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## Economic Crisis Unleashes its Wrath Upon the Working Class

The events of July and August all came in such rapid succession that the ruling class seemed dizzied by their speed and depth: the debt-ceiling crisis, the downgrading of the U.S. creditworthiness from AAA to AA+ by Standard & Poor, the plunges and volatility on the stock markets, the news of the insolvencies of countries like Spain and Italy and the impasse at the IMF over what to do, the flight of capital away from U.S. Treasury bonds to gold. The ruling class is running out of arguments with which to reassure an ever more uncertain working class with hopes for a better future. To add insult to injury, its options about how to address an ever-aggravating economic crisis are also wearing thin. What is going on?

The credit crunch that followed the housing bubble burst of 2008 threatened the freezing of economic activity so seriously that the bourgeoisie was obliged to bring in recovery plans in the form of the 'economic stimulus package' and shore up the financial industry by absorbing the banks' toxic assets and bailing them out. The little respite these measures offered are at the root of the so-called 'recovery' flaunted for the last two years. From the point of view of the working class, as it continues to

suffer the brunt of the crisis, it is obvious there has been no ending or solution to its worsening living and working conditions. As capitalism is reaching the end of its tether, and the measures used by the ruling class to slow down the worst effects of the crisis wear out, the working class can only expect more brutal attacks against it.

### How is the working class faring?

On Friday, September 2 the government reported on hiring as the Bureau of Labor Statistics released its figures for the month of August. The *New York Times* wrote the following headline on the front page of its Saturday, September 3 edition: "Zero Job Growth Latest Bleak Sign for U.S. Economy". The dismal realization at reading the figures is that new people entering the labor market will not be absorbed and that the unemployed will continue to stay unemployed for the foreseeable future: the first time this has happened since the 1940s. It is important to recall that the official unemployment rate, steady at 9.1%, is based on the number of people who have been actively looking for a job in the previous four weeks. It does not include discouraged workers who have given up looking for a job, and

those who are employed part time but would be working full time. Adding these, the unemployment rate immediately jumps to 16.1%, and even this is a very conservative figure, because it counts as employed the non-civilian population absorbed in the military.

What is also very worrisome is the long term characteristic of unemployment in the present recession. Job losses have not only been worse since the beginning of the last recession than in previous ones. It is taking much longer to find a job. The 'zero growth' figure just released confirms the chronic state of malaise the economy is in. Taking a look at the composition of the working class in America, the brunt of unemployment is carried by the Black population, who experienced an increase in unemployment from 16.2% to 16.7%, once again confirming the chronic illness of capitalism, utterly incapable of lifting the sectors of the population that historically have been disadvantaged out of their bleakness. Hispanics follow suit, with 11.3% unemployment rate. The other very telling demographic figure is that regarding youth unemployment, standing at 25.4%. In the context of an economy that has stalled and is not hiring, this creates the

unprecedented condition in which employed parents who still rely on a pension or social security check will have to worry about the financial stability of their children as their parents move into retirement.

The economy continued to shed jobs in the government sector, and manufacturing and retail, which benefited from a little respite last year, also started to shed jobs. This trend will continue, as the only sector that added jobs is agriculture and the harvesting season is drawing to an end. These figures are disheartening enough, but as to the 'lucky' ones who still hold a job, going to work is becoming more and more an activity bearing resemblance to torture, with intolerable conditions of oppression, control, and intensification of exploitation. Teachers have especially been victimized and blamed for their 'privileged' wages and benefit packages, but their conditions of work have particularly deteriorated since the start of the crisis. It is no surprise that we find in the statistics released by the Bureau of Labor this figure: the number of quits almost equals the number of layoffs, with quits highest in education! This suggests that the conditions

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## Israel Protests: "Mubarak, Assad, Netanyahu!"

In Israel, over the last month, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest against the dizzying cost of living, the growing impossibility for the average person to afford accommodation, the dismantling of welfare services. The demonstrators are calling for "social justice", but many are also talking about "revolution". They make no secret of the fact that they have been inspired by the wave of revolts in the Arab world, now spread to Spain and Greece. Israel's premier Netanyahu, whose brazenly right wing policies appeared to have had gained a popular following, is suddenly being compared to the dictators of Egypt (Mubarak, now facing trial for gunning down protesters) and Syria (Assad, now ordering atrocious massacres against a population increasingly exasperated with his regime).

Like the movements in the Arab world and Europe, the demonstrations and tent cities now springing up in numerous towns in Israel, but Tel Aviv in particular, seem to have come out of nowhere: messages on Facebook, a few people pitching tents in town squares... and from this, on one weekend there have been between 50,000 and 150,000 marching in Tel Aviv, (with more than 200,000 on the most recent Saturday) and perhaps three or four times that number have been involved in the country as a whole, the majority of them young. As in the other countries, demonstrators have clashed frequently with the police. As in the other countries, the official political parties and trade unions have not played a leading role in the movement, even if they are certainly present. People involved in the movement are often associated with ideas about direct democracy and even anarchism.

A demonstrator interviewed on the RT news network was asked whether the protests had been inspired by events in Arab countries. He replied, "There is a lot of influence of what happened in Tahrir Square... There's a lot of influence of course. That's when people understand that they have the power, that they can organise by themselves, they don't need any more the government to tell them what to do, they can start telling the government what they want". These views, even if they only express the conscious opinions of a minority, certainly reflect a much more general feeling of disillusionment with the entire bourgeois political system, whether in its dictatorial or its democratic form.

Like its counterparts elsewhere, this movement is historic in its significance, as noted by an Israeli journalist, Noam Sheizaf: "Unlike in Syria or Libya, where dictators slaughter their own citizens by the hundreds, it was never oppression that held the social order in Israel together, as far as the Jewish society was concerned. It was indoctrination - a dominant ideology, to use a term preferred by critical theorists. And it was this cultural order that was dented in this round of protests. For the first time, a major part of the Jewish middle class - it's too early to estimate how large is this group - recognized their problem not with other Israelis, or with the Arabs, or with a certain politician, but with the entire social order, with the entire system. In this sense, it's a unique event in Israel's history."

This is why this protest has such tremendous potential. This is also the reason that we shouldn't just watch for the immediate political fallout—I don't think we will see the government fall any time soon—but for the long term consequences, the undercurrent, which is sure to arrive".

### Playing down the significance of these events

And yet there are those who are only too happy to play down the significance of these events. The official press has to a large extent ignored them altogether. There is an 800 to 1,000-strong foreign press corps in Jerusalem (second in size only to that in Washington) which only began to show any interest after the movement had already been under way for a couple of weeks. You would have to search long and hard for any mention of this movement in 'progressive' papers like *The Guardian* or *Socialist Worker* in the UK.

Another tack is to label this as a 'middle class' movement. It's true that, as with all the other movements, we are looking at a broad social revolt which can express the dissatisfaction of many different layers in society, from small businessmen to workers at the point of production, all of whom are affected by the world economic crisis, the growing gap between rich and poor, and, in a country like Israel, the aggravation of living conditions by the insatiable demands of the war economy. But 'middle class' has become a lazy, catch-all term meaning anyone with an education or a job, and in Israel as in North Africa, Spain or

Greece, growing numbers of educated young people are being pushed into the ranks of the proletariat, working in low paid and unskilled jobs where they can find work at all. In any case, more 'classic' sectors of the working class have also been involved in the demonstrations: public sector and industrial workers, the poorest sectors of the unemployed, some of them non-Jewish immigrants from Africa and other third world countries. There was also a 24-hour general strike as the Histadut trade union federation tried to deal with the discontent of its own members.

But the biggest detractors of the movement are those on the extreme left. As one of the posters on Libcom.org put it: "I got in a big argument with one of the leading SWP people in my union branch, whose argument was that Israel did not have a working class. I asked her who drove the buses, built the roads, looked after the children, etc and she just dodged the question and ranted about Zionism and the occupation."

The same thread also contained a link to a leftist blog which put forward a more sophisticated version of this argument: "Certainly, every level of Israeli society, from trade unions

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# Struggles at Verizon

The strike at Verizon in August, involving 45,000 workers at one of the largest companies in the US in the industrial Northeast, is the largest of its kind since the 2008 financial crash, and follows on the heels of a long development of class struggle in the U.S. For all its difficulties, the US working class is returning to the class struggle and will continue to do so as the crisis deepens. On August 7 Verizon workers across the Mid-Atlantic region struck against savage attacks on their living and working conditions, picketing outside company headquarters in from Boston to Pittsburgh and down to Richmond. Despite the blackmail of the ruling class, with even the apologists of the ruling class are again forecasting more increases in unemployment (already officially at 9%), Verizon workers' determination to struggle has given an inspiration to their entire class, which is more and more looking for ways to give voice to its grievances and fight back against the sacrifices this rotten system continues to demand.

Verizon's proposed contract demanded 100 different concessions including a complete pension freeze and the elimination of pensions for new hires, as well as eliminating all job security provisions, tying all pay increases to performance, and ending night, weekend, and double-time pay. In addition, the company offered only to pay a fixed amount for all medical premiums with workers paying the difference. The new contract also proposed that the company be able to force transfers anywhere in the US for any employee at any time. This was clearly a provocation on the part of the company to force the CWA and IBEW, who represent the unionized workers at Verizon mostly in the landline and FiOS divisions, to call a strike.

