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Editorial

The birth of totalitarian democracy
Propaganda during World War I

First World War: Zimmerwald conference
The centrist currents in the political organisations of the proletariat

Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa (II)
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Editorial

In this summer of 2015, the centenary of the Great War – as it is still called – is behind us. The wreaths on the monuments to the fallen faded long ago, the town halls' temporary exhibitions have been folded and put away, the politicians have given their fine hypocritical speeches, and life can return to whatever passes for "normal".

In 1915, the war is anything but finished. Nobody any longer has the slightest illusion that the troops will be "home by Christmas". Ever since the German army's advance was halted on the river Marne in September 1914, the conflict has been bogged down in trench warfare. During the second battle of Ypres, in April 1915, the Germans used poison gas for the first time, and this will soon be put to use by the armies on both sides of the front. Already, the dead are numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

The war will be long, the suffering terrible, and the cost ruinous. How can the populations be made to accept the horror to which they are subjected? This is to be the cynical task of the warring states' propaganda bureaux, and it is the subject of our first article. Here, as in so many other domains, 1914 marks the opening of a watershed period which will see the step-by-step installation of an omnipresent state capitalism, the only response possible to capitalism's decadence as a social form.

In 1915, we also begin to see the first signs of working class resistance, especially in Germany where the Socialist Party's parliamentary fraction no longer votes unanimously for war credits as it had done the previous August. The revolutionaries Otto Rühle and Karl Liebknecht, who were the first to break ranks and oppose the war, have been joined by others. The movement of opposition to the war, bringing together a handful of militants from the various belligerent nations, will give rise in September 1915 to the first Zimmerwald Conference.

The groups who came together in the Swiss village of Zimmerwald were far from presenting a united front. Alongside Lenin's revolutionary Bolsheviks, for whom the only answer to imperialist war was the civil war for the overthrow of capitalism, there was a – much more numerous – current which still hoped to reach an accommodation with the Socialist Parties that had gone over to the enemy. This was known as the "centrist" current, and it was to play an important part in the difficulties and ultimate defeat of the German revolution in 1919. This is the theme of an internal text written by Marc Chirik in December 1984, substantial extracts of which we are publishing here. The centrist USPD is no more, but it would be a mistake to think that centrism as a form of political behaviour has disappeared as a result; on the contrary, as this text shows, centrism is especially characteristic of decadent capitalism.

To conclude, we also publish in this issue a new article in our series on the class struggle in Africa, notably in this case, in South Africa. We deal here with the dark period between World War II and the world wide renewal of class struggle at the end of the 1960s; despite the divisions imposed by the sinister apartheid regime, we show that the class struggle did indeed survive and that it is far from being a mere accessory to the nationalist movement led by Nelson Mandela's ANC.

ICC, July 2015

The birth of totalitarian democracy

Propaganda during World War I

"*The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country*." Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, 1928.

Propaganda was not invented in World War I. When we admire the lines of tributaries carved on the monumental staircase of Persepolis, laying the produce of the empire before the great King Darius, or the deeds of the Pharaohs immortalised in the stone of Luxor, or the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles, we are looking at works of propaganda, designed to communicate a monarch's power and legitimacy to his subjects. The imperial theatre of troops on parade in Persepolis would have been perfectly recognisable to the British Empire of the 19th century, which itself staged immense and colourful displays of military power at the "Durbars" held in Delhi on great royal occasions.

But while propaganda was not new in 1914, the war profoundly altered its form and its significance. In the years after the war, "propaganda" became a dirty word synonymous with the dishonest manipulation, or fabrication, of information by the state.[1]

By the end of World War II, following the experience of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, it took on still more sinister overtones: omnipresent, excluding all other sources of information, invading every corner of private life, propaganda came to be presented as an equivalent to brainwashing. But in reality, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia were merely crude caricatures of the ubiquitous propaganda machine set up in the Western democracies post-1918, building with ever-growing sophistication on the techniques first developed on a large scale during the war. When Edward Bernays,[2] whose seminal work on propaganda we have quoted at the beginning of this article, left the US Committee on Public Information (in reality, the government office of war propaganda) at the end of the war, he established himself as a consultant to private industry not in propaganda but in "public relations" - a term which he himself coined. This was a deliberate and conscious decision: even at such an early date, Bernays knew that the word "propaganda" had become indelibly stained in the public mind with the taint of "untruth".

World War I marked the moment that the capitalist state first undertook the massive and totalitarian control of information, through propaganda and censorship, directed towards a single over-riding aim: victory in all-out war. As in all other aspects of social life – the organisation of production and finance, the social control of the population and especially of the working class, the transformation of a parliamentary democracy of opposing bourgeois interests into an empty shell – World War I marked the beginning of the state's absorption and control of social thought and action: state capitalism. After 1918 the men who, like Bernays, had worked for government propaganda departments during the war, fanned out into private industry to become PR men, advertising consultants, experts in "communication" as it is called today. This did not mean an end to state involvement; quite the contrary, it continued a process begun during the war of constant osmosis between the state and private industry. Propaganda did not go away, but it did disappear: it became such a ubiquitous and normal part of everyday life that it became invisible, one of the most insidious and powerful elements of today's "totalitarian democracy". When George Orwell wrote his great and chilling novel *1984* (in 1948, hence the title), he imagined a future where every citizen would be obliged to have a screen installed in his home through which he could be subjected to state propaganda: sixty years on, people buy their own TV sets, and willingly sit down to be entertained by products whose sophistication leaves Big Brother's Ministry of Truth in the shade.[3]

The approach of war confronted Europe's ruling classes with a historically unprecedented problem, though the full implications only emerged as war progressed. First, this was a total war involving vast masses of troops: never before in the modern world had such a proportion of the male population been under arms. Second – and in part as a result – the war involved the entire civilian population in the manufacture of military supplies both directly offensive (cannon, rifles, ammunition...) and equipment (uniforms, food, transport). Men were conscripted *en masse* to the front; women were drawn *en masse* into the factories and hospitals. The war also had to be financed; it was impossible to take on such enormous costs through taxation, and a major preoccupation of state propaganda was to call on the nation's savings through the sale of war bonds. Because the whole population was directly involved in the war, the whole population had to be convinced that the war was right and necessary, and this was not something that could simply be assumed in advance:

"*So great are the psychological resist-*

1. A book by the British pacifist Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in wartime*, published in 1928, caused an enormous uproar by detailing the mendacious nature of the most widespread anti-German atrocity stories: it went through 11 print editions between 1928 and 1942.

2. Edward Bernays (1891-1995) was born in Vienna, the nephew both of Sigmund Freud and of his wife Anna Bernays. His family moved to New York in the year after his birth, but as an adult he kept in close contact with his uncle and was deeply influenced by his ideas, as well as by the studies on crowd psychology published by Gustave Le Bon and William Trotter. By all accounts, he was deeply impressed by the impact that US President Woodrow Wilson made on European crowds when he toured the continent at the end of the war; he attributed this to the success of US propaganda for Wilson's "14 Points" peace programme. In 1919 he opened an office as "Public Relations Counsellor" and became a well-known and highly influential manager of advertising campaigns for major US corporations, notably American Tobacco (Lucky Strike cigarettes) and United Fruit. His book on *Propaganda* can be seen as an advertising prospectus to potential clients.

3. One classic early example of the symbiotic relationship between state propaganda and private PR is the 1954 publicity campaign, masterminded by Edward Bernays' company on behalf of the United Fruit Corporation, to justify the CIA-sponsored overthrow of the newly elected Guatemalan government (which intended to nationalise uncultivated land owned by United Fruit), and its replacement by a military regime of fascist death squads, all in the name of "defending democracy". The techniques used against Guatemala in 1954 were first sketched out by state propaganda departments during World War I.

ances to war in modern nations that every war must appear to be a war of defence against a menacing, murderous aggressor. There must be no ambiguity about whom the public is to hate. The war must not be due to a world system of conducting international affairs, nor to the stupidity or malevolence of all governing classes, but to the rapacity of the enemy. Guilt and guilelessness must be assessed geographically, and all the guilt must be on the other side of the frontier. If the propagandist is to mobilise the hate of the people, he must see to it that everything is circulated which establishes the sole responsibility of the enemy. Variations from this theme may be permitted under certain contingencies which we shall undertake to specify, but it must continue to be the leading motif.

"*The governments of Western Europe can never be perfectly certain that a class-conscious proletariat within the borders of their authority will rally to the clarion of war*".[4]

Propaganda, communist and capitalist

Etymologically the word propaganda means that which is to be propagated, distributed, from the Latin *propagare*: to distribute. It was used notably in the name of an organism of the Catholic Church created in 1622: the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Ministry for Propagating the Faith). By the end of the 18th century, with the bourgeois revolutions the term also began to be used for propaganda in secular activities, especially for the spreading of political ideas. In *What is to be done?* Lenin followed Plekhanov, saying that: "*A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people.*"

In his 1897 text on "The tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats", Lenin insisted on the importance of "*spreading by propaganda the teachings of scientific socialism* (…) *spreading among the workers a proper understanding of the present social and economic system, its basis and its development, an understanding of the various classes in* (…) *society, of their interrelations, of the struggle between these classes* (…) *an understanding of the historical task of international Social-Democracy...*" Over and over again, Lenin insists on the need to educate **conscious** workers ("Letter to the Northern Union of the RSDLP, 1902), that to do this the propagandists must first educate themselves, must read, study and gain experience ("Letter to a comrade on our organisational tasks", September 1902), that the socialists consider themselves heirs to the best of previous culture ("What heritage do we reject?", 1897). Propaganda then, for communists, is education, the development of consciousness and a critical spirit, inseparable from a determined and conscious effort by the workers themselves to acquire this consciousness.

Compare this to Bernays: "*The steam engine, the multiple press, and the public school, that trio of the industrial revolution, have taken the power away from kings and given it to the people. The people actually gained power which the king lost. For economic power tends to draw after it political power; and the history of the industrial revolution shows how that power passed from the king and the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. Universal suffrage reinforced this tendency, and at last even the bourgeoisie stood in fear of the common people. For the masses promised to become king.*

"*Today, however, a reaction has set in. the minority has discovered a powerful help in influencing majorities. It has been found possible so to mould the mind of the masses that they will throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction* (…) *Universal literacy was supposed to educate the common man to control his environment. Once he could read and write he would have a mind fit to rule. So ran the democratic doctrine. But instead of a mind, universal literacy has given him rubber stamps inked with advertising slogans, with editorials, with published scientific data, with the trivialities of the tabloids and the platitudes of history, but quite innocent of original thought. Each man's rubber stamps are the duplicates of millions of others, so that when those millions are exposed to the same stimuli, all received identical imprints* (…)

"*As a matter of fact, the practice of propaganda since the war has assumed very different forms from those prevalent twenty years ago. This new technique may fairly be called the new propaganda.*

"*It takes account not merely of the individual, nor even of the mass mind alone, but also and especially of the anatomy of society, with its interlocking group formations and loyalties. It sees the individual not only as a cell in the social organism but as a cell organised into the social unit. Touch a nerve at a sensitive spot and you get an automatic response from certain specific members of the organism.*"[5]

Bernays had been deeply impressed by the theories of Freud, in particular his work *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* ("Group psychology and the analysis of the Ego"); far from seeking to educate and develop the conscious mind, he considered that the work of the propagandist was to manipulate the unconscious. "*Trotter and Le Bon*", he wrote, "*concluded that the group mind does not **think** in the strict sense of the word. In place of thoughts it has impulses, habits, and emotions.*"[6] Consequently, "*If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without them knowing about it?*"[7] In whose name is this manipulation to be undertaken? Bernays uses the expression "*invisible government*", and it is clear that he is referring here to the big bourgeoisie or even to its upper reaches: "*The invisible government tends to be concentrated in the hands of the few because of the expense of manipulating the social machinery which controls the opinions and habits of the masses. To advertise on a scale which will reach fifty million persons is expensive. To reach and persuade the group leaders who dictate the public's thoughts and actions is likewise expensive.*"[8]

Organising for war

Bernays' book was written in 1928, and drew in large part on his work as a propagandist during the war. But in August 1914 this was still in the future. European governments had long been accustomed to manipulating the press by "planting" stories and even complete articles, but now this had to be organised – like the war itself – on an industrial scale: the aim, as the German General Ludendorff wrote, was "*to mould public opinion without appearing to do so*".[9]

There is a striking difference in the approach adopted by the continental powers, and that taken by Britain and later America. On the continent, propaganda was first and foremost a military affair. The Austrians, surprisingly, were quickest off the mark:

4. Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda technique in the World War*, 1927 (available online at http://babel.hathitrust.org/). Harold Dwight Lasswell (1902-1978) was one of the foremost American political scientists of his day, introducing for the first time into the discipline, new methods based on statistical measurement, content analysis, etc. He was especially interested in the psychological aspect of politics and the workings of the "group mind". During World War II, he worked for the American army's political warfare unit. Although raised in small-town Illinois he had a broad education, being introduced by one of his uncles to the work of Freud, and to the works of Marx and Havelock Ellis by one of his teachers. His 1927 doctoral thesis, from which we quote extensively in this article, was probably the first in-depth study of the subject.

5. Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, Ig Publishing, 2005, pp47, 48, 55.

6. Op. cit. p73.

7. Op. cit. p.71.

8. Op. cit. p63.

9. Lasswell, op. cit., p28.

on 28th July 1914, while the war was still a localised conflict between Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the KuK KriegsPressequartier (Imperial and Royal war press bureau) was established as a division of the Army High Command. In Germany, control of propaganda was at first divided between the Army General Staff's War Press Office and the Nachrichtenabteilung (News Department) of the Foreign Ministry, which was limited to organising propaganda in neutral countries; in 1917, the military created the Deutsche Kriegsnachrichtendienst (German War News Service), which kept control of propaganda to the end.[10] In France, a Section d'Information publishing military bulletins and later whole articles, was set up in October 1914 as a division of Military Intelligence. Under General Nivelle, this became a "Service d'Information pour les Armées", and it was this organism that accredited journalists to the front. The Foreign Ministry had its own "Bureau de la Presse et de l'Information", and it was only in 1916 that the two were brought together in a single "Maison de la Presse".

Britain, with its 150 years experience of running a vast empire on the basis of a small island population, was both more informal and more secretive. The War Propaganda Bureau set up in 1914 was run not by the military, but by the Liberal politician Charles Masterman. It was never known by this name, but simply as "Wellington House", a building housing the National Insurance Commission which the Propaganda Bureau used as a front. At least at the outset, Masterman concentrated on coordinating the work of well-known authors like John Buchan and HG Wells,[11] and the Bureau's output was impressive: by 1915 it had printed 2.5 million books, as well as circulating a newsletter to 360 American newspapers.[12] By the end of the war, Britain's propaganda effort was in the hands of two newspaper magnates: Lord Northcliffe (owner of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*) was in charge of British propaganda first in the USA then in enemy countries, while Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, took responsibility for a full-blown Ministry of Information that was to replace the Propaganda Bureau. Lloyd George, Britain's Prime Minister during the war, responded to protests at the undue influence thus handed to the press barons, that "*he had found that only newspapermen could do the job*". This is according to Lasswell who goes on to remark that "*Newspapermen win their daily bread by telling their tales in terse, vivid style. They know how to get over to the average man in the street, and to exploit his vocabulary, prejudices, and enthusiasms* (…) *they are not hampered by what Dr Johnson has termed 'needless scrupulosity'. They have a feeling for words and moods, and they know that the public is not convinced by logic but seduced by stories*".[13]

When the United States entered the war in 1917, its propaganda was immediately put on an industrial footing, with all the country's genius for logistics. According to George Creel, who ran the "Committee on Public Information", "*Thirty odd booklets were printed in several languages, 75 million copies were circulated in America, and many millions of copies were circulated abroad* (…) *The Four-Minute Men*[14] *commanded the volunteer services of 75,000 speakers, operating in 5,200 communities, and making a total of 775,190 speeches*[15] (…) *it used 1,438 drawings prepared by volunteers for the production of posters, window cards and similar material* (…) *Moving pictures were commercially successful in America and effective abroad, such as 'Pershing's Crusaders', 'America's answer', and 'Under 4 Flags', etc*".[16]

The mention of volunteers is significant of the developing symbiosis between the overt state apparatus and civil society that is characteristic of democratic state capitalism: thus Germany had its Pan-German League and its Fatherland Party, Britain its Council of Loyal British Subjects and British Empire Union, and America its American Patriotic League and Patriotic Order of Sons of America (which were essentially vigilante groups).

On a grander scale, the film industry[17] acted both independently and under government auspices, and in a less formal mixture of the two. In Britain, the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee – not strictly a government agency but rather an informal grouping of MPs – commissioned the recruiting film *You!* In 1916, on the other hand, the first major feature-length movie of the war – *The Battle of the Somme*, 1916 – was produced by an industry cartel, the British Topical Committee for War Films, which paid for permits to film at the front and then sold the resulting film to the government. In Germany, the film producer Oskar Messner established a virtual monopoly over war reporting thanks to his control of government permits to film at the front. Towards the end of the war, in 1917, Ludendorff established the Universum-Film-AG (known as Ufa) for the purpose of "patriotic instruction"; it was financed jointly by state and private industry, and after the war was to become Europe's biggest private film company.[18]

To conclude on a technical note. Perhaps the greatest single prize in the propaganda war was the support of the United States. The British here had an immense advantage: right at the outset of the war, the Royal Navy cut Germany's undersea transatlantic cable, and from then on all communication between Europe and the Americas could only pass through London. Germany attempted to respond using the world's first radio transmitter at Nauen, but this was before radio had become a means of mass communication and its impact was marginal at most.

The purpose of propaganda

What was propaganda for? At the most general level, propaganda aimed at something that had never been done before: to bind together all the material, physical, and psychological energies of the nation and to direct them towards a single aim – the crushing defeat of the enemy.

Relatively little propaganda was aimed directly at the troops in combat. This may seem paradoxical, but it reveals a certain reality at the foundation of all propaganda: although its underlying theme is a lie – the idea that the nation is united, above social classes, and that all have an equal interest in its defence – it loses its effectiveness when it is too much at odds with the lived reality of those it aims to influence.[19]

Troops at the front in World War I generally derided the grossest propaganda directed at them, and succeeded in produc-

10. See Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, Penguin Books, 1999, pp224-5).

11. See also our article "Truth and memory, art and propaganda": http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201502/12275/truth-and-memory-art-and-propaganda.

