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International Review

Presenting the *Review*

Middle East

Capitalism is a growing threat to humanity

Fifty years since May 1968

Sinking into the economic crisis

**Report on imperialist tensions
(November 2017)**

**The world bourgeoisie
against the October revolution**

Belated response to a revolutionary anarchist

Emma Goldman and the Russian Revolution

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Presenting the *Review*

This issue of the *International Review* is dedicated to three main topics: the growing presence of war, notably in the Middle East, May '68 fifty years on, and the October revolution.

The articles on 1917/18 and 1968 commemorate these important moments in the life of our class one century and half a century ago respectively. They aim to answer the propaganda of the ruling class in the present period and its distortion of the history of the working class. At the same time we come back to these events because they are fundamental for understanding the current world situation and the huge difficulties we confront: the lack of confidence of the proletariat in its forces, the lack of a global perspective pointing towards a new society without exploitation and commodity exchange. Together with the articles on the spread of wars and increased barbarism, they form part of our attempt to analyse contemporary reality, the dangers we are facing and the obstacles in the way of a new revolutionary endeavour.

The first article, "Middle East: capitalism is a growing threat to humanity" is a concrete assessment of the changing situation in this area of permanent war over decades, in the framework of our analysis of imperialism and decomposition. The increased role of Russia in the region, which is "indeed engaging in a counter-offensive, a response to the threat of strangulation by the US and its allies" is a particularly important element in these changes.

The third article, the "Report on imperialist tensions (November 2017)", is part of a critical balance sheet of our analyses, in particular over the last 30 years, since the start of the period of decomposition. It gives a broader view of the evolution of imperialist tensions, both geographically and for the whole historic period. Although we were right to say, soon after the collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989-91, that the reconstitution of blocs was not on the agenda, the report rightly affirms that the "prediction [in 1991] that 'despite its enormous arsenals, the USSR will never again be able to play a major role on the international stage' and that it is 'condemned to return to a third-rate position' have not really been confirmed: Russia has certainly not become a world-wide

challenger to the USA but it plays a far from negligible role as a 'troublemaker', which is typical of decomposition (...) We undoubtedly underestimated the resources of an imperialism with its back to the wall, ready to defend its interests tooth and nail."

Both of the articles on the imperialist tensions highlight the growing difficulty of the United States and its present government to control the situation, and the steady rise of China on the world stage, as the major challenger to the US. This analysis also includes an examination of the tensions within the EU, focusing precisely on the orientation towards Russia.

The second article in this *Review*, "Fifty years ago, May 1968", starts with a presentation of different articles that have been published on our website or are planned to be written, and continues with the contribution "Sinking into the economic crisis" – the first of three articles that review the past 50 years in the light of our conclusions on the meaning of the events of May 68. This opening article is dedicated to the development of the economic crisis. In 1969 we said that the sources of prosperity and full employment during the previous 20 years were close to exhaustion ("Understanding May", *Révolution Internationale* n° 2, republished on our website). The prediction proved to be correct. In the 1970s the post-war Keynesian consensus was confronted with growing difficulties, expressed in mounting inflation and attacks on workers' living standards, in particular on wages, which had risen steadily during the period of post-war prosperity. The article shows as well the accuracy of the analysis in 1969 about the capacity of state capitalism "temporarily to attenuate the crisis' most striking expressions". In the following phase, under the banner of "neoliberalism", the state has tended to delegate many of its functions to the private sector, with the aim of increasing the economy's competitive edge and mobilising to the maximum all the available capital.

The fourth article, "The world bourgeoisie against the October revolution" is an answer to the lies that the bourgeois media spread over the events of 100 years ago. Why, every ten years, do they consistently denigrate one of the most precious

episodes in the history of the struggle of the proletariat? Because the bourgeoisie knows very well that the class that failed to overturn the capitalist system one hundred years ago still exists today – and so does the yet-to-be-accomplished promise of a better world. The article gives a detailed picture about the period after the victorious insurrection – the German ultimatum at Brest-Litovsk, the allied forces attacking the Soviet power from all sides, the economic strangulation – all of them combined succeeding in isolating the revolutionary bastion in Russia from the rest of the world proletariat.