From the beginning of the strike the sole demand was that the company "bargain in good faith" over the proposed concessions with the unions who said they were ready to stay out as long as it took to achieve this. After wearing out the workers with isolated pickets and almost two weeks without pay and court injunctions in each state limiting pickets either at a

maximum of six, or proportional to the number of replacement workers at each location, the unions announced they had reached an agreement with Verizon about how to proceed with the negotiations (although everything is still on the table at press time) and ordered a return to work under the old contract for another 30 days. As a condition of "negotiating seriously" the company was given full discretion over reinstating almost 80 workers who were suspended during the strike without the usual arbitration proceedings. The first day back workers were given \$260 of strike pay for their two weeks out.

Despite the union mostly having a free hand to exhaust sabotage the struggle, presenting it as a union-busting campaign aimed at cutting the union out of negotiations like Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker had attempted last spring and calling on workers to focus on defending the idea of "negotiating in good faith" rather than any specific demands, many workers were on strike for different reasons. Pickets with whom *Internationalism* spoke when distributing our leaflet (published in the August ICConline section of our website and discussed below) said very clearly that they were on strike to prevent pension freezes, the elimination of job security provisions, the maintenance of their health care costs, and other class demands. Passing motorists honked in support of picketers and even accepted leaflets. While the perspective was not towards self-organization, many workers were very wikking to discuss, and agreed with a number of our criticisms of the union's demands and strategy. Since the strikes' end, the union-sponsored Facebook page has seen a number of comments from workers calling the deal a betrayal and even wondering why they are paying dues, and a rank-and-file forum called Rebuild 1101 online has seen debate about the role the CWA plays with one poster calling for its destruction and others recommending the road of reform.

The dispute at Verizon is in continuity with struggles that have emerged over the past year or so. In the spring of 2010, students across

California and in parts of New York staged occupations and strikes in the universities against drastic hikes in tuition and fees which posed many political questions about the crisis and the future of capitalism and includes attempts by minorities to link up with the rest of the working class in California. After that, serious strikes by nurses in Philadelphia and Minneapolis, a major construction strike in Chicago, and a month-long struggle by Mott's workers in New York confirmed the working class' willingness to fight despite the extreme risk involved and the blackmail of the bourgeoisie.

That summer ended with a strike at Boeing, numerous teachers' strikes, and a two-day wildcat up and down the East Coast among dockworkers. November saw GM workers in Indianapolis thrice reject a 50 percent pay cut pushed by the UAW and attempts at coordination with other GM plants to refuse the UAW's contract, which ended in the closure of the plant. Each of these strikes was actively contained by the unions, and the working class suffered a series of defeats (often dressed up as victories), but the desire of the working class to struggle, and the refusal to accept sacrifices any longer has been growing in the US working class.

Last February in Wisconsin, a brief unofficial sick-out coordinated between students and teachers, combined with an occupation of the Wisconsin state capitol building with obvious echoes of events in Egypt and Tunisia seemed to herald a new phase in the class struggle. But after the first week, the unions (who from the beginning agreed to every economic concession so long as their role as negotiators was respected) and the Democratic Party mobilized a gigantic campaign for the defense of collective bargaining, completely sidelining the class demands of that struggle related to the living conditions of Wisconsin state employees. While efforts were made by some groups to popularize the idea of a general strike, much of this was attempted to be done through the very unions who had already ruled out any strike action, and many workers got sucked up

in the defense of the unions and the subsequent recall campaign against Republican state senators in Wisconsin.

In the Verizon strike, the CWA and IBEW have both presented the Verizon strike as one against "union-busting" and with the only demand that the company "bargain in good faith," attempting to chain the strike to the same mystifications used in Wisconsin, despite its very different character. At the same time, they have insisted that the concessions being demanded are simply "corporate greed" despite the very obvious fact that their union-busting precedent comes from a state government pushing austerity on the public sector. The unions and the left have publicized Verizon's new willingness to "bargain" as a major victory, despite the fact that ever concession is still on the table, as in the "victory" won by Democrats with the debt ceiling feud in Washington (see our article, "U.S. Debt Ceiling Crisis: Political Wrangling While the Global Economy Burns" in this issue).

This mystification of defending the unions as a way to defend the working class is likely to be milked by the left of capitalism for a long time, especially after the publicity of the mobilizations "in defense of collective bargaining" in Wisconsin. The descent of the bourgeoisie right into more and more ideologically-based irrationality has only added to the impact of these campaigns in building this stumbling block for class consciousness in the US. After a record low in strikes in 2009, and with so many ideological campaigns aimed against it since the end of the 1980s about the end of the class struggle, the narrative provided by the media of a victimized left attempting to cautiously but courageously resist the onslaught of Tea Party ideology and the dismantling of the social wage is a difficult one to move beyond. Only the deepening and multiplication of struggles can provide a situation in which these illusions give way on a massive scale to the realities and needs of the struggles the working class is forced to undertake.

JJ, 09/09/11.

## Discussion: How to Intervene in the Class Struggle?

Here we are publishing an exchange that occurred between the comrades who were engaged in the intervention toward the striking Verizon workers, some of them ICC militants, some of them sympathizers. They worked in close collaboration from the early tossing around of ideas about what to write in the leaflet that was to be distributed, to the actual distribution of the leaflet and several discussions held with the striking workers, and to the post-intervention reflection, which is what is published here. We cannot stress enough the importance of the collective nature of this work. It is important for the sympathizers as they get a 'hands-on' experience of actually intervening in the class struggle with a collective framework that is the product of open discussions. It is important for the ICC as it continues to listen to and learn from the insights of the young—and not so young—generation of elements and groups in search of a political direction new and creative ways of approaching different issues.

Cde H: When we denounce the unions, we can sound very much like the bourgeois right-wing attacks against them. It can be difficult for people who have not heard the unions attacked from the left before to make the distinction. In fact, we often do end up saying the same things as the right-wing (unions just take your dues money; but do nothing for you; they only advance their own interests, etc.)

Perhaps then, given the balance of class forces in the U.S., we could not feature our attacks on the union as much—or at the least not make them centerpiece of intervention - and instead focus on developing class demands. Yes, the unions will sabotage them, but perhaps the workers have to learn this in the course of the struggle. Perhaps, too heavy a denunciation of the unions only strengthens the tendency to identify with them. Workers still fail to see the difference between the unions and themselves. When they hear the unions attacked, they think they are being attacked. Maybe there isn't an immediate perspective in the U.S. for workers to take control of their own struggles? In this sense, maybe Wisconsin was a true exception

and we saw how quickly the unions got control of the situation there. Maybe the more important thing is that workers are actually trying to struggle; maybe we should focus on building the will to struggle, rather than denouncing the unions? This doesn't mean giving the unions a pass; but we shouldn't sound like our chief goal is to destroy the unions.

Cde A: I personally have a really hard time understanding how exactly intervene in a way that, on the one hand, helps/promotes/fosters class consciousness and also steers away from what is indeed a denunciation of the unions that overwhelmingly the workers don't understand yet. I also do not know how workers can agree to doing the above without questioning why all of this has to be done outside of the union framework. This is the conundrum I always find myself in at my workplace, where many colleagues agree with the ideas and proposals, but then always end up saying something like: well, let's go and propose this to the union... ultimately, workers need to feel that they can do any of the above without the union. It's this sense of powerlessness and also a still undeveloped sense of class identity that, I think, the working class has not overcome/developed yet. And this, as we know, happens through the struggles themselves. I wonder whether the leaflet would not have had an altogether different impact if the first three paragraphs had not been there at all, or if they had been written at the end, after the presentation on what workers could actually do under the circumstances...

Cde H: These are all valid concerns and feelings. Often I think, our intervention boils down to the following: workers need to come together to decide for themselves what to do. Other than some very general things and a lot of what not to do, we can't really on principle tell the workers what to do or really how to struggle outside of a few basic lessons from history. This is really the entire left communist predicament. Workers have to figure it out for themselves. As such, our intervention can often appear quite negative, i.e.: "We don't know exactly what the answer is, but the unions sure

don't have it, why don't you guys go and discuss what to do while the union isn't looking." Meanwhile, the unions appear to have concrete answers, which are only shown to be illusions very slowly. It will take time and experience for the workers to break the union stranglehold. Right now, the absurd attempts by elements of the bourgeoisie to destroy the unions seems only to be reinforcing this myth of the unions. The unions are able to play the victim card; it's not an optimal time to make an intervention condemning the unions in such stark terms. In Europe and elsewhere the story may be different. I hear A's frustration over the agreement workers seem to have with some basic concepts of ours, yet they think they can achieve them through the union. It's like when you have a list of grievances against society and some smarty pants tells you to write your Congressman. It's as if they don't get the fundamentally different framework you are posing. In fact, they don't. It's only experience that will teach. We can really only hope to plant a seed of doubt, the kernel of a different paradigm among the more farsighted and open elements so as to prepare the ground for the next struggle. We are still at a very early stage in the return to struggle, a return that is only very slowly locating the class terrain.

Cde J: I very much appreciate your help with the intervention. I think I learned a lot and I was also surprised by the openness to discuss and encouraged by the solidarity other workers showed. At the same time, I very much agree with what H. is saying. At the moment, the workers are still thinking in terms of the union fighting "for" them. I think that 10 years of indoctrination can erode what most workers learned from the last strike especially when the bulk of the class is not struggling and that despite the appreciation of solidarity we saw--the working class is still very fearful and conservative about all of its attempts to defend itself, and until struggles are happening more frequently it's probably unlikely that we will convince many of our position on the unions, but we can probably convince workers that a) the crisis isn't going anywhere and there

will be more fights in the near future, b) every worker deserves to and should take an active role in these struggles and discuss exactly what the demands are and how to fight them, c) other workers are interested in your struggle and want to help you so you should discuss with them as well, d) what the union is doing will not work in the long term and what we need to do with this struggle is discuss it, think outside the box, discuss it with other workers, and discuss other workers' struggles--to build some kind of class identity and e) it is not this or that boss but the whole system of capitalism which attacks not just Verizon workers (or whomever) but the whole working class and we have to fight back as a class.