12. Ferguson, op.cit., p223.

13. Op.cit., p32.

14. The "Four-Minute Men" were a remarkable and uniquely American invention. Volunteers would deliver a four-minute speech (on themes provided by the Creel Committee) at all kinds of places where an audience would be guaranteed: street corners during market days, in cinemas while reels were changed, and so on.

15. Since the USA only entered the war in April 1917, they were delivering more than 1000 speeches every day. It is estimated that they were heard by 11 million people.

16. Quoted in Lasswell, op. cit., pp211-212. We have limited ourselves to the most significant elements in Creel's list.

17. Cinema, despite being silent, was already a major medium of public entertainment. In Britain alone in 1917, there were already more than 4000 cinemas playing to audiences of 20 million every week (cf. John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, Manchester University Press, 1984, p69).

18. Cf. Ferguson, op. cit., pp226-225.

19. We can take two admittedly extreme examples to illustrate this point: it was notorious, by the 1980s, that nobody in the Eastern Bloc countries believed any official propaganda; by the end of World War II, the German population no longer believed anything they read in print – with the exception, for some, of the horoscope, which was duly prepared every day by the Propaganda Ministry (cf. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, MacMillan 1970, pp410-411.

ing their own "press" which caricatured the yellow press delivered to them in the trenches: the British had the *Wipers Times*,[20] the French had *La Rire aux Éclats*, *Le Poilu*, and *Le Crapouillot*. German troops did not believe their propaganda either: in July 1915, a Saxon regiment at Ypres sent a message to the British line, asking them to "*Send us an English newspaper so that we may hear the verity*".

Propaganda was also aimed at enemy troops, the French and British in particular taking advantage of the prevailing westerly winds to send balloons to drop leaflets over Germany. There is little evidence that this had very much effect.

The main emphasis, then, was on the home front, rather than the fighting troops, and here we can distinguish several main aims whose relative importance varied according to the specific circumstances of each country. Three stand out especially:

1) Financing the war. Even at the outset, it was obvious that normal income would not meet the cost of the conflict, which rose dramatically as the war dragged on. The solution was to call on the nation's accumulated savings through war loans, which remained voluntary even in the autocratic regimes.[21]

2) Recruitment for the armed forces. For the powers of the European continent, where compulsory military service was a long-standing fact,[22] the issue of recruitment did not really arise. In the British Empire and the United States it was another matter: Britain only introduced conscription in 1916, Canada did so in 1917, while in Australia two referendums on conscription were defeated and the country relied entirely on volunteers; in the USA, a Draft Bill was ready as soon as the country entered the war, but the lack of enthusiasm for the war among the working population was such that the government in effect had to "recruit" Americans to support the Draft.

3) Support for industry and agriculture. The nation's entire productive apparatus must be constantly keyed to the highest pitch and directed wholly to military purposes. Inevitably this means austerity for the population in general, but it also means a vast upheaval in the organisation of industry and agriculture: the men at war must be replaced by women in the fields and factories.

So much for the Home Front, but what of abroad? The 1914-18 war was, for the first time in history, a truly world war and as such the attitudes adopted by neutrals and allies could be of critical importance. The question was posed immediately by Britain's economic blockade of the German coast, imposed on all shipping including that of neutrals: what attitude to this clear violation of international agreements on the freedom of the seas would neutral governments adopt? But by far the most important effort towards neutral states was aimed by both sides at bringing the USA – the only great industrial power not involved in war from the beginning – into the conflict. America's intervention on behalf of the Entente was by no means a foregone conclusion: it might remain neutral, picking up the pieces once the Europeans had fought themselves to exhaustion; should it enter the war, it might even do so on the German side: Britain was its main commercial and imperial rival, and there was an old historical antipathy to Britain going back to the American revolution and the 1812 war between the two countries.

How propaganda worked

The propaganda **objectives** that we have just outlined are, in themselves, rational, or at the least accessible to rational analysis. But this begs the question that the vast mass of the population might well have asked: why should we fight? What is this war for? Why, in short, is propaganda necessary? How can millions of men be persuaded to hurl themselves into the maelstrom of murder that was the Western Front, year after year? How can millions of civilians be made to accept the slaughter of sons, brothers, husbands, the physical exhaustion of factory labour and the privations of rationing?

The reasoning of pre-capitalist societies no longer held true. As Lasswell points out: "*The bonds of personal loyalty and affection which bound a man to his chief have long since dissolved. Monarchy and class privilege have gone the way of all flesh and the idolatry of the individual passes for the official religion of democracy. It is an atomised world...*".[23] But capitalism is not only the atomisation of the individual, it has also called into being a social class inherently opposed to war and capable of overthrowing the existing order, a revolutionary class unlike any other because its political power is founded on consciousness and understanding. It is a class which capitalism itself has been forced to educate so that it can fulfil its role in the productive process. How then to appeal to a literate working class schooled in political debate?

In these conditions, propaganda "*is a concession to the rationality of the modern world. A literate world, a schooled world, prefers to thrive on argument and news* (…) *All the apparatus of diffused erudition popularises the symbols and forms of pseudo-rational appeal: the wolf of propaganda does not hesitate to masquerade in the sheepskin. All the voluble men of the day – writers, reporters, editors, preachers, lecturers, teachers, politicians – are drawn into the service of propaganda to amplify a master voice. All is conducted with the decorum and trappery of intelligence, for this is a rational epoch, and demands its raw meat cooked and garnished by adroit and skilful chefs*." These "new chefs" must serve up the "raw meat" of unavowable emotion: "*A new flame must burn out the canker of dissent and temper the steel of bellicose enthusiasm*".[24]

In a sense we can say that the problem facing the ruling class in 1914 is one of different perspectives for the future: up until 1914, the Second International had repeatedly declared, in the most solemn terms, that the war which it rightly saw as imminent would be fought for the interests of the capitalist class, and had called on the international working class to oppose it with the perspective of revolution, or at the very least mass international class struggle;[25] for the ruling class, the real perspective of war, of appalling bloodshed in defence of the interests of a small class of exploiters, must therefore at all costs be concealed. The bourgeois state must assure itself of the monopoly of propaganda by smashing or seducing the organisations which give expression to the working-class perspective, and at the same time hide its own perspective under the illusion that the conquest of the enemy will open up a new period of peace and prosperity – a "new world order", as George Bush once put it.

This introduces two fundamentals of war propaganda: "war aims", and the

20. "Wipers" being the English distortion of Ypres, the section of the front where a large part of the British army was concentrated and which saw one of the war's most murderous engagements.

21. The war was also financed through loans abroad, most importantly by France and Britain borrowing in the United States. "*As* [President] *Woodrow Wilson put it, the beauty of having financial leverage over Britain and France was that* 'when the war is over we can force them to our way of thinking'" (Ferguson, op. cit., p329).

22. Indeed, shortly before the outbreak of war the French had raised the duration of military service to three years.

23. Lasswell, op.cit., p222.

24. Lasswell, op. cit., p221.

25. This was the public, official agitation of the International. Events were tragically to show that the International's apparent strength hid a profound weakness which in 1914 led its constituent parties to betray the workers' cause and lend their support to their respective ruling classes. See our article "1914: Why the Second International failed" in *International Review* n°154 (http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201502/12081/1914-how-2nd-international-failed).

hatred of the enemy. The two are closely connected. "*To mobilise the hatred of the people against the enemy, represent the opposing nation as a menacing, murderous aggressor* (…) *It is through the elaboration of war aims that the obstructive role of the enemy becomes particularly evident. Represent the opposing nation as satanic; it violates all the moral standards (mores) of the group and insults its self-esteem. The maintenance of hatred depends upon supplementing the direct representations of the menacing, obstructive, satanic enemy, by assurances of ultimate victory*".[26]

Already prior to the war, a good deal of work had been done by psychologists on the existence and nature of what Gustave Le Bon[27] called the "group mind", a form of collective unconscious formed by "the crowd" in the sense of the anonymous mass of atomised individuals, cut off from social ties and obligations, which is characteristic of capitalist society and especially of the petty bourgeoisie. Lasswell comments that "*Every school of psychological thought seems to agree* (…) *that war is a type of influence, which has vast capacities for releasing repressed impulses and for allowing their external manifestations in direct form. There is thus a general consensus that the propagandist is able to count upon very primitive and powerful allies in mobilising his subjects for war-time hatred of the enemy*". He also quotes from John A Hobson's *The psychology of jingoism* (1900),[28] which speaks of "*a coarse patriotism, fed by the wildest rumours and the most violent appeals to hate and the animal lust for blood,* [that] *passes by quick contagion through the crowded life of the cities, and recommends itself everywhere by the satisfaction it affords to the sensational cravings. It is less the savage feeling for personal participation in the fray than the feeling of a neurotic imagination that marks Jingoism*".[29]

There is a certain contradiction here nonetheless. Capitalism, as Rosa Luxemburg said, likes to present, and indeed has, a cultured self-image;[30] yet beneath the surface lies a seething volcano of hatred and violence which occasionally breaks through into the open – or is put to use by the ruling class. The question remains: is this violence a return to primal aggressive instincts or is it caused by the neurotic, anti-human nature of capitalist society? It is certainly true that human beings have asocial, aggressive instincts as well as social ones. Yet there is a fundamental difference between the social life of archaic societies and capitalism. In the former, aggression is held in check and regulated by a whole web of social interactions and obligations outside of which life is not merely impossible but unimaginable. In capitalism, the tendency is towards the individual's detachment from all social ties and responsibilities,[31] whence an immense emotional impoverishment and a lack of resistance to the anti-social instincts.

An important element of the culture of hatred within capitalist society, is the guilty conscience. This did not appear with capitalism: on the contrary, if we follow Freud it is an ancient attainment of human culture. Human beings' ability to think and so to choose between two different courses of action places them before the choice between good and evil, and hence before moral conflict. The sense of guilt is a consequence of this very freedom, which is both a product of culture springing from the ability to think, yet at the same time largely unconscious and so open to manipulation. One mechanism that the unconscious uses to deal with guilt is through projection: guilt is projected onto "the other". The guilty conscience's self-hatred is relieved by being projected towards the outside, onto those who have suffered injustice and who are thus the cause of guilty feelings.

Some might object that capitalism is hardly the first society in which murder, exploitation, and oppression have existed – and this of course is true. The difference with all previous societies is that capitalism claims to be based on the "rights of man": when Genghis Khan massacred the population of Khorasan, he did not claim to be doing it for their own good. The oppressed, enslaved, and exploited populations of imperialistic capitalism weigh on the conscience of bourgeois society, whatever the self-serving justifications (usually backed up by the church) it may have invented for itself. Prior to World War I, the hatred of bourgeois society had been directed logically against the most downtrodden sections of society: the precursors to the hate-mongering images of Germans are thus to be found in the caricatures of the Irish in Britain, and the negroes in the United States in particular.

Hatred of the enemy is far more effective if it can be combined with a conviction in one's own righteousness. Hatred and humanitarianism are thus close companions in war-time.

It is striking that the politically more backward, autocratic regimes of Germany and Austria-Hungary were unable to wield these weapons with the success and sophistication of the British and French, and later the Americans. Most caricatural in this respect was Austria-Hungary, a sprawling multi-ethnic empire made up in large part of minorities infected by a fractious nationalism. Its semi-feudal, aristocratic ruling caste, cut off from the aspirations of its population, had none of the versatile unscrupulousness of a Poincaré, a Clemenceau, or a Lloyd George. Its social vision was limited to the Vienna Ring, a multi-cultural city of which Stefan Zweig could write that "*Life was pleasant in this atmosphere of spiritual conciliation and, all unbeknown to himself, each bourgeois of this city was raised by his education to that cosmopolitanism which repudiates all narrow nationalism, to the dignity, in short, of a citizen of the world*". Small wonder then, that Austro-Hungarian propaganda combined medieval imagery with *art nouveau* style: St George overcoming an enemy reduced to the mythical anonymity of a dragon [fig. 1]; of the handsome prince in shining armour escorting his lady to the sunlit kingdom of peace.[32] (. [fig. 2].

For all its brutal Prussian heavy-handedness, the German aristocratic caste still preserved a certain sense of *noblesse oblige*, at least in its own vision of itself that it sought to portray to the outside world. According to Lasswell, German ineffectiveness could be blamed on the lack of imagination of the Germany military, who kept control of the propaganda throughout, but there was more to it than that: in early 1915 the Leitsätze der Oberzensurstelle (the censorship bureau) laid down the following guidelines for journalists: "*The language towards the enemy states can be hard (…) The pureness and the greatness of the movement that seized our people demand a dignified language (…) Calls for barbaric warfare, extermination of foreign people are disgusting; the army knows where severity and clemency should reign. Our shield must remain pure. Similar callings by the enemy yellow press are no excuse*

26. Lasswell, op. cit., p195

27. Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) was a French anthropologist and psychologist, whose major work *La psychologie des foules* was published in 1895.

28. John Atkinson Hobson (1858-1940) was a British economist who opposed the development of imperialism, believing it contained the seeds of international conflict. Lenin drew extensively on (and polemicised with) Hobson's major work *Imperialism* (1902), in his own *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*.

29. "Jingoism" is an English term for aggressive patriotism, derived from a popular British song at the time of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877:
"*We don't want to fight but by Jingo if we do*
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too
We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true
The Russians shall not have Constantinople".

30. The "cultured surface" is not only a mask. Capitalist society also contains within itself a dynamic towards the development of culture, science, and art. To deal with this here however, would take too long and distract from our main argument.

31. Or as Margaret Thatcher once said, there is no society, only individuals and their families.

32. Both these posters are for war loans; like several of the illustrations in the article they are taken from Annie Pastor's book I*mages de propagande 1914-18, ou l'art de vendre la guerre.*.

[fig.1]

[fig.2]

for such behaviour on our part".

The British and French had no such qualms, any more than did the Americans.[33] [fig. 3].

The contrast between the British and German handling of the Edith Cavell affair is striking in this respect. Edith Cavell was a British nurse who worked for the Red Cross in Belgium, continuing to do so under the German occupation. At the same time, she was helping British, French and Belgian troops escape to Britain via Holland (there have also been unconfirmed suggestions that she was working for British intelligence). Cavell was arrested by the Germans, tried and found guilty of treason under German military law, and shot by firing squad in 1915. This was a gift from heaven for the British, who raised an enormous scandal aimed both at recruitment in Britain and at discrediting the German cause in the USA. A torrent of posters, postcards, pamphlets and even postage stamps kept the tragic fate of nurse Cavell constantly before the public mind (in this poster she appears a good deal younger than she was in reality). [fig. 4].

Not only were the Germans hopelessly inept at responding, they proved equally incapable of using their own opportunities. "*Shortly after the Allies had created the most tremendous uproar about the execution of Nurse Cavell, the French executed two German nurses under substantially the same circumstances*", Lasswell tells us.[34] An American newspaperman asked the officer in charge of German propaganda why they did not "*raise the devil about those nurses the French shot the other day*", to which the German replied: "*What? Protest? The French had a perfect right to shoot them!*"

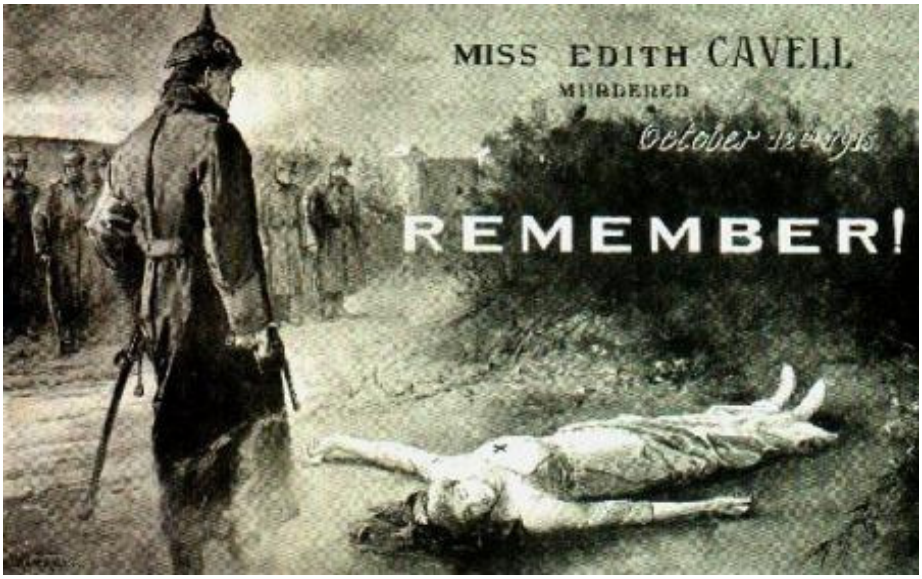
The British made enormous use of Germany's occupation of Belgium, not without a good dose of cynicism since the German invasion merely forestalled Britain's own war plans. Much was made of the most lurid atrocity stories: German troops were bayoneting babies, making soap out of corpses, tying priests upside-down on the clappers of their own church bells, etc., etc. To give such fanciful tales more weight, the British commissioned a report on "Alleged German atrocities", chaired by Viscount James Bryce, who had been a respected ambassador to the USA (1907-13) and was known as a scholar imbued with, and sympathetic to, German culture (he had studied at Heidelberg) – so many guarantees of impartiality. Since atrocities are inevitable when a raw conscript army officered by political incompetents is engaged among a rebellious civilian population,[35] some of those condemned by the "Bryce Report" as it became known, were undoubtedly true. However, there is no doubt either that the Committee was unable to interview any witnesses of the supposed atrocities, and that the majority were pure fabrications especially the most revolting tales of rape and mutilation. Nor were the Allies above using a touch of pornographic sensationalism, with posters portraying women in suggestive states of

33. The postcard contains a "poem" supposedly written by a French infantryman to his daughter on the theme "What is a Boche (pejorative French term for a German)?
"*Do you want to know, child, what is this monster, a Boche?*
A Boche, dear, is a being without honour,
A cunning heavy-handed bandit, full of hatred and ugly with it,
A Bogeyman, a poisoning Ogre!
He's the Devil disguised as a soldier who burns down villages,
Shoots the old men and women, without remorse,
Finishes off the wounded and robs the dead!
He's a cowardly cut-throat of children and little girls,
Spitting babies with his bayonet,
Killing for pleasure, for no reason, without pity!
This is the man, my child, who wants to kill your father,
Destroy the Fatherland and torture your mother!
This is the Teuton damned by the whole Universe!"

