

International leaflet

Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Mexico, China...

We have to go further than in 1968!

“Enough is enough!” - Britain. *“Not a year more, not a euro less”* - France. *“Indignation runs deep”* - Spain. *“For all of us”* - Germany. All these slogans, chanted round the world during strikes in recent months, show how much the current workers’ struggles express the rejection of the general deterioration of our living and working conditions. In Denmark, Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Mexico, China... the same strikes against the same increasingly unbearable exploitation. *“The real hardship: not being able to heat, eat, look after yourself, drive!”*

But our struggles are also much more than that. In demonstrations, we began to see on some placards the rejection of the war in Ukraine, the refusal to produce more and more weapons and bombs, to have to tighten our belts in the name of the development of the war economy: *“No money for the war, no money for weapons, money for wages, money for pensions”* we could hear during demonstrations in France. They also express the refusal to see the planet destroyed in the name of profit.

Our struggles are the only thing standing against this self-destructive dynamic, the only thing standing against the death that capitalism promises all humanity. Because, left to its own logic, this decadent system will drag ever greater parts of humanity into war and misery, it will destroy the planet with greenhouse gases, devastated forests, and bombs.

Capitalism is leading humanity to disaster!

The class that rules world society, the bourgeoisie, is partly aware of this reality, of the barbaric future that its dying system promises us. You only have to read the studies and predictions of its own experts to see this.

According to the “Global Risks Report” presented at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2023: *“The first years of this decade have heralded a particularly disruptive period in human history. The return to a ‘new normal’ following the COVID-19 pandemic was quickly disrupted by the outbreak of war in Ukraine, ushering in a fresh series of crises in food and energy [...]. As 2023, begins the world faces a series of risks [...]: inflation, cost-of-living crises, trade wars [...], geopolitical confrontation and the spectre of nuclear warfare [...], unsustainable levels of debt [...], a decline in human development [...], the growing pressure of climate change impacts and ambitions [...]. Together, these are converging to shape a unique, uncertain and turbulent decade to come.”*

In reality, the coming decade is not so “uncertain” as the same Report says: *“The next decade will be characterised by environmental and societal crises [...], the ‘cost of living crisis’ [...], biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse [...], geo-economic confrontation [...], large-scale involuntary migration [...], global economic fragmentation, geopolitical tensions [...]. Economic warfare is becoming the norm, with increasing con-*

frontation between world powers [...]. The recent uptick in military expenditure [...] could lead to a global arms race [...], with the targeted deployment of new-tech weaponry on a potentially more destructive scale than seen in recent decades.”

Faced with this overwhelming prospect, the bourgeoisie is powerless. **It and its system are not the solution, they are the cause of the problem.** If, in the mainstream media, it tries to make us believe that it is doing everything possible to fight global warming, that a “green” and “sustainable” capitalism is possible, it knows the extent of its lies. For, as the ‘Global Risks Report’ points out: *“Today, atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have all reached record highs. Emission trajectories make it very unlikely that global ambitions to limit warming to 1.5°C will be achieved. Recent events have exposed a divergence between what is scientifically necessary and what is politically expedient.”*

In reality, this “divergence” is not limited to the climate issue. It expresses the fundamental contradiction of an economic system based not on the satisfaction of human needs but on profit and competition, on the predation of natural resources and the ferocious exploitation of the class that produces most of the social wealth: the proletariat, the wage workers of all countries.

Is another future possible?

Capitalism and the bourgeoisie are one of the two poles of society, one that leads humanity towards poverty and war, towards barbarism and destruction. The other pole is the proletariat and its struggle. For a year now, in the social movements that have been developing in France, Britain, and Spain, workers, pensioners, the unemployed and students have been sticking together. This active solidarity, this collective combativity, are witnesses to the profound nature of the workers’ struggle: a struggle for a radically different world, a world without exploitation or social classes, without competition, without borders or nations. *“Workers stick together”*, shout strikers in the UK. *“Either we fight together or we’ll end up sleeping in the street”*, confirmed the demonstrators in France. The banner *“For all of us”* under which the strike against attacks on living standards took place in Germany on 27 March shows clearly the general feeling that is growing in the working class: we are all in the same boat and we are all fighting for each other. The strikes in Germany, the UK and France are inspired by each other. In France, workers explicitly went on strike in solidarity with their class brothers and sisters fighting in Britain: *“We are in solidarity with the British workers, who have been on strike for weeks for higher wages”*. This reflex of international solidarity is the exact opposite of the capitalist world divided into competing nations, up to and including war. It recalls the rallying cry of our class since 1848: *“The proletariat has no country! Workers of the world, unite!”*

1968

All over the world, the mood in society is changing. After decades of passivity and holding back, the working class is beginning to find its way back to struggle and self-respect. This was shown by the ‘Summer of Anger’ and the return of strikes in the UK, almost forty years after the miners’ defeat by Thatcher in 1985.