Cde A: There are a lot of things we can say to workers and J points some of them out here, but I agree that we should not feature the denunciation of the unions when approaching workers on the picket line, or at a rally or whatever. I don't think we should hide or lie about our positions, but this shouldn't be the first thing out of our mouth. It shouldn't be the first line of a leaflet. I think in our press it is a different story. The audience is different. When we intervene at a picket, we are going to the workers. However, when someone buys a newspaper or takes the time to go to the webpage, they are taking the initiative to find out more about our positions. In theory, our press is only ever going to be read by the more advanced elements of the class, whereas a leaflet has a much broader distribution. I agree with J that at this stage it is probably more important to intervene on the question of the crisis, putting forward the perspective of Marxism that says there is no solution to this mess within capitalism; whatever workers are doing in the unions, they do not go beyond the horizon of bourgeois alternatives, which are really no alternative at all. Workers need to see that reform is not possible, no faction of the bourgeoisie has an answer: the future is bleak without their own independent action. In theory, the questioning of union hegemony over the struggle should follow.

ICC, 09/24/11.

# Debt Ceiling: Political Wrangling While Economy Burns

This is an edited version of a longer article that was published in the *ICConline* section of our website in August.

Throughout the month of July and into the early days of August, the bourgeois media inundated us with discussion and analysis of a veritable existential crisis for the entire global capitalist system, should the U.S. political class fail to resolve its differences and agree to an extension of the legal limit the U.S. government is allowed to borrow.

Should the U.S. have failed to extend the so-called “debt-ceiling” and default on its debt, all manner of hellish consequences for the national and global economy were predicted. With such dire consequences, many bourgeois analysts continued to assure us that a U.S. default was simply impossible. That didn’t stop CNN from running a “Debt-Ceiling Countdown Clock” during the weeks leading up to the August 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline. In the end, the U.S. bourgeoisie was able to finalize an agreement just one day before the deadline. This agreement allows for the extension of the debt ceiling to 2013, removing the immediate threat of default for the rest of President Obama’s first term, in exchange for federal budget cuts that will see 1 trillion dollars slashed from the federal budget immediately. In one fell swoop; the U.S. state has gone from the last defenders of Keynesian stimulus faced with the global economic crisis, to the architect of massive austerity.

Nevertheless, the U.S. bourgeoisie’s debt-deal has ultimately proven too-little, too late for at least one bond rating agency, with Standards and Poor downgrading U.S. government debt from AAA rating to AA+, just days after the agreement was reached. The downgrade, coming around the same time as a massive sell-off on Wall Street, confirms that the global markets now recognize political instability in Washington as a fact.

Much of the analysis of this crisis in the bourgeois media has focused on the role played in the debt-ceiling negotiations by the freshman Tea Party Congressmen elected in the 2010 mid-term elections. According to this narrative, the Tea Party bears ultimate responsibility for the crisis, as they approached the debt-ceiling negotiations with a no-holds barred approach that would refuse to allow the debt ceiling to be raised without corresponding budget cuts. Against the “balanced approach”, slash and cut was the only method to fiscal sustainability the Tea Party would accept. The problem for the U.S. bourgeoisie was that the Tea Party now has a stranglehold on the GOP itself, threatening to render the entire Republican apparatus politically obsolete. The ideological meltdown of a significant faction of the U.S. political class is now an acknowledged fact in Washington.

However, the Tea Party is not the only faction of the bourgeoisie that has come in for harsh criticism in the media over the debt-ceiling debacle. President Obama himself has come under fire from all sides. The right continues its relentless crusade against the man they consider “the worst President in American history,” while the left grows increasingly frustrated with his willingness to sell-out his base in every negotiation with Republicans, giving away the store to a political faction that poll after poll shows most Americans now reject. Most importantly, however, a consensus has begun to emerge among bourgeois opinion makers that Obama is simply not able to deal with the threat to the national capital posed by the Tea Party faction. Accusations of “weakness” now haunt the President as he prepares for his 2012 re-election campaign. On the debt-ceiling deal, it is widely acknowledged that the President suffered a grave political defeat. Now that the Tea Party has learned they can get a lot of what they want by threatening to tank the entire global economy, there is no reason to believe they won’t do it again.

## Confirmation of Our Analysis of Political Decomposition

The U.S. debt-ceiling crisis stands as a remarkable confirmation of the analysis *Internationalism* has been developing of the insidious effects of social decomposition on the political life of the U.S. bourgeoisie itself. In 2008 the U.S. bourgeoisie was able to achieve a major success by organizing a massive elec-

toral circus around Obama’s historic candidacy. However, a parallel movement was taking place within the American political class. Starting with the nomination of Sarah Palin as John McCain’s Vice Presidential candidate, Obama’s candidacy was to prove as polarizing as it was inspiring. Decades of repressed racist impulses, paranoid fantasies and wild conspiracies theories surged to the surface, as the new President faced constant challenges to his legitimacy from an emboldened right-wing. A new Tea Party movement emerged early in 2009. It was quickly endorsed by many mainstream Republicans gearing up for the divisive health care reform debate in order to exploit it for political advantage. The situation reached a head in the 2010 mid-term elections, as the Republican Party gained control of the House of Representatives largely on the back of Tea Party based enthusiasm within the smaller and more conservative mid-term electorate. Now it has greater influence over the government, the Tea Party has revealed its true nature as the party of extreme austerity.

Clearly, when one party in a two party system has become so ideologically rigid, this seriously impacts the state’s flexibility to arrive at the best policies for managing the economic crisis for a given political and social moment. This difficulty was played out in dramatic fashion in the debt ceiling crisis. Obama was forced to agree to a debt reduction plan that currently contains not one cent in tax increases, despite the fact that virtually every poll of the American public has shown a strong willingness to raise taxes on the wealthy. The debt ceiling deal was not the resolution to this crisis that the main factions of the bourgeoisie would have preferred. The passage of a deal which accomplishes this through budget cuts alone is totally out of step with the American public, serving to further alienate it from the state. Many foreign observers look in horror at political events in Washington, realizing that in a world marked by global interconnectedness, their own economic and political fates are just as much subject to Republican/Tea Party fanaticism as is the U.S. credit rating. The response of the Chinese was particularly strong, calling on the US to protect the value of the \$1tn China has invested in the US by cutting military and social spending, and even suggesting that a new global reserve currency may be necessary, adding that, “*It should also stop its old practice of letting its domestic electoral politics take the global economy hostage and rely on the deep pockets of major surplus countries to make up for its perennial deficits.*” Clearly, the growing influence of the Tea Party has not made the task of managing the economic crisis any easier for the main factions of the bourgeoisie and has only served to accelerate the process of the decomposition of the U.S. state. Of course, in line with their extreme libertarian ideology, this has been the Tea Party’s goal along. Is it any surprise that in an age marked by social decomposition, the bourgeoisie coughs up a political movement whose very goal is furthering the political decomposition of the state? Dialectics has come back to haunt the bourgeoisie in menacing fashion.

However, we should be careful not to exempt other factions from the U.S. bourgeoisie from our analysis of political decomposition. There is an element on the bourgeois left that continues to argue that in an economy marked by stagnation, unemployment and a “demand deficit” that the only recourse is more government spending. This faction is as wedded to its Keynesian ideology as the Tea Party is to their Lockean individualism. It is between these two opposed positions, that continue to hardened around its flanks, that the main factions of the bourgeoisie—headed up by the Obama administration—attempt to steer the ship of state, hoping to find some way out of the morass that avoids the pitfalls of both extremes and that keeps the American public believing in the myth of the democratic state.

All of this does not bode well for the U.S. bourgeoisie heading into next year’s Presidential election. The danger of giving control of the government over to the Republican Party is very real. Yet, Obama himself has proven to be a real lightning rod, emboldening the most ideologically hardened elements of the Republican Party. While it is unlikely the main factions of the bourgeoisie would move to dump

Obama if his opponent is a radical Tea Party Republican, the prospect of a more moderate Republican President, who can enact austerity, while at the same time cooling the Tea Party insurgency, is probably the best hope of the U.S. bourgeoisie at the moment.

## What Policy In Face of the Crisis?

The debt-ceiling debacle stands as a clear demonstration of the stark economic policy contradictions facing the U.S. bourgeoisie as it attempts to manage the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. On the one hand growth remains abysmal, business investment is low and unemployment is still sky high. Liberal economists, such as Paul Krugman and Robert Reich, continue to call for more government stimulus in order to get the economy moving again and put people back to work. More and more their calls are beginning to be echoed in the mainstream media as talk of a “demand crisis” in the economy is heard more frequently. However, on the other hand, the deficit hawks—backed up by Republican/Tea Party anti-government rhetoric—see the federal government’s enormous debt as the main threat to the country’s economic well being, weakening the U.S.’s long-term position in the bond markets. For this faction, only massive government budget cuts and austerity measures can improve the nation’s attractiveness to investors, free businesses’ creative potential and put people back work. In this view, tax increases on “job creators” are to be avoided at all costs, as they can only serve to kill jobs.