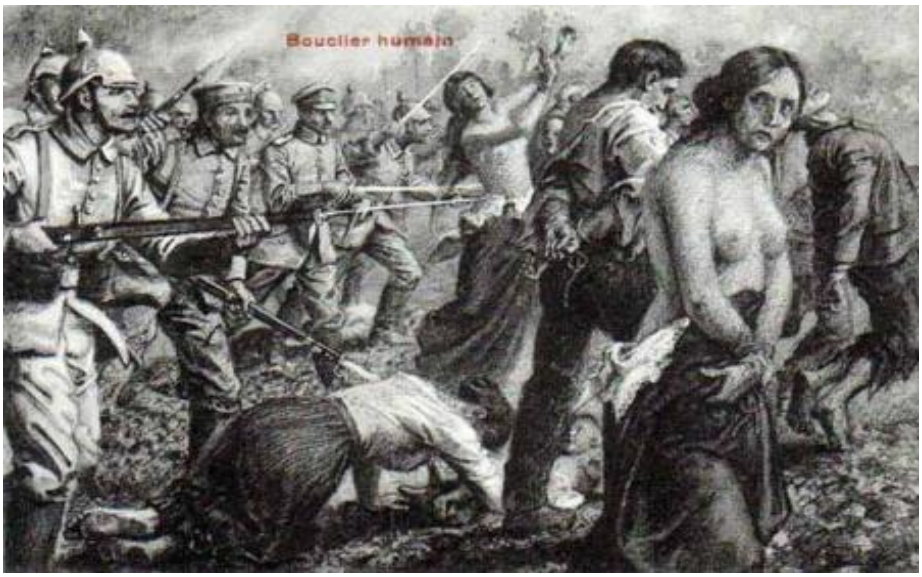
34. Op. cit., p32.

35. We need only remember the example of the Vietnam war, where atrocities such as the My Lai massacre were frequent and attested.

[fig.3]



[fig.4]



[fig.5]

undress, a simultaneous appeal to prudery and salaciousness. [fig. 5]

The appeals for help to Belgian widows and orphans issued by organisations like the "Committee for Belgian Relief", with the aid of an illustrious galaxy of literary stars, including (in Britain) Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy and George Bernard Shaw amongst the best known,[36] or for funds to support the Belgian Red Cross, were the precursors of today's "humanitarian" military interventions supported by intellectuals like Bernard Henri-Lévy (though one would hesitate to compare, in terms of talent, an Henri-Lévy with a Thomas Hardy). The plight of Belgium, indeed, was used over and over again in a multitude of contexts: in recruitment, to denounce German barbarism or perfidious disregard for diplomatic treaties (much was made of Germany's reneging on its commitment to honour and defend Belgian neutrality), and, importantly, to win American sympathy for the Franco-British cause. [fig. 6]

German attempts to respond to the barrage of Allied hate campaigns, based on atrocity stories and cultural animosity, remained legalistic, literal-minded, and unimaginative. In effect, the Germans remained on the back foot, constantly forced to react to Allied attacks and incapable making effective use of the Allies' own contraventions of international law – as we can see in the Cavell case.

In writing of hate campaigns and atrocities, Lasswell makes the point that "*It is always difficult for many simple minds inside a nation to attach personal traits to so dispersed an enemy as a whole nation. They need to have some individual on whom to pin their hate. It is therefore important to single out a handful of enemy leaders and load them down with the whole decalogue of sins*". And he continues, "*No personality drew more abuse of this sort in the last war than the Kaiser*".[37] The Kaiser was made to epitomise everything barbaric, militaristic, brutal, autocratic – "The Mad Dog of Europe", as he was christened by the British *Daily Express*, or even the Beast of the Apocalypse according to the Parisian *Liberté*. The parallels with the propaganda use of Saddam Hussein or Osama Bin Laden to justify the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are obvious. [fig. 7].

Hatred of what is different, of whatever is outside the group, is a powerful unifying psychological force. Warfare – and above all the total war of national masses – demands that the nation's psychological

36. Cf. Lasswell, op. cit., p138.

37. Lasswell, op. cit., p.88. Though one wonders whether one should consider it a "quality" of less "simple" minds that they should be capable of hating an entire nation without a hate figure to focus on...

energies be welded into a single effort. The entire nation must be aware of itself as a unity, which means eradicating from conscious awareness the indubitable fact that this unity is unreal, a myth, since in reality the nation is made up of opposing classes with antagonistic interests. One way of achieving this is to emphasise a figurehead of national unity, which may be real, symbolic, or both. The autocratic regimes had the ruler: the Tsar in Russia, the Kaiser in Germany, the Emperor in Austria-Hungary. Britain had the King and the symbolic figure of Britannia, France and the United States had the Republic, personified respectively as Marianne and Liberty. The drawback of such positive symbolism is that it can also fall victim to criticism especially should the war go badly. The Kaiser, after all, was also a figure of Prussian militarism and junkerdom which was far from arousing universal enthusiasm in Germany; the King in Britain could also be associated with an arrogant and privileged aristocratic ruling caste. Hatred directed outside the nation, at the enemy, has no such disadvantages. The hated figure's defeats may make him contemptible but never less hateful, while his successes only make him more so. "*The leader or leading idea might also, so to speak, be negative; hatred against a particular person or institution might operate in just the same unifying way, and might call up the same kind of emotional ties as positive attachment*".[38] We are tempted, indeed, to say that the more society is fractured and atomised, the sharper the real class contradictions within it, the greater the emotional and spiritual emptiness of its mental life, the greater are its reserves of frustration and hatred and the more effectively can these be redirected into hatred of an external enemy. Or to put it another way, the further a society has moved towards advanced capitalist totalitarianism, be it Stalinist, fascist or democratic, the more will the ruling class use hatred of the outside as a means to unite an atomised and disunited social body.

It was only in 1918 that posters appeared in Germany, that could be said to prefigure the Nazis' anti-Jewish propaganda. It was directed, not against Germany's military enemies, but against the internal threat from the working class, and especially from its most combative, class-conscious and dangerous element: Spartacus. [figs. 8 & 9].

These posters were both produced by a right-wing "Union for struggle against Bolshevism", allied to the same *Freikorps* units of disbanded soldiers and lumpen

38. Freud, *Group psychology*... quoted in Adorno, *Freudian theory and the pattern of fascist propaganda.*

[fig.6]

[fig.7]

[fig.8]

[fig.9]

elements that were to assassinate Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, at the behest of the Social-Democratic government. One wonders what workers thought of the idea that it was Bolshevism that was responsible for "*War, unemployment, and hunger*" as the poster on the right pretends.

Just as the SPD used the *Freikorps* while disowning it, the poster on the following page – presumably by the SPD since the baby is clutching a red flag – avoids referring to Bolshevism or Spartakus directly, but still puts out the same message: "*Don't strangle baby Freedom with disorder and crime! Otherwise, our children will die of hunger!*". [fig. 10].

The psychology of propaganda

For Bernays, as we have seen above, propaganda was directed at the "*impulses, habits, and emotions*" of the masses. It seems to us undeniable that the theories of Le Bon, Trotter, and Freud on the over-riding importance of the unconscious mind, and above all what Bernays terms the "group mind", strongly influenced the production of propaganda, at least in the Allied countries. It is therefore worth considering its themes in this light. Rather than concerning ourselves with the fairly straightforward message - "support the war" - let us look at its vehicle: the emotional wellsprings that propaganda sought to press into service.

We are struck first by the fact that this overwhelmingly patriarchal society, engaged in warfare whose combatants are all men and where war is still seen as a strictly male preserve, choose women as a national symbol: Britannia, Marianne, Liberty, Eternal Rome. These female figures can be extremely ambiguous. Britannia – a mixture of Athena and the indigenous Boadicea – tends to be statuesque and regal, but she can also be motherly, sometimes explicitly so; Marianne, bare-breasted, is generally heroic but she can be downright alluring on occasion, as can Roma; Liberty manages to play in every key – majestic, maternal, and enticing all at once. [figs. 11 & 12].

Britain and America also have their father symbols: John Bull and Uncle Sam, both of whom are shown pointing sternly out of their posters "*wanting YOU! For the armed forces*". One British poster rather optimistically features a marriage of Britannia with Uncle Sam.

The real art of propaganda lies in suggestion rather than clarity, and this ambiguous combination, or rather confusion of imagery, loads the message with all the powerful emotions of childhood and family. Guilt fuelled by sexual desire and sexual shame is a powerful driver, especially for the young men at whom the recruiting campaigns were directed. These were critical in the "Anglo-Saxon" countries where conscription was introduced late (Britain, Canada), with much controversy (USA) or not at all (Australia). In Britain, indeed, the use of sexual shame was made absolutely explicit, in the "White Feather campaign" organised by Admiral Charles Fitzgerald, with the enthusiastic support of the suffragette leaders Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst: this involved recruiting young women to hand a white feather – a traditional symbol of cowardice – to men not in uniform.[39] .

The "King Kong" coifed with a German helmet , and carrying a semi-naked female [fig. 13], is a typically American effort to manipulate feelings of sexual insecurity. The black ape ravishing the white innocent is a classic theme of the anti-negro propa-

39. As can be imagined, this was deeply resented by men on leave from the front, when they found themselves being given a white feather, but it could also be devastating: the grandfather of one of the present authors was a 17-year old apprentice in a Newcastle steel works when he was given a white feather by his own sister – driving him to enlist in the Navy by lying about his age.

ganda prevalent in the United States well into the 1950s and 60s, which played on the supposed "animality" and sexual prowess of black men portrayed as a threat to "civilised" white womanhood, and of course by implication to her male "protector".[40] This made it possible, in the American south, for the white planter aristocracy to tie the "poor white trash" to support for the existing order of segregation and class rule, whereas their real material interests should have made them natural allies of the black worker.[41] The myth of "white superiority", with all its accompanying emotions of sexual shame, fear, domination and violence, infested American society including the working class – prior to World War I, the only union to form chapters where blacks and whites were on an equal footing, was the revolutionary syndicalist IWW.[42]

The other side of the coin to sexual shame and fear is the image of "man as protector". The modern soldier, a worker in uniform whose life in the trenches will be one of mud, lice, and imminent death from shells and bullets fired by an enemy he cannot even see, is portrayed over and over again as the gallant defender of hearth and home against a bestial (if often unseen) foe.

Propaganda thereby carried out a veritable hijack on one of the proletariat's prime principles: solidarity. From its beginnings, the working class had had to fight for the protection of women and children, especially to shield them from the unhealthiest or most dangerous employment, to limit their working hours, or to outlaw their subjection to night work. By protecting the reproduction that only women can assume, the workers' movement took on the solidarity both between the sexes and towards future generations, just as the creation of the first retirement pension funds outside state control expressed its solidarity towards the older generations no longer apt for work.

At the same time, from the outset marxism has both defended the equal status of the sexes as a condition *sine qua non* of communist society, and shown that women's emancipation through wage labour is a precondition for this objective.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that patriarchal attitudes remained deeply anchored in society as a whole, including in the working class: we will not be rid of millennia of patriarchy in a few decades. To assert their independence, women still had to organise separately in special sections within the unions and the socialist parties. Rosa Luxemburg's example is striking in this respect: the SPD leadership thought they could reduce her influence by encouraging her to limit herself to the organisation of "women's business" – something she refused outright. Propaganda sought to subvert solidarity with women by transforming it into the "chivalrous" protection of women, which of course is nothing but the counterpart to the reality of women's inferior status within class society. [fig. 14].

This idea of manly duty – more especially the duty of the knight – to protect "widows and orphans" and the poor and oppressed, strikes deep roots in European civilisation, going back to the medieval church's efforts to establish its moral authority over the warrior aristocracy. It might seem far-fetched to connect the propaganda

[fig.10

Marianne in dual mode

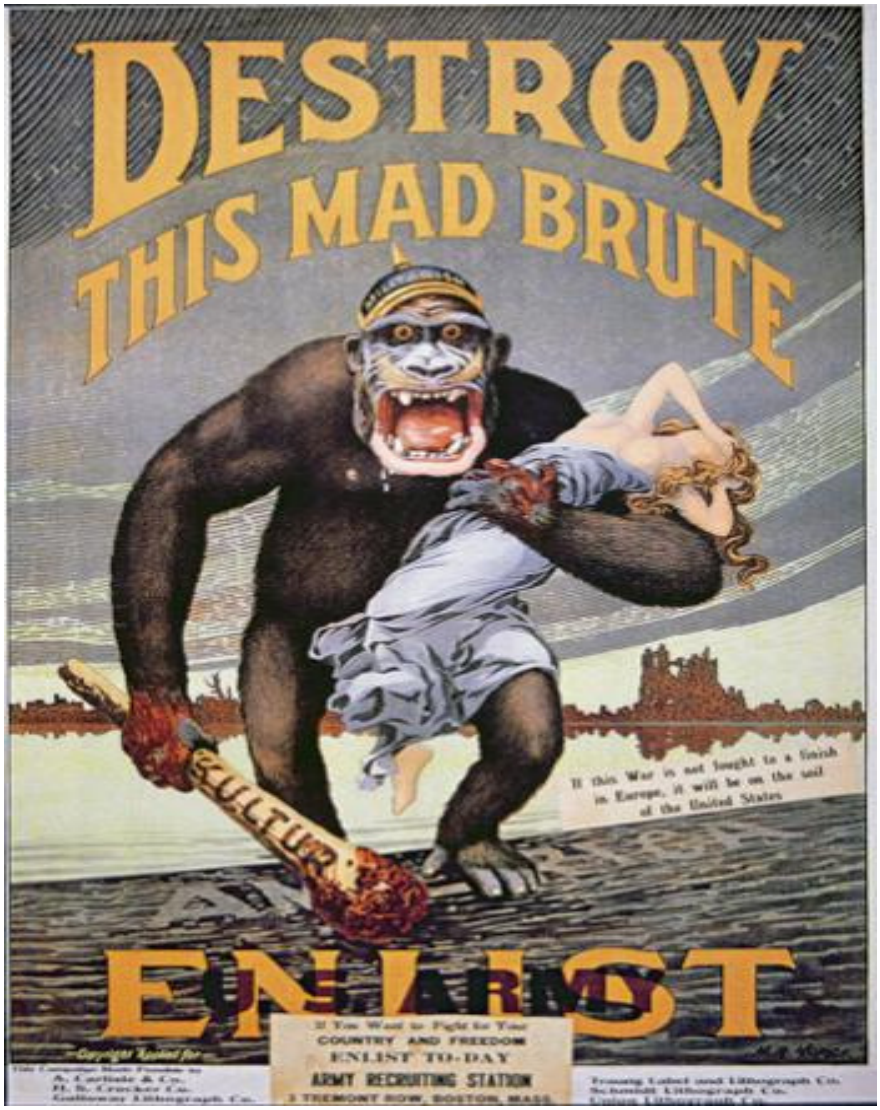
[fig.11]

40. Given that – in a white-dominated patriarchal society – sexual predation was above all the fact of white males on black women, this would almost be funny were it not so vile.

41. As was indeed the case, embryonically, in the 18th century: cf Howard Zinn's *People's history of the United States*.

42. International Workers of the World.

[fig.12]



[fig.13]

of 1914 with an ideology promoted for very different reasons a thousand years previously. But ideologies remain like a sediment in society's mental structures, even when their material underpinning has long disappeared. Moreover, what one might call "medievalism" was used by both the big and small bourgeoisie in Germany and Britain – and so, by extension, in the United States – during the 19th century's massive surge of industrialisation in order to give a solid foundation to the national principle. In Germany, where national unity still remained to be built, there was an entirely conscious effort to create the vision of a "*volk*" united by a common culture; it is to be found, for example, in the Grimm brothers' great project to resuscitate the popular culture of myths and legends. In Britain, the notion of "the liberties of freeborn Englishmen" could be traced back to the *Magna Carta* signed by King John in 1206. The medieval idiom exerted a strong influence not only in church-building – no Victorian suburb would be complete without its mock-medieval church – but also on scientific institutions like the magnificent Natural History Museum, or on railway stations like St Pancras (both in London). Not only did workers live in a physical space marked by medieval imagery, the same idiom entered the workers' movement, for example in William Morris' utopian novel *News from Nowhere*. Even in the United States, the first real trade union called itself "The Knights of Labor". The aristocratic ideals of "chivalry" and "gallantry" were thus very present – and very real – in a society which, on the level of day-to-day economic life, was given over to greed, the ruthless exploitation of labour, and a bitter conflict between the capitalist and proletarian classes. [fig. 15].

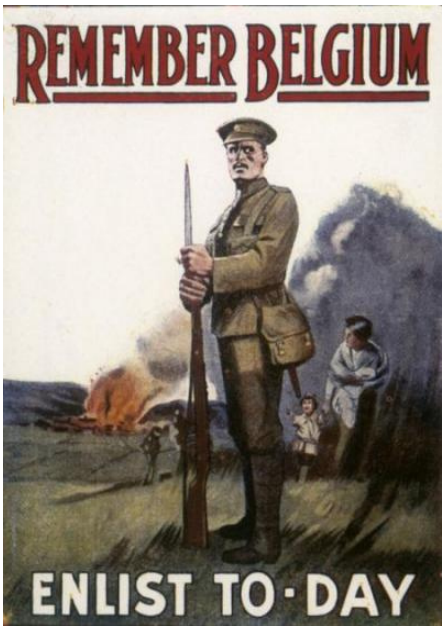
If war propaganda diverted the solidarity between the sexes into a reactionary chivalric ideology, it also subverted the masculine solidarity between factory workers. In 1914, any worker knew the importance of solidarity in the workplace. But despite the International, the workers' movement remained a collection of national organisations: day-to-day solidarity was towards familiar faces. It was above all the recruitment propaganda that made use of this themes, and nowhere more so than in Australia where there was no conscription. To show solidarity is no longer to struggle with your comrades **against** war, but to take your place alongside comrades in uniform, at the Front. Since this is necessarily a **male** solidarity, there are – as in the "defence of the family" - strong overtones of "manliness" in many of these posters. [fig. 16].

