



Belgique - België
PB
2600 Berchem 1-2
BC 9925

International Communist Current

Spring 2017

International Review

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

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

Communism is on the agenda of history
**The 1950s and 60s: Damen, Bordiga and
the passion for communism**

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

**From the Soweto movement of 1976 to
the coming to power of the ANC in 1993**

£2.50 \$3 \$6Can \$7Aus 20Rupees 3Euros 650Yen 50.00PHP 12Rand

158

périodique semestriel
Supplément à INTERNATIONALISME.FR
Bureau de Depot: B-2600 Berchem 1-2
N° d'agrégation P408982

Contents

Russia 1917 and the revolutionary memory of the working class 1

The Trump election and the crumbling of capitalist world order 3

The dilemma of the Republican Party

The dilemma of the Democratic Party

The dilemma of the established political parties

The dilemma of the American ruling class and Trump's "Make America Great Again"

Trump's Russian roulette

Trump's promise of violence

The fish stinks from the head down

The challenge to the working class

Communism is on the agenda of history

The 1950s and 60s: Damen, Bordiga and the passion for communism 9

Damen and Bordiga as revolutionary militants

The passion for communism: Bordiga's defence of the 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

The dialectic of history

What communism is not

The transformation of relations between the sexes

Conscious life at another level

Against the destruction of the environment

The problem with "invariance"

Individual and species

Bordiga's contribution

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

From the Soweto movement of 1976

to the coming to power of the ANC in 1993 19

The great imperialist powers get involved

The proletarian class struggle shakes the apartheid system

A historic turning point in the apartheid system

To save its system of production the bourgeoisie gives birth to new unions

The struggles of Soweto poisoned by the trade unions and the ideological confusions of the proletariat

The ANC diverts the youth struggle of Soweto towards imperialist armed struggle

From FOSATU to COSATU, South African trade unionism at the service of the national capital

FOSATU prepares to integrate itself into the political apparatus

Control of the struggle committees (civics) at stake in the bitter struggles of the union/political apparatus

The strikes return in the midst of an economic recession

1986-90, strikes against the backdrop of political manoeuvring within the bourgeoisie

Contact the ICC:

<http://www.internationalism.org>

uk@internationalism.org

india@internationalism.org

international@internationalism.org (rest of world)

Responsible editor: H. Deponthiere,
PB 102, 2018 Antwerp Central Station,
Antwerp

Russia 1917 and the revolutionary memory of the working class

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

Many of them will ignore it of course, or downplay its significance by telling us that this is just ancient history. Everything has changed since then – and what is the point of talking about a working class revolution when the working class no longer exists, or has been so degraded that the term “working class revolution” can even be assimilated to protest votes in favour of Brexit or Trump in old industrial centres decimated by globalisation?

Or if the upheaval which shook the world in 1917 is brought to mind, in the majority of cases it is painted as a kind of horror story, but one with a very definite “moral”: behold, this is what happens when you challenge the present system, if you fall for the delusion that a higher form of social life is possible. You get something much worse. You get terror, Gulags, the omnipresent totalitarian state. It began with Lenin and his fanatical band of Bolsheviks whose coup d’Etat in October 1917 killed off Russia’s fledgling democracy, and it ended up with Stalin, with the whole of society transformed into a forced labour camp. And then it all collapsed, which demonstrated once and for all that it is impossible to organise modern society other than by the methods of capitalism.

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

But this is also a moment for us to recall the work of our political ancestors, the left



Russian soldiers marching in Petrograd, February 1917

communist fractions who survived the terrible defeats of the revolutionary movements sparked off by the events in Russia 1917 and tried to make sense of the resulting degeneration and demise of the very communist parties which had been formed to lead the way to revolution. Resisting both the open terror of the counter-revolution in its Stalinist and fascist forms, and the more veiled deceptions of democracy, the most lucid left communist currents, such as those grouped around the reviews *Bilan* in the 1930s and *Internationalisme* in the 40s, began the enormous task of drawing the “balance sheet” of the revolution. First and foremost, against all its denigrators, they reaffirmed what had been essential and positive about the Russian revolution. In particular, they insisted

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

a revolutionary political organisation defending the principles of internationalism and working class autonomy.

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

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

The ICC, from its inception, has attempted to carry on with this work of



Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet, 1917

drawing the lessons of the Russian revolution and the international revolutionary wave of 1917-23. We have over the years developed quite a library of articles and pamphlets dealing with this absolutely vital era in the history of our class. In the coming year, and beyond, we will be making sure that these texts are more accessible to our readers, by compiling an updated dossier of our most important articles on the Russian revolution and the international revolutionary wave. Each month or so we will headline articles which most directly correspond either to the chronological development of the revolutionary process or which contain responses to the most important questions posed by the attacks of bourgeois propaganda or by discussions in and around the proletarian political milieu. So this month we will be “promoting” to the front page of our website an article on the February revolution first written in 1997. It will be followed by articles on Lenin’s April Theses, the July days, the October insurrection, and so on; and we intend to keep this process going over a long period, precisely because the drama of the revolution and counter-revolution lasted for a number of years and was by no means limited to Russia, but had its echoes all across the globe, from Berlin to Shanghai, from Turin to Patagonia, and from Clydeside to Seattle.

At the same time, we will be seeking to add to this collection with new articles which deal with issues that we have not yet examined in depth (such as the onslaught

against the revolution by the ruling class at the time, the problem of “Red Terror”, and so on); articles which respond to the current campaigns of capitalism aimed against the revolutionary memory of the working class; and articles which will look at the conditions for the proletarian revolution today – at what they have in common with the time of the Russian revolution, but also and above all at what significant changes have intervened over the past 100 years.

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

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

our own future as they were to the future she herself confronted:

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

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

ICC

The Trump election and the crumbling of capitalist world order

What can the world expect from the new Trump Administration in the USA? Whereas the traditional political elites across the globe are full of anxiety, the Russian government and the right-wing populists in America and throughout Europe see history on their side. And while big world-wide operating companies (such as in the car industry) fear reprisals now if they do not produce in the United States, the stock exchanges and economic institutes were initially confident, expecting increased growth for the US and even the world economy under Trump. As for Mr. President himself, he regularly contradicts not only his own new administration, but also himself. Thus NATO, free trade or the European Union can in one sentence be “essential” and in the next “obsolete”.

Instead of joining in with this crystal ball gazing about the near future of American state policy, we will try here first of all to analyse why Trump was elected president, although the traditional established political elites did not want him. Out of this contradiction between what Trump represents, and the interests of the US ruling class as a whole, we hope to win firmer ground for giving some first indications of what can be expected from his presidency, without falling into too much speculation.

The dilemma of the Republican Party

It is no secret that Donald Trump is looked on as a foreign body in the Republican Party which nominated him for election to the White House. He is neither religious nor conservative enough for the Christian fundamentalists who play such an important role in that party. His economic policy proposals, such as a state organised infrastructure programme, protectionism, or the replacement of “Obamacare” by a state-backed social insurance for everyone, are anathema to the neo-liberals who still play a central role in Republican circles, as they do in the Democratic Party. His plans for a rapprochement with Putin’s Russia pit him against the military and intelligence lobby which is so strong both in the Republican and Democratic parties.

The presidential candidature of Trump was made possible by an unprecedented revolt of the Republican membership and supporters against their leaders. The other candidates, whether they came from the Bush clan, the Christian evangelists, the neo-liberals or the Tea Party movement, had all been discredited by their participation in or support for the George W Bush administration which preceded that of Obama. The fact that, in the face of the economic and financial crisis of 2007/08, a Republican president had done nothing to help millions of small property owners and aspiring small property owners – who in many cases lost job, home and savings at one go – while bailing out banks with government money, was unforgivable to

traditional Republican voters. Moreover, none of the other candidates had anything else to propose, at the economic level, other than more of the same of what had not prevented the 2008 disaster.

Indeed, the rebellion of the traditional Republican voters directed itself not only against their leadership, but against some of the traditional “values” of the party. In this way, the candidature of Trump was not only made possible, it was virtually imposed on the party leadership. Of course, the latter could have prevented it – but only at the risk of estranging themselves from their mass basis and even of dividing the party. This explains why the attempts to foil Trump were half-hearted and ineffective. In the end, the “Grand Old Party” was obliged to try and make a “deal” with the intruder from the East Coast.

The dilemma of the Democratic Party

A similar revolt took place within the Democratic Party. After eight years of Obama, belief in the famous “yes we can” (“yes we can” improve the lives of the population at large) had seriously waned. The leader of this rebellion was Bernie Sanders, the self-proclaimed “socialist”. Like Trump on the Republican side, Sanders was a new phenomenon in the modern history of the Democrats. Not that “socialists” as such are a foreign body within that party. But they belong to it as one minority among many, who underline the claim to multi-cultural plurality within that party. They are considered a foreign element when they stake a claim for candidature to the

Oval Office. Whether under Bill Clinton or Barak Obama, contemporary Democratic presidents combine a social welfare touch with fundamentally neo-liberal economic policies. A direct interventionist state economic policy of a strong “Keynesian” character (such as that of FD Roosevelt before and during World War II) is as much anathema to the Democratic as to the Republican leadership today. This explains why Sanders never made a secret of the fact that on some issues his policies are closer to those of Trump than they are to those of Hillary Clinton. After the Trump election, Sanders immediately offered him his support in the implementation of his “insurance for all” scheme.

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

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

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

The dilemma of the established political parties

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

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

But this essentially non-party political integration process, compatible with the stability of the party apparatus, began to fail for the first time in the face of the demands of the black Americans. The latter had come to America originally, not as settlers, but as slaves. They had from the onset to bear

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

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

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

The problem of all the Republican candidates who tried to oppose Trump, and then of Hillary Clinton, was not only that they were not convincing, but also that they did not seem convinced themselves. All they could propose were different varieties of “business as usual”. Above all, they had no alternatives to Trump’s “making America great again”. Behind this slogan there is not just a new version of the old nationalism. Trump’s Americanism is of a new kind. It contains the clear admission that

America is no longer as “great” as it used to be. Economically it has been unable to prevent the rise of China. Militarily it has suffered a series of more or less humiliating reversals: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria. America is a power in decline, even if it remains economically and above all militarily and technologically by far the leading country. But not only this. America is not an exception in an otherwise flourishing world. Its decline has come to symbolise that of capitalism as a whole. The vacuum created by the absence of any alternatives coming from the established elites has helped to give Trump his chance.

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

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

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

Trump’s Russian roulette

But the question the world is asking itself is whether Trump has a real political offer

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

But this does not necessarily mean that Trump has no chance of at least slowing down the decline of America. He *might* at least partly succeed – but only if he is lucky. Here we are approaching the crux of Trumpism. The new president, who wants to run the world's leading state as if it were a capitalist enterprise, is ready, in the pursuit of his goals, to take incalculable risks – risks which no "conventional" bourgeois politician in his position would want to take. If they work, they could turn out to be to the benefit of American capitalism at the expense of its rivals, but without too much damage to the system as a whole. But if they go wrong, the consequences could be catastrophic for American and for world capitalism.

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

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

Our last example is Trump's project of a "great deal" with Putin's Russia. One of the main problems of the Russian economy

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

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

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

However, none of Trump's projects have provoked such bitter resistance within the US ruling class as this one. The whole phase between the election of Trump and his arrival in office was dominated by the joint attempts of the "intelligence community", the mainstream media and the Obama administration to sabotage the envisaged rapprochement with Moscow. Here they all think that the risks Trump wants to take are too high. Even if it is true that the main challenger today is China, a modernised Russia would constitute a considerable additional danger to the USA. After all, Russia is (also) a European power, and Europe is

still the heart of the world economy. And Russia still has the second largest nuclear arsenal after the US. Another possible problem is that, if the economic sanctions against Russia were lifted, the sphinx in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin, is considered perfectly capable of outwitting Trump by re-introducing the Europeans into his plans (in order to limit his dependence on America). The French bourgeoisie, for instance, is already getting ready for this eventuality: two of the main candidates for the coming presidential elections there (Fillon and Le Pen) have made no secret of their sympathies for Russia.

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

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

Trump's promise of violence

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

During his electoral campaign, Trump told his challenger Hillary Clinton he wanted to "lock her up". Later he declared

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

These threats have obviously been a calculated part of Trump's demagogic election campaign, but on assuming office he lost no time pushing through a number of "accomplished facts" aimed at proving that he, unlike other politicians, is going to do what he says. The most spectacular expression of this – one which has caused enormous conflict both within the bourgeoisie and within the population as a whole – has been his "Muslim ban", suspending the right of travellers from a selected number of Muslim-majority countries to enter or re-enter the US. This is above all a statement of intent, a sign of his willingness to target minorities and associate Islam in general with terrorism, however much he denies that this measure is aimed specifically at Muslims.

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

In capitalism there are always two possible alternatives, either equivalent exchange or non-equivalent exchange (robbery). You can either give someone else an equivalent for what you get, or you don't. In order for the market to function, its subjects have to renounce violence in economic life. They do so under threat of reprisals, such as prison, but also on the promise that their renunciation will pay off for them in the long run in terms of securing their existence. However, it remains

the case that the basis of economic life in capitalism is indeed robbery: the surplus value the capitalists gain from the unpaid surplus labour of the wage workers. This robbery has been legalised in the form of capitalist private property of the means of production; it is enforced every day by the state, which is the state apparatus of the ruling class. Capitalist economy requires a taboo on violence at the market place. Buying and selling are supposed to be peaceful actions – including the buying and selling of labour power: workers are not slaves. Under "normal" circumstances, working people are ready to live more or less peacefully under such conditions, despite realising that there is a minority which refuses to do the same. This minority is composed of the criminal milieu, which lives from robbery, and the state, which is the biggest robber of all, both in relation to its "own" population (taxation), and in relation to other states (war). And although the state represses the criminals in defence of private property, at the upper echelons the top gangsters and the robber state tend to collaborate rather than oppose each other. But when capitalism can no longer credibly offer even the illusion of a possible improvement of the living conditions for society as a whole, the compliance of society may be revoked.

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

replace buying and selling, this is at once the self-realisation and self-destruction of bourgeois civilisation. In the absence of an alternative, of a revolutionary communist perspective, the longing to exercise violence against others grows.

The fish stinks from the head downwards

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

However, according to an old expression, the fish begins to stink from the head downwards. It is first and foremost the state and the economic apparatus of the ruling class itself which produces this putrefaction. The diagnosis made by the capitalist media is that the Trump presidency, the victory of the Brexiters in Britain, the rise of right wing "populism" in Europe, are the result of a protest against "globalisation". But this is only true if violence is understood as the essence of this protest, and if globalisation is understood, not only as an economic option among others, but as a label for the extremely violent means through which a declining capitalism has, in recent decades, kept itself alive. The result of this gigantic economic and political offensive of the bourgeoisie (a kind of war of the capitalist class against the rest of humanity and against nature) was the production of millions of victims, not only among the working populations of the whole planet, but even within the apparatus of the ruling class itself. It is not least this latter aspect which, in its dimensions, is absolutely unprecedented in modern history. Unprecedented also is the degree to which parts of the American

bourgeoisie and its state apparatus itself fell victim to this devastation. And this is true even though the United States was the main instigator of that policy. It is as if the ruling class was obliged to lop off parts of its own body in order to save the rest. Whole sectors of the national industry were closed down because their products could be produced more cheaply elsewhere. Not only these industries themselves had to shut down – whole parts of the country were laid waste in the process: regions and administrations, local consumer, retail and credit branches, providers of parts, the local building industry etc. were all shattered. Not only workers, but big and small businesses, civil servants and local dignitaries were among its victims. Unlike the workers, who lost their livelihoods, these bourgeois and petty bourgeois victims lost their power, privileges and social status.

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

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

This vandalism can also be seen in the

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

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

The weakening of working class resistance

The weakening of the principle of solidarity clearly indicates that the victory of

Trump is not only the result of a loss of perspective by the capitalist class, but also by the working class. As a consequence, many more workers than otherwise would be the case are negatively influenced by what is called populism. It is significant, for instance, that along with millions of white workers, many Latinos also seem to have voted for Trump, despite his diatribes against them. Many among those who were among the last to gain access to “God’s own country” – precisely because they are afraid of being among the first to be evicted – were lured into thinking that they would be safer if the gate were closed firmly behind them.