In short, these two contrasting policy alternatives highlight the fundamental contradictions dogging state capitalism in the United States and elsewhere in the face of the global economic crisis. While government stimulus may serve as a momentary shot in the arm to an ailing economy, it only serves to worsen the overall debt picture. If austerity and government contraction might momentarily reassure investors, it only serves to worsen the underlying economic contraction and threatens to increase unemployment and possibly provoke a genuine social crisis. The debt ceiling deal reached by the U.S. political class falls squarely into the camp of cruel austerity and government contraction. Cutting trillions of dollars out of the federal budget, while failing to include any stimulating measures, threatens to send the nation deeper into a double-dip recession, increase already high unemployment numbers, putting the U.S. closer to the brink perhaps sooner than would have otherwise happened.

All of this begs the question of the fundamental ability of the U.S. state to manage the economic crisis that has now beset it for the last three years. Given the content of the debt deal, one could be forgiven for concluding that the U.S. bourgeoisie has just given up attempting to solve the economic crisis, choosing instead to run headlong into the fury of a permanent slow growth/low wage/high unemployment economy. In a world that requires choosing between on the one hand the wrath of millions of unemployed workers and millions more who hang on to their jobs by a thread and on the other the scorn of the bond markets and rating agencies, the U.S. political class appears to have decided to take its chances with the class struggle. Herein lies the real social danger for the bourgeoisie of the debt ceiling deal Obama agreed to with the Republicans: it is all stick and no carrot. Statements from the President on Medicare reforms, taken together with his history of caving into Republican demands time and again, have caused many on the bourgeois left to wonder out loud if, rather than being played like a fool in the debt ceiling negotiations, Obama didn’t get just what he was looking for all along. After all, it was the President himself who originally proposed a much larger 4 trillion dollar deficit reduction package. The difference of course with Obama’s plan was that at least it contained a series of “revenue increases” that might have been sold to the American public as a “balanced plan” of “shared sacrifice.” Nobody should doubt that Obama and the Democrats wanted to make cuts, they only sought a package that would be more politically marketable to the population at large.

With so much social pain for workers sure to follow, the U.S. bourgeoisie finds itself in a very difficult position in its confrontation

with the working class. With each cave in to Republican demands, the U.S. two-party system loses more of its legitimacy in the eyes of the population as a whole. The ideological division of labor between the Democrats and Republicans ceases to function. A state that does not have a political entity that can do a credible job appearing to fight for the interests of the common-man is ultimately a state in trouble. Such is the fate of the U.S. political class at the moment. The longer they have to rely on the Democratic Party to enact the austerity the historical moment requires the more it weakens the democratic mystification itself. Unfortunately for the U.S. bourgeoisie at the moment, a Republican administration might be out of the question.

## Political Decomposition Against the Class Struggle

Whatever the U.S. bourgeoisie’s political difficulties at the moment, we should expect nothing less than for it to attempt to use its own political decomposition against the working class to the best of its abilities. On the one hand, Obama and the centrist Democrats will utilize the debt ceiling crisis as a way of terrorizing the populace into supporting them over the radical Republican/Tea Party right, who have clearly lost all semblance of credibility as a governing party. The specter of further “economic hostage taking,” the stoppage of Social Security checks, drastic cutbacks to Medicare will be used to fuel an electoral campaign to stop the Tea Party insurgency in its tracks. The themes of this campaign will be “shared sacrifice,” a “balanced approach” to deficit reduction as well as the endorsement of modest stimulus programs such as a further extension of unemployment benefits that have long since run out for millions of unemployed workers and which will expire for millions more at the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the left of the Democratic Party will likely launch a parallel campaign, urging support for “progressive candidates” who will stand up to the corporations, make the rich pay for the crisis and protect valued social programs. This campaign will endorse heavy taxation of the rich, massive Keynesian infrastructure investments and a national jobs program, all of which have little chance of ever coming to fruition. While sharply critical of Obama, in the hopes of playing a kind of left in opposition from within the Democratic Party, this faction will still ultimately endorse his reelection against the menace of Republican/Tea Party revanchism.

Finally, the Republican Party, depending upon its ultimate Presidential nominee, will conduct a campaign blaming Obama’s lack of leadership for the country’s economic woes, citing the need to free business from government regulation and unleash the country’s stunted entrepreneurial spirit. This campaign will talk tough on the deficit, scolding the federal government for its profligate ways and reminding everyone that it must accept pain now in order not to leave the fiscal mess to our children and grandchildren.

Ultimately, the real threat to the working class from the debt ceiling crisis and the resulting deficit reduction mania lies in the further brutalization of social life that will inevitably result. The further attacks on the social safety net are likely to add fuel to the fire of the one society among the major powers that has always come closest to the libertarian ideal of “everyman for his self.” It’s not surprising that the breakdown of social solidarity that characterizes the epoch of capitalist decomposition has, in the U.S., thrown up a political movement that takes social solidarity—even its corrupted representation in the capitalist state—as its chief enemy. For the working class, there is only one remedy to this downward spiral into the abyss—autonomous struggles on our own class terrain, outside the unions and all bourgeois political parties. Only the united action of workers can provide a counterweight to the assembling forces of capitalist barbarism, which now expresses itself so clearly in the continuing dramas of the U.S. political class.

Henk, 08/19/2011.

# The Riots in Britain and Capitalism's Dead-end

In the aftermath of the riots which broke out across the country this week, the spokesmen of the ruling class – government, politicians, media, etc – are subjecting us to a deafening campaign aimed at getting us to support their ‘programme’ for the future: deepening austerity and increased repression against anyone who complains about it.

**Growing austerity**, because they have no answer to the terminal economic crisis of their system. They can only continue to keep cutting jobs, wages, social benefits, pensions, health and education. All this can only mean a worsening of the very social conditions that gave rise to the riots, conditions which are convincing a large part of an entire generation that they have no future ahead of them. Which is why any serious discussion about the social and economic causes of the riots is being denounced as ‘excusing’ the rioters. They are criminals, we are told, and they will be dealt with as criminals. End of story. Which is all very convenient, because the state has no intention of pouring money into the inner cities as it did after the riots of the 80s.

**Increased repression**, because that is what our rulers can offer us. They are going to take maximum advantage of public concern about the destruction caused by the riots to increase spending on the police, to equip them with rubber bullets and water cannon, even to bring in curfews and put the army on the street. These weapons, along with increased surveillance of web-based social networks and the summary ‘justice’ being handed out to those arrested after the riots, will not only be used against looting and random mayhem. Our rulers know full well that the crisis is giving rise to a tide of social revolt and workers’ struggles which has spread from North Africa to Spain and from Greece back to Israel. They are perfectly aware that they will face such massive movements in the future, and for all their democratic pretensions they will be just as prepared to use violence against them as openly dictatorial regimes like Egypt, Bahrain or Syria. They already showed that during last year’s student struggles in Britain.

## The ‘moral high ground’ of the ruling class

The campaign about the riots is based on our rulers’ claim that they are occupying the moral high ground. It is worth considering the sub-

stance of these claims.

The mouthpieces of the state condemn the violence of the riots. But this is the state that is now inflicting violence on a far bigger scale against the populations of Afghanistan and Libya. Violence that is presented every day as heroic and altruistic when it serves only the interests of our rulers.

The government and the media condemn lawlessness and criminality. But it was the brutality of their very own forces of law and order, the police, which sparked the riots in the first place, from the shooting of Mark Duggan to the arrogant treatment of his family and supporters who demonstrated outside Tottenham police station demanding to know what had happened. And this comes on top of a long history of people from areas like Tottenham dying in police custody or facing daily harassment on the streets.

The government and the media condemn the greed and selfishness of the looters. But they are the guardians and propagandists of a society which functions on the basis of organised greed, on the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority. Meanwhile the rest of us are ceaselessly encouraged to consume the products that realise their profits, to identify our worth with the amount of stuff we can afford to buy. And since inequality is not only built into this system, but is getting worse and worse, it is no surprise when those at the bottom of the pile, who can’t afford the shiny things they are told they need, think that the answer to their problem is to nick what they can, when they can.

The rulers condemn this petty looting while participating in a vast operation of looting on the scale of the planet – the oil and logging corporations who ravage nature for gain, the speculators who are richly rewarded for pushing up the price of food, the arms dealers profiting from death and destruction, the respectable financial institutions who launder billions from the proceeds of the drug trade. An intrinsic part of this robbery is that a growing part of the exploited class is pushed into poverty, hopelessness, and crime. The difference is that the lowly law-breakers usually get punished, while the masters of crime do not.

In short: the morality of the ruling class does not exist.

## The real question: how to resist

The real question facing those of us – the vast majority – who do not profit from this gigantic criminal enterprise called capitalism is this: how can we defend ourselves **effectively** when this system, now visibly drowning in debt, is obliged to take everything from us?

Do the riots we have seen in the UK this past week provide a method for fighting back, for taking control, for uniting our forces, for carving out a different future for ourselves?

Many of those taking part in the riots were clearly expressing their anger against the police and against the possessors of wealth, who they see as the main cause of their own poverty. But almost immediately the riots threw up more negative elements, darker attitudes fed by decades of social disintegration in the poorest urban areas, of gang culture, of buying into the dominant philosophies of every man for himself and ‘get rich or die trying’. This is how an initial protest against police repression got derailed by a chaos of frankly anti-social and anti-working class actions: intimidation and mugging of individuals, trashing of small neighbourhood shops, attacks on fire and ambulance crews, and the indiscriminate burning of buildings, often with their residents still inside.