The picture of this terrible period that facilitated the degeneration of the Bolshevik party and the revolution itself is completed by the last article in this *Review*, "Emma Goldman and the Russian Revolution – a belated answer to a revolutionary anarchist". Up until February 1918 Emma Goldman travelled around America defending the Bolsheviks as the embodiment of the practical spirit of the revolution, despite their commitment to Marxist theory. The article is focussed on Emma Goldman's experiences from 1920 onwards, when her observations on the concrete reality of the state are a very precise description of how it was growing more and more and tending to absorb everything inexorably. After witnessing the bloody crushing of the Kronstadt soviet by a Bolshevik party that had identified itself with the state machine, she fought vehemently against the idea that the end justifies the means, but at the same time fell into a superficial view which criticised what she called the "Jesuitism" of the Bolsheviks "from the beginning", which is totally contradicted by their real history. The contribution is not only a further attempt to retrace these crucial moments of revolutionary history without any fear of the truth, but also a continuation of our debate with internationalist anarchists on the lessons that the proletariat should draw from the tragedy.

The Editors, 5.6.18

Middle East

Capitalism is a growing threat to humanity

A few months ago, the world seemed to be taking a step towards a nuclear confrontation over North Korea, with Trump's threats of "fire and fury" and North Korea's Great Leader boasting of its capacity for massive retaliation. Today¹ the North and South Korean leaders are holding hands in public and promising us real steps towards peace; Trump will hold his face-to-face meeting with Kim Jong-un on 12th June in Singapore.

Only weeks ago, there was talk of World War Three breaking out over the war in Syria, this time with Trump warning Russia that his smart missiles were on their way in response to the chemical weapons attack in Douma. The missiles were launched, no Russian military units were hit, and it looked like we were back to the "normal", everyday forms of slaughter in Syria.

Then Trump stirred the pot again, announcing that the US would be pulling out of the "Bad Deal" Obama made with Iran over its nuclear weapons programme. This immediately created divisions between the US and other western powers who consider that the agreement with Iran was working, and who now face the threat of US sanctions if they continue to trade or cooperate with Iran. And in the Middle East itself, the impact was no less immediate: for the first time a salvo of missiles was launched against Israel by Iranian forces in Syria, not merely their local proxy Hezbollah. Israel – whose Prime Minister Netanyahu had not long before performed a song and dance about Iranian violations of the nuclear treaty – reacted with its habitual speed and ruthlessness, hitting a number of Iranian bases in southern Syria.

Meanwhile Trump's recent declaration of support for Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has inflamed the atmosphere on the occupied West Bank, particularly in Gaza, where Hamas has encouraged "martyrdom" protests and in one bloody day alone, Israel obliged by massacring more than 60 demonstrators (eight of them aged under 16) and wounding over 2,500 more who suffered injuries from live sniper and automatic fire, shrapnel from unknown sources and the inhalation of tear gas for the 'crime' of approaching border fences and, in some cases, of possession of rocks, slingshots and bottles of petrol attached to kites.

It's easy to succumb to panic in a world that looks increasingly out of control – and then to slip into complacency when our immediate fears are not realized or the killing fields slip down the news agendas. But in

order to understand the real dangers posed by the present system and its wars, it's necessary to step back, to consider where we are in the unfolding of events on a historical and world-wide scale.

In the *Junius Pamphlet*, written from prison in 1915, Rosa Luxemburg wrote that the world war signified that capitalist society was already sinking into barbarism. *"The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture, sporadically during a modern war, and forever, if the period of world wars that has just begun is allowed to take its damnable course to the last ultimate consequence"*.

Luxemburg's historical prediction was taken up by the Communist International formed in 1919: if the working class did not overthrow a capitalist system which had now entered its epoch of decay, the "Great War" would be followed by even greater, i.e. more destructive and barbaric wars, endangering the very survival of civilisation. And indeed this proved to be true: the defeat of the world revolutionary wave which broke out in reaction to the First World War opened the door to a second and even more nightmarish conflict. And at the end of six years of butchery, in which civilian populations were the first target, the unleashing of the atomic bomb by the USA against Japan gave material form to the danger that future wars would lead to the extermination of humanity.

For the next four decades, we lived under the menacing shadow of a third world war between the nuclear-armed blocs that dominated the planet. But although this threat came close to being carried out – as over the Cuba crisis in 1962 for example – the very existence of the US and Russian blocs imposed a kind of discipline over the natural tendency of capitalism to

operate as a war of each against all. This was one element that prevented local conflicts – which were usually proxy battles between the blocs – from spiralling out of control. Another element was the fact that, following the world-wide revival of class struggle after 1968, the bourgeoisie did not have the working class in its pocket and was not sure of being able to march it off to war.