Inevitably, pride and shame go together so that the proud assertion of masculinity

that comes (or is supposed to come) with being part of a fighting corps, has its counterpoint in guilt at "not doing one's bit", at not sharing the manly suffering of one's comrades. It was perhaps some such mix of emotions that drove the war poet Wilfred Owen to return to the front after recovering from a nervous breakdown, despite his horror at the war and his deep loathing for the ruling classes – and the yellow press – that he held responsible for this.[43]

Freud believed not only that the "group mind" was ruled by the emotional unconscious, but that it represented an atavistic return to a more primitive mental state characteristic of archaic societies and of childhood. The ego, with its usual self-conscious calculation of personal advantage, could be submerged in the "group mind" and in this condition would be capable of actions that the individual would not contemplate, both for better or for worse, becoming capable of great savagery or great heroism. Bernays and his propagandists undoubtedly agreed with this view, at least up to a point – but they were more interested in the mechanics of manipulation than with theory and they certainly did not share Freud's deep pessimism about human civilisation and its prospects, above all after the experience of World War I. Where Freud was a scientist whose aim was to further humanity's understanding of itself by bringing the unconscious to consciousness, Bernays – and of course his employers – were interested in the unconscious only insofar as it allowed them to manipulate a mass that must remain unconscious. Lasswell considers that one can participate in the "group mind" even when one is alone; he makes the point that propaganda seeks to be omnipresent in the individual's life, to take every opportunity (street hoardings, advertising in public transport, the press, etc.) to affect his thinking as a member of a group. We touch here on a whole range of questions far too complex to be treated in this article: the relationship between the individual's psychology profoundly influenced by his personal history, and the prevalent "psychological energies" (for want of a better term) in society as a whole. But there can be no doubt, in our view, that these "psychological energies" exist, and that the ruling class studies them and seeks to use them in order to manipulate the mass for its own ends. Revolutionaries ignore them at their peril – not least because we do not exist outside bourgeois society and are also subjected to its influence.

Today, the war propaganda of 1914 can seem naïve, absurd, even grotesque. The



[fig.14]

[fig.15]

[fig.16]

19th century's naivety has been cauterised from society by two world wars and one hundred years of capitalist decadence and barbaric warfare. The development of cinema, television, radio, the omnipresence of the visual media, and the universal education demanded by the production process, have made society more sophisticated; it is also, perhaps, more cynical. But this does not make it immune from propaganda. On the contrary, not only have propaganda techniques been constantly refined, what was once merely commercial advertising has become one of propaganda's principal forms. Advertising – as Bernays said it should – has long since ceased merely plugging products: it promotes a world-view within which the product becomes desirable, and this world-view is deeply, viscerally bourgeois (and petty-bourgeois) and reactionary (and never more so than when it pretends to be "rebellious").

But the purposes of bourgeois propaganda is not only to inculcate, to propagate; it is also, perhaps even above all, to hide, to conceal. Let us remember Lasswell's words quoted at the beginning of this article: "*The war must not be due to a world system of conducting international affairs, nor to the stupidity or malevolence of all governing classes...*". The difference with communist propaganda is stark for the communists (as Rosa Luxemburg did in the *Junius pamphlet*) aim to reveal, to strip bare, to make comprehensible and therefore open to revolutionary change, the social order that confronts the working class. The ruling class seeks to submerge rational thought and conscious knowledge of social existence. The more "democratic" the society, the truer this is, for the greater the appearance of choice and "freedom", the more care must be taken to ensure that the population makes the "right choice" in complete freedom. Communist propaganda seeks on the contrary to help the revolutionary class to free itself from class society's ideology, including when this is deeply rooted in the unconscious. It aims to ally rational consciousness with the development of the social emotions, and to make each individual aware of himself not as a helpless atom, but as one link in a great association extended not only geographically – because the working class is inherently internationalist – but also historically, into both the past and the future which we have yet to build.

Jens / Gianni, 7th June, 2015

43. Owen's motivations were certainly much more complicated, as they must be for an individual. He was also an officer, and felt a responsibility towards "his" men.

First World War: Zimmerwald conference

The centrist currents in the political organisations of the proletariat

The article we publish here is a contribution by comrade MC to the internal debate of the 1980s, with the aim of fighting against centrist positions towards councilism within the ICC. MC was the signature of Marc Chirik (1907-1990), a former militant of the communist left and the main founding member of the ICC (see *International Reviews* nºs 61 and 62).

It may seem surprising that a text whose title refers to the Zimmerwald Conference held in September 1915 against the imperialist war was written in the context of an internal debate in the ICC around the question of councilism. In fact, as the reader will see, this debate was obliged to widen out to more general questions which had already been posed for a century and which are just as relevant today.

We have given an account of this debate on centrism towards councilism in issues nºs 40 to 44 of the *International Review* (1985-6). We refer the reader in particular to the article in issue nº 42 of the *Review*, "Centrist slidings towards councilism". This article presents the origins of the debate which we will summarise here in order to make certain aspects of MC's polemic more understandable.

At the 5th congress of the ICC, and especially afterwards, a series of confusions emerged within the organisation with regard to the analysis of the international situation; in particular, a position on the development of consciousness within the proletariat which was influenced by a councilist vision. This position was mainly put forward by comrades of the section in Spain (referred to as "AP" in MC's text, the name of the section's publication, *Acción Proletaria*).

"*The comrades who identified with this analysis thought that they were in agreement with the classic theses of marxism (and of the ICC) on the problem of class consciousness. In particular, they never explicitly rejected the necessity for an organisation of revolutionaries in the development of consciousness. But in fact, they had ended up with a councilist vision:*

– *by presenting consciousness as a determined and never a determining factor in the class struggle;*

– *by considering that the 'one and only crucible of class consciousness is the massive, open struggle', which leaves no place for revolutionary organisations;*

– *by denying any possibility of the latter carrying out the work of developing and deepening class consciousness in phases of reflux in the struggle.*

The only major difference between this vision and councilism is that the latter takes the approach to its logical conclusion by explicitly rejecting the necessity for communist organisation whereas our comrades did not go as far as this." [1]

One of the major themes of this approach was the rejection of the notion of the "subterranean maturation of consciousness", which actually meant excluding the possibility of revolutionary organisations developing and deepening communist consciousness outside the open struggles of the working class.

As soon as he became aware of the documents that expressed this point of view, our comrade MC wrote a contribution aimed at combating it. In January 1984, the plenary meeting of the central organ of the ICC adopted a resolution that took position on the erroneous analyses which had been expressed, in particular on the councilist conceptions involved:

"*When this resolution was adopted, the ICC comrades who had previously developed the thesis of 'no subterranean maturation', with all its councilist implications, acknowledged the error they had made. Thus they pronounced themselves firmly in favour of this resolution and notably of point 7 whose specific function was to reject the analyses which they had previously elaborated. But at the same time, other comrades raised disagreements with point seven which led them either to reject it en bloc or to vote for it 'with reservations', rejecting some of its formulations. We thus saw the appearance within the organisation of an approach which, without openly supporting the councilist theses, served as a shield or umbrella for these theses by rejecting the organisation's clear condemnation of them or attenuating their significance. Against this approach, the ICC's central organ was led in March '84 to adopt a resolution recalling the characteristics of:*

a) 'opportunism as a manifestation of the penetration of bourgeois ideology into proletarian organizations, and which is mainly expressed by:

– a rejection or covering up of revolutionary principles and of the general framework of marxist analyses;

– a lack of firmness in the defence of these principles;

b) centrism as a particular form of opportunism characterised by*:*

– a phobia about intransigent, frank and decisive positions, positions that take their implications to their conclusions;

– the systematic adoption of medium positions between antagonistic ones;

– a taste for conciliation between these positions;

– the search for a role of arbiter between these positions;

– the search for the unity of the organisation at any price, including that of confusion, concession on matters of principle, and a lack of rigour, coherence and cohesion in analyses.'

1. *International Review* nº 42, "Centrist slidings towards councilism", http://en.internationalism.org/node/2978

And the resolution concludes that 'within the ICC at the moment there is a tendency towards centrism - ie towards conciliation and lack of firmness - with regard to councilism.'"[2]

In response to this analysis, a certain number of "reservists", rather than taking the analyses of the organisation into consideration in a serious and rigorous way, adopted a classically centrist approach, evading the real questions and engaging in a whole series of contortions that were as spectacular as they were lamentable. The text by McIntosh[3] to which MC was replying was a flagrant illustration of this kind of evasion, defending a thesis that was very simple (and unprecedented): there can't be any centrism towards councilism in the ICC because centrism cannot exist in the period of capitalist decadence.

Thus, as we saw earlier, although at the beginning the debate of 1985 was around the question of councilism as a political current and outlook, it was led to broaden out onto the more general question of centrism as an expression of the way that the organisations of the working class are subjected to the influence of the dominant ideology of bourgeois society. As MC underlines in the article below, centrism as such cannot disappear as long as class society exists.

The interest in publishing his article externally today consists above all in the fact that it relates to the history of the First World War (a question which we have been looking at from various angles in the *International Review* since 2014) and in particular on the role of revolutionaries and the development of consciousness about this event in the working class and its vanguard. The Zimmerwald Conference, which was held 100 years ago this September, is part of our history, but it is also a very significant illustration of the difficulties and hesitations of its participants in breaking not only with the traitor parties of the Second International but also with the whole conciliationist and pacifist ideology which hoped to put an end to the war without launching an explicitly revolutionary struggle against the capitalist society which had engendered it. This is how Lenin presented the question in 1917:

"*During the two odd years of the war the internationalist and working class movement in **every** country has evolved three trends...The three trends are:*

*1) The social-chauvinists, ie, socialists in word and chauvinists in deed... These people are our **class** enemies. They have gone over to the bourgeoisie...*

2) The second trend, known as the 'Centre', consists of people who vacillate between the social-chauvinists and the true internationalists... The 'Centre' is the realm of honeyed petty bourgeois phrases, of internationalism in word and cowardly opportunism and fawning on the social-chauvinists in deed.

*The crux of the matter is that the 'Centre' is not convinced of the necessity for a revolution against one's own government; it does not preach revolution; it does not carry on a wholehearted revolutionary struggle; and in order to evade such a struggle it resorts to the tritest ultra 'Marxist'-sounding **excuses**...*

The chief leader and spokesman of the "Centre" is Karl Kautsky, the most outstanding authority in the Second International (1889-1914), since August 1914 a model of utter bankruptcy as a marxist, the embodiment of unheard-of spinelessness and the most wretched vacillations and betrayals...

3) The third trend, that of the true internationalists, is best represented by the 'Zimmerwald Left'."[4]

It would however be more correct to say, in the context of Zimmerwald, that the right was represented not by the "social chauvinists", to use Lenin's term, but by Kautsky and his consorts – all those who later formed the right wing of the USPD[5] – whereas the left was made up of the Bolsheviks and the centre by Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacus group. The process which led towards the revolution in Russia and Germany was marked precisely by the fact that a large part of the "centre" was won over to the positions of the Bolsheviks.

Later on, the term centrism was not used in the same way by all political currents. For the Bordigists, for example, Stalin and the Stalinists in the 1930s are still named as the "centre" between the left of the International (those who we now call the communist left around Bordiga and Pannekoek in particular), and the right around Bukharin. *Bilan* maintained this terminology up until the Second World War. For the ICC, which follows on from Lenin's approach, the term centrist means the tendency that lies between the revolutionary left and the right (which is opportunist, but still in the proletarian camp). Thus Stalinism with its programme of "socialism in one country" was neither centrist nor opportunist, but part of the enemy camp – of capitalism. As the article below makes clear, 'centrism' doesn't represent a political current with specific positions, but rather a permanent tendency within the political organisations of the working class, looking for a "happy medium" between intransigent revolutionary positions and those which represent a form of conciliation with the ruling class.

2. Ibid.

3. This text was published as a contribution to debate in the ICC's internal bulletin but it was afterwards published, with a few minor differences, in *International Review* nº 43 under the title "The concept of 'centrism', the road to the abandoning of class positions" as a position of the "Tendency" which was constituted in January 1985. In the same number of the *International Review* there was also a response to this text under the title "The rejection of the notion of 'centrism': an open door to the abandonment of class positions".

4. "The tasks of the proletariat in our revolution", quoted in the article "The rejection of the notion of 'centrism': an open door to the abandonment of class positions".

5. 'Unabhängige Sozialdemokratishe Partei Deutschlands', the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, which was founded in 1917 by the minority of those excluded from the Social Democratic Party, the SPD, for their opposition to the war.

Centrism according to Mish-Mash Intosh

In my article *Centrism and our informal tendency*, which appeared in the previous issue of the IIB (International Internal Bulletin), I have attempted to demonstrate the inconsistency of the affirmations of McIntosh concerning the definition of centrism in the 2nd International. We have seen the confusion established by McIntosh:

– in identifying centrism with reformism;

– in reducing centrism to a "*social basis*", that of the "*functionaries and officials of the social democratic apparatus and the unions*" (the bureaucracy);

– stressing that "*its political basis*" is furnished by the existence of a fixed "*precise programme*";

– in proclaiming that the existence of centrism is exclusively tied to *one* determined period of capitalism, the ascendant period;

– in completely ignoring the persistence within the proletariat of the mentality and ideas of the bourgeoisie and the petit-bourgeoisie (immaturity of consciousness), which it has great difficulty in disengaging itself from;

– in neglecting the fact of the constant penetration of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology within the working class;

– in totally eluding the problem of a possible process of degeneration of a proletarian organisation.

We recall these points, not simply to summarise the preceding article, but also because many of these points are necessary in order to demolish the *new* theory of McIntosh on the existence of centrism in the workers' movement in the period of the decadence of capitalism…

Centrism in the period of decadence

McIntosh bases his accusation that we cannot have a centrist current in the decadence of capitalism on the fact that with the change of period the room previously occupied (in the ascendant period) by centrism is now occupied by capitalism, and notably by state capitalism. This is only partly true. It is true for *certain* political positions formerly defended by centrism, but it is wrong with respect to the room, the "space" separating the communist programme of the proletariat from bourgeois ideology. This space (which supplies centrism with a terrain) is determined by the immaturity (or the maturity) of class consciousness and by the force of the penetration of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideology within its ranks, which *tends* to be reduced, but does not disappear except along with the existence of classes, all the more so as long as the bourgeoisie remains the dominant class in society. This remains equally true even after the victory of the revolution, since, when we speak of the proletariat as a class, this implies that also other classes exist in society and thus exercise an influence on the working class and penetrate it with their ideology. The entire marxist theory of the period of transition is based on the fact that, contrary to other revolutions in history, the proletarian revolution does not close the period of transition but only *opens* it. Only the anarchists (and in part the councilists) think that with the revolution it's possible to jump straight from capitalism to communism. For marxists, the revolution is but the precondition opening the *possibility* of the realisation of the communist programme of the social transformation and a society without classes. This communist programme is defended by a revolutionary minority organised as a political party against the positions of the other currents and political organisations acting within the class and on its class terrain, and this both before, during and after the revolution. To put it mildly, to consider that the class already has a communist consciousness or can develop one without further ado is to render any political organisation of the class superfluous if not damaging (unless it be an organisation with a purely pedagogic function as in the councilism of Pannekoek) or else to decree that the class can have just a single party (as the rabid Bordigists see it) whereas we recognise the inevitable existence within the proletariat, alongside the organisation of the communist party, of confused political organisations, more or less coherently carrying the ideas of the petit-bourgeoisie and making political concessions towards ideologies alien to the class.

To say this is to recognise the existence within the class, in all periods, of centrist tendencies, since centrism is none other than the persistence within the class of political currents with confused, inconsequent, incoherent programmes, penetrated by and acting as a vehicle for petit-bourgeois ideology, making concessions to it, vacillating between this ideology and the historical consciousness of the proletariat, and trying unceasingly to conciliate them.

It is precisely because centrism cannot be defined in terms of a "precise programme", which it hasn't got, that we can understand its persistence, how it adapts itself to every particular situation, changing the position according to the balance of forces existing between the classes.

It is nonsensical to talk of centrism in *general*, in the *abstract*, in terms of a "*social base*" of its own or a "*specific precise programme*". It has to be located in relation to other, more stable political currents, as it happens in the present debate in relation to councilism. One can, on the other hand speak of a consistence in its political behaviour: oscillation, avoiding taking a clear and consequent position...

Let us take another concrete example, equally edifying, of centrist behaviour: in his text McIntosh refers several times to the Kautsky-Rosa polemic of 1910. How did this polemic begin? It was begun by an article which Rosa wrote against the opportunist politics and practice of the leadership of the social democracy, opposing it to the revolutionary politics of the mass strike. Kautsky in his position as editor of *Neue Zeit* (the theoretical organ of social democracy) refused to publish this article under the pretext that, while being perfectly in agreement with the general idea of the mass strike, he considered this policy to be inadequate at the given moment, so that he would be compelled to reply, implying a discussion between two members of the radical marxist tendency in face of the right wing of the party, something he considered would be most regrettable. In face of this refusal, Rosa published her article in the *Dortmunder Arbeiter Zeitung*, thereby forcing Kautsky to reply and to engage in the polemic known to us.

When I announced in September in the IS[1] my intention of writing an article throwing light on the councilist approach of the texts of AP, comrade JA[2] began by demanding an explanation of the content

1. The International Secretariat, the permanent commission of the International Bureau, the central organ of the ICC.

2. JA (Judith Allen) was one of those comrades who expressed "reserves" with regard to the resolution adopted in January 1984 by the central organ of the ICC and who, later on, rejected the notion of centrism towards councilism. In fact, they themselves fell into councilist conceptions and the majority of them left the ICC before the debate was finished, forming the "External fraction of the ICC" (EFICC) which published *Internationalist Perspective.* At the beginning this group presented itself as the real defender of the ICC's platform, but it has little by little abandoned all reference to our platform.

and argumentation of this article. This explanation having been given, comrade JA considered this article to be inopportune and suggested waiting until the IS gave its preliminary agreement, that is to say to "correct" it in advance in such a way that the IS as a whole could sign it. In face of this kind of correction consisting of rounding off the angles and obsucring the real issues, I preferred to go ahead with publication under my own name. Once it had been published JA considered this article to be absolutely deplorable since it could only stir up trouble in the organisation. Fortunately, JA was not the editor (of the IIB) as Kautsky had been and didn't have his power, since otherwise the article would never have seen the light of day. In the 75 intervening years with the change of period (ascendance and decadence) centrism has certainly changed its face and its positions but has retained the same spirit and the same approach: avoiding raising debates in order not to "trouble" the organisation.