Such actions offer absolutely no perspective for standing up to the thieving system we live under. On the contrary, they only serve to widen divisions among those who suffer from the system. Faced with attacks on local shops and buildings, some residents armed themselves with baseball bats and formed ‘protection units’. Others volunteered for clean-up operations the day after the riots. Many ordinary people complained about the lack of police presence and demanded stronger measures.

Who will profit most from these divisions? The ruling class and its state. As we have said: those in power will now claim a popular mandate for beefing up the machinery of police and military repression, for branding all forms of protest and political dissent as forms of criminality. Already the riots have been blamed on ‘anarchists’ and only a week or two ago the Met made the mistake of publishing recommendations about grassing on people who are in favour of a stateless society.

The riots are a reflection of the dead-end reached by the capitalist system. They are not a form of working class struggle; rather they are an expression of rage and despair in a situation where the working class is absent as a class. The looting was not a step towards a higher form of struggle, but an obstacle in its way. Hence the justified frustration of the Hackney woman who has been watched by thousands on Youtube, denouncing the looting because it was preventing people from actually getting together and working out what the struggle was about. “*You lot piss me off...we are not all gathering together and fighting for a cause. We’re running down Footlocker...*” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G18EmYGGpYI>)

Gathering together and fighting for a cause: these are the methods of the working class; this is the morality of the proletarian class struggle, but they are in danger of being eaten away by atomisation and nihilism to the point where whole sectors of the working class have forgotten who they are.

But there is an alternative. The re-emergence of class identity, the reappearance of the class struggle, can be discerned in the massive and inclusive movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece or Israel. These movements, with all their weaknesses, give us a glimpse of a different way of fighting: through street assemblies where everyone can have a voice; through intense political discussion where every issue can be discussed; through organised defence against attacks by police and thugs, through workers’ demonstrations and strikes; through raising the question of revolution, of a completely different form of society, one based not on dog eat dog but on solidarity between human beings, not on production for sale and profit but on the production of what we really need.

In the short term, because of the divisions created by the riots, because the state is having some success in plugging its message that any struggle against the present system can only end in wanton destruction, it is likely that the development of a real class movement in the UK is going to face even greater difficulties than before. But world-wide, the perspective remains: deepening crisis of this truly sick society, and increasingly conscious and organised resistance by the exploited. The ruling class in Britain will not be spared from either.

ICC, 14.8.11

## Israel Protests: “Mubarak, Assad, Netanyahu!”

*Continued from Page 1*

to the education systems, the armed forces and the dominant political parties, are implicated in the apartheid system. That was true from the very inception, in the very germinal forms of the Israeli state built up in the British Mandate period. Israeli is a society of settlers, and this has enormous ramifications for the development of class consciousness. As long as it thrives on building colonial outposts, as long as people identify their interests with the expansion of settler-colonialism, then there is little prospect of the working class developing an independent revolutionary agency. Not only is it a settler-colonial society, it is also one supported with the material resources of US imperialism”.

The idea that the Israeli working class is a special case leads many leftists to argue that the protest movement should not be supported, or should only be supported if it first takes up a position on the Palestinian question: “The social protests have been dubbed Israel’s largest since the 1970s and are expected to result in reformed policies or even reshuffled governmental authority. But until the reforms address all of the issues at the core of Israel’s oppressive and discriminatory housing situation, until the policy changes put Palestinians at an equal footing with Israelis, until eviction notices are no longer dealt out on a whim, then the reforms are baseless and the protests are useless” ‘Israel’s one-sided, ‘liberal’ housing protest is not a movement worth joining or even championing’, Sami Kishawi, Sixteen Minutes to Palestine blog.

In Spain, among participants in the 15M movement, similar debates have been taking place, for example around a proposal “that the

Israeli protesters should only be supported if they “take a position as a movement on the Palestinian question, denouncing clearly and openly the occupation, the blockade of Gaza and [calling for] the end of the settlements” (from the same thread on Libcom.)

These leftist arguments are being answered in practice by the movement in Israel. For a start, the questioning taking place in the Israeli streets is already challenging the division between Jews and Arabs and others. Some examples: in Jaffa, dozens of Arab and Jewish protesters carried signs in Hebrew and Arabic reading “Arabs and Jews want affordable housing,” and “Jaffa doesn’t want bids for the rich only.”

Arab activists set up an encampment in the centre of Taibeh and hundreds of people visit it every night. “This is a social protest stemming from profound distress in the Arab community. All Arabs suffer from the cost of living and housing shortages,” one of the organizers, Dr. Zoheir Tibi, said. A number of Druze youngsters set up tents outside the villages of Yarka and Julis in the Western Galilee. “We’re trying to draw everyone to the tents to join the protest,” said Wajdi Khatar, one of the protest initiators. A Jewish and Palestinian joint camp was set up in the city of Akko, as well as in East Jerusalem where there have been ongoing protests of both Jews and Arabs against evictions of the latter from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. In Tel Aviv, contacts were made with residents of refugee camps in the occupied territories, who visited the tent cities and engaged in discussions with the protesters.

At Levinsky Park in southern Tel Aviv on Monday 1 August, where the city’s second largest tent city has stood for nearly a week,

over a hundred African migrants and refugees gathered for a discussion on the ongoing quality-of-life protests taking place across Israel.

## No reason to put up with austerity

Numerous demonstrators have expressed their frustration with the way the incessant refrain of ‘security’ and of the ‘threat of terrorism’ is used to make people put up with growing economic and social misery. Some have openly warned of the danger that the government could provoke military clashes or even a new war to restore ‘national unity’ and split the protest movement. As it happens, the Netanyahu government seems to be on the back foot at the moment, taken by surprise and trying offer all kinds of sops to take the heat out of the movement. The point remains that there is indeed a mounting awareness that the military situation and the social situation are very closely linked.

As ever, the material situation of the working class is key to the development of consciousness, and the current social movement is greatly accelerating the possibility of approaching the military situation from a class standpoint. The Israeli proletariat, often portrayed by the left wing of capital as a ‘privileged’ caste living off the misery of the Palestinians, actually pays very heavily for the Israeli war effort in lives, psychological damage, and material impoverishment. A very precise example linked to one of the key issues behind the current movement, housing: the government is pouring a highly disproportionate amount of money into building up settlements in the occupied territories rather than increasing the housing stock in the rest of Israel.

The significance of the present movement in Israel, with all its confusions and hesitations, is

that it has very clearly confirmed the existence of class exploitation and class conflict within the apparent national monolith of Israel. The defence of working class living standards will inevitably come up against the sacrifices demanded by war; and as a result, all the concrete political issues posed by the war will have to be raised, discussed, and clarified: apartheid laws in Israel and the occupied territories, the brutality of the occupation, conscription, right up to the ideology of Zionism and the false ideal of the Jewish state. Certainly, these are difficult and potentially divisive issues and there has been a strong temptation to try to avoid raising them directly. But politics has a way of intruding into every social conflict. An example of this has been the growing conflict between the demonstrators and representatives of the extreme right – Kahanists who want to expel Arabs from Israel and fundamentalist settlers who see the demonstrators as traitors.

But it would not be an advance if the movement rejected these right wing ideologies and adopted the positions of the left wing of capital: support for Palestinian nationalism, for a two state solution or a “democratic secular state”. The present international wave of revolts against capitalist austerity is opening the door to another solution altogether: the solidarity of all the exploited across religious or national divisions; class struggle in all countries with the ultimate goal of a worldwide revolution which will be the negation of national borders and states. A year or two ago such a perspective would have seemed completely utopian to most. Today, increasing numbers are seeing global revolution as a realistic alternative to the collapsing order of global capital.

Amos 7/8/11.

# 9/11: The Bourgeoisie Has Little to Celebrate

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Meanwhile, the situation in Afghanistan, had only deteriorated during the years US imperialism was distracted in Iraq. The Taliban had never been completely eliminated, Osama Bin Laden remained at large and the government of Hamid Karzai was riddled with corruption, incompetence and frustrating eccentricity. Afghanistan's neighbor, nuclear-armed Pakistan, was itself slipping into instability, as US military brass bemoaned the ability of Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters to find sanctuary across the Af-Pak border. As the 2008 Presidential campaign got underway, Obama rose to prominence as the consensus candidate of the main factions of the US bourgeoisie, promising to refocus US imperialism's efforts on Afghanistan and take a harder line with Pakistan.

On the domestic level, the evolution of US society under Bush was marked by the inflation of a massive real estate bubble, which saw home prices spiral over the course of the first half of the decade. Fueled by the Federal Reserve's easy money, low interest rate policies, Americans were able to borrow massive sums of money, using their homes as virtual ATM machines to fuel consumer driven demand. Under the aegis of so-called "liar loans" the real estate frenzy penetrated American society, as even those without jobs, undocumented immigrants and college students were able to qualify for adjustable rate mortgages to buy newly built McMansions in the US's rapidly expanding suburbs and exurbs. The phenomenon of families running up credit card bills to buy daily necessities, only to refinance them into new real estate loans every six months or so was a common feature of this period. This process of the hyper-leveraging of the US working class was aided and abetted by Wall Street, who created new exotic mortgage-backed financial products. These products were ostensibly designed to "spread the risk" and "share the wealth," but in reality only created a Sword of Damocles hanging over the entire global economy—what came to be known after the fact in the economics literature as "systemic risk."