What has happened to the working class, to its revolutionary perspective, to its class identity and its traditions of solidarity? Over half a century ago, there was a return by the working class to the stage of history, above all in Europe (May 1968 in France, Autumn 1969 in Italy, 1970 in Poland etc.) but also more globally. In the “New World” this renaissance of the class struggle manifested itself in Latin America (above all 1969 in Argentina), but also in North America, in particular in the United States. There were two main expressions of this resurgence. One was a whole development of often large scale wildcat strikes and other, often radical, struggles on an economic terrain, for working class demands. The other was the reappearance of politicised minorities among the new generation, attracted towards revolutionary proletarian politics. Particularly important was the tendency to develop a communist perspective against Stalinism, which was more or less clearly recognised as counter-revolutionary. The return to centre stage of the workers’ struggles, class identity and solidarity, and a proletarian revolutionary perspective, went hand in hand. During the 1960s and 70s probably several million young people in the old industrial countries were politicised in this manner – a hope and strength of humanity.

Apart from the suffering of the working class, the two most burning issues at the time in the United States were the Vietnam War (the American government, moreover, had introduced universal conscription) and the racist exclusion of and violence against black people. Originally, these issues were at least partly additional factors of politicisation and radicalisation. However, lacking any political experience of their own, lacking the guidance of an older generation politicised in any proletarian sense, the new activists harboured enormous illusions about the possibilities of a rapid social transformation. In particular, the class movements of the time were still much too weak either to oblige the government to end the Vietnam War,

or to protect blacks and other minorities against racism and discrimination (unlike the 1905 revolutionary movement in Russia, for instance, which included the revolt against the Japanese-Russian war as well as the protection of the Jews in Russia against pogroms). Since fractions developed within the American bourgeoisie which, in its own class interest, wanted to end its engagement in Vietnam, and to allow a black American bourgeoisie to share in power, many of these young militants got drawn into bourgeois politics, turning their backs on the working class. Others, while wanting to remain committed to the cause of the workers, because they were overwhelmed by impatience, stood as left candidates for state elections, or engaged themselves in the trade unions in the hope of achieving something immediate and tangible for those they claimed to represent. Hopes which were invariably disappointed. The workers developed a more and more open hostility towards these leftists, who moreover often discredited themselves and the reputation of the revolution by their identification with brutal, counter-revolutionary, essentially Stalinist regimes, and by their bourgeois manipulative approach to politics. As for these militants themselves, they in turn developed a hostility towards the working class, which refused to follow them – a hostility which often turned into hatred. All of this amounted to a large-scale destruction of political revolutionary class energy. It was a tragedy of almost a whole generation of the working class which had begun so promisingly. What followed was the collapse of Stalinism 1989 (misunderstood and misrepresented as the collapse of communism and of marxism) and the closing down of whole traditional industries in the old capitalist countries (misunderstood and misrepresented as the disappearance of the working class in that part of the world). In this context (as for instance the French sociologist Didier Eribon has pointed out) the political left (which, according to the ICC, is the left of capital, part of the ruling apparatus) were among the first to declare the disappearance of the working class. It is revealing that, during the recent electoral campaign in the USA, the candidate of the Democrats (who used to claim to represent “organised labour”) never referred to anything like a working class, whereas the multi-millionaire Donald Trump constantly did. In fact, one of his main electoral promises was to prevent the disappearance of the American working class (understood only as blue collar workers) from “extinction”. His working class is an essential part of the American nation, and is the one capitalists dream of: patriotic, hard working, obedient.

The disappearance, for the moment, of

working class identity and solidarity from the forefront of the scene is a catastrophe for the proletariat and for humanity. In the face of the present incapacity of either of the two main classes of modern society to put forward a credible perspective of their own, the very essence of bourgeois society comes more clearly to the light of day: desolidarisation. The principle of solidarity which was the safety net, more or less, of all pre-capitalist societies based on natural rather than “market” economy, is replaced by the safety net of private property – for those who have it. In bourgeois society, you have to be able to help yourself, and the means to this end are not solidarity, but credit-worthiness and insurance. For many decades, in the main industrial countries, the welfare state – although an integral part of the credit and insurance economy – was used to hide this elimination of solidarity from the social “agenda”. Today the rejection of solidarity is not only not hidden, but gaining ground.

The challenge to the working class

The demonstration of millions of people, mainly women, all over the United States, against the new president the day after his inauguration, made it clear that large parts of the working population of America support neither Trump nor the tendency he stands for. However, far from succeeding in opposing Trump’s nationalism, these demonstrations tended to answer Trump on his own ground by claiming: “We are the true America”.

These demonstrations show in fact that the populist policy of exclusion and scapegoating is not the only danger for the working class. This young generation which is expressing its protest, while not falling for Trump, is in danger of falling for the trap of defending “democratic” and “liberal” bourgeois society instead. The ruling fractions of the bourgeoisie would be delighted to enlist the support of the most intelligent and generous sectors of the working class in the defence of the present version of an exploitation system which – even without “populism” – has long become a menace to the existence of our species, and which moreover is itself the producer of the “populism” it wants to keep in check. It is undeniable that today, to many workers, in the absence of a revolutionary alternative they can have confidence in, an Obama, Sanders or Angela Merkel can appear as a lesser evil compared to a Trump, Farage, Le Pen or the “Alternative für Deutschland”. But at the same time, these workers also feel indignant about what “liberal society” has done to humanity in the past decades. The

class antagonism remains.

It should also be pointed out that the resistance within the working class to populism is not in itself a proof that these workers follow the bourgeois liberals and are ready to sacrifice their own class interests. Millions of workers at the heart of the globalised system of production are above all very much aware that their material existence depends on a world-wide system of production and exchange, and that there can be no reverting to a more local division of labour. They are also aware that what Marx called the “socialisation” of production (the replacement of individual by associated labour) teaches them to collaborate with each other on a world scale, and that only on such a scale can the present problems of humanity be surmounted. In the present historical situation, in the absence of class identity and a perspective of a struggle for a classless society, the revolutionary potential of contemporary society takes refuge, for the moment, in the “objective” conditions: the persistence of the class antagonisms; the irreconcilable nature of class interests; the world wide collaboration of the proletarians in the production and reproduction of social life. Only the proletariat has an objective interest in and capacity to resolve the contradiction between worldwide production and private and nation-state appropriation of wealth. Since humanity cannot go back to local market production, it can only go forward by abolishing private property, by putting the international production process at the disposal of the whole of humanity.

On this objective basis, the subjective conditions for revolution can still recover, in particular through the return of the economic struggle of the proletariat on an important scale, and through the development of a new generation of revolutionary political minorities with the necessary daring to take up now more than ever the cause of the working class, and to do so with the profundity needed to convince the proletariat of its own revolutionary mission.

Steinklopfer Late January, 2017

Communism is on the agenda of history

The 1950s and 60s: Damen, Bordiga and the passion for communism

Prior to our excursion into the attempts of Spanish anarchism to establish “libertarian communism” during the war in Spain of 1936-39, we had published the contribution of the Gauche Communiste de France on the state in the period of transition,¹ a text based on the theoretical advances of the Italian and Belgian left fractions in the 1930s, while already advancing beyond their conceptions in several respects. The GCF was part of a certain resurgence of proletarian political organisations in the wake of the Second World War, but by the early 1950s, the proletarian milieu was facing a serious crisis as it became increasingly evident that the profound defeat suffered by the working class had not been dispersed by the war – on the contrary, the victory of democracy over fascism had further exacerbated the disorientation of the proletariat. The end of the counter-revolution which had begun in the 1920s was still a long way ahead.

In our book *The Dutch and German Left*, particularly chapter 11, “The Communistenbond Spartacus and the ‘councilist current’ (1942-50)” we looked at the significant developments that took place in a part of the Dutch communist left: the attempt by the Communistenbond Spartacus to open up to discussions with other currents (such as the GCF) and to re-appropriate some of the old positions of the KAPD – this was a turn away from the anti-party ideas developed in the 30s. However, these advances were fragile and the basically anarchist ideas which had been adopted by the majority of the Dutch-German left in reaction to the degeneration of Bolshevism soon returned in force, contributing to a long-drawn out process of dispersal into mainly local groups focused on the immediate struggles of the workers.

In 1952, the GCF broke up: partly the result of a mistaken diagnosis of the historic course, leading to the conclusion that a third world war was imminent and to the departure of Marc Chirik, the most influential member of the GCF, to Venezuela; and partly due to a combination of personal tensions and unexpressed political differences. Marc fought against these difficulties in a series of “letters from afar”, in which he also tried to outline the tasks of revolutionary organisations in the historic conditions they now encountered, but he was unable to halt the disintegration of the group. Some of its former members joined

the Socialisme ou Barbarie group around Cornelius Castoriadis, of which more in a later article.

In the same year, a major split took place between the two major tendencies within the Internationalist Communist Party in Italy – tendencies which had existed more or less from the beginning but which had been able to establish a kind of *Modus Vivendi* when the party was going through a euphoric phase of growth. As the retreat in the class struggle became increasingly obvious, the organisation, faced with the demoralisation of many of the workers who had joined it on a superficial activist basis at the beginning, was inevitably compelled to reflect on its future tasks and direction.

The 1950s and early 60s was thus another dark period for the communist movement, which faced a real prolongation of the deep counter-revolution that had descended on the working class in the 30s and 40s, but this time dominated by the image of a triumphant capitalism which appeared to have recovered – perhaps definitively – from the catastrophic crisis of the 30s. It was the triumph, in particular, of US capital, of democracy, of an economy which passed relatively quickly from post-war austerity to the consumer boom of the late 50s and early 60s. Certainly this “glorious” period had its shadow side, above all the relentless confrontation between the two imperialist giants with its proliferation of local wars and the overarching threat of a nuclear holocaust. Along with this, in the “democratic” bloc, there was a real surge in paranoia about communism and sub-



Onorato Damen

version, exemplified by the McCarthyite witch-hunts in the USA. In this atmosphere, revolutionary organisations, where they existed at all, were even more reduced in scale, even more isolated than they had been in the 1930s.

This period thus marked a profound rupture in continuity with the movement that had shaken the world in the aftermath of the First World War, and even with the courageous minorities which had resisted the advancing counter-revolution. As the economic boom continued, the very idea that capitalism was a transient system, doomed by its own inner contradictions, appeared far less evident than it had done in the years 1914-1945, when the system seemed to be caught up in one gigantic catastrophe after another. Perhaps marxism itself had failed? This was certainly the message being pushed by any number of sociologists and other professional bourgeois thinkers, and such ideas would soon penetrate the revolutionary movement itself, as we saw in our recent series on decadence.²

All the same, the generation of militants who had been steeled by the revolution or by the fight against the degeneration of the

1. “In the aftermath of World War Two: debates on how the workers will hold power after the revolution.”

2. “The post-war boom did not reverse the decline of capitalism”. *International Review* n° 147

political organisations it had created had not altogether vanished. Some of the key figures of the communist left remained active after the war and into the period of retreat in the 50s and 60s, and for them, despite everything, the perspective of communism was by no means dead and buried. Pannekoek, though no longer linked to an organisation, published his book on workers' councils and their role in the construction of a new society;³ and right into his old age he remained in contact with a number of the groups that appeared after the war, such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Militants who had broken with Trotskyism during the war, such as Castoriadis and Munis, maintained a political activity and tried to outline a vision of what lay beyond the capitalist horizon. And Marc Chirik, though "unorganised" for over a decade, certainly did not abandon revolutionary thought and inquiry; when he returned to organised militant life in the mid-60s, he would have clarified his views on a number of questions, not least on the problems of the transition period.

We will return to the writings of Castoriadis, Munis and Chirik in subsequent articles. We think it is valid to talk about their individual contributions even though the work they carried out was nearly always done in the context of a political organisation. A revolutionary militant does not exist as a mere individual, but as part of a collective organism which, in the final analysis, is engendered by the working class and its struggle to become conscious of its historical role. A militant is by definition an individual who has committed him or herself to the construction and defence of a political organisation, and who is thus motivated by a profound loyalty to the organisation and its needs. But – and here, as we shall see below, we part company with the conceptions developed by Bordiga – the revolutionary organisation is not an anonymous collective, in which the individual sacrifices his personality and thus abandons his critical faculties; a healthy political organisation is an association in which the individuality of different comrades is harnessed rather than suppressed. In such an association, there is room for the particular theoretical contributions of different comrades and, of course, for debate around the differences raised by individual militants. Thus, as we have found throughout this series, the history of the communist programme is not only a history of the struggles of the working class, not only a history of the organisations and currents that have drawn the lessons from these struggles and elaborated them

into a coherent programme, but also of the individual militants who have led the way in this process of elaboration.

Damen and Bordiga as revolutionary militants

In this article, we return to the work of the Italian communist left, which before the war, in the shape of the Fraction in exile, had made such an irreplaceable contribution to our understanding of the problems of the transition from capitalism to communism. This contribution had also been constructed on the marxist foundations laid down by the left current in Italy during the preceding phase, the phase of imperialist world war and of the post-war revolutionary wave; and after the second imperialist war, the theoretical legacy of the Italian left did not disappear in spite of the errors and schisms that afflicted the Internationalist Communist Party. And throughout this whole period, whether we are examining the question of the transition period or other issues, it is impossible to ignore the interaction, and often the opposition, of two leading militants of this current – Onorato Damen and Amadeo Bordiga.

During the stormy days of war and revolution from 1914 to 1926, Damen and Bordiga demonstrated very clearly a capacity to stand against the dominant order that is the hallmark of a communist militant. Damen was jailed for agitating against the war; Bordiga fought tirelessly to develop the work of his fraction inside the Socialist Party and then to push for a split with the right wing and the centrists and the formation of a communist party on solid principles. When the new Communist International itself embarked upon an opportunist course in the early 1920s, Bordiga was again in the front line of opposition to the tactics of the United Front and the "Bolshevisation" of the CPs; he had the immense courage to stand up at the meeting of the CI's Executive Committee in Moscow in 1926 and denounce Stalin, to his face, as the gravedigger of the revolution. That same year, Bordiga himself was arrested and exiled to the island of Ustica.⁴ Damen meanwhile was also active in resisting the attempts of the CI to impose its opportunist policies on the Italian party, which had initially been dominated by the left. Along with Forticiari, Repossi and others he formed the *Comitato di Intesa* in 1926.⁵

4. On Ustica, he encountered Gramsci who had played a central role in imposing the CI's line in the Italian party and pushing Bordiga out of the leadership. By now Gramsci was already ill and despite their considerable differences Bordiga didn't hesitate to take up the defence of his basic needs, and to work with him in the formation of a marxist educational circle.

5. This text was recently re-published in English

During the fascist period he went through more than one episode of confinement and exile, but he was not silenced, leading a prisoners' revolt in Pianosa.

At this juncture, however, there was a difference in the reaction of the two militants, which was to have very long term consequences. Bordiga, placed under house arrest and obliged to abjure all political activity (how mild the fascists seemed then!), avoided all contacts with his comrades and concentrated entirely on his work as an engineer. He recognised that the working class had suffered a historic defeat, but did not draw the same conclusion from this as the comrades who formed the Fraction in exile. The latter understood that it was as necessary as ever to maintain an organised political activity, even if it could no longer be in the form of a party. Thus at the time of the formation of the Italian Fraction, and all through the extremely fertile decade that followed, Bordiga was entirely cut off from these theoretical developments.⁶ Damen on the other hand maintained contacts and regrouped a number of comrades from the Fraction on their return to Italy with the idea of contributing to the formation of the party. These included militants like Stefanini, Danielis and Lecci, who had remained faithful to the essential positions of the Fraction throughout the 30s and the war. In 1943, the *Partito Comunista Internazionale* (PCInt) was proclaimed in the north of Italy; the party was then "re-founded" in 1945 following a somewhat hasty regroupment with elements around Bordiga in the south of Italy.⁷

as a pamphlet by the Internationalist Communist Tendency.