In one of my first polemical articles against the reservists I said that the period of decadence is the period *par excellence* of manifestations of centrism. A simple glance over the history of these last 70 years will immediately allow us to establish the fact that in no other period of the history of the workers' movement has centrism manifested itself with such force, in such a variety and has caused so many ravages as in this period of the decadence of capitalism. One cannot but agree with the very correct definition given by *Bilan*: that an International never betrays as such but dies, disappears, ceases to exist so that its different "national" parties one by one go over to their national bourgeoisie. Thus, in the aftermath of 4th August 1914 when the socialist parties of the belligerent countries sealed their treason in voting for the war credits, there began to develop, in each country, alongside the small minorities remaining loyal to internationalism, a more and more numerous opposition, within the socialist parties and the unions, against the war and the politics of national defence. This was the case in Russia with the Menshevik Internationalists of Martov, with the intermediary group of Trotsky. This was the case in Germany with the development of the opposition to the war which was to be excluded from the SPD in order to give birth to the USPD. This was the case in France with the revolutionary syndicalist group of *Vie Ouvrière* of Monatte and Rosmer, with the majority of the socialist party of Italy, that of Switzerland etc etc. All of this constituted a varied, inconsistent, pacifist-centrist current opposed to war in the name of peace and not in the name of revolutionary defeatism and of the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. It was this centrist current which organised the socialist conferences against the war, at Zimmerwald in 1915 (where the consistent and intransigent revolutionary left represented a small minority, restricted to the Russian Bolsheviks, the Dutch Tribunists and the Bremen Radicals in Germany) and at Kienthal in 1916, which was still largely dominated by the centrist current (when the Spartakists of Rosa and Liebknecht finally joined the revolutionary left). This centrist current posed in no manner or means the question of the immediate rupture with the socialist parties which had become social-chauvinists and "bitter-enders". Instead they raised the question of their regeneration in an organisational unity.[3] The revolution in February 1917 in Russia found almost the whole of the Bolshevik party and many workers' and soldiers' councils adhering to the position of conditional support for the bourgeois government of Kerensky.

The general enthusiasm sparked off in the working class of the whole world following the victory of the October revolution could not go much further than develop an immense fundamentally centrist current. The parties and groups which were to constitute and adhere to the Communist International were for the most part profoundly marked by centrism. With 1920 one saw the first signs of the revolutionary wave running out of steam, and it was to shrivel up rapidly. This was expressed at the political level by a centrist sliding already visible at the Second Congress of the CI (Communist International), through the taking up of ambiguous and erroneous positions on questions as important as the trade unions, parliamentarism, the independence and self-determination of nations. From one year to the next, the CI and the Communist Parties which constituted it followed an accelerating rhythm of retreat towards centrist positions and degeneration. The revolutionary intransigent tendencies rapidly became a minority in the Communist Parties, and were one by one excluded from these parties and themselves suffered the impact of the centrist gangrene as was to be the case for the different oppositions coming out of the CI and in particular for the left opposition of Trotsky which finally crossed the class line with the war in Spain and the Second World War in the name of anti-fascism and of the defence of the degenerated workers' state in Russia. The tiny minority which remained firmly on the terrain of the class and communism, such as the International Communist Left and the Dutch Left, suffered the blows of the black period which followed the aftermath of the war with, on the one hand, the Bordigists becoming sclerotic and seriously regressing politically, and on the other hand the Dutch Left decomposing in a completely degenerated councilism. One had to wait until the end of the sixties with the announcing of the open crisis and the revival of the class struggle before it was possible to renew, at considerable effort, the historic line of revolutionary marxism…

You really have to be struck by a kind of academic blindness not to see this reality. You have to completely ignore the last 70 years of the history of the workers' movement since 1914 in order to peremptorily affirm, as McIntosh does, that centrism doesn't and cannot exist in the period of decadence. Grandiloquent radical phraseology, fake indignation, don't make up for a lack of serious argumentation.

It is certainly more comfortable to pursue the politics of the ostrich, closing one's eyes in order not to see reality and its dangers, all the better to deny them. This is a cheap way of reassuring oneself and of sparing oneself from the headaches of thinking. This is not the method of Marx who wrote: "*The communists are not there to console the class, they are there to make it even more miserable and to make it conscious of its misery*". McIntosh follows the first path in denying the existence of centrism in the period of decadence, purely and simply for his own tranquillity and against all the evidence. For the marxists which we have to be it is necessary to follow another path: to open our eyes wide to reality, to recognise reality and to understand it *in its movement and is complexity*. It is therefore up to us to set about explaining the why and wherefore of the undeniable fact that the period of decadence is also a period of the gestating of centrist tendencies.

The proletariat and the period of capitalist decadence

…The period of decadence means entering a permanent, objective historic crisis of the capitalist system, thus posing the historical dilemma: its self destruction, bringing with it the destruction of the whole of society, or the destruction of this system in order to make way for a new society without classes – communist society. The only class capable of realising this grandiose project of saving humanity is the proletariat, since its interest in liberating itself from exploitation pushes it into a life and death struggle against the system of capitalist wage slavery, and since the proletariat cannot emancipate itself without emancipating the whole of humanity.

Against the theory according to which

3. Note in MC's original text: "*We will return later to the analysis of the nature of this centrism which spanned the period from the war to the constitution of the Communist International.*"

the workers' struggles determine the crisis of the capitalist economic system (GLAT - Groupe de Liaison et d'Action des Travailleurs); against the theory which ignores the permanent historic crisis, recognising only conjunctural and cyclical crises offering the possibility of revolution and, in the absence of its victory, permitting a new cycle of accumulation going on until infinity (A. Bordiga); against the pedagogic theory for which the revolution is not linked to a question of the crisis of capitalism but depends on the intelligence of the workers acquired in the course of their struggle (A. Pannekoek); we affirm with Marx that a society does not disappear until it has exhausted all the possibilities for development which it contains within itself. We affirm with Rosa that it is the maturation of the internal contradictions of capital which determines its historic crisis, the objective condition of the necessity of revolution. We affirm with Lenin that it is not enough that the proletariat no longer tolerates being exploited, but that it is necessary that capitalism cannot continue to live as before.

Decadence is the break-down of the capitalist system under the weight of its *own* internal contradictions. The comprehension of this theory is indispensable in order to understand the conditions in which the proletarian revolution unfolds and will unfold.

With this entrance into the decadence of its economic system, which bourgeois academic science could neither foresee nor understand, capitalism – without being able to master this objective situation – replies with the extreme concentration of all its political, economic and military forces which is state capitalism, both in order to face up to the extreme exacerbation of inter-imperialist tensions and above all in the face of the menace of the explosion of the proletarian revolution which it became aware of with the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

If the entry into decadence signifies the *objective* historical necessity for the disappearance of capitalism, the same is not true for the maturation of the *subjective* conditions – the coming to consciousness of the proletariat – in order to be able to accomplish this. This condition is *indispensable* since, as Marx and Engels said, history does nothing by itself; men (classes) make history.

We know that as opposed to all the past revolutions in history, in which the coming to consciousness on the part of the classes which carried them out played a secondary role, since they involved replacing one system of exploitation by another system of exploitation, the socialist revolution signals the end of every exploitation of man by man and of the entire history of class societies, necessitating and posing as its *fundamental* condition the conscious action of the revolutionary class. The proletariat is not only the class upon which history imposes the greatest task which it has ever thrust upon any class in humanity, a task which goes beyond all the tasks which humanity has ever faced up to, the leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom; but also the proletariat is confronted with the greatest difficulties. The last exploited class, it represents *all* the exploited classes of history against *all* the exploiting classes represented by capitalism.

It is the first time in history that an exploited class is led to assume the social transformation, and what's more, a transformation which carries with it the destiny and future of the whole of humanity. In this titanic struggle the proletariat presents itself at the beginning in a state of weakness, a state inherent to every exploited class, aggravated by the weight of the weaknesses of all the dead generations of exploited classes which weigh on it: lack of consciousness, lack of conviction, lack of confidence, afraid of what it is led to think and to undertake, habituated to thousands of years of submission to the force and ideology of dominant classes. This is why, contrary to the line of march of other classes from victory to victory, the struggle of the proletariat proceeds through advances and retreats and cannot achieve its final goal except in the wake of a long series of defeats…

This movement of advances and retreats of the struggle of the proletariat which Marx already spoke of in the aftermath of the revolutionary events of 1848 cannot but accelerate and does accelerate in the period of decadence since it is the very barbarism of this period which poses to the proletariat the question of the revolution in more concrete, more practical, more dramatic terms. This in turn is translated, at the level of the coming to consciousness, by an accelerated and turbulent movement like the sweep of waves on an agitated ocean.

These conditions – a reality which consists of the maturity of the objective conditions and the immaturity of the subjective conditions – determine the tortuous process within the class which gives rise to a multitude of diverse and contradictory, convergent and divergent political currents, evolving and regressing, and notably the different varieties of centrism.

The struggle against capitalism is at the same time a struggle and a political decantation within the proletariat in its striving towards coming to consciousness, and this process is all the more violent and tortuous in that it takes place under the fire of the class enemy.

The only weapons the class possesses in its death struggle against capitalism and which can assure its victory are: consciousness and organisation. It is in this sense and in this sense *only* that one can understand the phrase used by Marx: "*It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do.*" (*The Holy Family*)…

The councilists interpret this phrase of Marx in the sense that each workers' struggle automatically produces the coming to consciousness of the class, denying the necessity of conducting a theoretical-political struggle within the class (the necessary existence of the political-revolutionary organisation). Our reservists have slid in the same direction with the debates of the IB Plenum of January '84 and the voting of point 7 of the resolution. Today (in order to cover up the first sliding), in latching on to the aberrant theory of McIntosh of the impossibility of the existence of centrist currents in the class in the period of decadence, they really pursue the same sliding, contenting themselves simply with placing the same coin on its other side.

To say that in this period (of the decadence of capitalism) there cannot be any kind of centrism within the class, neither before, during or after the revolution, amounts to idealistically considering the class to have a uniform consciousness, absolutely homogenous and totally communist (eliminating the need for the very existence of a communist party, as council communists do), or else deducing that just a single party can exist in the class, beyond which every other current is by definition counter-revolutionary and bourgeois, falling by a curious detour into the worst manifestations of Bordigist megalomania.

The two principal tendencies of the centrist current

As we have already seen, the centrist current does not present itself as a homogenous current with a "specific, precise, programme". It is the least stable, least coherent political current, torn within itself by the attraction exercised on it on the one hand, by the influence of the communist programme and on the other by petit-bourgeois ideology. This comes from two sources (existing and growing at the same time) which give rise to and nourishes this:

1) The immaturity of the class in the process

of coming to consciousness.

2) The constant penetration of petit-bourgeois ideology within the class.

These sources push the centrist current in two diametrically opposed directions.

As a general rule, it is the balance of forces between the classes in precise periods of upsurge and reflux of the class struggle which decide the direction of the evolution or the regression of centrist organisations… McIntosh sees in his congenital myopia only the second source and imperiously ignores the first, just as he ignores the contradictory pressures which are exerted on centrism. He only knows centrism as an "abstraction" and not in the reality of its movement. McIntosh recognises centrism when it is definitively integrated into the bourgeoisie, that is when centrism ceases to be centrism and our comrade is all the more furious and lets his indignation fly against what he hadn't known and recognised previously.

It corresponds perfectly to the nature of our minority to fiercely attack the corpse of a wild animal which it didn't combat when it was alive and which it takes care not to recognise and combat today.

Let us then examine the centrism nourished by the first source, in others words coming from the immaturity in understanding class positions. Let us take the example of the USPD, the bogeyman discovered today by our minority and made into the main bone of contention by them.

Persian mythology relates that the devil, fed up with his defeats in combating God through the use of evil decided, one fine day, on a change of tactics and proceeded by another means, pitting good against good. Thus when God gave man the blessing of love and the desires of the flesh, the devil, by increasing and exacerbating the desire, caused man to sink into luxury and rape. The same thing when God bestowed the blessing of wine, the devil increased the pleasure of wine in order to create alcoholism. We know the slogan "one glass is good, three glasses makes for a hangover."

Our minority do exactly the same thing today. In their incapacity to defend their centrist sliding towards councilism they change their tactics. "You talk of centrism, but centrism is the bourgeoisie! In pretending to combat centrism you only succeed in rehabilitating it, in placing it and giving it a class label. Thus in situating it in the class, you make yourselves its defenders and its apologists."

The old trick of the reversal of roles. Perfectly successful in the hands of the devil. Unfortunately for them, our minoritarians are not devils, so that in their hands this astute tactic doesn't get them very far. Who, which comrade, could seriously believe this absurdity that the majority of the IB Plenum of January '84, which pointed out the existence of a centrist sliding towards councilism and for a year now has done nothing but combat it, would become in reality the defender and apologist for the Kautsky of 70 years ago? Our minoritarians themselves don't believe this. They are trying rather to blur the debate on the present by raving on about the past.

To return to the history of the USPD we will begin by recalling the development of the opposition to the war in the social democracy

In Germany, the *Union Sacrée* was sealed by the unanimous vote – minus the vote of Rühle – of the parliamentary fraction in favour of war credits, stupefying many members of this party to the point of paralysis. The left which was to give birth to Spartacus is at this moment so reduced that the small apartment of Rosa was big enough to allow it to meet in the aftermath of 4th August 1914.

The left was not only reduced but was divided into several groups:

– the "Radical Left" of Bremen which, influenced by the Bolsheviks, called for an immediate break with social democracy;

– groups around small bulletins and reviews, such as that of Borchardt (close to the "Radical Left");

– the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (the most important of the groups) regrouping the union representatives of the metal factories of Berlin and which were situated politically between the centre and Spartakus;

– the Spartakus group;

– and finally the centre which would give birth to the USPD.

Moreover, none of the groups represented a homogenous entity but were subdivided into multiple tendencies, expanding and contracting, approaching each other and distancing themselves again incessantly. In any case, the principle axis of their divisions always remained the regression towards the right and the evolution towards the left.

This already gives us an idea of the ferment in the working class in Germany from the beginning of the war (the critical point of the period of decadence) and which accelerated as the war went on. It is impossible within the limits of this article to give details concerning the numerous strikes and demonstrations against the war in Germany. No other belligerent country witnessed such a development, not even Russia. We will content ourselves here with giving some points of reference: amongst others, the political repercussions of these shudderings in the most right-wing fraction of the SPD, the parliamentary fraction:

– On August 4th 1914, 94 out of 95 deputies voted the war credits. Only one vote was cast against, that of Rühle. Karl Liebnecht, submitting to discipline, also voted in favour.

– In December 1914, on the occasion of a new vote on credits, Liebnecht broke discipline and voted against.

– In March 1915, a new budgetary vote including new war credits. "*Only **Liebnecht and Rühle** voted against, after which **thirty** deputies, with Haase and Ledebour (two future USPD leaders) at their head, left the hall.*" (Fleichmann, *The German Communist Party in the Weimar Republic*, El Maspero, p.38).

– 21 December 1915, a new vote of credits in the Reichstag. F. Geyer declared in the name of 20 deputies of the SPD "*We refuse the credits*". "*With this vote twenty deputies refused the war credits and twenty more left the room*" (ibid).

– January 6 1916, the social-chauvinist majority of the parliamentary group excluded Liebknecht from its ranks. Rühle solidarised with him and was also excluded. Haase rejected, in the name of the minority of the SPD group in the Reichstag, the emergency budget of the state. After the meeting, the minority published the following statement: "*The social-democratic parliamentary group has with 58 votes against 33 and 4 abstentions taken away our rights pertaining to the group…We see ourselves compelled to group ourselves in a social democratic working collective.*" Among the signatories of this declaration we find the names of the most of the future leaders of the USPD, and notably Bernstein.

The split and from then on the existence of two SD groups in the Reichstag, one social-chauvinist and the other against the war, corresponded, to some extent, to what happened in the SD as a whole, with its divisions and fierce struggles of tendencies, as within the working class as a whole.

In June 1915 a common action of the entire opposition was organised against the central committee of the party. A text in the form of a leaflet was distributed, carrying the signatures of hundreds of full-timers. It ended as follows: "*we demand that the*

parliamentary group and the leadership of the party finally denounce the Union Sacrée and engage in the class struggle on the basis of the programme and decisions of the party, the socialist struggle for peace" (op. cit). Soon afterwards a manifesto appeared, signed by Bernstein, Haase and Kautsky entitled "The needs of the hour" "*in which they called for an end of the politics of voting for the credits*" (ibid).

At the level of the class struggle we can recall:

– 1915 several demonstrations against the war in Berlin involving at the most one thousand people.

– On the occasion of May Day 1916 the Spartakus group held a demonstration of 10,000 workers from the factories.

– August 1916, following the arrest and condemnation of Liebknecht for his action against the war, 55,000 metal workers went on strike in Berlin.

There were also strikes in several provincial cities.

This movement against the war and against the social chauvinist positions grew continuously throughout the war, winning over more and more workers, within them a small revolutionary minority (itself groping in the dark) and a strong majority made up of a centrist current becoming more radical. Thus at the national conference of the SPD in September 1916, in which the centrist minority and the Spartakus group participated, 4 speakers declared "*What is important is not the unity of the party but the unity of principles. We must call on the masses to engage in struggle against imperialism and the war and impose peace by employing every means at the disposal of the proletariat*" (ibid).

On January 7th 1917 a national conference grouping all the currents opposed to the war was held. Of 187 delegates, 35 represented the Spartakus group. A conference which *unanimously* adopted a manifesto…written by Kautsky, and a resolution by Kurt Eisner. The two texts said: "*What the opposition demands is a peace without victors or vanquished, a peace of reconciliation without violence.*"

How is it to be explained that Spartakus voted for such a perfectly opportunist, pacifist resolution, which according to its representative Ernst Meyer "*poses the question of stopping the payment of dues to the instances of the party*"?

For McIntosh, in his simplism, such a question has no sense; the majority of social democracy had become bourgeois, centrism is thus also bourgeois and the same goes for Spartakus…

But in that case it must be explained what this makes the Bolsheviks and the Dutch Tribunists at the conferences of Zimmerwald and Kienthal, where, while proposing their own resolution for the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war, they finally voted for the manifesto and resolution in favour of peace without annexations and retributions. In the logic of McIntosh everything is black and white for all eternity. He doesn't see the movement, any more than he sees the direction of the movement. Luckily, McIntosh is not a doctor since he would be a bad doctor, who in the face of an advanced disease would already see the patient as a corpse.