Although these policies allowed the American working-class a temporary respite to fulfill Bush's call to consume the economy back to health, it became increasingly apparent that the real estate bubble could not last. When the interest rates on many so-called "sub-prime" loans finally reset in mid-2007, millions of American "homeowners" suddenly found themselves unable to make their mortgage payments. It wasn't long before consumer credit dried up, millions of houses went underwater and the American working class found itself without any money to spend. Soon, the financial repercussions were felt on Wall Street itself as systemic risk asserted itself in

dramatic ways. In the midst of the 2008 Presidential campaign, the US bourgeoisie found itself gripped by the greatest financial debacle in its history, with a President who had already checked out of office! The failure of Lehman Brothers in the Fall of 2008 nearly brought the entire global economy to a halt, necessitating Bush's Secretary of the Treasury Paulson and current Fed Chairman Bernanke to put together a massive financial rescue package for the giant banking and insurance concerns. Overnight the world's staunchest proponents of "trickle-down economics" became its most fervent Keynesian state capitalists. However, the Wall Street bailout proved extremely unpopular among the population. With millions of Americans facing foreclosure, eviction and unemployment, the idea that the state would come to Wall Street's rescue, but leave Main Street to stew in its own juice was a step too far. The population's distaste for their political leaders became generalized beyond the Bush administration and many in Congress were forced to actually vote against the bail-out on its first pass, causing the stock markets to plummet and provoking a general panic on the business news networks of historic proportion. The sense that the nation was on the verge of another catastrophe was widespread.

## Obama: A Temporary Respite

It was in this context that the US bourgeoisie was able to pull off its one crowning success of the post-9/11 period: the election of President Barack Obama. Through an intense media barrage surrounding the historic candidacy of the first African-American to run for President, the US bourgeoisie was able to whip-up a frenzied energy among the youth and minorities to come out to the polls to vote for Obama—many participating in the bourgeois electoral circus for the first time in their lives. For much of the Fall of 2008, the looming economic catastrophe was put on the back burner as Obama's election fulfilled the main factions of the US bourgeoisie's desire to replace Bush with an President who could repair its image abroad, revitalize the democratic mystification, give the American working class hope in the electoral arena and distract it from the economic crisis.

Nevertheless, events since Obama's election have proven that the bourgeoisie's hope was misplaced. As President, Obama has proven even more divisive of the population than Bush was. The attacks against him from opposing Republican and Tea Party politicians are twice as vicious as anything meted out to Bush by Democrats. For all the electoral energy Obama was able to create among the youth as a candidate, as President he has created even more energy among the Republican Party and its constituency in pursuit of his defeat in 2012. While the electoral energy Obama cre-

ated in support of the democratic mystification was doomed to fade; the hatred, paranoia and outright lunacy his Presidency has engendered among Republicans has proven stubbornly intractable.

The divisions, recriminations and maneuvers taking place today within the US bourgeoisie are so deep and so severe as to call into question the signature ideological division of labor between the Democratic and Republican Parties and even the legitimacy of the democratic illusion itself among large sectors of the population. Whatever boost the US's democratic illusion received from Obama's election—which itself was only a corrective to the damage done by Bush—has, only three years later, been totally lost. On the domestic socioeconomic level, the Obama administration has proven completely impotent in the face of the "Great Recession." With his economic team consisting mostly of recycled Clinton era economists and Wall Street insiders, it was unable to lower unemployment through the rather weak stimulus measures it pursued early on. Instead, Obama has now conceded the political ground to an insurgent right-wing and pursued austerity and deficit reduction.

On the social level, the American working class is living through the most severe attack on its living and working conditions since the Great Depression. Home foreclosures continue apace as everywhere the state abandons any pretense to the rule of law permitting banks with dubious title to seize the homes of workers too beaten down to even attempt to fight back on the terrain of bourgeois legalism. Unemployment benefits have run out for millions of long-term workers, with millions more facing cut off at the end of the year. Ten years after 9/11, the much hoped for social peace has been transformed into a veritable social powder keg with little indication of the direction popular anger over the crisis will take.<sup>3</sup>

On the imperialist level, Obama has met with some success in repairing the US's image abroad, undoing the worst of the damage the Bush administration did. On this level, the main factions of the bourgeoisie have mostly supported the Obama administration. However, on the signature foreign policy issue of his campaign—the successful conclusion of the war in Afghanistan—Obama has not met with the same success. On the contrary, Afghanistan remains a total quagmire, even after the brutal dispatch of Bin Laden earlier this year. So intractable is the situation in Afghanistan, that the US suffered its greatest one-day loss of life in the now ten-year long war just last month, when the Taliban were able to down a US military helicopter with a primitive rocket

<sup>3</sup> The US bourgeoisie must have watched coverage of the recent British riots wondering if they are prelude to the future of its own cities. See article in this issue on the riots.

propelled grenade.<sup>4</sup>

The recent US involvement in the Libya campaign has been a mixed bag for US imperialism. While it was able to achieve its stated goal of toppling the Gaddafi regime without the loss of a single US life, it did this by "leading from behind," relying on other NATO powers to carry out the bulk of the five month air campaign in support of a disparate group of rebels nobody is certain can be trusted. Although the US was able to achieve its immediate objectives behind a multi-lateral veneer this time, this has allowed France and the UK to flex some credible military muscle of their own for the first time in years. Moreover, the strategy of leading from behind has proven fodder for domestic political bashing of Obama by Republicans desperate to paint him as a failure for allowing other countries to take the lead and failing to bring the full force of US military might to bear.

With such a record the past decade, its no wonder the US bourgeoisie has downplayed the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The hopes of a seamless continuation of the American imperial project into the twenty-first century have proven to be a real chimera. The disaster of the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq, its total incompetence in managing the domestic economy, its ultimate inability to lead society in a credible fashion has wrought irreparable damage to US hegemony and squandered whatever benefit that the US accrued in the immediate aftermath of the attack on its own soil.

Moreover, the Obama administration has proven unable to reverse the totality of the Bush administration's many failures, just as his own Presidency has proven to be an important moment in the historic political crisis of American state capitalism. It's not surprising then that at this time, the US bourgeoisie would like to keep the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary memorial ceremonies low key.

Henk, 09/03/2011

<sup>4</sup> Ironically, many of the troops killed when the helicopter went down are said to be from the same super-secret special operations unit that carried out the raid to kill Bin Laden.

**ICC online**  
**The "9/11 Truth"**  
**Movement And The**  
**Machiavellianism**  
**of the Bourgeoisie**  
**internationalism.org**

## Economic Crisis Unleashes its Wrath

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of work can be so extenuating that a worker may rather choose the prospect of financial instability over unbearable oppression at work! Faced with the reality of the crisis, bourgeois economists are now projecting downward their growth figures.

### How is capitalism faring, and what will the ruling class do?

These convulsions of the economy are neither the result of corporate greed or stock market speculation, as we were told in 2008, when they first emerged to the surface. Their roots are not to be found in "consumers' recklessness in contracting debts they could not repay. Neither are they the cause of the incessant squabbles in Washington between factions of the U.S. ruling class divided by the dilemma of what to do in face of the most serious recession in U.S. history. These factors certainly aggravate the situation, but rather than being the cause, they are a symptom of a malaise for which the ruling class has no cure. As we wrote in *International Review* 133: "For the last four decades ...the overall economy has only kept a semblance of functionality thanks to systematic state capitalist monetary and fiscal policies...During these decades of crisis the economy has accumulated so many contradictions that today there is a real threat of an

*economic catastrophe.*" ("The United States - locomotive of the world economy... toward the abyss", 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2008.)

The monstrous public debt of states, the federal budget deficit, the private national debt, the huge trade deficit are all the result of the capitalist state intervention over the course of the last four decades to shore up its ailing economy. They have now brought capitalism to the point where it has exceeded its ability to sustain its indebtedness. The multiplicity of the contradictions accumulated over the last four decades have come to a head all at once and the ruling class is incapable of coming up with a coherent plan. Austerity plans risk to aggravate an already weakened economy, causing consumption to further become restricted, and exacerbating the risk of bankruptcies. Pumping money into the financial markets --the central bank's policy called Quantitative Easing of flooding the financial system with cash through direct purchases of Treasury debt, to the tune of \$600 billion as of the latest such action--will cause a depreciation of the value of money in circulation, and inflation. Yet, the ruling class will have to continue to rely on the state apparatus to massively intervene in the economy and apply more of the same medicine, already a veritable poison. But more financial and monetary manipulation will only postpone the day of reckoning for a little lon-

ger. The central bank, for instance, may start selling off United States Treasury securities set to mature soon and buy the ones that mature later in an attempt to increase demand for longer-term issues. In this way, their price would rise and the interest rates on those securities fall, making it cheaper for the U.S. to finance its debt. But this can only encourage speculation in riskier assets as investors seek higher returns in the stock markets as long-term Treasuries wouldn't offer a great return.

The growing incoherence the American ruling class finds itself in is also exemplified by the speech made by the central bank's chairman, Ben Bernanke on August 26, in Jackson Hole, Wyoming when he said that the present state of the economy had not deteriorated to the point where a third round of Quantitative Easing was granted. A few days later, the statistics released by the Bureau of Labor once again are increasing pressure on American capitalism to go to the press and print more of the green back. But this will not cure this terminally ill patient, moribund capitalism in its death throes. Why not?