But we all feel the difficulties and the current limits of our struggles. Faced with the steamroller of the economic crisis, inflation, and the government attacks that they call “reforms”, we are not yet able to establish a balance of forces in our favour. Often isolated in separate strikes, or frustrated by demonstrations reduced to mere processions, without meetings or discussion, without general assemblies or collective organisations, we all aspire to a wider, stronger, united movement. In demonstrations in France, the call for a new May 68 is constantly being heard. Faced with the “reform” that delays retirement age to 64, the most popular slogan on the placards was: “*You give us 64, we give you May 68*”.

In 1968, the proletariat in France united by taking the struggle into its own hands. Following the huge demonstrations of 13 May protesting against police repression handed out to students, the walkouts and general assemblies spread like wildfire in the factories and all the workplaces to end up, with 9 million strikers, in the biggest strike in the history of the international workers’ movement. Faced with this dynamic of extension and unity of the workers’ struggle, the government and the unions rushed to sign an agreement for a general wage increase in order to stop the movement. At the same time as this reawakening of the workers’ struggle was taking place, there was a strong return to the idea of revolution, which was discussed by many workers in struggle.

An event on this scale was evidence of a fundamental change in the life of society: it was the end of the terrible counter-revolution which had engulfed the working class since the end of the 1920s with the failure of the world revolution following its first victory in October 1917 in Russia. A counter-revolution that had taken on the hideous face of Stalinism and Fascism, that had opened the door to the Second World War with its 60 million dead and then continued for two decades more. But the resurgence of struggle that began in France in 1968 was rapidly confirmed in all parts of the world by a series of struggles on a scale unknown for decades:

- The Italian hot autumn of 1969, also known as ‘rampant May’, which saw massive struggles in the main industrial centres and an explicit challenge to the trade union leadership.

- The workers’ uprising in Córdoba, Argentina, in the same year.

- The massive strikes of workers on the Baltic in Poland in the winter of 1970-71.

- Numerous other struggles in the following years in virtually all European countries, particularly the UK.

- In 1980, in Poland, faced with rising food prices, the strikers carried this international wave even further by taking their struggles into their own hands, gathering in huge general assemblies, deciding for themselves what demands to make and what actions to take, and, above all, **constantly striving to extend the struggle**. Faced with this display of strength by the workers, it was not just the Polish bourgeoisie that trembled, but the ruling class in all countries.

In two decades, from 1968 to 1989, a whole generation of workers acquired experience in the struggle. Its many defeats, and sometimes victories, allowed this generation to confront the many traps set by the bourgeoisie to sabotage, divide and demoralise. Its struggles must allow us to draw vital lessons for our current and

future struggles: **only gathering in open and massive general assemblies, autonomously, really deciding on the direction of the movement, outside and even against union control, can we lay the basis for a united and growing struggle, undertaken with solidarity between all sectors, all generations. Mass meetings in which we feel united and confident in our collective strength. Mass meetings in which we can adopt increasingly unifying demands together. Mass meetings in which we gather and from which we can go in massive delegations to meet our class brothers and sisters, workers in factories, hospitals, schools, shopping centres, offices... those that are closest to us.**

The new generation of workers, who are now taking up the torch, must get together, debate, in order to reacquire the great lessons of past struggles. The older generation must tell the younger generation about their struggles, so that the accumulated experience is passed on and can become a weapon in the struggles to come.

What about tomorrow?

But we must also go further. The wave of international struggle that began in May 1968 was a reaction to the slowdown in growth and the reappearance of mass unemployment. Today, the situation is much more serious. The catastrophic state of capitalism puts the very survival of humanity at stake. If we do not succeed in overturning it, barbarism will gradually take over.

The momentum of May ‘68 was shattered by a double lie from the bourgeoisie: when the Stalinist regimes collapsed in 1989-91, they claimed that the collapse of Stalinism meant the death of communism and that a new era of peace and prosperity was opening up. Three decades later, we know from experience that instead of peace and prosperity, we got war and misery. We still have to understand that Stalinism is the antithesis of communism, **that it is a particularly brutal form of state capitalism that emerged from the counter-revolution of the 1920s**. By falsifying history, by passing off Stalinism as communism (like yesterday’s USSR and today’s China, Cuba, Venezuela or North Korea!), the bourgeoisie managed to make the working class believe that its revolutionary project of liberation could only lead to disaster. Until suspicion and distrust fell on the very word “revolution”.

But in the struggle, we will gradually develop our collective strength, our self-confidence, our solidarity, our unity, our self-organisation. In the struggle, we will gradually realise that we, the working class, are capable of offering another perspective than the nightmare promised by a decaying capitalist system: the communist revolution.

The perspective of the proletarian revolution is growing, in our minds and in our struggles.

The future belongs to the class struggle!

International Communist Current, 22 April 2023

ICC online public meeting on May 1968

Saturday 13 May at 3 pm BST

Write to uk@internationalism.org and we will send you the link to the meeting.

en.internationalism.org

