it would be suicidal for the bourgeoisie to deploy its brute force first of all.** Brute force is only effective when it is used as part of a strategy capable of mystifying the proletariat, to use any weakness, to turn it towards impasses, to set traps for it. And this dirty work can only be carried out by political parties which, although they have betrayed the proletariat, still have the confidence of large parts of the working class.

So, in 1919, the very democratic German SPD, last political pillar of capitalist domination at the time of the revolution in Germany, had the task of being the executioner of the revolutionary working class. To this end it was supported by the remains of the army still faithful to the state and set in motion the repressive Freikorps, the ancestors of the Nazi shock troops.

For this reason, of all the enemies of the working class, right wing democrats, left wing democrats, extreme left whether democratic or not, populists whether fascist or not, the most dangerous are those who can mystify the proletariat in order to prevent it advancing towards its revolutionary project. This is primarily the job of the left and extreme left of capital, and this is why it’s so important to unmask them.

What is the situation in the present period?

The great difference with the 1930s is that in 1968 the working class in France and internationally opened a new course of class struggle, a

Continued on page 6

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

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*.