As we wrote in the *International Review* 144: "...capitalism suffers genetically from a lack of outlets because the exploitation of labor power leads to a creation of a value greater than the outlay in wages, because the working class

*consumes much less than what it produces.*" ("Capitalism has no way out of its crisis", 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2011.) Workers and capitalists cannot constitute enough of a market for capitalism to restart its process of production. And a market is necessary in order to valorize the part of surplus value extracted through the exploitation of the working class and destined to reproduction. Exchanging value among capitalists loses sight of the fact that capital must expand, not consume, its value. As to the workers constituting a solvent market, the most powerful --and mortal-- contradiction of capitalism is the fact that as capital struggles against the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as a result of competition, it improves technology, thus displacing workers and increasing productivity without a corresponding rise in wages. This results in a contraction of demand, as the workers' ability to consume becomes more and more restricted. The current talks about anaemic spending, lack of investments, decrease in productivity express this fundamental contradiction of capitalism. Under these conditions, capitalism does not, and cannot have a solution to its crisis. As it imposes its oppression and its brutal austerity plans against the working class, the bourgeoisie risks to accelerate the time when the workers of the world take capitalism head on and consign it to the dustbin of history.

Ana, 09/04/11.

# What is the Communist Left?

We are re-publishing here the first part of an article written in 1998 for the Russian journal *Proletarian Tribune*, the aim of which was to give a brief history of the Communist Left for those who may not be well acquainted with the political tradition the ICC draws its heritage from. The full version can be found on our website.

1 Since the defeat of the international revolutionary feat of the international revolutionary wave in the middle of the 1920s, no terms have been more distorted or abused than those of socialism, communism, and marxism. The idea that the Stalinist regimes of the former eastern bloc, or countries like China, Cuba and North Korea today, are expressions of communism or marxism is indeed the Great Lie of the 20th century, one deliberately perpetuated by all factions of the ruling class, from the extreme right to the extreme left. During the imperialist world war of 1939-45, the myth of the “defence of the socialist fatherland” was used, along with “anti-fascism” and the “defence of democracy” to mobilise workers both inside and outside Russia for the greatest slaughter in human history.

During the period from 1945-89, dominated by the rivalries between the two gigantic imperialist blocs under American and Russian leadership, the lie was used even more extensively: in the east, to justify the imperialist ambitions of Russian capital; in the west, both as an ideological cover for imperialist conflict (“defence of democracy against soviet totalitarianism”) and as a means of poisoning the consciousness of the working class: pointing to the Russian labour camp and hammering home the message - if that is socialism, wouldn't you rather have capitalism, for all its faults? And this theme became even more deafening when the collapse of the eastern bloc was said to signify the “death of communism”, the “bankruptcy of marxism”, and even the end of the working class itself. Further grist to this bourgeois mill was added by the “extreme” left of capitalism, Trotskyists in particular, who, although critical of its “bureaucratic deformations”, continued to see a working class foundation in the Stalinist edifice.

2 This huge pile of ideological distortions has also served to obscure the real continuity and development of marxism in the 20th century. The false defenders of marxism - the Stalinists, the Trotskyists, all sorts of academic “marxologists”, modernisers and philosophers - have occupied the limelight, while its real defenders have been banished to the sidelines, dismissed as irrelevant sects and, increasingly, as fossils from a lost world, when not being more directly repressed and silenced. To reconstruct the authentic continuity of marxism in this century, therefore, it is necessary to begin with a definition of what marxism is. From its first great declarations in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, marxism defined itself not as the product of isolated “thinkers” of genius, but as the theoretical expression of the real movement of the proletariat.

As such, it can only be a fighting theory, one which proves its adherence to the cause of the exploited class by the intransigent defence of the latter's immediate and historic interests. This defence, while based on a capacity to remain loyal to fundamental and unalterable principles such as proletarian internationalism, also involves the constant enrichment of marxist theory in direct and living relationship with the experience of the working class. Furthermore, as the product of a class which embodies collective work and struggle, marxism itself can only develop through organised collectivities - through revolutionary fractions and parties. Thus the Communist Manifesto appeared as the programme of the first marxist organisation in history - the Communist League.

3 In the 19th century, when capitalism was still an expanding, ascendant system, the bourgeoisie had less need to hide the exploitative nature of its rule by pretending that black was white and capitalism was really socialism. Ideological perversions of this type are above all typical of capitalism's historic

decadence, and are most clearly expressed by the efforts of the bourgeoisie to use “marxism” itself as a tool of mystification. But even in capitalism's ascendant phase, the unrelenting pressure of the dominant ideology frequently took the form of false versions of socialism being smuggled into the workers' movement. It was for this reason that the Communist Manifesto was obliged to distinguish itself from “feudal”, “bourgeois” and “petty bourgeois” socialism, and that the marxist fraction within the First International had to fight a two-pronged battle against Bakuninism on the one hand, and Lassallean “state socialism” on the other.

4 The parties of the Second International were founded on the basis of marxism, and in this sense represented a considerable step forward from the First International, which had been a coalition of different tendencies within the workers' movement. But since they operated in a period of tremendous capitalist growth, when the struggle for reforms was a key focus for the energies of the working class, the social democratic parties were particularly vulnerable to the pressures towards integration into the capitalist system. These pressures expressed themselves within these parties through the development of the reformist currents who began to argue that marxism's predictions about the inevitable downfall of capitalism had to be “revised” and that it would be possible to evolve peacefully

against Kautsky's legalist and gradualist vision of the road to power, Luxemburg and Pannekoek had elaborated the conception of the mass strike as the soil of the revolution; against Kautsky's parliamentary cretinism, Pannekoek, Bukharin and Lenin had revived and refined Marx's insistence on the necessity of destroying the bourgeois state and creating the “state of the Commune”. These theoretical developments were to become matters of practical politics when the hour of revolution dawned.

This demonstrated quite conclusively that adherence to marxism is vindicated not by pious declarations or party labels but in living practice. It was the left wing currents who alone kept the banner of proletarian internationalism flying during the imperialist holocaust, who rallied to the defence of the proletarian revolution in Russia, and who led the strikes and uprisings which broke out in numerous countries in the wake of the war. And it was these same currents who provided the core of the new Communist International founded in 1919.

6 1919 was the highpoint of the post-war revolutionary wave and the positions of the Communist International in its founding congress expressed the most advanced positions of the proletarian movement: for a total break with the social-patriotic traitors, for the methods of mass action demanded by the new period of capitalist decadence, for the destruction of the capitalist state and for the international dictatorship of the workers' soviets. This programmatic clarity reflected the enormous impetus of the revolutionary wave, but it had also been prepared in advance by the political and theoretical contributions of the left fractions inside the old parties: thus,



Past left communist press

towards socialism without any revolutionary interruptions.

During this period - particularly in the late 1890s and early 1900s - the continuity of marxism was upheld by the “left” currents who were both the most uncompromising in the defence of basic marxist principles, and the first to see the new conditions for the proletarian struggle that were arising as capitalism reached the limits of its ascendant epoch. The names which embody the left wing of the social democracy are well-known - Lenin in Russia, Luxemburg in Germany, Pannekoek in Holland, Bordiga in Italy - but it is also important to remember that none of these militants functioned in isolation. Increasingly, as the gangrene of opportunism spread through the International, they were obliged to work as organised fractions - the Bolsheviks in Russia, the Tribune group in Holland, and so on, both within their respective parties and internationally.

5 The imperialist war of 1914 and the Russian revolution of 1917 both confirmed the marxist vision that capitalism would inevitably enter its “epoch of social revolution”, and precipitated a fundamental split in the workers' movement. For the first time, organisations which both referred to Marx and Engels found themselves on different sides of the barricades: the official social democratic parties, the majority of which had fallen into the hands of the erstwhile “reformists”, supported the imperialist war by invoking Marx's writings of an earlier period, and denounced the October revolution by arguing that Rus-

left - many of whose spokesmen, such as Pannekoek and Bordiga, had already proved themselves as the best defenders of marxism in the old International. The communist left was essentially an international current and had expressions in many different countries, from Bulgaria to Britain and from the USA to South Africa. But its most important representatives were to be found precisely in those countries where the marxist tradition was at its strongest: Germany, Italy, and Russia.

8 In Germany, the depth of the marxist tradition coupled with the huge impetus coming from the actual movement of the proletarian masses had already, in the height of the revolutionary wave, engendered some of the most advanced political positions, particularly on the parliamentary and trade union questions. But left communism as such appeared as a response to the first signs of opportunism in the German Communist party and the International, and was spearheaded by the KAPD, formed in 1920 when the left opposition within the KPD was expelled by an unprincipled manoeuvre. Though criticised by the CI leadership as “infantile” and “anarcho-sindicalist”, the KAPD's rejection of the old parliamentary and trade union tactics were based on a profound marxist analysis of the decadence of capitalism, which rendered these tactics obsolete and demanded new forms of class organisation - the factory committees and workers' councils; the same can be said for its clear rejection of the old “mass party” conception of social democracy in favour of the notion of the party as a programmatically clear nucleus - a notion directly inherited from Bolshevism. The KAPD's intransigent defence of these acquisitions against a return to the old social democratic tactics made it the core of an international current which had expressions in a number of countries, particularly in Holland, whose revolutionary movement was closely linked to Germany through the work of Pannekoek and Gorter.

This is not to say that left communism in Germany in the early 20s didn't suffer from important weaknesses. Its tendency to see the decline of capitalism in the form of a final “death crisis” rather than a long drawn out process made it hard for it to see the retreat of the revolutionary wave and exposed it to the danger of voluntarism; linked to this were weaknesses on the organisation question which led it to a premature break with the Communist International and the ill-fated effort to set up a new International in 1922. These chinks in its armour were to hinder it from resisting the tide of counter-revolution that set in during the 1920s and resulted in a disastrous process of fragmentation, theorised in many cases by the ideology of “councilism” which denied the necessity for a distinct political organisation.