6. The practical problems facing Bordiga during this period were certainly considerable: he was followed by two police agents wherever he went. Nevertheless there was also a voluntary element in Bordiga's isolation from his comrades and Damen, in a kind of obituary written shortly after Bordiga's death in 1970, is sharply critical of Bordiga at the level of political comportment: "His political behaviour, his constant refusal to take on a politically responsible attitude, has to be considered in this particular climate. Thus many political events, some of great historic importance, such as the Trotsky-Stalin conflict and Stalinism itself were disdainfully ignored without an echo. The same was true for our Fraction abroad in France and Belgium, the ideology and the politics of the party of Livorno, the Second World War and finally the alignment of the USSR with the imperialist front. Not a word, not a line on Bordiga's part appeared throughout this historic period which was on a wider and more complex level than the First World War". <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-01-21/amadeo-bordiga-beyond-the-myth-and-the-rhetoric-0>. A study of Bordiga's "years of obscurity" has been published in Italian: Arturo Peregalli and Sandro Saggiolo, *Amadeo Bordiga. – La sconfitta e gli anni oscuri (1926-1945)*. Edizioni Colibri, Milan, November 1998.

7. See the following articles: "The Second Congress of the Internationalist Communist Party", *International Review* n° 36; "The Italian Fraction and the French Communist Left", *International Review* n° 90.

3. <https://libcom.org/library/workers-councils-book-pannekoek>. See also the article referenced in footnote 1.

As a result, the unified party, formed around a platform written by Bordiga, was from the very beginning a compromise between two tendencies. The one around Damen was much clearer on many basic class positions and these were to no small extent connected to the developments undertaken by the Fraction – for example, the explicit adoption of the theory of the decadence of capitalism and the rejection of Lenin's position on national self-determination.

In this sense – and we have never hidden our criticism of the profound opportunism involved in the formation of the party from the very beginning – the “Damen” tendency showed a capacity to assimilate some of the most important programmatic gains made by the Italian Fraction in exile, and even to take on some of the key questions raised within the Italian Fraction and advance towards a more worked out position. This was the case with the union question: within the Fraction, this had been an unresolved debate, in which Stefanini had been the first to defend the idea that the unions had already been integrated into the capitalist state. Although it cannot be said that the position of the Damen tendency has ever been totally consistent on the union question, it was certainly clearer than what became the dominant “Bordigist” view after the 1952 split.

This process of clarification also extended to the tasks of the communist party in the proletarian revolution. As we have seen in previous articles in his series,⁸ the Fraction had, despite some lingering notions about the party exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat, essentially gone beyond this position by insisting that a key lesson of the Russian revolution was that the party should not become entangled with the transitional state. The Damen tendency went even further and made it clear that the task of the party was not to exercise power. Its 1952 platform, for example states that “no time and for no reason should the proletariat surrender its role in the struggle. It should not delegate its historical mission to others or transfer its power to other – not even its own political party”.

As we show in our book *The Italian Communist Left*, these insights, quite logically, were linked to certain developments on the question of the state:

“Much bolder was the position that the PCInt took up on the question of the state in the period of transition, where it was visibly influenced by Bilan and Octobre. Damen and his comrades rejected the assimilation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with

the rule of the party, and in the face of the ‘proletarian state’ called for the widest democracy in the councils. They did not rule out the hypothesis, verified at Kronstadt, of confrontations between the ‘workers’ state’ and the proletariat, in the which case the communist party should be on the side of the latter: ‘The dictatorship of the proletariat can in no sense be reduced to the dictatorship of this party, even if this is the party of the proletariat, the intelligence and guide of the proletarian state. The state and the party in power, as organs of such a dictatorship, bear the seeds of the tendency towards compromise with the old world, a tendency which as the Russian experience shows develops and strengthens through the momentary inability of the revolution in a given country to spread, by linking itself to the insurrectionary movement in other countries. Our party... a) would have to avoid becoming the instrument of the workers’ state and its policies... would have to defend the interests of the revolution even in confrontations with the workers’ state; b) would have to avoid becoming bureaucratised, by making its directive centre or its more peripheral centres a field of manoeuvres for the careerism of functionaries; c) would have to prevent class politics being thought out or carried out through formalist and administrative criteria.’”⁹

However, the most crucial insight of the Fraction – the notion of the fraction itself, the form and function that the revolutionary organisation must take on in a period of defeat in the class struggle – was entirely lost on the Damen tendency, as was the closely connected notion of the historic course, the necessity to understand the global balance of forces between the classes that can undergo profound alterations within the epoch of decadence. Unable to make a real critique of the momentous error made in ‘43 – the constitution of a “party” in one single country in a period of profound counter-revolution – the Damenists compounded the mistake by theorising the party as a permanent necessity and even as a permanent reality. Hence, despite quickly shrinking to a “mini-party”, the original emphasis of the regroupment of 43-45 on building up a presence within the working class and giving a decisive lead in

its struggles remained, at the cost of what was really needed: a focus on theoretical clarification about the necessities and possibilities of the period.

The opposing tendency around figures like Bordiga and Maffi was, in general, much more confused about the most important class positions. Bordiga more or less ignored the acquisitions of the Fraction and advocated a return to the positions of the first two congresses of the Third International, which for him were based on Lenin's “restoration” of the communist programme. An extreme suspicion of opportunist “innovations” to marxism (which, it's true, were beginning to flourish in the soil of the counter-revolution) led him to the notion of the “invariant” programme which had been fixed in stone in 1848 and only needed to be disinterred when it was periodically buried by the opportunists and traitors.¹⁰ As we have often pointed out, this notion of invariance is based on a highly “variant” geometry, so that for example Bordiga and his followers could both affirm that capitalism had entered its epoch of wars and revolutions (a fundamental position of the Third International) and yet polemicise against the notion of decline as being founded on a pacifist and gradualist ideology.¹¹

This questioning of decadence had important repercussions when it came to analysing the nature of the Russian revolution (defined as a dual revolution, not unlike the councilist vision), and in particular when it came to characterising the struggles for national independence which were proliferating in the former colonies. Mao, instead of being seen for what he was, an expression of the Stalinist counter-revolution and a real product of capitalist decay, was hailed as a great bourgeois revolutionary in the mould of Cromwell. Later on the Bordigists were to come out with the same appreciation of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and this deep incomprehension of the national question was to cause havoc in the Bordigist party in the later 1970s, with a sizeable element abandoning internationalism altogether.

10. In his preface to *Russia and Revolution in Marxist Theory* (*Russie et Révolution dans la Théorie Marxiste*, Spartacus 1975, Jacques Camatte shows that the Bordiga of the revolutionary years after World War One did not defend the notion of invariance, referring in particular to the first article in the collection, “The lessons of recent history”, which argues that the real movement of the proletariat can enrich theory, and which openly criticises certain of Marx's ideas about democracy and some of the tactical prescriptions in the Communist Manifesto “the system of critical communism must naturally be understood in liaison with the integration of historical experience subsequent to Marx's Manifesto, and, if necessary, in an opposite direction to certain tactical behaviours by Marx and Engels which proved to be wrong”.

11. “The post-war boom did not reverse the decline of capitalism”, *International Review* n° 147.

8. See in particular *Communism* Vol. 3, Part 4 – “The 1930s: debate on the period of transition”, *International Review* n° 127.

9. See p 163-4 in the English edition. These insights into the potential dangers emanating from the “proletarian” state seem to have been lost, judging by the surprise the delegate of the PCInt/Battaglia Comunista expressed, at the Second Congress of the ICC, after reading a proposed resolution on the state in the period of transition which was based on the insights of the Fraction and of the GCF. The resolution was eventually adopted at the Third Congress: “Resolution on the State in the Transition Period”, *International Review* n° 18. See also “The period of transition: Polemic with the P.C.Int.-Battaglia Comunista”, *International Review* n° 47.

On the party question, on the errors of the Bolsheviks in the running of the Soviet state, it was as if the Fraction had never existed. The party takes power, wields the state machine, imposes the Red Terror without mercy...even the important nuances of Lenin on the need for the working class to be wary of the bureaucratisation and autonomisation of the transitional state seem to have been forgotten. As we argue in a previous article in this series,¹² Bordiga's most important contribution on the lessons of the Russian revolution in the post World War Two period, "Force, violence and dictatorship in the class struggle" (1946), certainly contains some insights on the problem of degeneration, but its rather dogmatic anti-democratism didn't enable it to recognise the problem of the party and state substituting for the proletariat (see final note below).

However: even though the Bordiga tendency also never openly put into question the formation of the party in 1943, it was able to understand that the organisation had entered into a far more difficult period and that different tasks were on the order of the day. Bordiga had been sceptical about the formation of the party in the first instance. Without showing the slightest understanding of the notion of the fraction—indeed, he rather buried his own experience of fraction work prior to the First World War under his subsequent theorisations about the formal and the historic party¹³—there was a certain understanding that simply maintaining a routine of intervention in the immediate struggle was not the way forward, and that it was essential to return to the theoretical foundations of marxism. Having rejected the contribution of the Fraction and other expressions of the communist left, this work was not completed, or even attempted, with regard to the key programmatic positions. But when it came to certain more general theoretical questions, and particularly those relating to the nature of the future communist society, it seems to us that during this period it was Bordiga, rather than the "Damenists", who has left us with the most important legacy.

The passion for communism: Bordiga's defence of the 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

The book *Bordiga et la passion du communisme*, a collection of writings put together by Jacques Camatte in 1972, is the best testimony to the profundity of



Amadeo Bordiga

Bordiga's reflections about communism, in particular two major presentations given at party meetings in 1959-60, which are dedicated to Marx's 1844 Economic and Political Manuscripts: "Commentaries on the 1844 manuscripts" (1959-60), and "Tablets of stone of the communist theory of the party"¹⁴ (page references are to the first text unless indicated).

This is how Bordiga places the 1844 MS within the corpus of Marx's writings

"Another very vulgar commonplace is that Marx was a Hegelian in his youthful writings, that it was only afterwards that he became the theoretician of historical materialism, and that, when he was older, he became a vulgar opportunist. It is a task of the revolutionary marxist school to make it clear to all its enemies (who have the choice to accept everything or reject everything) the monolithism of the whole system from its birth to the death of Marx and even after him (the fundamental concept of invariance, the fundamental rejection the 'enriching' evolution of the party doctrine)" (p120).

Here we have both the strengths and weaknesses of Bordiga's approach in one paragraph. On the one hand: the intransigent defence of the continuity of Marx's thought and the repudiation of the notion that the 1844 MS are the product of a Marx who was still essentially idealist and Hegelian (or at least Feuerbachian), a notion that has been associated in particular with the Stalinist intellectual Althusser and which we have already criticised in earlier articles in this series.¹⁴

For Bordiga, the 1844 MS, with their profound exposé of capitalist alienation,

and their inspiring description of the communist society that will overcome it, already indicate that Marx had made a qualitative break with the most advanced forms of bourgeois thought. In particular, the 1844 MS, which contain a large section devoted to the critique of the Hegelian philosophy, demonstrate that whatever Marx had assimilated from Hegel in matters of the dialectic, his rupture with Hegel - which meant overturning him, "turning him on his head" - and the adoption of a communist world outlook, take place at exactly the same moment. Bordiga emphasises in particular Marx's rejection of the very starting point of the Hegelian system: the individual "I". *"What is clear is that for Marx Hegel's error is to build his whole colossal speculative edifice, with its rigorous formalism, on an abstract basis, 'consciousness'. As Marx would say many times, you have to begin from being, and not from the consciousness it has of itself...Hegel is shut in on himself, from the beginning, in the vain eternal dialogue between subject and object. His subject is the 'me' extended in an absolute sense..."* (p119).

At the same time, it is evident that for Bordiga, the 1844 MS provide evidence for his theory of the invariance of marxism, an idea which we think is contradicted by the real development of the communist programme which we have traced throughout this series. But we will return to this question later on. What we share with Bordiga's view of the 1844 MS is, above all: the centrality of Marx's conception of alienation, not only to the MS, but to the whole of his work; a number of fundamental elements in Bordiga's conception of the dialectic of history; and the exalted vision of communism which, again, Marx never repudiated in his later work (although he did, in our view, enrich it).

The dialectic of history

Bordiga's references to the concept of alienation in the 1844 MS inform his whole view of history, since he insists that *"the highest degree of man's alienation has been reached in the current capitalist epoch"* (p124). Without abandoning the understanding that the emergence and development of capitalism, and the destruction of the old feudal mode of exploitation, is a precondition for the communist revolution, he pours scorn on the facile progressivism of the bourgeoisie which vaunts its superiority over previous modes of production and ways of experiencing the world. He even suggests that bourgeois thinking is in certain senses empty in comparison with the much derided pre-capitalist viewpoints. For Bordiga, marxism has

12. "In the aftermath of World War Two: debates on how the workers will hold power after the revolution."

13. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1965/consider.htm>

14. See in particular: "The alienation of labour is the premise for its emancipation, *International Review* n° 70; The study of Capital and the foundations of Communism", *International Review* n° 75.

demonstrated that “your affirmations are empty and inconsistent lies, much more clearly so than the most ancient opinions of human thought which, you, bourgeois, believe you have buried once and for all under the fatuousness of your illuminist rhetoric” (p168). Consequently even when both bourgeoisie and proletariat formulate their critique of religion, there is again a rupture between the two class standpoints: “even in the cases (not general) where the ideologues of the bourgeoisie dared to break openly with the principles of the Christian church, we marxists do not define this superstructure, atheism, as a platform common to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat” (p 117).

With such affirmations, Bordiga seems to connect his thought with some of the “philosophical” critics of the marxism of the Second International (and, by extension, of the official philosophy of the Third) such as Pannekoek, Lukacs and Korsch, who rejected the idea that, just as socialism is the logical next step in historical evolution and only requires the “taking over” of the capitalist state and economy, so historical materialism is simply the next step in the advance of classical bourgeois materialism. Such views are based on a profound underestimation of the antagonism between the bourgeois and proletarian world outlooks, the unavoidable necessity for a revolutionary rupture with the old forms. There is continuity, of course, but it is anything but gradual and peaceful. This way of approaching the problem is entirely consistent with the idea that the bourgeoisie can only see the social and natural world through the distorting lens of alienation, which under its reign has reached its “supreme” phase.

The slogan “Against immediatism” features more than once in the sub-headings of these contributions. For Bordiga it was essential to avoid any narrowing of focus to the present moment of history, and to look beyond capitalism backwards as well as forwards. In the current epoch, bourgeois thought is perhaps more immediatist than ever, more than ever fixated on the particular, the here and now, the short term, since it lives in mortal fear that regarding present-day society with the eye of history will enable us to discern its transient nature. But Bordiga also develops a polemic against the classical “grand narratives” of the bourgeoisie in its more optimistic age: not because it was grand, but because the bourgeoisie’s narrative deformed the real story. Just as the transition from bourgeois to proletarian thinking is not merely another forward step, so history in general is not a straight line going from darkness to light, but is an expression of the dialectic in movement: “*The progress*

of humanity and of knowledge in the much tormented homo sapiens is not continuous, but moves through great isolated leaps punctuated by sinister and obscure plunges into social forms degenerating to the point of putrefaction” (p168). This is no accidental formulation: elsewhere in the same text he says “*the banal conceptions of the dominant ideologies see this path (of human history) as a continuous and constant ascent; marxism does not share this vision, and defines a series alternating between rises and descents, interlaced by violent crises*” (p152). A clear answer, one would think, to those who reject the concept of the ascendance and decadence of successive modes of production...

The dialectical vision of history sees movement as resulting from the clash – often violent – of contradictions. But it also contains the notion of the spiral and the “return at a higher level”. Thus the communism of the future is, in an important sense, a return of man to himself, as Marx puts it in the 1844 manuscripts, since it is not only a rupture with the past, but a synthesis of everything that was human within it: “*man returns to himself not as he began at the origin of his long history, but finally having at his disposal all the perfections of an immense development, acquired in the form of all the successive techniques, customs, religions, philosophies whose useful sides were – if we can be permitted to express ourselves in this way – imprisoned in the zone of alienation*” (p125).