We have to insist that what is not true for the life of men is a total absurdity at the level of an historic movement such as that of the proletariat. Here the passage from life to death is not measured in seconds or even minutes but in years. The moment when a workers' party signs its own death certificate and its actual, definitive death, are not the same thing. This is perhaps difficult to understand for a radical phraseologist, but it is quite understandable for a marxist who doesn't have the habit of deserting a ship like a rat when it begins to take in water. Revolutionaries know the historical meaning of an organisation which the class has given birth to, and as long as it still contains a breath of life they fight in order to save it, to hold onto it for the class. Such a position didn't exist a few years ago for the CWO, it doesn't exist for Guy Sabatier and other phraseologists for whom the Communist International and the Bolshevik party were bourgeois the whole time. Nor does it exist for McIntosh. Revolutionaries can be mistaken at a given moment, but for them this question is of the greatest importance. And why? Because revolutionaries do not constitute a sect of researchers but are a living part of the living body which is the workers' movement, with its moments of ups and downs.

The social chauvinist majority of the SPD understood better than McIntosh the danger posed by this current of opposition to the *Union Sacrée* and the war, and urgently went over to the policy of massive expulsions. It was in the wake of these expulsions that the USPD was founded on 8 April 1917. It was only with the greatest reservations and many hesitations that Spartakus agreed to join this new party, posing as a precondition "*complete freedom of critique and independent action*". Later Liebknecht was to characterise the relationship between the Spartakus group and the USPD as follows: "*We joined the USPD in order to drive it forward, to have a platform for our position, to be able to reach thousands of elements*." It is more than doubtful if this strategy was valid at this moment, but one thing is clear: if such a question was posed for Luxemburg and Liebknecht, then it was because they rightly considered the USPD to be a centrist movement and not a party of the bourgeoisie.

It shouldn't be forgotten that of the 38 delegates who participated at Zimmerwald, the German delegation with ten members under the leadership of Ledebour comprised seven members of the centrist opposition, 2 of Spartakus and one from the Bremen Left. And at Kienthal, of the 43 participants, 7 delegates came from Germany of whom four were centrists, 2 from Spartakus and one from the Bremen Left. Spartakus, though inside the USPD, preserved its independence and conducted itself in a similar manner to the Bolsheviks at the conferences of Zimmerwald and Kienthal.

One cannot understand what was the centrist USPD without situating it in the context of a formidable movement of mass struggles. In April 1917 a mass strike broke out involving no less than 300,000 workers. Elsewhere, the first mutinies in the navy took place. In January 1918 on the occasion of the peace negotiations of Brest-Litovsk a strike wave involved an estimated one million workers. The organisation of the strike lay in the hands of the revolutionary shop stewards who were very close to the USPD (something no less astonishing is to see Ebert and Scheidemann becoming part of the strike committee). According to some estimates, at the moment of the split 248,000 adhered to the SPD and 100,000 to the USPD. In 1919 the USPD had almost one million members, and these in the main industrial cities.

It is impossible here to go over all the twists and turns of the revolutionary events in Germany in 1918. We will recall simply that on October 7 the fusion between Spartakus and the Bremen Left was decided on. On being freed, Liebknecht joined the organisation of the revolutionary shop stewards involved in preparing an armed insurrection for November 9. But in the meantime the rising of the sailors at Kiel broke out in October 1918. In many respects the beginning of the revolution in Germany resembled that of February 1917. Particularly concerning the immaturity of the subjective factor, the immaturity of the consciousness in the class. Just like in Russia, the congress of the councils placed themselves in the hands of the worst hard-liners throughout the war; Ebert, Scheidemann, Lansburg, to which were added three members of the USPD: Haase, Ditmann and Barthe. These latter were part of the centrist right, with all this implies by way of spinelessness, cowardice, hesita-

tion, and they served as a "revolutionary" cover for Ebert-Scheidemann, for a very short time (from 20/12 to 29/12 1918), but long enough to allow the latter to organise the counter revolutionary massacre, with the aid of the Prussian junkers and the Freikorps.

The policy of semi-confidence, semi-trust in this government, which was the policy of the direction of the USPD leadership, strangely resembled that of conditional support for the provisional government of Kerensky adopted by the leadership of the Bolshevik party up until May 1917 with the triumph of the *April Theses* of Lenin. The great difference, however, did not reside so much in the firmness of the Bolshevik party under the direction of Lenin and Trotsky as in the strength, the intelligence of an experienced class, able to bring together all its forces against the proletariat as did the German bourgeoisie. As for the USPD, it was torn, like every centrist current, between a right wing tendency seeking to reintegrate itself into the old party that had gone over to the bourgeoisie, and a stronger and stronger tendency seeking the camp of the revolution. Thus one finds the USPD by the side of Spartakus during the bloody days of the counter revolution in Berlin in January 1919, just as we find them in the different confrontations in the other cities, as was the case in Bavaria, in Munich. The USPD, like every centrist current, cannot maintain itself in the face of decisive revolutionary tests. It is condemned to blow apart; it was blown apart.

At its second congress (March 6 1919) the two tendencies confronted each other on several questions (unionism, parliamentarism) but above all on the question of joining the Communist International. The majority rejected joining. The minority however was growing stronger but at the national conference which was held in September it still did not succeed in gaining a majority. At the Leipzig Conference of November 3 of the same year, the minority won on the question of a programme of action, adopted unanimously, on the principle of the dictatorship of the soviets, and it was decided to engage in negotiations with the CI. In June 1920, a delegation was sent to Moscow to broach the question of negotiations and in order to participate at the second congress of the CI.

The EC of the CI had prepared on this subject a text containing, originally, 18 conditions which were to be reinforced with the addition of 3 more conditions. These were the 21 points of adhesion to the Communist International. After violent internal discussions, by a majority of 237 votes against 156, the extraordinary conference of October 1920 finally spoke out in favour of accepting the 21 conditions and of joining the CI.

McIntosh, and behind him JA, discovered in August 1984 the critique always made by the left of the CI that too many loopholes were left open regarding adhesion to the International. But as always, the extremely late discovery of our minority is but a caricature verging on absurdity. There is no doubt but that the 21 conditions contained positions which were erroneous in themselves, not only from the point of view of 1984, but already for the time, and were criticised by the left. What does this prove? That the CI was bourgeois? Or doesn't it mean that the CI was penetrated by centrist positions on a deal of questions, and that from the onset?

The sudden indignation of our minority doesn't hide very well either their ignorance of the history which they seem to have discovered today or the absurdity of their conclusion that centrism cannot exist in the present period of the decadence of capitalism.

So we have the spectacle of our minoritarians, who make concessions to councilism, posing as *purists*. Decidedly, they are not afraid of making themselves ridiculous in demanding *a pure and virgin communist party*, a party falling from the sky or emerging fully armed as God's gift to mankind. Still, myopic as they are, incapable of going back very far in time, they should at least be able to see and understand the short history of the ICC. Where did the groups come from which finished up regrouping in the ICC? Our minoritarians only have to begin by looking at themselves and their political trajectory. From where did RI come, or WR, or the section in Belgium, the USA, Spain, Italy and Sweden? Didn't they come out of the confusionist, anarchist and contestationist swamp?

We can never have stitches tight enough to give us an absolute guarantee against the penetration of centrist elements or their arising from within. The history of the ICC – without even speaking of the history of the workers' movement – is there to show that the revolutionary movement is a process of incessant decantation. It suffices to look at our minoritarians to get an idea of the amount of confusions which they are capable of giving rise to in one year.

And so we have McIntosh discovering that the flood of the first revolutionary wave also threw up a Smeral, a Cachin, a Frossard and a Serrati. Has McIntosh ever seen, from the window of his university, what a revolutionary flood looks like?

As far as the PCF is concerned, McIntosh writes history in his own manner in saying for example that the party joined the CI grouped around Cachin-Frossard. Does he know nothing of the existence of the Committee for the Third International grouped around Longuet? Frossard and Cachin zig-zagged between these two committees, before finally rallying to the resolution of the Committee for the Third International in favour of joining the CI.

At the Strasbourg Conference of February 1920, the majority was still opposed to joining. At the congress of Tours in December 1920, the motion for joining the CI obtained 3,208 mandates, the motion of Longuet for joining with reserves got 1,022 and the group in favour of abstention (the Blum-Renaudel group) got 397 mandates.

The stitches were not yet sufficiently tight? Certainly. But this does not prevent us from understanding what it means to be in the rising flood of a revolution.

We are discussing whether the Bolsheviks, the Spartakists, the socialist parties which constituted or joined the CI were workers' parties or parties of the bourgeoisie. We are not discussing their *errors* but their class *nature*, and Mish-Mash Intosh does not help us along in the slightest in this matter.

Just as McIntosh does not see what is a current of maturation, moving from bourgeois ideology towards class consciousness, he is no more able to distinguish this from a current which degenerates, that is to say goes from class positions towards bourgeois ideology.

In his fixed, frozen vision of the world, the *direction* of the movement has no sense or meaning. That's why he cannot understand what it means to help the tendency which is approaching us by criticising it, and to pitilessly combat the other tendency which is distancing itself from us. But above all, he cannot recognise when the process of decantation of a proletarian party has been definitively completed. Without going over the entire history of the workers' movement, we can give him one point of reference: a party is definitively lost for the working class when no tendency, no living (proletarian) body can emerge from it any more. This was the case from 1921 on for the Socialist Parties; this was the case at the beginning of the 30s for the Communist Parties. It is correct to talk of these organisations in terms of centrism until those dates.

And to finish off, it should be recalled that the new theory of McIntosh, which ignores the existence of centrism in the period of decadence, strongly resembles those people who instead of treating a

"shameful disease" prefer to ignore it. One cannot combat centrism in the void, in ignorance. Centrism like every other plague which affects the workers' movement cannot be dealt with by being hidden, but by being exposed, by being brought into the open as Rosa Luxemburg said.

The new theory of McIntosh rests on the superstitious belief in the evil power of words: the less one speaks of centrism the better. For us, on the contrary it is necessary to be able to recognise centrism, to know in which period of upsurge or reflux it situates itself, and to understand in what direction it is evolving. Understanding and combating centrism is in the final analysis the problem of the maturation of the subjective factor, of the coming to consciousness of the class.

MC (December 1984)

Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa (II)

From the Second World War to the mid-1970s

In the previous article on the workers' movement in South Africa[1], we addressed the history of South Africa by successively evoking the birth of capitalism, of the working class, the apartheid system and the first movements of workers' struggle. And we ended the article by showing that, following the crushing of the workers' struggles of the 1920s, the bourgeoisie (then represented by the Labour Party and the Afrikaner National Party) managed to stifle all expressions of proletarian class struggle, so that it was not until the eve of the Second World War that we see the working class awake from its deep sleep. Clearly, after the crushing of the insurrectionary strike of 1922 in a terrible bloodbath and up until the late 1930s, the South African proletariat was paralysed and essentially left the terrain of struggle to the white and black nationalist groups and parties.

This article highlights the formidable effect of the apartheid system on the class struggle, combined with the action of the trade unions and parties of the bourgeoisie, up until the end of the 1960s when, faced with the unprecedented development of the class struggle, the bourgeoisie had to "modernise" its political apparatus and revamp its system. In other words, it had to face up to the South African proletariat, which had finally resumed its massive struggles by enrolling in the global waves of struggle that marked the end of the 1960s and early 1970s.

To evoke this period of the working class struggle, we rely heavily on the work of Brigitte Lachartre,[2] member of the Centre for Research, Information and Action in Africa – CRIAA – the only body (to our knowledge) that is dedicated to the history of social struggles in South Africa.

Ephemeral revival of the class struggle during the second butchery of 39-45

War preparations in Europe meant for South Africa an unexpected acceleration of industrialization, the major industrial countries constituting the principal sources of support for the South African economy: "(...) *The period 1937-1945 was marked by a brutal acceleration of the industrial process. South Africa, at this time, was forced to develop its own processing industries given the economic paralysis of Europe at war and of its exports across the world.*"[3]

This resulted in the massive recruitment of workers and increasing rates of production. Against these rates and the degradation of its living conditions, the working class had to suddenly wake up and launch itself into struggle:

"*For the African masses, this phase of industrial intensification was reflected in accelerated proletarianisation, further increased by the fact that a quarter of the white labour force was then enrolled in voluntary military service with the Allies. During this period, workers' struggles and strikes led to significant wage increases (13% per year between 1941 and 1944) and a resurgence of the African trade union movement.* (...) *Between 1934 and 1945 there were a record 304 strikes in which 58,000 Africans, coloureds and Indians and 6,000 whites took part. In 1946, the African miners' union, an organisation not legally recognised, triggered a very important wave of strikes across the country that was repressed in blood. It nevertheless managed to mobilize some 74,000 black workers.*"[4]

So the South African regime was forced to develop its own processing industries, given that it also had to replace a large part of the workforce mobilised in the imperialist slaughter. This meant that South Africa achieved at that time a certain level of technological development that allowed it to free itself (momentarily) from its European suppliers; a unique case on the African continent.

For its part, unexpectedly, the working class was able to quite massively resume its struggle in reaction to the super-exploitation caused by the speed up of work rates. Through a heroic movement (in the context of war with martial law applying) it was able to wrest wage increases without being massacred in a bloodbath. This defensive struggle, however, was largely insufficient to positively affect the dynamics of the class struggle, which was still largely contained by the bourgeois state. Indeed, the state was not slow to take advantage of the wartime context to reinforce its repressive apparatus and finally managed to inflict a heavy defeat on the entire South African proletariat. This defeat (like those experienced previously) traumatised the working class for a long time and plunged it into inertia, allowing the South African bourgeoisie to consolidate its victory at the political level, in particular through the formalisation of the apartheid system. The South African state, which was directed by the Afrikaners after their victory in parliamentary elections in 1948, decided to reinforce all the old repressive laws and measures[5] against the proletarian masses in general. Thus, apartheid officially became a system of governance, justifying the most barbaric acts against the working class in its various ethnic groups and especially against Africans. These went from "small" vexations to the most

1. Published in *International Review* nº 154.

2. *Luttes ouvrières et libération en Afrique du Sud,* Editions Syros, 1977. We draw the reader's attention to the fact that a simple reading of the book does not allow us to really know its author, her profile in terms of precise political influences. Nevertheless this seems close (at the time of the release of her book)to the intellectual milieu of the French left (or extreme left), as indicated from the following passage in her introduction: "*(...) What to say to the individual concerned and aware of the game being played in southern Africa, to the political activist, trade unionist, student? Tell them about the struggles that led to it; that is, no doubt, what he expects. It is also a way of getting his attention by showing him how these struggles are close to him and how the society to which he belongs depends on their outcome. This is the choice that has been made here: to talk of the struggles of the black proletariat in recent years. Not that others have not done such work at different levels, and it would be a pity to pass over these in silence (those of intellectuals of all races, progressive Christians ...).*"
It turns out that among the authors (and other researchers) that we encountered in our research on the history of the workers' movement in South Africa, Brigitte Lachartre is the only one who proposes to focus on the issue of workers' struggles in this region, describing their progress with conviction and detailed analyses. Ultimately, that's why we rely on it as a primary source document. Of course, where necessary, we reserve the right to express our disagreement with this or that element of her viewpoint.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. 1924 law passed by the Labourites and Afrikaners when in power.

abject practices: separate toilets, separate kitchens, separate living areas, separate public benches, separate bus/taxis, separate schools, separate hospitals, etc. And they were all accompanied by an article of law punishing by imprisonment anyone who ventured to violate these monstrous laws. And indeed each year more than 300,000 people were arrested for breaches of these despicable laws. Thus, a worker of European origin was likely to go to jail if he was caught drinking with someone who was black or of mixed race. In this context where everyone risked prison, it was impossible to envisage a political discussion between proletarians of different ethnic groups.[6]

This situation weighed terribly on the ability of the working class as a whole to struggle, to the point of plunging it back into a period of "sleep" (like the one after the 1920s), which lasted from the 1950s until the early 1970s. During this period, the class struggle was diverted mainly by supporters of the struggle for "national liberation", namely the partisans of the ANC/CP, behind whose cause they led black South African workers up until the end of apartheid.

Parties and unions divert the struggles onto a nationalist terrain

Parties and unions played a leading role in systematically diverting workers' struggles onto the terrain of white and black nationalism. It is not necessary to describe at length the role played by the Labour Party against the working class, this being evident from the fact that, the day after its active participation in the global butchery of 1914-1918, it used its power to openly carry out violent attacks against the South African proletariat. Moreover, from that moment, it ceased to officially claim membership of "the workers' movement", which did not prevent it from preserving its links with the unions it was close to like TUCSA (Trade Union Confederation of South Africa). In addition, between 1914 and the end of apartheid, before breaking up, it passed from government to opposition, and vice versa, like any "classical" bourgeois party

For more details on the ANC, readers are referred to the previous article in this series. If we mention it here it is mainly because it is its alliance with the CP and trade unions that allowed it to play a double role as the controller and oppressor of the working class.

6. On the "specific" difficulties of the white working class see *International Review* nº 154, the sections on "Apartheid against the class struggle", and "National liberation struggle against the class struggle".

As for the Communist Party, we will return to the way it dealt with a certain proletarian opposition at the beginning of its black nationalist orientation, applying the instructions of Stalin and the degenerating Third International. Certainly the information we have does not indicate the numerical or political importance of this proletarian opposition to the South African Communist Party, but it was strong enough to attract the attention of Leon Trotsky who attempted to support it.