9 In Italy, on the other hand, the communist left - which initially occupied a majority position within the Communist Party of Italy - was particularly clear on the organisation question and this enabled it not only to wage a courageous battle against opportunism within the degenerating International, but also to engender a communist fraction that was able to survive the shipwreck of the revolutionary movement and develop marxist theory during the night of the counter-revolution. But during the early 1920s, its arguments in favour of abstentionism from bourgeois parliaments, against merging the communist vanguard with large centrist parties in order to give an illusion of “mass influence”, against the slogans of the United Front and the “workers' government” were also based on a profound grasp of the marxist method.

The same applies to its analysis of the new phenomenon of fascism and its consequent rejection of any anti-fascist fronts with the parties of the “democratic” bourgeoisie. The name of Bordiga is irrevocably associated with this phase in the history of the Italian communist left, but despite the huge importance of this militant's contribution, the Italian left is no more reducible to Bordiga than Bolshevism was to Lenin: both were organic products of the proletarian political movement.

To be continued...

But just as the growth of opportunism in the Second International provoked a proletarian response in the form of the left currents, so the tide of opportunism in the Third International was resisted by the currents of the communist

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# 9/11: The Bourgeoisie Has Little to Celebrate

This September 11<sup>th</sup> marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Preparations for the 10-year milestone were subdued. There was no concerted effort to whip-up a patriotic campaign as in years past. One gets the impression that if it could, the bourgeoisie would rather just skip the ceremonies altogether. There was of course a memorial service at Ground Zero. However, the assembled political leaders only read somber poetry, as the 9/11 Victims Memorial was finally unveiled at Ground Zero. While families of the dead were permitted to attend the ceremony, survivors of the attacks and First Responders were told there wasn't room for them that day.

On the day of the attacks itself, panic and worry engulfed the population. The media reported numerous unconfirmed rumors. Sheer pandemonium and confusion were the only consistent things about that day. But soon after the population began to react with a profound sense of grief and solidarity for the dead and a desire to help the injured. The first impulse from the population was not anger and revenge, it was solidarity for those who were killed or injured. Ordinary people lined up to donate blood for the wounded. Firefighters, construction workers, public servants of all kinds and ordinary workers ignored the perils of smoke, fire and toxic debris to rush to the disaster site to aid in the rescue efforts.

Nevertheless, the US bourgeoisie wasted no time transforming the tremendous upsurge of empathy within the population into the false solidarity of a patriotic war psychosis. In the span of a few days, President Bush was transformed from an incompetent bumbler to the courageous leader of an aggrieved nation ready to seek revenge on its attackers and all who harbored them. Within hours, the US state declared Al Qaeda unilaterally responsible for the attacks. The media parroted this story across the airwaves without so much as raising an eyebrow. Anyone who questioned the official narrative was immediately dismissed as a quack conspiracy theorist or a traitor. As Bush himself said in the days after the attacks, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

These ominous words were meant as a warning to all parties—foreign and domestic—that the United States meant business. Since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc ten years earlier the US was experiencing the collapse of its own bloc. The 'New World Order' saw the first war in Iraq, where the US was able to rally around it a sizeable coalition of allies, but the disciplinary effect was short lived. Differences

between the great powers became clear in the mid 90s during the collapse of ex-Yugoslavia and the conflict in Bosnia. The US increasingly used NATO to bypass the UN. In the absence of bloc discipline, it was increasingly 'every man for themselves'.

War was in the offing. Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime was said to harbor Bin Laden, was sized up to feel the wrath of American bombs and cruise missiles, but almost immediately suspicion became rampant that the administration's real target was the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. At any rate, the United States was going to war and it wouldn't be the kind of limited operation we had gotten used to from U.S. imperialism in the years since the Vietnam War. Any mobilization for a major war demands the acquiescence of the working class. As Condoleezza Rice said in her testimony to the 9/11 Commission in 2004, "*The U.S. government did not act against the growing threat from Imperial Japan until the threat became all too evident at Pearl Harbor. And, tragically, for all the language of war spoken before September 11, this country simply was not on a war footing. ...Bold and comprehensive changes are sometimes only possible in the wake of catastrophic events -- events which create a new consensus that allows us to transcend old ways of thinking and acting.*" (CNN, 04/08/04).

If nothing else, the US state took full advantage of the horror over the first attack on the continental United States since the British burned Washington in the War of 1812, to announce a new global "War on Terror", continuing its inglorious legacy of launching wars after historic 'incidents' have taken place: the annexation of Texas in 1845, the sinking of the USS Maine in 1898, that attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964.

## Bush: The "Worst President" in American History?

In the months after 9/11, NATO invoked Article 5 of its statutes for the first time in history, declaring that an attack on one was an attack on all. Remarkably, it was the leaders of France who led this move. The questioning of American imperialist leadership by the other major powers seemed to be over. On the domestic front, the bourgeoisie drummed up the patriotic fervor. Congress quickly passed sweeping legislation limiting civil liberties and authorizing domestic spying in ways not seen since the Red Scare.<sup>1</sup>

So, what then is behind the U.S. bourgeoisie's apparent reluctance to mark the tenth anniversary of 9/11 in a more bellicose and dramatic fashion? The image of the US bourgeoisie marking the anniversary amidst the clutter of the still incomplete Freedom Tower at Ground Zero stands as a stark symbol of the incomplete and ultimately failed imperialist project. Although the United States was able to reap an immediate benefit from the attacks in terms of rallying the population behind its war aims and forcing the other major powers to acquiesce to its military campaign in Afghanistan, the Bush administration's efforts to carry the war to Iraq were doomed to squander this momentum.

<sup>1</sup> See "The Strengthening of the Repressive Apparatus" in *Internationalism #146*.

The Bush administration's callous diplomatic policies and cowboy mentality made it easy for the other major powers to challenge its desire to take the war to Iraq. Among the great powers, the Bush administration was only able to gain the participation of the UK in its invasion and occupation of Iraq. In particular, France, Germany and Russia stood as consistent critics of the US's military adventure in Iraq. Although they were unable to prevent the US from carrying out its invasion, their ability to put the US's purported rationale for the war into question—Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction—forced the US into a particularly embarrassing display of diplomatic deception and outright lying, evidenced by Colin Powell's pathetic presentation to the UN Security Council in the Spring of 2003.

Failing to gain any international sanction for its war efforts in Iraq, the US was forced into a mostly unilateral action, despite putting together a dubious "coalition of the willing." Relations between the US and France fell to a low point in modern history. The US would enter the Iraq war mostly isolated and with international public opinion squarely against it. The world's super power could no longer credibly claim to be acting in the name of peace and democracy. It was now the aggressor in a preemptive war against an enemy that had nothing to do with 9/11. The post invasion revelation that Iraq in fact had no weapons of mass destruction only reinforced the negative image of the United States that the Bush administration's policies had largely created. Moreover, the Bush Administration's aggressive prosecution during this period of the so-called "War on Terror" gave the lie to any attempt to paint itself as a benevolent power guided by the rule of law.

Militarily, the Iraq occupation proved to be a complete quagmire for the better part of the decade. The fateful decision by the US occupation authorities to destroy the Bathist bureaucracy, led to a brutal insurgency by the Sunni minority against the US occupation and

the Shiite majority. Soon, Iraq descended into utter chaos with sectarian violence tearing the country apart. American casualties, fairly low in the initial invasion, climbed steadily upwards as it seemed the US had only turned a relatively stable country under the iron hand of a cruel dictator into a hotbed of Islamic fanaticism and terrorism.

Within the US bourgeoisie, the sense that the invasion of Iraq had been a mistake, or at the very least was being badly mismanaged, became more prevalent. However, the attempt to replace Bush with the much stouter warrior John Kerry the 2004 was a miserable failure. The main factions of the US bourgeoisie failed to rally to his candidacy in time and a skillful Karl Rove was able to manipulate domestic wedge issues to ensure Bush's reelection. Stuck with the insufferable Bush for the next four years, the main factions of the bourgeoisie launched a media campaign to pressure him once again to change course in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> The Bush administration doubled down. The neo-conservative Wolfowitz was out, but Rumsfeld remained. Secretary of State Powell would leave the administration in disgust. Violence continued to dominate the scene in Iraq, and by the time of the 2006 mid-term elections the US really seemed to be bogged down in with no end in sight. Public opinion turned dramatically against the Iraq War and the Bush administration itself. A change in ruling team was sorely needed, but how to accomplish this?

The 2006 mid-term elections were a groundswell for the Democrats. Winning control of both houses of Congress, they pressed the Bush administration to do something to remake the US's imperialist image. Bush was forced to dump Rumsfeld, replacing him with a figure more acceptable across the political spectrum: Robert Gates. However, this was only the prelude to the ultimate *coup d'gras*: the replacement of the Republican President with a Democratic one in the 2008 Presidential election. Before this could be accomplished, the military situation in Iraq had to be brought under some measure of control. The "Surge" strategy implemented from 2007 onwards did encounter some success, but the US population was growing increasingly tired of the war and the President's approval ratings continued to nosedive. Only a dramatic outcome to the 2008 Presidential election could restore some level of credibility to the US political system, which had suffered two terms of what many historians begin to openly call "the worst President in US history."

<sup>2</sup> See "Media Campaigns Put Pressure on Bush to Change Policy" in *Internationalism #136*.

*Continued on Page 5*

## Political positions of the ICC

**Internationalism** is the section in the USA 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 stratified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.
- \* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an

ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

- \* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.
- \* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.
- \* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.
- \* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.
- \* In order to advance its combat, the working class

has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

- \* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.
- \* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.
- \* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.
- \* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the move-

ment 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*.