A more concrete example of this: in a short article about the inhabitants of the island of Janitzio in Mexico,¹⁵ written in 1961, and included in Camatte’s collection, Bordiga develops the idea that “*in natural and primitive communism*” the individual, still linked to his fellow human beings in a real community, does not experience the same fear of death that emerged with the social atomisation engendered by private property and class society; and that this provides us with an indication that in the communism of the future, where the individual’s destiny will be linked to that of the species, the fear of personal death and “*any cult of the living and the dead*” will be overcome. Bordiga thereby confirms his continuity with that central strand of the marxist tradition which affirms that in a certain sense “*the members of primitive societies were closer to the human essence*” (p175) – that the communism of the distant past can also be understood as a pre-figuration of the communism of the future.¹⁶

15. “In Janitzio they’re not afraid of death.”

16. See also a previous article in this series: “The Mature Marx - Past and Future Communism”, *International Review* n° 81.

What communism is not

Bordiga’s defence of the 1844 MS is, to a large extent, a long diatribe against the fraud of “really existing socialism” in the countries of the eastern bloc, which had gained a new lease of life in the wake of the “anti-fascist war” of 1939-45. His attack was mounted at two levels: negation and affirmation. Negation of the claims that what existed in the USSR and similar regimes had anything whatever to do with Marx’s conception of communism, first and foremost at the economic level; affirmation of the fundamental characteristics of communist relations of production.

According to one version of a ubiquitous joke from the old USSR, an instructor in the party school is lecturing Young Comsomol members on the key question: will there be money in communism?

“*Historically, comrades, there are three positions on this question. There is the right wing, Proudhonist-Bukharinite deviation: under communism, everyone will have money. Then there is the ultra-left, infantile deviation: under communism, no one will have money. So what then is the dialectical position of Marxism-Leninism? It is clearly this: under communism, some people will have money, and others won’t have any money.*”

Whether Bordiga was acquainted with this joke or not, his response to the Stalinists in his “Commentaries” goes in a similar direction. A preface to one of the Stalinist editions to the 1844 MS points out that Marx’s text contains a polemic against Proudhon’s theory of equal wages, the implication being that for the authentic marxism practised in the USSR, under socialism there must be unequal wages. But, in the ensuing section headed “Either wage labour or socialism”, Bordiga points out that in the 1844 MS as well as in other works such as *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *Capital*, Marx actually “*refutes the Proudhonist vacuity which conceives of a socialism where wages have been conserved, as they are conserved in Russia. Marx is not hitting out at the theory of equality, but on the existence of wages. Even if you could level them, wages are the negation of socialism. Even more so, not levelled, not equal, they are even more evidently the negation of socialism*” (p129).

And the following section is headed “Either money or socialism”: just as wage labour persists in the USSR, so must its corollary: the domination of human relations by exchange value, and thus by money. Returning, to the deep critique of money as an expression of alienation between human

beings, which Marx, citing Shakespeare and Goethe, developed in the 1844 manuscripts and returned to in *Capital*, Bordiga insisted that “*the societies where money circulates are societies of private property; they remain inside the barbaric prehistory of the human species*” (p137).

Bordiga in fact demonstrates that the Stalinists have more in common with the father of anarchism than they would like to admit. Proudhon, in the tradition of a “crude communism” which Marx already recognises as reactionary at the point that he himself embraced communism, envisages a society in which “*annual revenue is socially divided in equal parts among all members of society, who have all become waged workers*”. In other words, this notion of communism or socialism was one in which the misery of the proletarian condition was generalised rather than abolished, and in which “society” itself becomes the capitalist. And in response to those – not only the Stalinists, but also their leftwing apologists, the Trotskyists – who denied that the USSR could be a form of capitalism because it had (more or less) got rid of individual owners of capital, Bordiga replies: “*The question where are the capitalists has no meaning. The response has been there since 1844: society is an abstract capitalist*” (p132).

The polemical target of these essays is not restricted to the overt defenders of the USSR. If communism abolishes exchange value, it is because it has abolished all forms of property¹⁷ – not only state property as in the programme of Stalinism, but also the classical anarcho-syndicalist version (which Bordiga also attributes to the contemporary Socialisme ou Barbarie group with its definition of socialism as workers’ management of production): “*land to the peasants and the factories to the workers and similar pitiful parodies of the magnificent programme of the revolutionary communist party*” (p178). In communism the individual enterprise must be abolished as such. If it continues to be the property of those who work in it, or even of the local community around it, it has not been truly socialised, and the relations between the different self-managed enterprises must necessarily be founded on the exchange of commodities. We will return to this question when we look at the vision of socialism developed by Castoriadis and the Socialisme ou Barbarie group.

Like Trotsky in the visionary concluding passages of *Literature and Revolution*¹⁸ – who, in 1924, is unlikely to have had knowledge of the 1844 MS – Bordiga then ascends from the sphere of the negation of capitalism and its alienation, from an insistence on what socialism is not, to the positive affirmation of what humanity will be like in the higher stages of communist society. The 1844 MS, as we pointed out in an early article in this series,¹⁹ are full of passages describing how relations between human beings and between humanity and nature will be transformed under communism, and Bordiga quotes extensively from the most significant of these passages in his two texts, most notably where they deal with the transformation of relations between men and women, and where they insist that communist society will permit the emergence of a higher stage of conscious life.

The transformation of relations between the sexes

Throughout the 1844 MS Marx repudiates the “crude communism” which, while attacking the bourgeois family, still regards woman as an object and speculates about a coming “community of women”. On the contrary: Bordiga quotes Marx that the degree to which the relationship between man and woman has become humanised is a measurement of the real advance of the species. But at the same time, under capitalism, woman, and the relation between the sexes, will remain a prisoner of commodity relations.

After resuming Marx’s thinking on these questions, Bordiga digresses for a moment on the problem of terminology, of language.

“*In citing these passages, it is necessary to alternate between the word man and the word male to the extent that the first word indicates all the members of the species... When a half century ago the estimable marxist Filippo Turati made an enquiry into feminism, that miserable bourgeois deviation founded on the atrocious subordination of woman in societies of property, he responded with these simple words: woman... is man. That means: she will be in communism, but for your bourgeois society she is an animal, an object.*” (p150)

Feminism a bourgeois deviation? This is a position strongly rejected by those who argue that there can be a “socialist

feminism” or an “anarcha-feminism”. But from Bordiga’s standpoint, feminism has a bourgeois starting point because it aims at “equality” of the sexes inside the existing social relationships; and this leads logically to the demand that women should be “equally” able to fight in imperialist armies or rise to becoming company directors and prime ministers.

Communism did not need the addition of feminism or even “socialist feminism” to have been, from the beginning, an advocate of the solidarity of men and women in the here and now, but this can only be realised in the class struggle, in the fight against capitalist oppression and exploitation and for the creation of a society in which the “original form of exploitation” – that of woman by man – will no longer be possible. More than this: marxism has also recognised that the female of the species – because of her double oppression and her more advanced moral sense (linked in particular to her historic role in the rearing of children) – is often in the vanguard of the struggle, for example in the revolution in 1917 in Russia, which began with demonstrations of women against bread shortages, or more recently in the massive strikes in Egypt in 2007. Indeed according to the anthropological school of Chris Knight, Camilla Power and others, which identifies with the marxist tradition in anthropology, female morality and solidarity played a crucial role in the very emergence of human culture, in the primal “human revolution”.²⁰ Bordiga is in accord with this way of looking at things in the section of the “Commentaries” headed “Love, a universal need”, when he argues that the passive function assigned to women is purely a product of property relations, and that in fact “*in nature, love being the basis of reproduction, women is the active sex, and the monetary forms of love are revealed to be against nature*” (p156). And he continues with a summary of how the abolition of commodity relations will transform this relationship: “*In communism without money, love will, as a need, have the same weight for both sexes and the act which consecrates it will realise the social formula that the other’s human need is my human need, to the extent that the need of one sex is realised as the need of the other*”.

Bordiga then explains that this transformation will be based on the material and social changes introduced by the communist revolution: “*This cannot be proposed simply as a moral relationship founded on a certain physical connection, because*

17. A rather clear exposition of Bordiga’s conception of socialism can be found in an article by Adam Buick of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, who, for all their other faults, have always understood very clearly that socialism means the abolition of wage labour and money. <https://libcom.org/library/bordigism-adam-buick>.

18. “Trotsky and the culture of communism”, *International Review* n° 111.

19. “Communism: the real beginning of human society”, *International Review* n° 71. This article, like others in the series, also refers to Bordiga’s writings on communism.

20. “Woman’s role in the emergence of human culture”, *International Review* n° 150; and “Women’s role in the emergence of human solidarity”, *International Review* n° 151.

the passage to a higher form of society is effected in the economic domain: the care of children is no longer just the concern of the two parents but of the community.” It is from this starting point that future humanity will be able to break through the limitations imposed by the bourgeois family.

Conscious life at another level

In an earlier article in this series,²¹ we argued that certain passages in the 1844 MS only make sense if we see them as anticipations of a transformation of consciousness, of a new mode of being, which communist social relations will make possible. The article looked at some length at the passage from the chapter “Private Property and communism” where Marx talks about the way in which private property (understood in its broadest sense) has served to restrict the human senses, to obstruct – or, to use a more accurate term from psychoanalysis, repress – human sensual experience; consequently communism will bring with it the “emancipation of the senses”, a new bodily and mental rapport with the world which can be compared with the “inspired” state experienced by artists at their most creative moments.

Towards the end of Bordiga’s text “Tablets of stone” there is a section headed “Down with the personality, that is the key!” We will take up this question of “personality” later on, but we want first to look at the way Bordiga, in his interpretation of the 1844 manuscripts, envisages the alteration of human consciousness in the communist future.

He begins by affirming that in communism we will “have left behind the millennia-old deception of the lone individual facing the natural world, stupidly called ‘external’ by the philosophers. External to what? External to the ‘I’, this supreme deficiency; but we can no longer say external to the human species, because the species man is internal to nature, part of the physical world.” And he goes on to say that “in this powerful text, object and subject becomes, like man and nature, one and the same thing. We can even say that everything becomes object: man as a subject ‘against nature’ disappears, along with the illusion of a singular me.” (p190)

This can only be a reference to the passage in the “Private property and communism” chapter where Marx says

“it is only when objective reality universally becomes for man in society the reality of man’s essential powers, becomes human reality, and thus the reality of his own es-

sential powers, that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, objects that confirm and realise his individuality, his objects, i.e. he himself becomes the object.”

Bordiga continues:

“We have seen that when you pass from the individual to the species, the spirit, this absolute unfortunate, is dissolved into objective nature. The individual brain as a poor passive machine is replaced by the social brain. What’s more, Marx points to a collective human sense that has gone beyond the isolated corporal sense.” And he goes on to quote the 1844 Manuscripts on the emancipation of the senses, insisting that this also indicates the emergence of a kind of collective awareness – what we might term a passage from the “common sense” of the isolated ego to the communising of the senses.

What do we make of these conceptions? Before dismissing them as science fiction, we should remember that while, in bourgeois society above all, we often take the ego to be the absolute centre of our being (“I think, therefore I am”), there is also a long tradition of thought that insists that the ego is only a relative reality, at best a particular fraction of our being. This view is certainly central to psychoanalytical theory, for which the adult ego only emerges through a long process of repression and division between the conscious and unconscious part of ourselves – and is, furthermore, the “sole seat of anxiety”²² because, caught as it is between the demands of external reality and the unfulfilled urges buried in the unconscious, it is constantly preoccupied with its own overthrow or extinction.

It is also a view that has been put forward in a number of the “mystical” traditions east and west, although it was probably most coherently developed by Indian philosophy, and above all by Buddhism with its doctrine of “anatta” – the impermanence of the separate self. But all these traditions tend to concur that it is possible, through directly penetrating the unconscious mind, to surpass the everyday ego-consciousness – and thus the torment of perpetual anxiety. Shorn of the ideological distortions that inevitably accompanied these traditions, their most lucid insights do raise the possibility that human beings are capable of attaining another kind of consciousness in which the world around us is no longer seen as a hostile other, and the focus of awareness shifts, not merely intellectually, but through a direct and very bodily experience, from the isolated atom to the standpoint of the species – indeed, the standpoint of something even more than the species: of

nature, of an evolving universe, becoming conscious of itself.

It is difficult to read the above passages by Bordiga and conclude that he is talking about something entirely different. And it is important to note that Freud, in the opening sections of *Civilisation and its Discontents*, acknowledged the reality of the “oceanic feeling”, this experience of erotic unity with the world, although he could only see it as a regression to the infantile state prior to the emergence of the ego. However, in the same section of the book, he also accepts the possibility that the mental techniques of yoga can open the door to “*primordial states of mind which have long been overlaid*”. The question for us to raise theoretically – and perhaps for future generations to investigate more practically – is whether the age-old techniques of meditation can lead only to regression, a collapse back into the undifferentiated unity of the animal or the infant; or whether they can be part of a dialectical “*return become conscious*”, a self-aware exploration of our own minds. In which case the instances of the “oceanic feeling” point not only to the infantile past, but towards the horizon of a more advanced and more universal human consciousness. This was certainly the view adopted by Erich Fromm in his study *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism*, for example when he writes about what he calls the “*state of non-repressedness*”, defined as “*a state in which one acquires again the immediate, undistorted grasp of reality, the simpleness and spontaneity of the child; yet, after having gone through the process of alienation, of development of one’s intellect, non-repressedness is return to innocence on a higher level; this return to innocence is only possible after one has lost one’s innocence.*”²³

23. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism*, 1960, p 91 of the 1986 Allen and Unwin edition. Fromm, a descendant of the Frankfurt School who has also written extensively about the early writings of Marx, considers that, taken to its logical conclusion, the true goal of psychoanalysis (which could only be attained on a wide scale in a “sane society”), is not simply to relieve neurotic symptoms or to subordinate the instincts to intellectual control, but to make the unconscious conscious and thus reach the non-repressed life. He thus defines the method of psychoanalysis in relation to this goal: “*it examines the psychic development of a person from childhood on and tries to recover the earlier experiences in order to assist the person in experiencing what is now repressed. It proceeds by uncovering illusions within oneself about the world, step by step, so that parataxis distortions and alienated intellectualisations diminish. By becoming less of a stranger to himself, the person who goes through this process becomes less estranged to the world; because he has opened up communication with the universe within himself, he has opened up communication with the universe outside. False consciousness disappears, and with it the polarity conscious-unconscious*” (ibid p 107). Elsewhere (p 105) he compares this method with that of Zen, which uses different means, but also proceeds through a series of smaller realisations or “*satoris*” towards a qualitatively higher level of

21. “Communism: the real beginning of human society”, *International Review* n° 71.

22. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, London 1973, p 117.

Against the destruction of the environment

But Bordiga's theoretical writings during this period did not only pose the question of man's relationship with nature at this very "philosophical" level. He also raised it in his far-sighted reflections on the question of capitalist catastrophes and the problem of the environment. Writing on contemporary disasters like the flooding of the Po valley in 1957 and the sinking of the liner Andrea Doria in the year before, Bordiga again brings to bear his specialist knowledge as an engineer and above all his deep rejection of bourgeois "progress" to show how its drive to accumulate contains the seeds of such catastrophes, and ultimately of the destruction of the natural world itself.²⁴ Bordiga is particularly vehement in his articles about the frenzy of urbanisation which he could already discern in the post-war reconstruction period, denouncing the cramming of human beings into ever more limited urban spaces and the accompanying philosophy of "verticalism" in construction. He argues that this reduction of human beings to the level of ants is a direct product of the needs of accumulation and will be reversed in the communist future, reaffirming Marx and Engels' demand for overcoming the separation between town and country: *"When, after the forcible crushing of this ever-more obscene dictatorship, it will be possible to subordinate every solution and every plan to the amelioration of the conditions of living labour, to fashion with this aim everything that has come from dead labour, from constant capital, from the infrastructure that the human species has built up over the centuries and continues to build up on the earth's crust, then the brutal verticalism of the cement monsters will be made ridiculous and will be suppressed, and in the immense expanses of horizontal space, once the giant cities have been deflated, the strength and intelligence of the human animal will progressively tend to render uniform the density of life and labour over the habitable parts of the earth; and these forces will henceforth be in harmony, and no longer ferocious enemies as they are in the deformed civilisation of today, where they are only brought together by the spectre of servitude and hunger"* (published in "Space against cement" in *The Human Species and the Earth's Crust* (*Espèce Humaine et Croûte Terrestre*, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, p168). It is also worth noting that

being in the world

24. See the collection *Murdering the Dead: Amadeo Bordiga on capitalism and other disasters*, Antagonism Press, 2001. See also our article "Flooding: the shape of things to come", *World Revolution* n° 365, which looks at Bordiga's notion of the role of destruction in capitalist accumulation.

when Bordiga, in 1952, formulated a kind of "immediate revolutionary programme", it included demands for halting what he already saw as the inhuman congestion and pace of life brought about by capitalist urbanisation (a process that has reached much greater levels of irrationality since then). Thus the seventh point out of nine calls for *"halting construction of houses and workplaces in the big cities and even the smaller ones, as a starting point for the uniform distribution of the population in the countryside. Reduction of the speed and volume of traffic and forbidding it when it is useless"* (in a future article we intend to come back to the other demands in this "programme", because they contain a number of formulations which can, in our view, be strongly criticised).