In 1989-91, the Russian bloc collapsed faced with growing encirclement by the USA and inability of the model of state capitalism prevailing in the Russian bloc to adapt to the demands of the world economic crisis. The statesmen of the victorious US camp crowed that, with the "Soviet" enemy out of the way, we would enter a new era of prosperity and peace. For ourselves, as revolutionaries, we insisted that capitalism would remain no less imperialist, no less militarist, but that the drive to war inscribed in the system would simply take a more chaotic and unpredictable form.² And this too proved to be correct. And it is important to understand that this process, this plunge into military chaos, has worsened over the past three decades.

The rise of new challengers

In the first years of this new phase, the remaining superpower, aware that the demise of its Russian enemy would bring centrifugal tendencies in its own bloc, was still able to exert a certain discipline over its former allies. In the first Gulf War, for example, not only did its former subordinates (Britain, Germany, France, Japan, etc) join or support the US-led coalition against Saddam, it even had the backing of Gorbachev's USSR and the regime in Syria. Very soon however, the cracks started to show: the war in ex-Yugoslavia saw Britain, Germany and France taking up positions that often directly opposed the interests of the US, and a decade later, France, Germany and Russia openly opposed the US invasion of Iraq.

The "independence" of the USA's former western allies never reached the stage of constituting a new imperialist bloc in opposition to Washington. But over the

1. This article was written in mid May, prior to the meeting between Trump and Kim Jong-Un.

2. See in particular our orientation text "Militarism and decomposition" in *International Review* n° 64, 1991, <http://en.internationalism.org/node/3336>

last 20 or 30 years, we have seen the rise of a new power which poses a more direct challenge to the US: China, whose startling economic growth has been accompanied by a widening imperialist influence, not only in the Far East but across the Asian landmass towards the Middle East and into Africa. But China has shown the capacity to play the long game in pursuit of its imperialist ambitions—as shown in the patient construction of its “New Silk Road” to the west and its gradual build up of military bases in the South China Sea.

Even though at the moment the North-South Korean diplomatic initiatives and the announced US-North-Korean summit may leave the impression that “peace” and “disarmament” can be brokered, and that the threat of nuclear destruction can be thwarted by the “leaders coming to reason”, the imperialist tensions between the US and China will continue to dominate the rivalries in the region, and any future moves around Korea will be overshadowed by their antagonism.

Thus, the Chinese bourgeoisie has been engaged in a long-term and world-wide offensive, undermining not only the positions of the US but also of Russia and others in Central Asia and in the Far East; but at the same time, Russian interventions in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East have confronted the US with the dilemma of having to face up to two rivals on different levels and in different regions. Tensions between Russia and a number of western countries, above all the US and Britain, have increased in a very visible manner recently. Thus alongside the already unfolding rivalry between the US and its most serious global challenger China, the Russian counter-offensive has become an additional direct challenge to the authority of the US.

It is important to understand that Russia is indeed engaging in a *counter-offensive*, a response to the threat of strangulation by the US and its allies. The Putin regime, with its reliance on nationalist rhetoric and the military strength inherited from the “Soviet” era, was the product of a reaction not only against the asset-stripping economic policies of the west in the early years of the Russian Federation, but even more importantly against the continuation and even intensification of the encirclement of Russia begun during the Cold War. Russia was deprived of its former protective barrier to the west by the expansion of the EU and of NATO to the majority of eastern European states. In the ‘90s, with its brutal scorched-earth policy in Chechnya, it showed how it would react to any hint of independence inside the Federation itself. Since then it has extended this policy to Georgia (2008) and

Ukraine (2014 onwards)—states that were not part of the Federation but which risked becoming foci of western influence on its southern borders. In both cases, Moscow has used local separatist forces, as well as its own thinly-disguised military forces, to counter pro-western regimes.

These actions already sharpened tensions between Russia and the US, which responded by imposing economic sanctions on Russia, more or less supported by other western states despite their differences with the USA over Russian policy, generally based on their particular economic interests (this was especially true of Germany). But Russia’s subsequent intervention in Syria took these conflicts onto a new level.

The Middle East maelstrom

In fact, Russia has always backed the Assad regime in Syria with arms and advisers. Syria has long been its last outpost in the Middle East following the decline of the USSR’s influence in Libya, Egypt and elsewhere. The Syrian port of Tartus is absolutely vital to its strategic interests: it is its main outlet to the Mediterranean, and Russian imperialism has always insisted on maintaining its fleet there. But faced with the threat of the defeat of the Assad regime by rebel forces, and by the advance of ISIS forces towards Tartus, Russia took the major step of openly committing troops and warplanes in the service of the Assad regime, showing no hesitation in taking part in the daily devastation of rebel-held cities and neighbourhoods, which has added significantly to the civilian death toll.