The counter-revolutionary role of the South African Communist Party under Stalin's leadership

The South African Communist Party, as a "Stalinised party," played a harmful counter-revolutionary role against the workers' struggles in the early 1930s, when this former internationalist party was already in the grip of a profound process of degeneration. Having participated in the struggle for proletarian revolution at the beginning of its formation in the 1920s, the South African CP was very quickly manipulated by the Stalinist regime and from 1928 it obediently executed its counter-revolutionary orders, including the making of alliances with the black bourgeoisie. The Stalinist theory of "socialism in one country" was accompanied by the idea that underdeveloped countries must necessarily pass through a "*bourgeois revolution*" and that, in this vision, the proletariat could still fight against colonial oppression but on no account struggle for the overthrow of capitalism in order to establish proletarian power in the colonies. This policy was translated concretely, at the end of the 1920s, into a "class collaboration" where the South African CP was first the "proletarian guarantor" of the ANC's nationalist policies before definitively becoming its active accomplice up until today. This can be illustrated by these dire words from a secretary general of the CP, addressing Mandela: "*Nelson* (...) *we are fighting the same enemy* (...) *we are working in the context of African nationalism*".[7]

An internationalist minority opposed to the nationalist orientation of the South African CP

This policy of the South African CP was contested by a minority whose efforts Trotsky himself attempted to support, unfortunately in the wrong way. Instead of resolutely fighting against the nationalist and counter-revolutionary orientation advocated by Stalin in South Africa, in 1935 Leon Trotsky summed up the attitude that the revolutionary militants should have towards the ANC:

"*1. The Bolshevik-Leninists put themselves in defence of the Congress in all cases when it is being attacked by the white oppressors and their chauvinistic agents in the ranks of the workers' organisations.*

2. The Bolshevik-Leninists place the progressive over against the reactionary tendencies in the program of the Congress.

3. The Bolshevik-Leninists unmask before the native masses the inability of the Congress to achieve the realisation of even its own demands, because of its superficial, conciliatory policy, and develop in contradistinction to the Congress a program of revolutionary class struggle.

4. Separate, episodic agreements with the Congress, if they are forced by circumstances, are permissible only within the framework of strictly defined practical tasks, with the retention of full and complete independence of our own organization and freedom of political criticism."[8]

It is disconcerting to learn that, despite the evidence of the counter-revolutionary character of the Stalinist orientation applied by the South African CP towards the ANC, Trotsky still sought to accommodate himself with its diversionary tactics. On the one hand he asserted: "*The Bolshevik-Leninists put themselves in defence of the Congress*", and on the other: "*The Bolshevik-Leninists unmask before the native masses the inability of the Congress to achieve the realisation of even its own demands...*"

This was nothing but an expression of a policy of accommodation and conciliation with a fraction of the bourgeoisie because, at that time, there were no grounds to foresee any possible evolution of the ANC towards a proletarian class position. But above all, Trotsky was unable to see the reversal of the course of the class struggle, the domination of the counter-revolution, which was expressed by the victory of Stalinism.

It is no longer surprising to hear the Trotskyist group *Lutte Ouvrière* (80 years later), having noted the erroneous character of Trotsky's orientation, attempt to justify this orientation with typical Trotskyist contortions by saying, on the one hand: *"Trotsky's policy did not have a decisive influence but we must bear it in mind...."* On the other hand, *Lutte Ouvrière* says the South African CP: *"began fully in the service of the ANC and has continually sought to hide its bourgeois character".*

Instead of just saying that Trotsky's policy on the matter was wrong and that the CP had become a bourgeois party just

7. See *International Review* nº 154.

8. https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1935/04/wpsa.htm

like the ANC, *LO* engages in hypocritical acrobatics aimed at masking the nature of the South African Stalinist party. In doing so *LO* tries to hide its own bourgeois character and emotional ties with Stalinism.

The unions' role as saboteurs of struggles and the efforts of "revolutionary syndicalism"

It should first be said that, by their natural role as "professional negotiators" and "peacemakers" of the conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the unions cannot truly constitute organs of the struggle for proletarian revolution, especially in the period of capitalist decadence, as illustrated by the history of class struggle since 1914.

However, we should underline the fact that, with the butchery of 1914-1918, workers defending proletarian internationalism tried to create revolutionary unions such as the IWA (Industrial Workers of Africa), on the model of the American IWW, and the ICU (the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union)[9]:

"(...) *In 1917, a poster appeared on the walls of Johannesburg, convening a meeting for July 19*: 'Come and discuss issues of common interest between white and indigenous workers'. *This text was published by the International Socialist League (ISL), a revolutionary syndicalist organization influenced by the American IWW* (...) *and formed in 1915 in opposition to the First World War and the racist and conservative policies of the South African Labour Party and craft unions. Comprising at the beginning mostly white activists, the ISL moved very quickly towards black workers, calling in its weekly newspaper* International*, to build* 'a new union that overcomes the limitations of trade, skin colour, race and sex to destroy capitalism by a blockade of the capitalist class'"[10]

As shown in this quotation, truly revolutionary minorities did try to create "revolutionary" unions in order to destroy capitalism and its ruling class. We should note that the ICU was born in 1919 following a merger with the IWA and grew rapidly. But unfortunately this union soon abandoned the field of proletarian internationalism:

"*This union grew tremendously from 1924 and reached a peak of 100,000 members in 1927, making it the largest organisation of Africans after the ANC in the 1950s. In the 1930s, the ICU even established sections in Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe before declining gradually. The ICU was not officially a revolutionary syndicalist organization. It was more influenced by nationalist and traditionalist ideologies than anti-capitalism, and developed a certain form of bureaucracy*."[11]

As can be seen, "revolutionary" unionism did not thrive for as long in South Africa as its partisans claimed. The ICU was certainly a "radical" and combative union, which initially advocated the unity of the working class. But even before the end of the 1920s it oriented itself towards the exclusive defence of the "black cause" under the pretext that the official (white) unions did not defend the indigenous workers. Moreover, Clements Kadalie,[12] one of the ICU's most influential leaders, categorically rejected the notion of "class struggle" and ceased to integrate white workers (including members of the South African CP) into his union. Finally, the ICU died in the early 1930s under the blows of the ruling power and from its own contradictions. However, later on a number of its leaders pursued their union activities in other groups known for their African trade union nationalism, while other elements opting for internationalism were marginalised or dispersed.

Unions designed according to the laws of the apartheid regime

Like all states, faced with the working class, the apartheid regime felt the need for trade unions, but in this case they were to be designed according to the principles of the segregationist system:

"(…) *The unionised South African population was organised in unions partitioned according to the race of their members A first distinction was officially imposed between recognised unions, that is to say, those registered with the Ministry of Labour and workers' organisations not recognised by the government, that is to say, which did not enjoy the official status of a workers' union. This primary cleavage was the result, firstly, of the law on the settlement of Bantu work disputes* (...), *which maintained that Africans without the status of "employee" did not have the right to form fully recognised unions; and secondly, of the law on reconciliation in the industry* (...) *that allowed whites, coloureds and Indians to join unions but prohibited the creation of new mixed unions*."[13]

At first glance, one can see in the South African state's conception of trade unionism a certain cynicism and a very elementary racism. But really, the hidden purpose was to avoid at all costs a consciousness among the workers (of all backgrounds) that the resistance struggles of the working class were fundamentally confrontations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the two real antagonistic classes in society. What is the best instrument for this bourgeois policy on the ground? It is obviously unionism. Hence all the laws and regulations on trade unions decided by the government at the time in order to improve the effectiveness of its anti-proletarian defences. The fact remains that the African section of the proletariat was the main target of the oppressor regime because it was larger and more combative, hence the fury which the bourgeois power showed towards it:

"*Since 1950, the African trade unions have lived under the threat of the law on the suppression of communism, which gives the government the power to declare any organisation, including an African union (but not the other unions), 'illegal' if it engages in activities to promote the objectives of communism.* (…) *The definition of communism includes, among others, activities aimed at provoking 'industrial, social or economic change'. Thus, a strike, or any action organised by a trade union to end the system of reserved jobs or obtain wage increases and better working conditions, could well be declared favourable to 'communism' and serve as an excuse to outlaw the union.*"[14]

For the South African government, behind the workers' struggles there was the spectre of the questioning of its system, which it identified with the struggle for communism. Such a perspective was, we know, far from corresponding to the possibilities of this period of counter-revolution, which was unfavourable to the struggles of the working class on its own class terrain and where the struggle for communism was identified with the establishing of Stalinist-type regimes. But this does not preclude the fact that, even in these conditions, regimes of whatever kind are faced with the need to block the spontaneous tendency of workers to struggle to defend their conditions of life and work. The apartheid system understood that the unions constituted the best means of doing this, any union not pliant with its rules running the risk of being outlawed.

The main existing unions until the 1970s

These were the following:

– The unions of European origin: these had always followed the orientations of the colonial power, and in particular supported the war efforts in 1914-1918 and in 1939-1945. Similarly they assumed

9. Lucien van der Walt. http://www.zabalaza.net.

10. See the first article in this series in *International Review* nº 154.

11. Lucien van der Walt, ibid.

12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clements_Kadalie

13. Lachartre, ibid.

14. A. Hepple, *Les travailleurs livrés à l'apartheid*, cited by Lachartre, ibid.

until the end of the apartheid system and beyond their role as "defenders" of the exclusive interests of white workers, even when they included workers of colour in their ranks. On the one hand there was the South African Confederation of Labour, considered as the most racist and conservative workers' grouping in the country (close to the apartheid regime) and, on the other, the Trade Union Confederation of South Africa, whose complicit ties to the Labour Party were very old. Most workers of colour (Indian and 'coloured' as defined by the regime but neither blacks nor whites) were for their part sometimes in mixed unions (some coloured but mainly white) and sometimes in unions of "colour".

– African trade unions: these were more or less strongly tied to the CP and the ANC, proclaiming themselves as defenders of the African workers and for national liberation. These were the Congress of South African Trade Unions (SACTU), the Free Trade Union Federation of South Africa and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

In 1974, there were 1,673,000 union members organised on the one hand in 85 exclusively white unions and on the other in 41 mixed and coloured unions regrouping a total of 45,188 white members and 130,350 of colour. But although outnumbered by members of colour, the white union members were of course more advantaged and considered they were better than the latter:

"(...) *White workers' unions were concentrated in economic sectors long protected by the government and reserved as a priority for the Afrikaner workforce, the electoral base of the ruling party. The six most numerically important white unions* (...) *were implanted in public and municipal services, the iron and steel industry, the automobile industry and mechanical engineering, railways and port services*."[15]

With this kind of union apparatus, we can better understand the difficulties of the white working class in identifying with its sister fractions (black, coloured and Indian), since the steel barriers set up by the segregationist system made it almost impossible to envisage any common action between proletarians faced with the same exploiter.

There were (in 1974) 1,015,000 union members organised, firstly, in trade unions exclusively of colour and, secondly, in mixed unions (i.e. all those in unions excluding black Africans). "*The white unions were racially homogeneous, while the coloured or Asian unions had to submit to the coercion of the nationalist government.*"[16]

In the same year (1974), black Africans represented 70% of the working population and some 6,300,000 were affiliated to unions that were not officially recognised, given that workers didn't have the right to organise themselves. Here again is an aberration of the apartheid system with its bureaucracy of another age in which the state and employers were allowed to employ people while denying them the status of employees, but allowing them nevertheless to create their own unions. What could therefore be the purpose of the regime's manoeuvres in this situation?

It is clear that the tolerance of the African trade union organisations by the regime in no way contradicted its objective of controlling and dividing the working class along ethnic or nationalist lines. Indeed it is easier to control a strike controlled by "responsible" union organisations (even if unrecognised) than having to deal with a "wildcat" movement without leaders identified in advance. Besides, in this regard, the South African regime was following a "recipe" that was applied by all states faced with a combative proletariat.

The national liberation struggle against the class struggle

In reaction to the formal establishment of apartheid (1948), which resulted in the legal prohibition of African organisations, the CP and the ANC mobilised their militants, including the unions, and embarked on an armed struggle. With terror being employed on both sides, the working class suffered the consequences and could not avoid being enlisted by one or the other. Clearly, the working class as a whole was firmly taken hostage by the nationalists of all stripes.

"*Between 1956 and 1964, the main leaders of the ANC, the PAC,*[17] *and the South African Communist Party were arrested. The interminable trials to which they were subjected eventually ended in life imprisonment or renewed banishment for the principal historic leaders (N. Mandela, W. Sisulu, R. Fischer...), while very heavy prison sentences hit all the militants. Those who could escape repression took refuge in Lesotho, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana.* (…) *In addition, military camps in countries neighbouring South Africa regrouped refugees or 'freedom fighters' who underwent military training and stood ready to intervene. Inside the country, the decade 1960-1970 was one of silence: repression silenced the opposition and only the protests of some religious and student organisations were heard. Strikes could be counted on the fingers of one hand while black workers bowed their heads, and black puppet leaders appointed by the Nationalist government, collaborated in the policy of dividing the country.*"[18]

From all this it is clear that the South African proletariat was chained, trapped between the repression of the ruling power and the impasse of armed struggle launched by the African nationalists. This amply explains the passivity of the working class during this long period ranging from the 1940s up until the 1970s (except for the ephemeral episode of struggles during the second world butchery). But above all, this situation was an opportunity for the parties and trade unions to fully occupy the ideological terrain, poisoning class consciousness by striving to systematically transform every struggle of the working class into a struggle for "national liberation" for one section and one to defend the interests of "white workers" for the other. Obviously all this could only satisfy the objectives of the enemy of the working class, namely South African national capital.

The recovery of the class struggle: the strike waves between 1972 and 1975

After a long period of apathy, when it was subdued and held in check by the apartheid government and supporters of the liberation struggle, the working class successfully renewed its struggles in Namibia (a colony of South Africa at that time), thus enrolling itself in the worldwide waves of struggle that marked the end of the 1960s and the 1970s. [19]

The example of Namibia

As in South Africa, the working class in Namibia was, on the one side, caught in the bloody clutches of the South African police regime, and, on the other, dominated by the supporters of the national liberation struggle (SWAPO[20]). But, unlike the working class in South Africa which benefited from a long experience of struggle, it was the working class in Namibia, one with no real experience (to our knowledge), that would start the ball rolling in the struggles of the 1970s:

"*Eleven years had passed since the last African mass movements. The white regime took advantage of this respite to consolidate its plans for separate development. On the social front, peace and stability could be*

15. Lachartre, ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Pan-Africanist Congress, a split from the ANC.

18. Lachartre, ibid.

19. See ibid.

20. South-West Africa People's Organisation. Namibia was called "South-West Africa" at that time. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWAPO.

loudly proclaimed across the world. But, two series of events emerged to disturb the 'white peace' in South Africa and create a sense of disquiet: the first occurred at the end of 1971 in Namibia, a territory illegally occupied by South Africa, and which, since 1965, had been agitated by the resistance of the South-West Africa Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) to the central government of Pretoria. The second took place in the course of 1972 in South Africa itself, in the form of spectacular strikes launched by the bus conductors of Johannesburg. These two waves of unrest are generally attributed with the role of detonator for the events which were unleashed in the first days of January 1973."[21]

The first strike started in Namibia in Windhoek (the capital) and its suburbs, in Katutura, where 6,000 workers decided to enter into struggle against the political and economic oppression of the South African regime. And 12,000 other workers spread over a dozen industrial centres would soon follow the same strike agenda as their Katutura comrades. Thus 18,000 strikers downed tools several days after the beginning of the movement – one third of the estimated workforce of 50,000. And, despite threats of state repression and the violent blackmail of the employers, the workers' fighting spirit remained intact:

"*Two weeks after the start of the strike almost all the strikers were sent back to the townships. The employers announced that they would re-hire the Ovambo (the ethnic name of the strikers) who had been disciplined, but would seek their workforce from elsewhere if they did not accept the conditions on offer. With the workers standing firm, the employers launched a wide recruitment campaign in other parts of the country, as well as in Lesotho and South Africa: they failed to recruit more than 1,000 new workers and were forced to go back and talk to the Ovambo workers.*"[22]

Clearly, faced with the fighting spirit of the workers, the employers began to manoeuvre to divide the strikers, but were forced to give way: "*The employment contracts against which the strike was organised were subject to some changes; the recruitment agency (the SWANLA) was dismantled and its functions devolved to the Bantu authorities with the obligation to create recruitment offices in each Bantustan; the terms 'masters' and 'servants' were replaced in the contracts with 'employers' and 'employees'.*"[23]

Obviously, given everything that remained in the arsenal of apartheid in the world of work, we can say that the victory of the strikers was not decisive. However this was a highly symbolic and promising victory in the context in which the strike movement unfolded: "*The scale of the strikes was such that it made it impossible for the government to adopt any traditional style of punitive action.*"[24]

This showed that the balance of forces began to change in favour of the working class, which was able to show its militancy and its courage against the repressive regime. Besides, the exemplary experience of the struggle of the Namibian workers did not fail to spread to South Africa, unfolding there on an even more massive scale.