It is interesting to note that, when it comes to demonstrating why all this so-called progress of the capitalist city was nothing of the kind, Bordiga had recourse to a concept of decadence which he tends to throw out of window in other polemics – for example in the title "Weird and wonderful tales of modern social decadence".²⁵ Such a term is on the other hand entirely consistent with the general view of history we noted above, where societies can "degenerate to the point of putrefaction" and go through phases of ascent and descent. It is as if Bordiga, once removed from the "narrow" world of contending political positions, and obliged to return to the basics of marxist theory, had no choice but to recognise that capitalism, like all previous modes of production, must also enter an epoch of decline – and that this epoch has long been upon us, regardless of the marvels of capitalism's "growth in decay" which are smothering humanity and threatening its future.

The problem with "invariance"

We must now return to Bordiga's notion that the 1844 MS provide evidence for his theory of the "invariance of marxism". We have argued on various occasions that this is a religious conception. In a stinging polemic with the Bordigist group that publishes *Programma Comunista*, Mark Chirik noted the real similarity between the Bordigist concept of invariance and the Muslim attitude of submission to an immutable doctrine.²⁶

The target of this article was, it's true, mainly the epigones of Bordiga, but what did Bordiga himself say about the relationship between marxism and the sources

of "invariant" doctrine in the past? In a seminal text titled precisely "The historical invariance of marxism",²⁷ he writes:

"Consequently, despite the fact that the ideological legacy of the revolutionary working class, unlike that of the classes that preceded it, does not assume the form of revelation, myth or idealism, but of 'positive' science, it nonetheless needs a stable formulation of its principles, and even of its rules for action, that performs the role and possesses the efficacy that dogmas, catechisms, tablets of law, constitutions and guide-books such as the Vedas, the Talmud, the Bible, the Koran or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights once performed and possessed. The profound errors with regard to form and substance in those compilations did not deprive them of their enormous organisational and social power (at first a revolutionary power; then a counterrevolutionary power; in dialectical succession); what is more, in many cases these 'deviations' contributed precisely to the creation of this power."

In his *Commentaries*, Bordiga was already aware of the accusation that such ideas led him back to the religious worldview:

"When, at a certain point, our banal contradictor ... says that we are building our mystique, himself posing as a mind who which has gone beyond all fideism and mysticism, when he holds us in derision for kneeling down to the Mosaic or talmudic tablets of the Bible or the Koran, to gospels and catechisms, we reply to him ... that we do not consider as an offence the assertion that we can indeed attribute to our movement - as long as it has not triumphed in reality (which in our method precedes any ulterior conquest of human consciousness) - the character of a mystique, or, if you want, a myth."

Myth, in its innumerable forms, was not a delirium of minds whose physical eyes were closed to reality ... but was an irreplaceable step in the single road to the real conquest of consciousness" (p169).

Bordiga is right to consider that mythical thought was indeed an "irreplaceable step" in the evolution of human consciousness, and that the Bible, the Koran, or the Declaration of Human Rights were, at a certain stage of history, authentically revolutionary products. He is also right to recognise that adherence to such "tablets of the law" became, at another stage in history, counter-revolutionary. But the mechanism through which they became counter-revolutionary in new historical circumstances was precisely the notion that

25. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1956/weird.htm>.

26. "A caricature of the Party: the Bordigist Party". *International Review* n° 14.

27. <https://libcom.org/library/historical-invariance-marxism-amadeo-bordiga>.

they were unchanging and unchangeable. Islam, for example, considers its revelation purer than that of the Jewish Torah because it is argued that while the latter had been subject to subsequent revision and editing, not a single word of the Koran had been altered from the moment the angel Gabriel dictated it to Mohammed. The difference between the marxist view of the communist programme and myth or religious dogma is that marxism sees its concepts as the historical product of human beings and thus subject to confirmation or refutation by succeeding historical growth or experience, and not as a once and for all revelation from a superhuman source. Indeed, it insists that mythical or religious revelations are themselves products of human history, and thus limited in their scope and clarity even at their highest points of achievement. In accepting the idea that marxism is itself a kind of myth, Bordiga loses sight of the historical method that he is able to use so well elsewhere.

Of course it is true that the communist programme itself is not infinitely malleable and does have an unchanging core of general principles such as the class struggle, the transient nature of class society, the necessity for the proletarian dictatorship and communism. Furthermore, there is a sense in which this general outline can appear like a sudden flash of inspiration. Hence Bordiga can write:

“A new doctrine cannot appear at just any historical moment, but there are certain quite characteristic—and even extremely rare—eras in history in which a new doctrine can appear like a blinding flash of light; if one has not recognised the crucial moment and fixed one’s gaze on this terrible light, in vain would one have resort to the candle stubs with which the academic pedant or the combatant of little faith attempts to illuminate the way forward” (“Historical invariance of marxism”)

Quite possibly Bordiga has in mind the incredibly rich phase of Marx’s work which gave rise to the 1844 MS and other fundamental texts. But Marx for one did not regard these texts as his final words on capitalism, the class struggle, or communism. Even though, in our view, he never abandoned the essential content of these writings, he regarded them as “first drafts” which had to be developed and given a more solid grounding by further research, itself closely connected to the practical/theoretical experimentation carried out by the real movement of the proletariat.

Bordiga, in the “Commentaries” (p 161) also points to a specific passage in the 1844 MS as proof of invariance. This is where Marx writes that “*The entire movement of history, just as its [communism’s] actual*

act of genesis – the birth act of its empirical existence – is, therefore, for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its becoming”.

And Bordiga adds that the subject of this consciousness cannot be the individual philosopher: it can only be the class party of the world proletariat. But if communism is, as Marx says, the product of the entire movement of history, then it must have begun to emerge long before the appearance of the working class and its political organisations, so that the source of this consciousness must be older than both – just as, within capitalist society, it is also wider than the political organisations of the class, even if they are generally its most advanced expression. Moreover, since communism can only become clear to itself, “comprehended and known” when it becomes proletarian communism, surely this is further evidence that communism and communist consciousness is something that evolves, that it is not static, but is a process of becoming – and thus cannot be invariant.

Individual and species

The critique of individualism has a long history in marxism, going back to Marx’s criticisms of Hegel and in particular his assault on Max Stirner; and in arguing against the philosophical standpoint of the isolated thinker, Bordiga is on solid ground, citing the *The German Ideology*’s cutting remark on Saint Max that “*philosophy stands in the same relation to the study of the actual world as masturbation to sexual love*”. And as we have seen, the idea that the ego is in some sense an illusory construct also has a long pedigree. But Bordiga goes further than this. As already noted, the section of “Tablets of Stone” (“Tables immuables”) which we cited earlier, where Bordiga predicts that communist humanity will be able to access a kind of species or cosmic consciousness, is headed “Down with the personality, that is the key!”. It is as if Bordiga wants the individual human being to be subsumed in the species rather than realised through it.

The experience of a state of awareness which goes beyond the ego tends to be a peak experience rather than a permanent state, but at any rate, it does not necessarily abolish the personality. Personality as a mask, perhaps, personality as a kind of private property, personality as the outward face of the illusion of an absolute ego – one could argue that this form of personality will be transcended in the future. But nature itself has a need for diversity if it is to move forward, and this is no less true for human society. Even the Buddhists did not argue

that enlightenment made the individual vanish. There is a Zen story which recounts how a student approached his teacher after hearing that the latter had achieved satori, the lightening flash of illumination. The student asks the master “how does it feel to be enlightened?” To which the master replies: “As miserable as ever”.

And in the same section of “Tablets of Stone”, Bordiga cites the “splendid expression” from the 1844 MS: that mankind is a being who suffers, and that if he does not suffer, he cannot know joy. This fleshly, mortal, individual human being will still exist in communism, which for Marx is “*the only society in which the original and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase*” (*German Ideology*, “The free development of individuals”)

These are of course questions for the far future. But Bordiga’s suspicion of the individual personality has far more immediate implications for the question of the revolutionary organisation.

We know that Bordiga made a trenchant critique of the bourgeois fetish of democracy, based as it is on the false notion of the isolated citizen and on the real foundation of a society atomised by commodity exchange. The insights he developed in *The Democratic Principle* and elsewhere enable us to expose the essential vacuity of the most democratic structures of the capitalist order. But there comes a point in Bordiga’s thinking where he loses sight of what was authentically “progressive” in the victory of commodity exchange over all the older forms of community: the possibility of critical, individual thought without which “positive science” – which Bordiga still reclaims as the standpoint of the proletariat – would not have emerged. Applied to Bordiga’s conception of the party, this line of thought leads to the concept of the “monolithic”, “anonymous” and even “totalitarian” organisation – all which terms have been used approvingly in the Bordigist canon. It leads to theorising the negation of individual thought and thus of internal differences and debates. And as with all totalitarian regimes, there is always at least one individual who becomes anything but anonymous – who becomes the object of a personality cult. And this is precisely what was justified within the post-war Internationalist Communist Party by those who saw in Bordiga the “brilliant leader”, the genius who could (even when he was not actually a member of the party!) come up with answers to all the theoretical problems posed to the organisation. This was the aberrant way of thinking attacked in the GCF’s article “Against the concept of the brilliant leader.”²⁸

28. “Against the concept of the “brilliant leader””, *International Review* n° 33.

Bordiga's contribution

We have sometimes criticised Bordiga's idea that a revolutionary is someone for whom the revolution has already happened. In so far as it implies the inevitability of communism, those criticisms are valid. But there is also a truth in Bordiga's dictum. Communists are those who represent the future in the present, as the Communist Manifesto puts it, and in this sense they measure the present – and the past – in the light of the possibility of communism. Bordiga's "passion for communism" – his insistence on demonstrating the superiority of communism over anything that class society and capitalism had engendered – enabled him to resist the false visions of capitalist and "socialist" progress that were being drummed into the working class in the 1950s and 60s and, perhaps most importantly, to demonstrate in practice that marxism is not in fact an invariant dogma but a living theory, since there is no doubt that Bordiga's contributions on communism enrich our understanding of it.

Earlier in this article we referred to Damen's obituary of 1970, which sought to assess Bordiga's overall political contribution.²⁹ Damen begins by listing all

the things "we owe to Bordiga", above all the immense contribution he made in his "classic" period on the theory of abstentionism and the relationship between party and class. But, as we have seen, he quite rightly does not spare Bordiga from criticism over his withdrawal from political activity from the late 20s to the early 40s, his refusal to comment on all the economic and political dramas that fill this period. Examining his return to political life at the end of the war, Damen is also scathing about Bordiga's ambiguities about the capitalist nature of the USSR. He could have gone further and showed how Bordiga's refusal to recognise the acquisitions of the Fraction led to a clear political regression on key issues such as the national question, the unions, and the role of the party in the proletarian dictatorship. But what is missing from Damen's text is an appraisal of the real contribution to our understanding of communism which Bordiga undertook in his later years – a contribution which the communist left still needs to assimilate, not

least because it has subsequently been taken up by others with dubious agendas, such as the "communisation" current (of which Camatte was one of the founding fathers), who have used it to produce results which Bordiga himself would certainly have disowned. But that will require a further article, and before we get there, we want to look at the other "theories of proletarian revolution" which were being developed in the 50s, 60s and 70s.

C D Ward

rhetoric-0

Post-scriptum: As pointed out in a recent article by C Derrick Varn on the blog Symptomatic Commentary, "The brain of society: notes on Bordiga, organic centralism, and the limitations of the party form", Bordiga seemed reluctant to abandon the notion of the party not only persisting but even acting as the incarnated "social brain" during the higher phase of communism.

29. <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-01-21/amadeo-bordiga-beyond-the-myth-and-the->

From the Soweto movement of 1976 to the coming to power of the ANC in 1993

In the previous article on the workers' movement in South Africa (in *International Review* n° 155) we highlighted the effectiveness against the class struggle of the apartheid system combined with the action of the trade unions and parties up until the late 1960s when, faced with an unprecedented development of the class struggle, the bourgeoisie had to "modernise" its political apparatus in order to preserve its system. It was forced to do this faced with a South African proletariat which, through massive struggles, showed that it was part of the global waves of struggle in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In this introduction we want to draw the attention of the reader to the importance of the questions dealt with. If, in the face of new social movements, the South African bourgeoisie relied on its most barbaric traditional weapons, the police and military forces, the dynamic of the confrontation between the classes carried with it unprecedented developments for this country: the working class had never before shown such combativity and development of consciousness, faced with a bourgeoisie that had never had to develop such sophisticated manoeuvres, including extensive use of the weapon of rank and file unionism animated by the extreme left of capital. In this clash between the two real historic classes, the determination of the proletariat would go so far as to provoke the dismantling of the system of apartheid, resulting in the unification of all fractions of the bourgeoisie with the aim of confronting the surge in the struggle of the working class.



Students marching in Soweto, June 16th 1976

Before that, in 1976, following the wave of struggles that marked the 1973-74 period,¹ we witnessed a vigorous continuation of this episode of struggle: the uprising of the school pupils. In June of that year some ten thousand young people took to the streets to protest against compulsory education in Afrikaans and more generally against the bad living conditions imposed

by the apartheid system. A movement of young people was immediately followed by the mobilisation of thousands of adults, active and unemployed workers. Shaken by this formidable proletarian explosion, the regime responded in its customary way by unleashing its guard dogs – the forces of repression – on the protesters and killing hundreds of demonstrators including children:

“Since the great strikes of 1973-74, another front of struggle was opened in South Africa: that of black schoolchildren

and students whose anger exploded in June 1976 in Soweto. Since then, the popular insurrection hardly knew a lull. The violent police repression (about 500 deaths in the city of Soweto alone, hundreds of others across the country, thousands wounded) united the entire black population in this common fight.

“Many of the young people behind the popular movement fell under police bullets during non-violent protests or during civilian militia raids in black neighbourhoods. Adults, struck by the courage and determination of the younger generation, joined them, and followed the slogans raised by their spokespeople: workers’ strikes and boycotts of transport were organised several times in the black areas of Johannesburg and Cape Town. They were massively followed, including by the Coloured populations of the Cape Province. The destruction of school buildings, drinking places, administration buildings and means of transport which marked the beginning of the popular revolt were followed by more orchestrated but equally successful campaigns. Boycotts of classes and exams until the release of imprisoned youths, general mourning in memory of the victims of repression, boycott of drinking establishments, department stores, Christmas celebrations.”²

We are in the presence here of a great proletarian insurrectional movement against

1. We often speak of the years 1973-74 and '76 without referring to 1975. Indeed, that year experienced fewer struggles and appeared as a moment of “pause” before the storm of Soweto.

2. Brigitte Lachartre, *Luttes ouvrières et libération en Afrique du Sud*, Editions Syros, 1977.

the general misery imposed by one of the most brutal forms of capitalism: apartheid. An uprising of indignation by youth echoed the resurgence of international class struggle marked by huge workers' strikes in the early 1970s in countries around the world. A movement that eventually spread to the major industrial areas of the country, leading to and mixing into a single struggle of workers and people of all ages. Faced with a struggle of this magnitude, with a surge of proletarian anger threatening to undermine the system, the barbaric regime could not hide its panic and responded with a bloody terror, even though this aroused widespread outrage in the country and amplified the anger and mobilisation of the whole population of Soweto and beyond. Workers, the unemployed and families with children joined the school pupils' fight and were also subjected to the batons and bullets of the forces of order, causing thousands of victims in their ranks.