But America also has its forces in Syria, ostensibly in response to the rise of ISIS. And the US has made no secret of backing the anti-Assad rebels—including the jihadist wing which served the expansion of ISIS. Thus the potential for a direct confrontation between Russian and US forces has been there for some time. The two US military responses to the regime’s probable use of chemical weapons have a more or less symbolic character, not least because the use of “conventional” weapons by the regime has killed far more civilians than the use of chlorine or other agents. There is strong evidence that the US military reined in Trump and made sure that great care would be taken to hit only regime facilities and not Russian troops.³

3. “US defence secretary James Mattis managed to restrain the president over the extent of airstrikes on Syria. (...) It was Jim Mattis who saved the day. The US defence secretary, Pentagon chief and retired Marine general has a reputation for toughness. His former nickname was ‘Mad Dog’. When push came to shove over Syria last week, it was Mattis—not the state department or Congress—who stood up to a Donald Trump baying for blood. Mattis told Trump, in effect, that the third world war was not going to

But this doesn’t mean that either the US or Russian governments can avoid more direct clashes between the two powers in the future—the forces working in favour of destabilisation and disorder are simply too deeply rooted, and they are revealing themselves with increasing virulence.

During both world wars, the Middle East was an important but still secondary theatre of conflict; its strategic importance has grown with the development of its immense oil reserves in the period after World War II. Between 1948 and 1973, the main arena for military confrontation was the succession of wars between Israel and the surrounding Arab states, but these wars tended to be short-lived and their outcomes largely benefited the US bloc. This was one expression of the “discipline” imposed on second and third rate powers by the bloc system. But even during this period there were signs of a more centrifugal tendency—most notably the long “civil war” in the Lebanon and the “Islamic revolution” which undermined the USA’s domination of Iran, precipitating the Iran-Iraq war (where the west mainly backed Saddam as a counter-weight to Iran).

The definitive end of the bloc system has profoundly accelerated these centrifugal forces, and the Syrian war has brought them to a head. Thus within or around Syria we can see a number of contradictory battles taking place:

- **Between Iran and Saudi Arabia:** often cloaked under the ideology of the Shia-Sunni split, Iranian backed Hezbollah militias from Lebanon have played a key role in shoring up the Assad regime, notably against jihadi militias supported by Saudi and Qatar (who have their own separate conflict). Iran has been the main beneficiary of the US invasion of Iraq, which has led to the virtual disintegration of the country and the imposition of a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad. Its imperialist ambitions have further been playing out in the war in Yemen,

start on his watch. Speaking as the airstrikes got under way early on Saturday, Mattis sounded more presidential than the president. The Assad regime, he said, had ‘again defied the norms of civilised people ... by using chemical weapons to murder women, children and other innocents. We and our allies find these atrocities inexcusable.’ Unlike Trump, who used a televised address to castigate Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin, in highly personal and emotive terms, Mattis kept his eye on the ball. The US was attacking Syria’s chemical weapons capabilities, he said, that this, nothing more or less, was what the air strikes were about. Mattis also had a more reassuring message for Moscow. ‘I want to emphasise that these strikes are directed at the Syrian regime ... We have gone to great lengths to avoid civilian and foreign casualties’ In other words, Russian troops and assets on the ground were not a target. Plus the strikes were a ‘one-off’, he added. No more would follow”. (Simon Tisdall, The Guardian 15th Apr 2018).

scene of a brutal proxy war between Iran and Saudi (the latter helped no end by British arms);⁴