Strikes and riots in South Africa between 1972 and 1975

After Namibia, the working class continued its struggle within South Africa in 1972 where 300 Johannesburg bus drivers went on strike, 350 in Pretoria; 2,000 dockers came out in Durban and 2,000 in Cape Town. All these strikes made demands for wage rises or better working conditions. And their importance could be measured by the anxiety of the bourgeoisie, which was soon employing huge resources to defeat the movements:

"*The reaction of the government and the employers was brutal and swift. The 300 strikers in Johannesburg were arrested. In Durban, 15 of them were sacked. In other sectors, at the Ferro Plastic Rubber Industries, they were penalised 100 rand or given 50 days in jail for stopping work illegally. At Colgate-Palmolive (Boksburg) all African staff were dismissed. In one diamond mine, the striking miners were sentenced to 80 days in prison, their contracts were cancelled and they were sent back to their townships.*"[25]

This brutal reaction expresses very clearly the palpable concern of the ruling class. However, the savagery which the South African bourgeoisie showed was accompanied by a dose of realism, because wage increases were granted to certain striking sectors with a view to encouraging a return to work. And as Brigitte Lachartre says:

"*Half-victory, half defeat, the 1972 strikes mainly had the effect of taking the authorities by surprise, and they swiftly took stock of the situation, refusing to negotiate with the black workers, deployed the police and dismissed the strikers. Some statistical measures help us to see the scale of the events that shook the country in the following years: coming from various sources, they do not match exactly and are inclined to under-estimate. According to the Ministry of Labour, there were 246 strikes in 1973, which involved 75,843 black workers. For its part, the Police Department declared that its forces were involved in dealing with 261 strikes in the same year. Meanwhile, union activists in Durban estimated at 100,000 the number of black workers who went on strike in Natal during the first three months of 1973. For 1974, the figure of 374 strikes was given for the industrial sector alone and there were considered to be 57,656 strikers. For the province of Natal alone from June 1972 to June 1974, there were officially 222 work stoppages involving 78,216 workers. In mid-June 1974, 39 strikes in metallurgy had been registered, 30 in textiles, 22 in the garment sector, 18 in construction, 15 in commerce and distribution*. (...) *Wildcat strikes were increasing. Durban had 30,000 strikers in mid-February '73, and the movement spread throughout the country*."[26]

As we can see, South Africa was fully drawn into the successive waves of struggle that unfolded from the late 1960s and which signalled the opening of a course towards the development of class confrontations globally. Many of these strikes had to face the harsh repression of the government and employers' militias and ended in hundreds of deaths and injuries in the workers' ranks. The aggression and fury of the forces of capitalist order were directed at strikers who were only demanding dignified living conditions. Therefore, we must underline the courage and the fighting spirit of the South African working class (black, in particular) that generally went into struggle in solidarity and relying on its own consciousness, as is illustrated by the following example:

"*The first expression of anger took place in a construction equipment plant (bricks and tiles): Coronation Brick and Tile Co, located in the industrial suburb of Durban. 2000 workers, the entire African workforce of the company, went on strike on 9 January 1973 in the morning. They demanded the doubling of their wages (which then amounted to 9 rand per week) and then demanded that they be tripled. An increase had been promised the previous year but had still not yet been given.*

"*The workers of the first factory told how the strike began: they were awakened by a group of comrades at about three in the morning, who told them to meet on the football field instead of going to clock in for work. A delegation of sorts then left in the direction of the warehouses in the Avoca area to ask other workers to join them at the stadium. This first phase of the strike unfolded in good spirits and the slogans were warmly welcomed. Nobody was op-*

21. Lachartre, ibid.
22 Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.

posed. The Avoca workforce went to the stadium across town in two columns and without worrying about the heavy traffic on the streets of the city at that time or the prohibitions they were breaking. Passing through the gates of the stadium, they all sang: 'Filumuntu ufesadikiza', meaning 'the man is dead, but his spirit still lives on.'"[27]

Here we see the working class engaging in a very different form of struggle, taking things into its own hands without consulting anyone; that is to say, neither the unions nor any other "social mediators", a development which could only disorient the employers. Indeed, as expected, the company's CEO said he did not want to discuss with the strikers inside a football stadium but would only be ready to negotiate with a "delegation". But since an enterprise committee already existed, the workers flatly refused to form a delegation, chanting "*our demands are clear, we do not want a committee, we want 30 rand a week*". So the South African government began to manoeuvre by sending the Zulu authorities (their puppets) to "discuss" with the strikers, while the police stood by with loaded guns. In the end, the strikers had to go back to work under the combined pressure of all the various forces of the regime and accept an increase of 2.077 rand after refusing 1.50 previously. The workers returned to work deeply dissatisfied because of the low salary increase obtained. However, with the press having broadcast the news of the movement, other sectors immediately gave it a fresh impetus by launching into struggle.

"*Two days later, 150 workers of a small tea packing company (TW Beckett) stopped work, demanding a wage increase of 3 rand a week. The reaction of management was to call the police and fire all those who refused to return to work. There were no negotiations. One of the employees said: 'We were given 10 minutes to make our minds up'. A hundred workers refused to return to work. A few days later the management let it be known that it would re-hire the sacked workers but at the previous wage. Almost no one went back to his post. After only three weeks of the strike, the company agreed an increase of 3 rand for everyone. Almost all the workers were re-hired.* (…). *At the same time as the strike at Beckett's, African workers from several service companies and boat repairers (JH Skitt and Co. and James Brown and Hamer) also stopped work.* (...) *The strike lasted several days and an increase of 2 to 3 rand a week was finally agreed*."[28]

A new phenomenon had occurred: a series of strikes which had ended in real victories because, faced with the balance of force imposed by the strikers, the bosses (in a state company) were forced to give in to the workers' wage demands. In this sense, the most illustrative case is that of Beckett's, which had agreed an increase of 3 rand a week; that is, the amount demanded by its employees. At the same time they were forced to take back almost all workers they had wanted to sack. Another very remarkable fact in the struggle was the conscious solidarity between workers from different ethnic groups, in this case, Africans and Indians. This wonderful gesture illustrates the ability of the working class to unite in struggle despite the multiple divisions institutionalised by the South African bourgeoisie and knowingly condoned and enforced by the trade unions and the nationalist parties. Therefore, ultimately, we can speak of a glorious workers' victory over the forces of capital. Indeed, it was a success appreciated as such by the workers themselves, and which encouraged other sectors to launch strike action, for example in the public service sector:

"*On 5th February, the most spectacular actions, but also the most tension-filled, were carried out: 3,000 employees of the Durban municipality went on strike from the roads, sewers, electricity and slaughterhouse sectors. The weekly salary of the staff at the time amounted to 13 rand; the demands were for this to be doubled. The protests had such an affect that soon there were 16,000 workers refusing the increase of 2 rand made by the municipal council. It's noteworthy that the Africans and Indians acted more often than not in close solidarity, even though the municipality had sent a large number of Indian employees home, so, it was said, they would not be molested and forced to strike by the Africans! If it was true that the Africans and Indians had different pay scales, the gaps in pay between them were not very important and usually varied between very low and low. On the other hand, if the Indians had the right to strike – which the Africans did not – this right was only applicable to certain sectors and in certain circumstances. However, in the public services, considered 'essential services', strikes were prohibited to everyone in the same way*".[29]

This strike, where we see the struggles in the private and public sectors coinciding, is also a major element expressing very clearly the high level of militancy and class consciousness reached by the South African proletariat in the early 1970s, especially as these movements took place, as always, in the same context of bloody repression - the automatic response of the apartheid regime, particularly against strikes considered "illegal". And yet, despite all this, the militancy remained intact and even grew:

"*The situation remained explosive: the municipal workers had refused a wage increase of 15%; the number of factories affected by the strike had further increased and the majority of the textile workers had not returned to work. Addressing the striking workers of the municipality, one of the officials threatened them with the physical force he had the right to use, since their strike was illegal.* (...) *The crowd then began to jeer at him and ordered him off the stage. Trying to explain that the municipal council had already granted an increase of 15%, he was again interrupted by the workers who shouted to him that they wanted a further 10 rand.* (...) *The atmosphere of these meetings seems to have been mostly euphoric and the comments from the crowd of strikers more jocular than furious. The workers gave the impression of throwing off a weight that had long oppressed them.* (...) *As for the demands they made at these demonstrations, these also revealed the euphoric excitement since they were calling for wage increases much higher than could actually be achieved, sometimes in the order of 50-100%."*

Here we can speak in terms of a working class that had greatly recovered its class consciousness and was no longer content with wage increases but was more concerned with its self-respect and its dignity. More importantly, it demonstrated self-confidence, as shown above for example in the verbal exchange with the spokesman for the forces of law and order who the workers openly mocked. In short, in the words of the author of this quotation, the workers were euphoric and far from shocked by the police repression imposed by the state. On the contrary, in this situation where the South African proletariat had demonstrated its self-confidence, its class consciousness sowed confusion and panic inside the ruling class.

The bourgeois reaction to the workers' strikes shows its disorientation

Clearly, faced with a wave of struggles of such strength, the ruling class could not stand idly by. But the leaders of the country were visibly surprised by the scale of combativity and the determination of the strikers, hence the dispersion and incoherence of the reactions of the bourgeoisie's representatives.

This is demonstrated by these statements:

– The President of the republic: "*The subversive organisations persist in their efforts to incite sectors of the population to agitate. Their effects are resolutely*

27. *The Durban Strikes - 1973*, quoted by Brigitte Lachartre, ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Lachartre, ibid.

opposed by the constant vigilance of the South African police. Sporadic strikes and protest campaigns, according to certain publications – organs of the Communist Party – are organised or given moral support by them, but have not produced significant results".

– The Minister of Labour: "*The strikes in Natal show, by their conduct, that this is not a wage problem*. (...) *Everything indicates that an action was organised and that the strikers are out to get something more than a simple wage increase. The action of the workers and their unwillingness to negotiate clearly shows that agitation for union rights is not the solution and that it is only a smokescreen that hides something else* ..."

– A representative of the employers: "*I don't know who first had the idea to replace the strikers by prisoners, but this solution merits study. The alternative would be to employ Whites, but they use paint guns, which is hardly practicable in the windy conditions. As for the prisoners, we could certainly use them to clean the port and its surroundings* …"

– An observer reflecting on the attitude of the unions to the strikes: "*Another important aspect of the social situation in the country was specifically highlighted during these strikes: namely the loss of significant influence of the official unions. Although some members of these unions were themselves involved in some of these strikes, the majority of the union organisations were aware that the initiative was coming entirely from the non-unionised African workers and that there was no point in their intervening.*"

This series of reactions clearly demonstrates a sense of panic at all levels of the South African state, and a particularly worrying phenomenon for the bourgeoisie was that these strikes were triggered and often controlled by the workers themselves, that is to say, with no union involvement. This attempt of the workers to control their struggles largely explains the divisions that were openly expressed by those in power over the means to be used to counteract the dynamic of the working class, as illustrated by the following quote:

"*The Anglophone and international sectors of capital did not have the same attachment to the racist and conservative doctrines as the state administrators. For them, productivity and profitability took precedence – at least at the level of discourse – over the official ideology and the legislative encumbrances of the colour barrier.* (...). *The most advanced spokesmen of the employers, for whom Harry Oppenheimer – President of the Anglo-American Corporation – was the leading voice, were for the gradual integration of the African labour force into the higher-paying skilled jobs, for improving the living and working conditions of the black workers and miners, and for its introduction to be controlled, at each stage, by the African trade unions.*"[30]

And, learning from the workers' struggles, the big boss (Oppenheimer) of one of the largest diamond companies was instrumental (with others) in calling for the legalisation of the African unions to give them the means to better control the working class. Similarly, here is the case made by a spokesman of the "Progressive Party", a close ally of the big boss quoted above: "*The unions play an important role in that they prevent political disorder,* (...) *which, as history amply demonstrates, often follows from economic demands. If we can prevent these disorders through trade unionism and with negotiations on wages and working conditions, we can also reduce other risks. And it is not unionism which risks aggravating the situation".* Unlike the proponents of the apartheid "hard line", this spokesman of the bourgeoisie (who we can describe as "enlightened") saw very well the importance of the role played by the trade unions for the ruling class as forces for controlling the working class and preventing "risks" and "political disorder".

The workers' militancy forces the bourgeoisie to change its legislative system

Predictably, in drawing the lessons from the waves of struggle that shook the country in the early 1970s, the ("enlightened") South African bourgeoisie was forced to react by adopting a series of measures to deal with the rising combativity of a working class that was becoming more and more aware of its strength and confidence. "*The 1973 strikes broke out when its deputies were opening the parliamentary session in Cape Town. As was reported by the trade unionists in Durban, the representatives of the employers' organisations and chambers of commerce went as a delegation to meet with the Minister of Labour to set up the first firewall against workers' unrest. On this occasion, state-employer consultations were numerous and acted upon; past mistakes were not repeated.*"[31]

Indeed, after a series of consultations between the government, parliamentarians and employers, it was decided to "relax" a number of repressive measures to prevent "wildcat strikes" by giving more space to the African trade unions so that they could assume control over the workers. In doing so, the South African bourgeoisie became more "reasonable", taking into account the changing balance of forces imposed by the working class through its massive struggles.

For a provisional conclusion on these great strike waves, we present the views of Brigitte Lachartre on these movements and those of a group of researchers from Durban, since both seem relevant in the light of the qualitative overall assessment: "*The development of solidarity among the black workers in struggle and the increased awareness of their class unity were highlighted by many observers. This unquantifiable acquisition of the struggles is understood by them as the most positive for the continuation of the organisation of the movement of the black workers.*"[32]

And according to the analysis of the group of researchers[33] cited by Brigitte Lachartre:

"*We note, moreover, that the spontaneity of the strikes was a major reason for their success, especially when compared with the relative failure of the mass actions of the Africans in the 50's, in a period of more intense political activity. It was enough that the strikes were clearly organised* (...) *for the police to quickly seize those responsible. At the time, organised as they were, the strikes were a much greater threat to the White power; their demands were not negligible and, from the point of view of the Whites, the use of violence seemed the only possible outcome*.

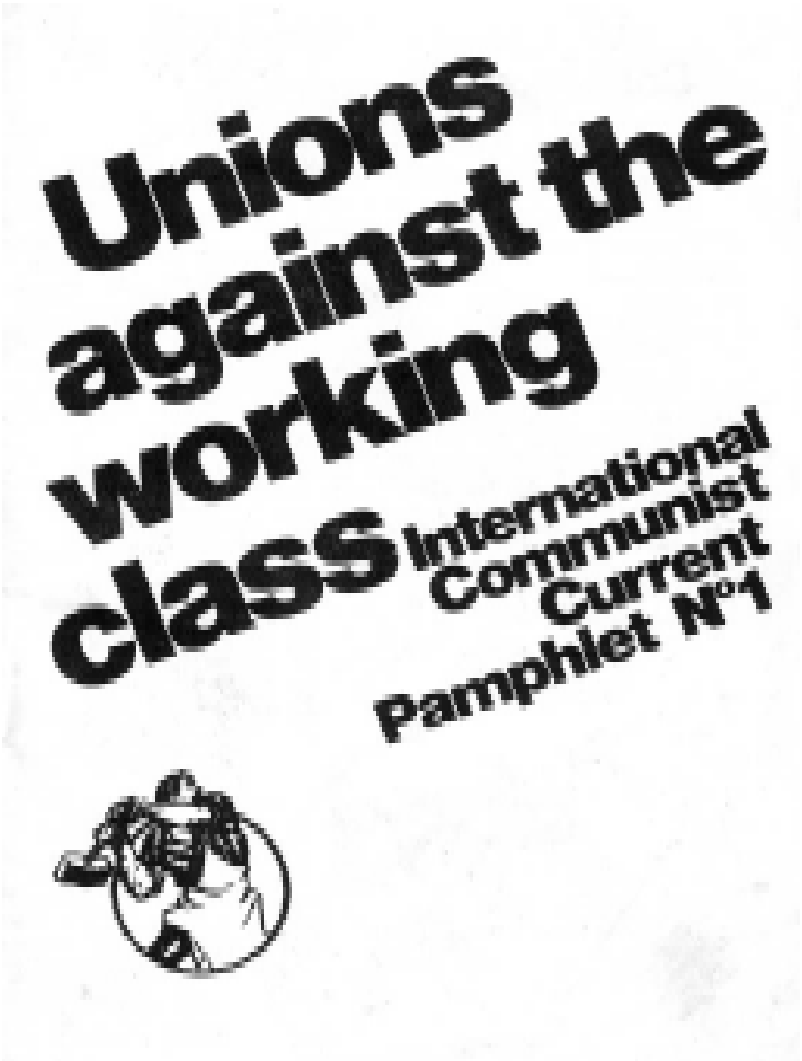
But the spontaneity of strikes does not mean that their demands were confined to the purely economic framework. These strikes were also political: the fact that the workers demanded the doubling of their wages is not a sign of the naiveté or stupidity of the Africans. It indicates more the expression of the rejection of their situation and their desire for a totally different society. The workers did return to work with some modest gains, but they were not more contented than they were before the strikes..."

We concur especially with the last paragraph of this quote, which gives a coherent conclusion to the overall analysis of the conduct of the struggles. As shown by its various experiences, the working class can easily switch from the economic struggle to the political struggle and vice versa. But we should above all retain the idea that the strikes were also very political. Indeed, behind the economic demands, the political consciousness of the South African working class was developing and

30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Authors of *The Durban Strikes - 1973*.

this was a source of concern for the South African bourgeoisie. In other words, the political character of the strike waves in the years 1972-1975 eventually caused serious cracks in the apartheid system by forcing the political and industrial apparatus of capital to review its machinery for supervising the working class. This gave rise to a broad debate at the summit of the South African state on the question of the relaxation of repressive measures and more generally on the democratisation of social life, particularly regarding the legalisation of black trade unions. And indeed, after 1973 (the year of powerful strike movements), 17 new black trade unions were created or legalised in addition to the 13 previously existing. In other words, this debate was triggered by the workers' struggles which led to the gradual process of dismantling the apartheid system but always under the pressure of workers' struggles. Clearly by creating or strengthening the union forces, the bourgeoisie wanted to provide "social firemen" capable of extinguishing the flames of the workers' struggles. For example, while maintaining the traditional means of deflecting social movements (nationalism, racism and corporatism), the bourgeoisie added a new "democratic" component by granting or extending "political rights" (supervised rights of association) to the black populations. It was this same process that allowed the ANC to come to power. However, as will be seen later on, the South African government would never abandon its other more traditional repressive measures against the working class, namely its police and military forces. This will be illustrated in the next article, particularly by looking at the large scale struggles of Soweto in 1976.

Lassou, June 2015



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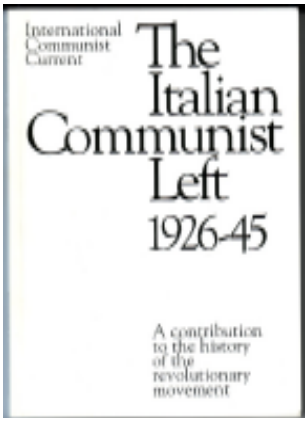

This history of the Italian Left is not neutral, looking down on the social battlefield. In today's world of decomposing capitalism, the alternative posed more than sixty years ago by the Communist Left is more valid than ever: "communist revolution or the destruction of humanity".

Of course, according to the ruling classes everywhere today, communism, the revolutionary perspective of the working class, has died with the collapse of Stalinism. But this is a monstrous lie. Stalinism was the gravedigger of the 1917 October Revolution, and therefore the deadliest enemy of the communist perspective. Stalinism was the main vehicle for the greatest counter-revolution in history.

In the midst of this defeat the Italian Communist Left remained faithful to the internationalist principles of the working class, and tried to draw the lessons of a counter-revolution which terminally infected even the Trotskyist Opposition.

The aim of this brief history of the struggle of the Italian Communist Left is to help all those who have thrown in their lot with the revolutionary working class to bridge the gap between their past and their present.

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BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

The **International Communist Current** defends the following political positions:

* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.
* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.
* The statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.
* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.
* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.
* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a mascarade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.
* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.
* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.
* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.
* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.
* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.
* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.
* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1889-1914, 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.*

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