But the savagery of the killings only served to radicalise the movement, which continued until 1977 with massive strikes and demonstrations and tended to politicise itself by generating countless struggle committees called "civics",³ consisting mainly of workers (unionised or not), the unemployed, young people and their parents.

*"The civics developed rapidly in the Cape at the end of the 1970s. They extended in a certain way the forms of organisation within the townships which had arisen during the movements of June 1976 in the Transvaal. There were practically as many specific histories as there were organisations, since these were very often born out of the particular needs of a township or neighbourhood. Many appeared in the form of struggle committees either for the boycott of public transport against an increase in fares or for a boycott of rents against their rise. Some took the form of political committees dealing with all the problems of the community. The movement was infinitely diverse: cultural, religious associations, youth, students or high school students, students' parents, were gradually assimilated to the concept of 'civics'. Also, there was not just one committee per ward or township but a complex web of activist memberships and areas of intervention."*⁴

3. Civics or CBOs (Community Based Organisations): "Popular associations, often on the basis of a geographical area or street, whose members organise themselves and decide the organisation's goals". This definition is from the book *La figure ouvrière en Afrique du Sud*, Karthala, 2008.

4. Claude Jacquin, *Une gauche syndicale en Afrique du Sud (1978-1993)*, Editions l'Harmattan, 1994. The author is a journalist and researcher specialising in the new South African trade unions.

Here was a powerful social movement that crystallised at a high level some of the characteristics of the wave of struggles on an international scale. We can see that the strong combativity of the working class which lay behind the massive strikes also expressed itself in a strong will for self-organisation, and this explains the extraordinary proliferation of "civics". To our knowledge this is the first time we have witnessed, on this scale, in South Africa (and on the African continent), such forms of self-organisation, where for several years the social life of neighbourhoods was literally in the hands of the inhabitants themselves who debated every subject and took charge of all the problems concerning them. This was the most worrying aspect for the bourgeoisie, which saw its authority slipping away. Certainly one can note that some committees took, here and there, an inter-classist character or religious connotation, especially to the extent that bourgeois forces (unions, parties, churches, etc.) infiltrated them. However, it should be clear that the "civics", despite the ideological heterogeneity that characterised them, were fundamentally the product of a genuine proletarian class struggle. Moreover, the aspect of self-organisation in the Soweto uprising shows a further step in relation to the politicisation that had characterised the South African proletariat in the powerful movement of struggle in the years 1973-1974, particularly in terms of solidarity and unity in the class struggle. Therefore a clear link can be established in the continuity between the two movements of struggle, the second taking over from the first to go further in the development of class consciousness, as illustrated by the following quote relating to the balance sheet of the preceding wave of struggles:

*"The development of solidarity of black workers in action and growing consciousness of their class unity were stressed by many observers. This achievement of the struggles, though unquantifiable, was considered by them as the most positive for the progress of the organisation of the black workers' movement. (...) These strikes were also political: the fact that the workers demanded the doubling of their wages is not a sign of the naivety or stupidity of Africans. Rather, it expresses the rejection of their situation and their desire for a totally different society. The workers returned to work with some modest achievements, but they were less satisfied now than they were before the strikes."*⁵

From this fact, we can deduce that many of the actors in the 1973-74 strikes joined the insurrectional movement in

5. Jacquin, Op. Cit.

Soweto, and that thanks to their previous experience, they could play a decisive role in its radicalisation and politicisation. Such potentialities for the development of militancy and consciousness could only shake the bourgeoisie which, moreover, was forced to become fully aware of it at the inter-imperialist level.

The great imperialist powers get involved

The Soweto movement was prolonged by strikes and demonstrations until 1977 when police repression still resulted in many victims, like the teenager Steve Biko, a militant of the "Black Consciousness" movement. The murder of this young man in a local police station refuelled the struggles and amplified the protests, the victim thus becoming a "martyr" of apartheid, especially in the eyes of all the defenders of the "black cause" around the world. Thus, in Africa, as in America and especially in Europe, where there were numerous demonstrations against the apartheid regime, led mainly by trade unions and leftist parties, one could read (in France) slogans such as: *"Against Franco-South African friendly relations (tourism, sport, culture); against French emigration in South Africa; against deliveries of weapons and technology to South Africa; against imports of South African products, etc."*⁶

Conscious of the intensification of the movement, in particular with the radicalisation of the proletarian youth of Soweto, the NATO imperialist bloc increased the pressure on its South African ally (including at the economic level by boycotting South African products) to prevent the political destabilisation that threatened its future. But above all to deal with the ideological exploitation of the events by the Russian bloc which, not content with arming and funding the ANC, also began to openly manipulate the various demonstrations around the world against the apartheid regime. It is in this context that South African officials finally accepted the "advice" of their Western sponsors by becoming aware of the risks they faced. Thus even among the most extreme South African leaders there was a change of tone or tactics towards the strikers:

"Unless we succeed in creating a strong middle class among the blacks, we will have serious problems" (Botha, minister of defence). *"We must give enough to the blacks for them to believe in separate development [a euphemism for the apartheid system] and so they will carefully protect what they have from the agitators. Nothing will happen to us if we give these people*

6. Ibid.

enough to be afraid of losing what they have ... A happy person cannot become a communist." (Kruger, minister of police and justice).

The Pretoria government therefore decided to make a number of concessions in line with the demands of the young people in struggle, for example by withdrawing its law to impose on African students education in Afrikaans and also by lifting the ban on the inhabitants of Soweto owning or building their own homes, while recognising the right to association implied by the existence of trade union and political organisations.

In truth, South African capital (its most "enlightened" sector) had not waited for the movement of Soweto to start implementing its plans to relax the apartheid regime in order to better thwart the workers' struggles:

*"Society had shifted. The system was no longer safe from destabilisation. The government and the South African employers would therefore make some adjustments, in order to frame as bureaucratically as possible the socio-political changes. The Bantu Labour Regulation Act of 1973 thus completed the arsenal of labour regulations. It established two types of factory committees: works committees composed only of workers' representatives; liaison committees made up of employer and employee representatives in equal numbers (...) And the Urban Training Project played the game and tried to use these factory committees to stabilise the trade unions it coordinated."*⁷

The implementation of this device well before the outbreak of the Soweto revolt clearly expressed the intent of the South African bourgeoisie to take into account the evolution of the situation which threatened to escape its control. Indeed, in drawing the lessons from the first wave of struggles in the years 1972-74, it had been forced to take a number of bold steps, the principal ones being to give more "power" to the African trade unions by greatly increasing their number and expanding their "rights" with the aim of avoiding "political turmoil".⁸ It found, however, that this was not enough to prevent the development of the struggles, as shown by the Soweto movement.

The proletarian class struggle shakes the apartheid system

In an apparent effort to counter the proletarian class struggle, the South African

regime undertook a major turn by deciding to introduce new political orientations for nothing less than the (progressive) dismantling of the apartheid system, which meant the dissolution of racial barriers and the integration of black nationalist movements into the (democratic) political circus. But to get to this point, the apartheid regime had to be shaken to its foundations. Everything changed in the mid-1970s due to the eruption of the class struggle, but up until then the bourgeoisie had not really been disturbed by the social question:

*"The events of Soweto in June 1976 would confirm the political change underway in the country. The youth revolt in the Transvaal combined with the rebirth of the black workers' movement to unleash the major social and political movements of the 1980s. After the strikes of 1973, the clashes of 1976 ended the period of defeat."*⁹

This is a real reversal of the situation, given that apartheid was designed above all against the class struggle with the aim of avoiding the development of a multiracial working class¹⁰ through segregation and the attribution of "rights and privileges" to fractions of the working class. In other words, the theory of the so-called "supremacy" of whites over blacks concretely translated into (skilled) jobs and other benefits reserved exclusively for workers of European origin, while their fellow Africans, Indians and Coloureds had to be content with unfavourable conditions of work, wages and existence.¹¹ In so doing, the apartheid regime succeeded in corrupting a large part of the working class of European origin by making it voluntarily or passively adhere to its segregationist system. And all this succeeded for a very long period (between 1940 and 1980) in the division of the South African proletariat which was thus hampered in its capacity to develop struggles that might obstruct the smooth running of capitalism.

A historic turning point in the apartheid system

This reversal of the situation was also reflected in a rapprochement between the two factions of the bourgeoisie from the two former colonial powers, namely the British and Dutch, who, faced with the rise of the proletariat, and a tendency towards the unity of all its ethnic components, deciding to forget their ancestral ideological

hatred and divergences in order to unite behind the national capital of South Africa as a whole.

This marked a truly historic turning point in the life of the South African bourgeoisie in general and within the Afrikaner faction in particular. Since the terrible "Boer Wars" of 1899-1902,¹² when the British crushed the Afrikaners, hatred between the descendants of settlers from the two former colonial powers remained visible until the eve of the end of apartheid, even though they had to govern the country together on several occasions. A significant faction of Afrikaners had long dreamed of taking revenge on the British Empire, as shown by the fact that during the Second World War a good part of the Afrikaner leaders (including the military) openly showed their support for the Hitler regime which was their ideological reference point, and by the decision of the Afrikaner regime to leave the Commonwealth and change the name of the country from the Union of South Africa to the Republic of South Africa).

To address this major historical turning point in the dismantling of apartheid, South African capital found a sizeable strategic ally, namely trade unionism, but of a new kind, in this case a "radical", "rank and file" unionism (discussed below), as the only one capable, in its eyes, of stemming the tide of struggle that threatened to become more and more dangerous. And this time, given the importance of the stakes of the epoch, all the decisive principal actors of the South African bourgeoisie clearly assumed this new orientation, including the most reactionary, not to say fascist, apartheid supporters like Botha, Kruger, etc. Similarly, as will be seen later, it was the latter, together with De Klerk (former president), who directly steered the negotiation process with Mandela's ANC with a view to dismantling the apartheid system.

To save its system of production the bourgeoisie gives birth to new unions

Faced with the collapse of the old union apparatus provoked by the explosion of struggles in the 1970s, and this despite the reinforcement by the state of the means at their disposal, the bourgeoisie decided to resort outright to what could be called "rank and file unionism" or "shop stewards", taking the form of new "fighting" trade unions that wanted to be independent of the large union centres:

12. On this conflict, with its hundreds of thousands of victims, and repercussions for relations between the two former colonial powers, see the article in *International Review* n° 154.

7. Ibid.

8. In the words of a South African leader quoted in the article "From the Second World War to the mid-1970s" in *International Review* n° 155.

9. Jacquin, Op. Cit.

10. On the basis of apartheid and its harmful effects on the working class struggle see the article "From the birth of capitalism to the eve of the Second World War" in *International Review* n° 154.

11. In fact, the first discriminatory measures were introduced in South Africa in 1924 by the Labour government, in which the Afrikaners participated.

“During the 1970s, several union currents developed and differentiated themselves amid the resurgence of social conflicts. Their stories intertwine to the rhythm of splits and unifications. Three union projects thus developed on the basis of some distinct political and ideological assumptions.

*“The first was constituted (or reconstituted) around the union tradition of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and its link to the African National Congress (ANC). The second was formed from the new Black Consciousness Movement, forming in particular the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). The last, finally, appeared in an original way, with no apparent link to a known political current. It was founded in 1979 as the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU).”*¹³

This was a radical reorganisation of the trade union system with the function of neutralising the workers’ struggles if they could not be prevented. But what this shows first is that the leadership of the South African regime was fully aware of the danger of the development of the class struggle from 1973 up to the Soweto movement in 1976 and beyond. It realised that the apartheid system in all its forms was no longer adapted to the rise of the workers’ growing militancy and consciousness. Clearly, the bourgeois regime had to take note of the fact that the system of unionisation based on the division of workers according to their ethnic origins was no longer appropriate and that the apparatus of the large unions, such as TUCSA (Trade Union Council of South Africa) were no longer credible among the combative workers, especially the younger generation. Hence the emergence of these new unions to play the role of a “fighting”, “base” unionism, “independent” of the union apparatus.

The following passage relating to FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) is eloquent about the reality of these new unions:

“Our study is particularly devoted to this union current (FOSATU), which was formed from networks of intellectuals and students, themselves the products of a specific phase of the socio-economic evolution of the country.

“(…) Thus, in barely ten years, a group of intellectuals (mainly white) and black workers would create a new form of union organisation. It would initially present itself as a point of reference independent of the ANC and radically opposed to the Communist Party. It would lead a large part of

*the strike movements of the 1980s.”*¹⁴

This was a very “radical” and “critical” trade union group vis-à-vis the union and political apparatus, but it was an unprecedented development in the period of apartheid in that it was able to join together black and white workers and intellectuals, radical political opponents of various kinds. In short, it was a new union apparatus called to play a major role in South African political life. As was the case for the bourgeoisie of the large European industries, faced with the radicalisation of the workers’ struggle, South African capital was forced to use “base unionism”.¹⁵ Similarly, as in Europe, in these “radical unions” was usually found a large number of leftists; this was the case with FOSATU, which was led more or less openly by elements close to the “Unity Movement”, that is to say, Trotskyists. We will come back to this later. How would the new base unions, once formed, accomplish their dirty work at the head or inside of the movements of the Soweto struggle?

The struggles of Soweto poisoned by the trade unions and the ideological confusions of the proletariat

As might be expected, the regime’s concessions could not really calm the Soweto movement; on the contrary they merely served to radicalise it, but also to divide its participants, both in the schools and among the workers. For example, some organisations more or less satisfied themselves with the government’s concessions while others with a more radical appearance demanded more. In fact there was a division of labour in the work of the unions. Besides FOSATU (among the new radical unions), the Black Allied Workers’ Union (BAWU) played an important role. Created in 1973 in the wake of the major strikes in Johannesburg, it campaigned for the exclusive regrouping of black workers of all categories and industrial sectors:

*“Its aims were primarily: ‘To organise and unify the black workers in a powerful workers’ movement, able to gain the respect and recognition of the employers and the government to improve the workers’ knowledge through general and specialised educational programmes, in order to promote their qualification to represent black workers and their interests in the workplace.’”*¹⁶

This was a union created exclusively by and for black workers, hence its opposition to all other unions (even those that were 99% black). But this orientation was particularly pernicious because it gave the impression of creating “positive segregation” by claiming to fulfil legitimate objectives such as improving the knowledge of black workers, or promoting their qualification. And in doing so it was able to “seduce” a large number of class consciousness workers. In other words, it acted as an obstacle to unity in the struggle between workers of all ethnic origins. Besides this, to drive the point home, the BAWU immediately approached the “Black Consciousness Movement”:

*“This position reflects the general attitude of the various organisations that made up the black consciousness movement, in particular of black students (South African Students’ Organisation – SASO – which was separate from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in order, according to its militants, to escape the paternalism shown by all whites vis-à-vis blacks.”*¹⁷

Thus the groups in the student milieu adopted openly and without difficulty the orientation of the BAWU union; that is, becoming openly racist and playing the same role of division of the workers’ ranks as the most racist white unions. In short, it was far from defending the common interests of the South African proletariat, and even those of the black fraction of the working class. And indeed, behind this regroupment or alliance between workers and students we can see the harmfulness of the race question, especially when it is couched in terms of “black consciousness” as opposed to “white consciousness”, rather than the consciousness of the proletarian class. And this even as the conditions were largely met for unity in the struggle as shown by the strike movements taking place in the country where many sectors of workers were fighting for class and not racial demands, which were in fact often successful. Moreover, to the difficulties of the alliance between workers and students linked to racial and trade union divisions was added the corporatism and petty bourgeois spirit of the intellectuals who were strongly present in this struggle movement. As a result, despite the strong momentum created by the general resurgence of the struggle in the early 1970s, the combativity of the workers and youth of Soweto was diverted into a dead end: the movement was diverted and divided by ethnic rivalries between ethnic, corporatist and petty bourgeois cliques, which ultimately stifled every purely proletarian attempt at

13. Jacquin, Op. Cit

14. Ibid.

15. See the ICC pamphlet *Unions against the working class*, which widely addresses the issue of “base unionism” and its nature.