- **Between Israel and Iran.** The recent Israeli air strikes against Iranian targets in Syria are in direct continuity with a series of raids aimed at degrading the forces of Hezbollah in that country. It seems that Israel continues to inform Russia in advance about these raids, and generally the latter turns a blind eye to them, although the Putin regime has now begun to criticise them more openly. But there is no guarantee that the conflict between Israel and Iran will not go beyond these controlled responses. Trump's "diplomatic vandalism"⁵ with regard to the Iranian nuclear deal is fueling both the Netanyahu government's aggressively anti-Iran posture and Iran's hostility to the "Zionist regime", which, it should not be forgotten, has long maintained its own nuclear weapons in defiance of international agreements.
- **Between Turkey and the Kurds** who have set up enclaves in northern Syria. Turkey covertly supported ISIS in the fight for Rojava, but has intervened directly against the Afrin enclave. The Kurdish forces, however, as the most reliable barrier to the spread of ISIS, have up to now been backed by the US, even if the latter might hesitate to use them to directly counter the military advances made by Turkish imperialism. In addition Turkish ambitions to once again play a leading role in the region and beyond have not only driven it into conflict with NATO and EU countries, but have reinforced Russian efforts to drive a wedge between NATO and Turkey, and to pull Turkey closer to Russia, despite Turkey's own long-standing rivalry with the Assad regime.
- This tableau of chaos is further enriched by the rise of numerous armed gangs which may form alliances with particular states but which are not necessarily subordinate to them. ISIS is the most obvious expression of this new tendency towards brigandage and warlordism, but by no means the only one.

The impact of political instability

We have seen how Trump's impetuous declarations have added to the general unpredictability of the situation in the Middle East. They are symptomatic of deep divi-

sions within the American bourgeoisie. The president is currently being investigated by the security apparatus for evidence of Russian involvement (via its well-developed cyber war techniques, financial irregularities, blackmail etc) in the Trump election campaign; and up till recently Trump made little secret of his admiration for Putin, possibly reflecting an option for allying with Russia as a counter-weight to the rise of China. But the antipathy towards Russia within the American bourgeoisie goes very deep and, whatever his personal motives (such as revenge or the desire to prove that he is no Russian stooge), Trump has also been obliged to talk tough and then walk the talk against the Russians. This instability at the very heart of the world's leading power is not a simple product of the unstable individual Trump; rather, Trump's accession to power is evidence of the rise of populism and the growing loss of control by the bourgeoisie over its own political apparatus - the directly political expressions of social decomposition. And such tendencies in the political machinery can only increase the development of instability on the imperialist level, where it is most dangerous.

In such a volatile context, it is impossible to rule out the danger of sudden acts of irrationality and self-destruction. The tendency towards a kind of suicidal insanity, which is certainly real, has not yet fully seized hold of the leading factions of the ruling class, who still understand that the unleashing of their nuclear arsenals runs the risk of destroying the capitalist system itself. And yet it would be foolish to rely on the good sense of the imperialist gangs that currently rule the planet - even now they are researching into ways in which nuclear weapons could be used to win a war.

As Luxemburg insisted in 1915, the only alternative to the destruction of culture by imperialism is "*the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism. Against its methods, against war. That is the dilemma of world history, its inevitable choice, whose scales are trembling in the balance awaiting the decision of the proletariat.*"

The present phase of capitalist decomposition, of spiralling imperialist chaos, is the price paid by humanity for the inability of the working class to realise the promise of 1968 and the ensuing wave of international class struggle: a conscious struggle for the socialist transformation of the world. Today the working class finds itself faced with the onward march of barbarism, taking the form of a multitude of imperialist conflicts, of social disintegration, and ecological devastation; and - in contrast to 1917-18,

when the workers' revolt put an end to the war - these forms of barbarism are much harder to oppose. They are certainly at their strongest in areas where the working class has little social weight - Syria being the most obvious example; but even in countries like Turkey, where the question of war faces a working class with a long tradition of struggle, there are few signs of direct resistance to the war effort. As for the working class in the central countries of capital, its struggles against what is now a more or less permanent economic crisis are currently at a very low ebb, and have no direct impact on the wars that, although geographically peripheral to Europe, are having a growing - and mainly negative - impact on social life, through the rise of terrorism and the cynical manipulation of the refugee question.⁶

But the class war is far from over. Here and there it shows signs of life: in the demonstrations and strikes in Iran, which showed a definite reaction against the state's militarist adventures; in the struggles in the education sector in the UK and the USA; in the growing discontent with government's austerity measures in France and Spain. This remains well below the level needed to respond to the decomposition of an entire social order, but the defensive struggle of the working class against the effects of the economic crisis remains the indispensable basis for a deeper questioning of the capitalist system.

Amos, 16.5.18

4. <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201712/14640/yemen-pivotal-war-fight-influence-middle-east>

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/09/europe-trump-wreck-iran-nuclear-deal-cancel-visit-sanctions>

6. For an assessment of the general state of the class struggle, see "22nd ICC Congress, resolution on the international class struggle", in *International Review* n° 159, <http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201711/14435/22nd-icc-congress-resolution-international-class-struggle>

Fifty years since May 1968

The events of spring 1968 in France, in their roots and in their results, had an international significance. Underlying them were the consequences for the working class of the first symptoms of the world economic crisis, which was reappearing after well over a decade of capitalist prosperity.