16. Lachartre, Op. Cit.

17. Ibid.

orientation of the struggle:

*“One of the important and not least surprising aspects of the creation of African trade unions in Natal is the role played by groups of academics, students or white teachers. The importance of the role of the handful of intellectuals who made a deep commitment to the African workers does not mean that the South African university was the vanguard of protest and combat for the liberation of the black masses. Far from it. The conservatism and racism of Afrikaner youth, the recklessness of Anglophone students and the corporatism of professional intellectuals were the general rule. As for black students, having voluntarily left the white student organisations (in 1972), it seems that their struggle for their own survival as a group and their participation in the Black Consciousness Movement captured their entire militant energy.”*¹⁸

Clearly, in these conditions the real proletarian vanguard could hardly put itself forward because it was tied down and corralled by the nationalist or racist trade unions, and sometimes by the corporatist factions of the intellectual petty bourgeoisie, manipulated by various political groups like the CP, ANC and leftist elements. From this point on, we can see more clearly the limits of the development of class consciousness, especially among the young people of Soweto, whose struggle was their first experience as members of the proletarian class.

The ANC diverts the youth struggle of Soweto towards the imperialist armed struggle

Having infiltrated the various organs of the working class youth of Soweto, the ANC extended its control over a large number of radical youths coming from the “civics” and managed to enrol them in the armed struggle by sending them to military training camps in neighbouring countries. The ANC especially targeted the most active elements of the Soweto movement, those who were seeking to escape the police repression of the South African regime, promising them “training” to better fight against the apartheid regime. And once there, many critical youths were systematically punished by imprisonment or even death:

“Those ANC soldiers unhappy with this policy did not have the right to discuss it in the name of discipline. In 1983, the ANC participated in the Angolan civil war, sending protesting soldiers there to get rid of them. And when hundreds of survivors who returned mutinied the following year,

*they were suppressed. For this there was an ANC prison camp in Mozambique, the Quatro, where torture was used against recalcitrant internal opponents.”*¹⁹

Clearly, even before coming to power, the ANC already conducted itself as an executioner of the working class. But what the Trotskyist group *Lutte Ouvrière*, which we have just cited, does not say is that the party of Mandela was involved in the war in Angola in the 1980s on behalf of the Russian imperialist bloc, where it received support from neighbouring countries (opponents of the NATO bloc): Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, etc. This was the period when the ANC and CP articulated their struggle for “national liberation” with confrontations between the imperialist powers of the east/west blocs, clearly relying on the support of Moscow. Similarly, while internally the struggle was being broken militarily, externally South Africa was playing the role of “deputy gendarme” of the western imperialist bloc in southern Africa, hence its military involvement, like all its rivals, in the war in Angola and other neighbouring countries.

From FOSATU to COSATU, South African trade unionism at the service of the national capital

Since the entry of capitalism into decadence (marked by the first imperialist world conflict in 1914), trade unionism has ceased to be a real organ of struggle for the working class, and even worse, has become a counter-revolutionary instrument in the service of the capitalist state. This is illustrated by the history of the class struggle in South Africa.²⁰ But the study of the history of trade unionism in the case of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) shows us the power of a new unionism capable of simultaneously exerting influence on a highly combative proletariat and on the archaic apartheid regime. FOSATU made use of its “genius” for organising, to the point of being simultaneously heard by both the exploited and the exploiter in order to astutely “manage” the conflicts between the two antagonists – which meant, in the final analysis, serving the bourgeoisie. Similarly, it played the role of “facilitator” in the “peaceful transition” between the “white power” and the “black power” resulting in the establishment of a “national unity” government.

Birth and characteristics of FOSATU: Founded in 1979, it was the result of a trade union re-organisation following the disappearance or self-dissolution of the main former trade unions in the aftermath of the vigorous strike action of 1973, which shook the entire country.

This new union current gave birth to the most important unions in industry (except the mines): automobiles, metallurgy, chemicals, textiles, etc. The same year that FOSATU was founded, the South African state facilitated its role by deciding to grant the title of “employee”²¹ to all blacks including those in the Bantustans, followed soon after by African workers from neighbouring countries. This hugely promoted the unionisation of workers in all sectors of the country, amply benefiting FOSATU by allowing it to create its own “development project”:

*“In the early 1980s [this union movement] developed an original trade union project, based on a conception explicitly independent of the main political forces, formed from networks of intellectuals and students, themselves produced from a specific phase of the socio-economic evolution of the country; it corresponded to a real social and economic change in the country and accompanied the gradual transformation of the organisation of the labour market.”*²²

It was, therefore, in this context that this trade union movement was propelled by its desire to be both a “trade union left” and a “political left”, and that many of its leaders were influenced by Trotskyist and Stalinist ideology:

“Towards the end of the 1920s, militants adhering to Trotskyist critiques split from the Communist Party. Some of them were leaders of a broad movement in the 1940s called the Unity Movement. Furthermore, a renowned trade unionist in the thirties and forties, Max Gordon, was a Trotskyist.

“This current fragmented and greatly weakened in the late fifties. But there still existed in Cape Town, in the seventies, a strong presence of these groups, mainly among Coloured teachers.”

“(…) In interviews done in Cape Town in 1982 and 1983, we were able to verify that the leader of the municipal workers’ union, John Erentzen, had been a member of the Unity Movement. Marcel Golding, before entering the union leadership of

19. “L’Afrique du Sud: de l’apartheid au pouvoir de l’ANC”, Cercle Léon Trotsky <http://www.lutteouvriere.org/documents/archives/cercle-leon-trotsky/article/afrique-du-sud-de-l-apartheid-au-9666>.

20. See the articles in the *International Review* n° 154 and 155.

21. Under apartheid a South African black worker, even if they had worked for decades in the country, was not considered an “employee” because this term was reserved for “rights-holders”, that is essentially white workers (and to a lesser degree Mestizo and Indian workers).

22. Jacquin, Op. Cit.

18. Ibid.

the miners becoming one of its leaders, was part of a study group of Trotskyist orientation.”

“(…) Alec Elwin (First Secretary of FOSATU) said he was influenced initially by the French Althusser and Poulantzas. He mentioned the importance for people like him of the debate that existed in Britain in the seventies on the question of shop stewards, that is to say, workshop delegates and rank and file organisation. Another important factor for this generation of radical intellectuals was the contribution of a renewed Marxist analysis of apartheid (by people like Martin Legassick) regarding capitalist relations of production. Thus there gradually emerged an alternative theory to that of the Communist Party.”

From these quotes we can see clearly the role played historically²³ by the Trotskyist current or its “nebula” in the unions in general and in base unionism in particular. We have seen previously that the Trotskyist current was involved in the formation of new radical unions in the wake of the struggles of the 1970s. In this context it is worth noting a specific facet of the contribution of Trotskyism to the counter-revolution, namely “entryism”²⁴ into the social democratic parties (and trade unions); that is, joining (clandestinely) these bourgeois organisations supposedly to seize (in due course) their leadership (for the revolution). In fact, this practice is anti-proletarian and expresses a clear contempt for the working class in whose name its (hidden) practitioners claim to act.²⁵ Another consequence of this practice is that it is impossible to positively identify “entrists”, to know, even approximately, the number of FOSATU leaders who were under Trotskyist influence at one time or another during their stay in the South African Trade unions.

Here we can put forward the idea that the leaders of the “trade union left” embodied by FOSATU/COSATU were marked by various bourgeois ideological influences: ranging from Trotskyism to Social-Democracy through Stalinism, “Solidarnosc” trade unionism (Poland), the “Workers’ Party” of Lula (Brazil):

“In October 1983 the newspaper ‘FOSATU Work News’ published a double page centrefold article on Solidarity and Poland.

23. See in this regard the articles in *International Review*, no 154 and 155.

24. The infiltration of the left parties (SP/CP) was theorised by Trotsky in 1930. For more on this see the ICC pamphlet in French *Le trotskisme contre la classe ouvrière*.

25. It is certainly no accident that many of these grass roots leaders (including Marcel Golding) left unionism at the end of the apartheid regime to become rich businessmen and influential politicians (discussed in the next article).

*The thread is pretty similar to what the leaders of the FOSATU thought about the South African process: industrial growth, little improvement of the workers’ status, repression, control of demand, internal differentiation in the union and the evolution of the Walesa group ... And the article ends: ‘the struggle of Polish workers is an inspiration to all other workers in struggle’. (...) In 1985, issues 39 and 40 published a long article reporting on the Workers’ Party of Brazil (PT).”*²⁶

Here we can clearly see the similarities in the approach of unions like FOSATU and those of Walesa and Lula, especially in terms of their preparations to accede to the highest levels of the state.

Thus armed with its experience of politico-trade union manoeuvring in the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, FOSATU could openly put itself in the service of South African national capital by taking advantage of its “aura” to work for the constitution of a new trade unionism rid of the archaic apartheid trade union apparatus, making its hazy union doctrine prevail by relying essentially on the industrial workers, as indicated in the text of its first congress:

“The federation will essentially consist of unions of industrial branches to the extent that this is, within the framework of existing industrial structures, the best way to promote workers’ unity and the interests of workers, and as far as this is also the best way for it to concentrate on the areas of workers’ concerns. This, however, does not reflect support for current industrial relations.”

*“(…) The absence of racial divisions (non-racialism), workers’ control, trade union branches, grassroots organising, international workers’ solidarity, trade union unity.”*²⁷

If we situate FOSATU’s politico-union manoeuvring in the context of apartheid, we can understand the relative ease with which the Federation was able to attract a number of workers struggling or conscious of the need for unity in the struggle across ethnic boundaries. Besides its status as the first union in the industrial sector, it made particular use of its combative image in the eyes of many workers from the struggles in the 1970s-80s to earn their trust. With its well-organised apparatus of “fighting unionism” it entered into discussions with all the other unions which had retained an influence, with a view to federating them, although not without great difficulties, especially with those under control of the ANC/CP. It also had to contend with the

26. Jacquin, Op. Cit.

27. Ibid.

hostility or reluctance of other trade union movements before convincing or marginalising them, like the Union of Mineworkers (NUM) or some unions close to the “Black Consciousness” Movement.

FOSATU prepares to integrate itself into the political apparatus

At its origin in 1979, FOSATU consisted of three registered (legal) trade unions and nine unregistered unions,²⁸ which meant that the latter were dominant and their weight was reflected in the Federation’s ideological and strategic choices. This was until the moment when FOSATU decided to initiate a shift towards its institutional integration, that is to say, by becoming more and more involved in power, albeit remaining “radical”:

“The debate on registration took the form of a sharp polemic against the unions of FOSATU that were registered. The attack came from the GWU (pro-Black Consciousness) and, in a much more virulent way, from the SAAWU (pro-ANC). The arguments were roughly similar: loss of independence vis-à-vis the state and obstructing a true democratic functioning of the trade unions which had to comply with the constraints of official control, etc.”

“(…) Other debates were conducted during negotiations. And it was the shape of the future confederation which most troubled the FOSATU leadership. It was convinced that the model of FOSATU was best suited to its company union sections, its industrial branch unions, regional structures (inter-professional, in the terminology of French unionism), its grassroots democracy based on shop stewards, etc.”

*“(…) The leadership of FOSATU finally convinced the majority of its partners on these union issues. But it is important to note here that the unification process towards the foundation of COSATU was finally clarified when the SAAWU changed position, in our opinion, after the leaders in exile of the ANC and the Communist Party themselves decided to change their attitude. And also when the NUM, the mining union member of CUSA and by far its biggest affiliate, decided in December 1984 to break with its federation and participate fully in the launch of COSATU.”*²⁹

By integrating the mining union (NUM), FOSATU definitively imposed itself in the decisive sectors of the national

28. Under apartheid, registered unions were unions recognised by the state, while those not registered were tolerated up to certain limit but not recognised by law.

29. The NUM was created in 1982. It claimed 20,000 members in 1983 and 110,000 in 1984. Initially it was hostile to its state registration (Jacquin, Op. cit.).

economy and became from that moment the obligatory partner of the regime. It thus reinforced its control over the most combative sectors of the working class and took the initiative to successfully unite the main trade unions. This was a remarkable journey for FOSATU, which managed to bring together the major influential trade unions in a great confederation throughout the country, leading to the creation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

Once again, FOSATU showed its “political genius” and organisational expertise by evolving from a radical opposition of the left to a union alongside the great nationalist bureaucratic apparatus with the aim of acceding to bourgeois power; and this without any openly hostile working class reaction. It is notable that these “pimps” of the working class for the left bourgeois apparatus had to proceed methodically step by step. First: by opting for a left political and union “radicalism” to better seduce the combative workers; second: by unifying the union apparatus, and third: by promoting the constitution of a broad trade union and political front in order to “wisely” govern the post-apartheid country.

Of course, in its quest for trade union and political unity, COSATU could not integrate two currents close to the “Black Consciousness” movement and the PAC. Both of them preferred to remain in opposition with their own unitary federation, the National Council of Trade Unions (NACU). There were also other small white or corporatist unions. However, they had no decisive influence on the organisation of struggles compared to COSATU.

It is through this that the ex-FOSATU leaders would continue to pursue their “trade union mission”, to the point that many are now playing their role of managers in charge of South African capital, as ministers or big business owners.

Control of the struggle committees (civics) at stake in the bitter struggles of the union/political apparatus

By becoming widespread and taking over the whole of social life in the main districts of the industrial cities over a period of time (generally between 1976 and 1985), the civics eventually became the central prize for all the organs of power in South Africa and the struggle for control over them provoked bitter clashes between union/political gangsters:

“One of the major problems facing the new union movement was the development of another form of or-

ganisation of the black population, the civics, or community associations. This term was often used to group all associative forms emerging in the townships.

“Considerable work remains to be done on these movements because they have not received the same attention as the trade unions on the part of researchers.

“(…) It seems that the development of the civics started mainly in the Cape under the impact of two competing political currents at the time in this region: one of the independent political left (nebulous political heir to the “Unity Movement”) and the other related to or influenced by the ANC. Networks of associations were divided according to political sympathies. Thus, in the Cape, militants of the Unity Movement formed with the associations they controlled the Federation of Cape Civic Associations and militants of the ANC and the Communist Party formed their own Cape Area Housing Action Committee (CAHAC). This cartelisation then developed at the national level with, in addition, the activity of the Azapo party (heir to the Black Consciousness Movement) and of militants and supporters of the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). In the mid-eighties the majority of the political currents appeared publicly under the banner of the groupings of the civics they controlled”.³⁰

We can only share the opinion of the author of the quote that the “civics” have not received the same attention from researchers as the unions and that much work remains to be done on these movements. This being said, the other major point to emphasise is the relentlessness with which the union and political vultures attempted to neutralise the organisations resulting from the insurrectionary struggles of Soweto. In order to catch up with the movement they had not initiated, all these bourgeois forces proceeded by infiltration and sordid maneuvers to sabotage the various committees under the name of “CIVICS” and finally managed to control them and use them as instruments in their struggle for influence in order to gain power. In 1983, we saw a series of demonstrations and strikes mobilising more and more people, especially in Soweto but also in other regions. This was the moment chosen by the ANC to intensify its control over the social movements by creating an organisation called the “United Democratic Front”, a kind of “forum” or simple “net” in which Mandela’s party managed to catch many of the “CIVICS”. And the ANC’s rivals were not slow to respond by chasing the same autonomous groups, accompanied by criminal violence on both sides:

“(…) More and more violent polemics developed at the rhythm of major social conflicts: a general strike, a local or regional stay-away, or even a boycott of white-owned businesses, indiscriminately aimed at factory employees and the population of the townships; and in these areas, such as Port Elizabeth or East London, where at least 50% of the unemployed were already at that time, it was not possible to organise movements of this magnitude without relying on the complementarity of the civics and the trade unions. Each party obviously had such a unitary conviction. But the political stakes were such that each sought to exert hegemonic pressure on the other. There were all sorts of conflicts including between associations controlled by AZAPO (the People’s Organisation of Azania) and certain unions.

“(…) Examples abound of cases of physical violence. FOSATU leaders complained that, because there was no real centralisation, groups of young people linked to the civics sometimes attacked workers carrying out their normal work. Bus drivers could be attacked or even killed by young people who did not understand or simply ignored the trade union opposition to this or that appeal.”³¹

In short, this is how the “civics” were scuttled by the various trade union, nationalist and democratic forces vying for control. In other words, we see that the ANC and its rivals did not hesitate to train many young people to kill each other or to attack and kill active workers like bus drivers. And this for the greater good of the common enemy, namely the national capital. Certainly, the ANC reached the pinnacle of crimes committed against the youth of Soweto for having enlisted a large number of former civic members into an imperialist camp and sending them to the slaughter for so-called “national liberation” (see previous section).

The strikes return in the midst of an economic recession

In 1982/83, strikes broke out in many areas against government austerity measures, particularly in the mines and automobile industry, mobilising tens of thousands of workers and seriously hitting the factories of General Motors, Ford, Volkswagen, etc. Like many other countries at this time, South Africa was hit by the economic crisis that plunged it deep into recession.

“The recession that opened in 1981-82 was marked by a shortness of breath of the whole system including at the institutional level. Between 1980 and 1985, corporate

30. Jacquin, Op. Cit.

31. Ibid.

bankruptcies rose by 500%. The interest rate went from 9.5% to 17% in 1981; it reached 18% in 1982 and 25% in August 1985. In 1982, the country still enjoyed a net inflow of 662 million rand; in 1983, it had a deficit of 93 million rand. The rand which was worth \$1.09 in 1982 was worth less than \$ 0.37 at the end of 1985. The total of investments went from 2.346 million rand in 1981 to 1.408 in 1984. That same year, the external debt reached \$24.8 billion, including 13 billion short term. The volume of manufacturing output fell, labour costs increased, unemployment grew, the volume of exports decreased.”³²

“Faced with the scale of the recession, the South African government had to take drastic measures against the living conditions of the working class - mass lay-offs and wage cuts, etc. For its part, despite its enormous weakening resulting mainly from the struggles for control waged by the ANC and rival cliques, the working class could not remain arms crossed and therefore had to go into struggle, showing once again that its combativeness remained intact. In this respect, as an illustrative example, one can take the year 1982 when most of the conflicts concerned wage claims (170), followed by problems of lay-offs and downsizing (56), whereas conflicts for trade union recognition resulted in only 12 strikes. This last aspect is important because it means that the workers clearly did not feel the need to unionise to enter into struggle”.

In the period 1982-83 South Africa was marked by an uninterrupted growth of strikes. In this context, once again the anti-working class role of radical trade unionism was notable:

“It was the unions of FOSATU which were responsible for the most strikes, including those in metalworking and automobiles. It was therefore in the regions where these industries were particularly present which recorded the most conflicts. The Eastern Cape region, notably the cities of Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, experienced the highest strike rates: 55,150 strikers in 1982, of whom 51,740 were in the automobile industry. It was in the East Rand that there were the most movements in metalworking: 40 with a total of 13,884 strikers. These figures can be compared with 30,773 strikers throughout the Johannesburg region, all sectors combined (...) Such comparisons allow us to measure, at this time, the relative weight of FOSATU in the whole independent trade union movement...”³³

Even when corralled, the working class remained combative and struggled on a

class terrain by refusing to submit without responding to the economic attacks of the bourgeoisie. Of course, it was clearly noticeable that the workers in struggle were strongly under the control of unionism, particularly base unionism, which took the lead in the movement in order to take control of it, eventually scuttling the strikes before they compromised the interests of South African national capital. In this sense, it is remarkable that during the strike movements in 1982, no role was assigned to the “civics”, on the contrary everything was the work of the trade unions, in particular of FOSATU, which could rely on its radicalised base organisations to ensure the supremacy of its version of militancy, and deter any attempt at autonomous organisation outside the apparatus constituted as the negotiator with the state.

In 1984-85, important strikes broke out in the Transvaal/Port Elizabeth, mobilising tens of thousands of workers and involving the population by combining multiple demands (wages, education, housing, right to vote, etc.). In parallel to the miners' strikes and those of other employees, businesses owned by whites and public transport were actively boycotted, and thousands of young people refused to serve in the military.

Faced with the protest movements, the South African regime responded by offering a “small carrot” in one hand and a “big stick” in the other. It decided, on the one hand, to grant citizens of colour (Indians and Coloureds) and blacks the right to elect their own MPs or municipal representatives from their communities. On the other hand, its only response to demands for higher wages and better living conditions from the protesters was the declaration of a state of emergency, and it used the opportunity to go after the strikers it accused of conducting “political strikes” to help justify a barbaric repression that led to the dismissal of 20,000 miners, the murder of a large number of workers and the imprisonment of thousands of others.

1986-90, strikes against the backdrop of political manoeuvring within the bourgeoisie

Between 1982 and 1987 the country experienced an uninterrupted growth of strikes, protests and deadly clashes with the forces of order:

“On 9 August 1987, the NUM unleashed a strike in the mines. 95% of the unions consulted by law voted in favour of the strike. This affected all the mines where the NUM was implanted, 28 gold mines and 18 coal mines. The conflict was by far the longest strike in the South African mines, lasting 21 days (the 1946 conflict

lasted 5 days) and representing 5.25 million days lost. (...) The NUM threw all its strength into this battle which was its biggest challenge since its creation in 1982. It demanded a 30% wage increase, a risk premium, 5 years' salary given to families of miners killed in accidents instead of two years', 30 days paid leave and June 16, the anniversary of the uprisings in Soweto, designated as a paid holiday.

“Mining companies lost 17 million rand in this conflict but yielded on almost nothing. The coordination of the Chamber of Mines proved effective. Their leaders remained extremely firm, led by those of Anglo-America.”³⁴

Once again the working class demonstrated its will to fight, even if this was clearly not enough to force back the bourgeoisie, which refused to yield on the main demands of the strikers. Moreover, employers and the state knew they could count on the unions to keep control of the workers, that the unions might have been “radical” but were very “responsible” when it came to protecting the interests of the national capital. Yet despite this, the working class refused to give up, returning to the fight massively in the following year (1988), when there were almost 3 million workers on strike, from 6 to 8 June.

But at the political level, the most significant event of this period took place in 1986. This was the year that saw the real political change that marked the end of the apartheid regime, embodied chiefly by the Afrikaners who had made it their mode of government. After definitively settling the “union question” by integrating the main unions into the bosom of the state (cf. the case of FOSATU/COSATU), those in power decided to implement the policy of constitutional reform. In this context, meetings were held (in secret) between the white South African leaders³⁵ and ANC officials, including Mandela who, from prison, between 1986 and 1990 regularly received emissaries of the Afrikaner government with a view to the reconstruction of the country on a new non-racial basis and in accordance with the interests of the national capital. The negotiations between the African nationalists and the South African government continued until 1990, the year of Mandela's release and the end

34. This company, whose boss (Oppenheimer) was one of the biggest supporters of the unionisation of Africans, was particularly fierce when faced with the demands of employees, unionised or not (Jacquin, Op. Cit.).

35. A delegation of South African employers went to Zambia in 1986 to meet with the ANC leadership. An exchange of correspondence developed from 1986-90 between Mandela and Botha, head of state of South Africa, then with De Klerk who succeeded him in 1989. This all led to the release of the ANC leader in 1990, which announced the end of apartheid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

of apartheid, the lifting of the ban on the South African CP and ANC. It goes without saying that the international context had something to do with this.

On the one hand, the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the sudden and brutal collapse of the main ally of the ANC/CP, the Soviet bloc, and a loss of prestige for the "Soviet model" that the ANC had adopted up until then; this forced the ANC to reconsider its previous "anti-imperialist" stance. On the other hand, the disappearance of the Soviet bloc meant that the prospect of the ANC's arrival in power was no longer a threat, on the imperialist level, for the pro-Western South African bourgeoisie. And this sheds light on the announcement by the South African president, Frederik de Klerk, in February 1990, before Parliament, of his decision to legalise the ANC, the CP and all the banned organisations, in a perspective of global negotiation. The following are the reasons for his decision:

"The current dynamic in international politics has also created new opportunities for South Africa. Significant progress has been made, among other things, in our external contacts, particularly where there were previously limitations of an ideological order. (...) the collapse of the economic system in Eastern Europe is also a signal (...) Those who seek to impose on South Africa such a bankrupt system should engage in a full revision of their point of view."

And indeed, "those who sought to impose on South Africa such a bankrupt system" (the coalition that governs South Africa today) then decided to engage in a full revision of their point of view by entering definitively into the ranks of the managers of the national capital, starting with COSATU:

"In early 1990 the debate on the working charter in COSATU finally turns to the development of a set of basic rights (...) accompanying the constitutional proposals of the ANC. It is no longer a question of a "political programme" (...);

- *In 1990, nationalist figures of NUMSA (unions affiliated to COSATU) join the Communist Party. Among others, Moses Mayekiso is elected member of the provisional leadership of the newly legal party;*
- *In July 1991 the fourth congress of COSATU confirms an alliance between the union of the miners (NUM) and that of the automobile-metalworkers (NUMSA). They together account for 2,000 delegates of the 2,500 present;*

(...) One of the resolutions adopted at the union congress says: 'We are in favour of

*training our members and encouraging them to join the ANC and the Communist Party'."*³⁶

From then on, the whole of the South African bourgeoisie was united in a new so-called "democratic" era and of course the whole population, including the working class, was invited to unite behind the new leaders in the construction of the democratic multiracial state, and the "party" could begin...

*"Co-option has only just begun, but already there is not a single big company that is not looking for a certain number of ANC managers to integrate into its leadership. A veritable 'Mandela generation' has been absorbed into public or private structures quickly losing their fidelity to the old doctrines. The call for 'civil society' has become the keystone of all discourse in order to bridge the gap between the still strong social movement and the arrangements at the top. But for those who remember the political themes of the eighties there is no doubt that the terminological shift is not a mere form."*³⁷

Ultimately, by virtue of its bourgeois class nature, the political-trade union left could absolutely not go against the capitalist system, despite its ultra-radical and anti-capitalist, workers' verbiage allegedly for the "defence of the working class". In the end, the trade union left proved to be a simple and formidable pimp for the left of the capital. But its main contribution was undoubtedly the fact of having succeeded in knowingly constructing the "democratic/national unity" trap in which the bourgeoisie was able to imprison the working class. Moreover, taking advantage of this climate of "democratic euphoria", largely as a result of the liberation of Mandela and company in 1990, the central power could rely on its "new union wall" consisting of COSATU and its "left wing" to systematically divert the struggle movements into demands for "democracy", "civil rights", "racial equality", etc. And this even when workers went on strike for wage demands or seeking to improve their living conditions. Indeed, between 1990 and 1993, when a transitional government of "national unity" was formed, strikes and demonstrations became scarce or had no effect on the new government. The poison of democratic illusions was compounded by a terrible tragedy in the black working class when, in 1990, the troops of Mandela and those of the Zulu chief Buthelezi clashed militarily for the control of the populations of the townships. This conflict lasted four years and caused more than 14,000 deaths and massive destruction of workers' dwellings. For revolutionary marxists this bloody strug-

gle between the black nationalist cliques merely confirmed once more the bourgeois (and backward) nature of these gangsters, who thus expressed their readiness to comply with the state's orders to prove their ability to manage the best interests of South African capital. Besides, this was the central objective of the bourgeoisie's project when it decided the process which led to the dismantling of apartheid and to the "national reconciliation" of all the bourgeois factions that had been killing each other under apartheid.

This project would be implemented faithfully by Mandela and the ANC between 1994 and 2014, including the massacre of workers resisting their exploitation and repression.

Lassou

36. Jacquin, Op. Cit.

37. Ibid.

Publications of the ICC

Cheques or money orders in **sterling** should be made out to "International Review" and sent to **London**.

Cheques or money orders in **dollars** should be made out to "Internationalism" and sent to **New York**.

ICC Publication

Unions against the working class
International Communist Current
Pamphlet N°1



Why trade unions can no longer be used as the organisational form for working class struggle. How the unions consistently sabotage independent class action.

Subscriptions	POSTAL ZONES			
	A	B	C	D
World Revolution	£10.00	£13.00/\$18.00	£13.00/\$18.00	
International Review	£12.00	£12.00/\$17.50	£15.00/\$22.50	
Internationalism	£5.50	£5.50/\$9.25	£5.50/\$9.25	\$6.50
Airmail postage supplement (WR)			£6.00/\$8.00	\$8.00
COMBINED SUBSCRIPTIONS				
WR/International Review	£22.00	£21.00/\$33.50	£28.00/\$40.50	\$40.50
Internationalism/Int. Review		£15.00/\$24.00	£16.00/\$25.50	\$31.50
Inter/Int Rev/WR	£27.50	£26.00/\$41.50	£33.50/\$49.00	\$47.00
Airmail postage supplement (WR)			£6.00/\$8.00	\$8.00
SUBSCRIBER/DISTRIBUTORS			Postal Zones	
World Revolution	£32.50 (6 months)		A) United Kingdom B) Europe (Air Mail) C) Outside Europe D) USA/Canada (orders to New York only)	
International Review	£20.00 (6 months)			
SUBSCRIBER/DISTRIBUTORS receive 5 copies of each publication per month, by air mail outside the UK.				

ICC Pamphlets	PRICES		POSTAGE		
	£	\$	A/B	C	D
The Italian Communist Left	10.00	9.00	£2.00	£8.00	\$2.00
The Dutch and German Communist Lefts	14.95	21.00	postage/packing included		
Unions against the working class	1.25	2.00	£0.30	£0.75	\$1.75
Nation or Class	1.25	2.00	£0.30	£0.75	\$1.75
Platform of the ICC	0.50	1.00	£0.30	£0.60	\$1.75
The Decadence of Capitalism	3.00	4.50	£0.30	£1.20	\$2.50
Russia 1917: Start of the World Revolution	1.00	1.50	£0.30	£1.00	\$2.00
Communist Organisations and Class Consciousness	1.75	2.50	£0.50	£1.40	\$2.00
The Period of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism	2.00	3.00	£0.50	£1.80	\$2.00
2nd Conference of Groups of the Communist Left, Vol I	1.50	2.25	£0.50	£2.10	\$4.50
2nd Conference of Groups of the Communist Left, Vol II	1.50	2.25	£0.50	£2.30	\$4.50
<p>* Prices in dollars applicable only to orders from the USA/Canada. Prices can be obtained from INTERNATIONALISM, in New York. POSTAL ZONES A= United Kingdom B= Europe C= Outside Europe D= USA & Canada for orders placed in New- York</p>					

Previous issues of the International Review

International Review 154

Editorial

100 years after the First World War, the struggle for proletarian principles is as relevant as ever

World War I

1914: Why the Second International failed

2014 Extraordinary Conference of the ICC

News of our death is greatly exaggerated

Communism is on the agenda of history

**The war in Spain exposes anarchism's fatal flaws.
Part 2: Dissidents in the anarchist movement**

Contribution to a history of the working class
in South Africa

From the birth of capitalism to the eve of the Second World War

International Review 155

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 the history of the working class in
South Africa (II)

From the Second World War to the mid-1970s

International Review 156

21st Congress of the ICC

40 years after the foundation of the ICC

What balance sheet and perspectives for our activity?

Report on the role of the ICC as a "fraction"

The idea of the fraction in the history of the workers' movement

Resolution on the international situation

Report on the class struggle

International Review 157

Introduction to the Review

Brexit, Trump

**Setbacks for the ruling class,
nothing good for the proletariat**

On the question of populism

Conference of the ICC sections in Germany
Switzerland and Sweden

Report on the situation in Germany

100 years since the Dublin Easter Rising

**The national question 100 years after
the Easter Rising**

IRA: Soldiers of imperialism (1978)

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 masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally

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

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political

goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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

ICC postal addresses

Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:

Spain, France, Brazil

Mail Boxes 153, 108 rue Damremont
75018 Paris

Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador

Apartado Postal 15-024,
CP 02600,
Distrito Federal, Mexico.

Belgium, Holland

BP 94, 2600 Berchem, Belgium

Great Britain, Australia, United States

BM Box 869
London WC1 N3XX
Great Britain

India, Phillippines

POB 25, NIT, Faridabad, 121001,
Haryana, India

Italy

CP 469, 80100, Naples, Italy

Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey

Postfach 2124
CH-8021 Zurich, Switzerland