After decades of defeat, disorientation and submission, in May 1968 the working class returned to the scene of history. While the student agitation which had been developing in France since the beginning of spring, and the radical workers' struggles which had broken out the previous year, had already changed the social atmosphere, the entry en masse of the class struggle (10 million on strike) overturned the whole social landscape.

Very soon other national sectors of the working class would enter the struggle. After the huge strike of May 1968 in France, the struggles in Argentina (the Cordobazo),

the "Hot Autumn" in Italy and many other movements across the world provided proof that the world proletariat had left behind the period of counter-revolution. In contrast to the crisis of 1929, the one now emerging would not lead to world war but to the development of class battles that would prevent the ruling class from imposing its barbaric solution to the convulsions of its economy.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of this major event, we are publishing on our website a dossier made up of some of the main articles the ICC has written about it, in particular:

- "Understanding May" re-published from *Revolution Internationale* n° 2, 1969, which polemicalises in particular with the Situationists who at the time denied the return of the economic crisis as one of the causes for the upsurge of the movement;

- "May 68 and the revolutionary perspective" from *International Review* n° 133 ("The student movement around the world in the 1960s" and n° 134 ("The end of the counter-revolution and the historic return of the world proletariat"), which goes in detail into the events themselves and examines their historical importance.

We also begin the publication of a series of three articles aimed at drawing a balance sheet of the period since 1968, motivated by the concern to examine the extent to which the conclusions we have drawn about the meaning of May 1968 have been verified by history. The first article looks at the course followed by the aggravation of the economic crisis, and the following two will deal with the dynamic of the class struggle and the development of the revolutionary milieu.

Sinking into the economic crisis

In issue number two of *Révolution Internationale*, published in 1969, there is an article called "Understanding May" written by Marc Chirik, who had returned from over a decade of exile in Venezuela to take an active part in the "Events" of May 68 in France.

This article was a polemical response to the pamphlet *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* published by the Situationist International. While recognising that the SI had indeed played an active part in the movement of May-June, it punctured their almost unlimited pretentiousness and self-regard, which led them to the frankly substitutionist conclusion that "*the agitation unleashed in January 1968 by the four or five revolutionaries who were to constitute the enragés group was to lead, in five months, to the virtual liquidation of the state*". And that "*never has an agitation undertaken by so small a number led in so short a time to such consequences*".

The material basis of the proletarian revolution

But the principal focus *RI's* polemic was the underlying conceptions that provided the soil for this exaltation of "exemplary" minorities – their rejection of the material bases of the proletarian revolution. Indeed, Marc's article concludes that the voluntarism and substitutionism of the SI was a logical consequence of repudiating the marxist method which holds that massive and spontaneous actions by the working class are intimately connected to the objective situation of the capitalist economy.

Thus, against the SI's notion that the "revolutionary events" of May-June had broken out against a capitalism that was "functioning well", and that there had been "no tendency towards economic crisis" in the period leading up to the explosion, Marc demonstrated that the movement had been preceded by a growing threat of unemployment and by falling wages

– signs that the "glorious" prosperity of the post-war period was coming to an end. And these signs were not limited to France but expressed themselves in various forms across the "developed" world, notably in the devaluation of the pound sterling and the dollar crisis in the USA. He stressed that these were indeed only signs and symptoms, that "*this is not yet an open economic crisis, first because we are only at the beginning, and second because in today's capitalism the state possesses a whole arsenal of means to slow down, and temporarily to attenuate the crisis' most striking expressions*".

At the same time, while repudiating the anarchist (and Situationist) idea that revolution is possible at any time, the article also affirms that the economic crisis is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the revolution, that profound changes in the subjective consciousness of the masses are not automatically produced by the decline of the economy, contrary to the affirmation of the Stalinists in 1929, who declared the

opening of a “Third Period” of imminent revolution in the wake of the 1929 crash, when in reality the working class was experiencing the most profound defeat in its history (of which Stalinism was, of course, both a product and active factor).

May ‘68 was thus not yet the revolution, but it did signify that the counter-revolutionary period that followed the defeat of the first world wide revolutionary wave had come to an end. *“The full significance of May 68 is that it was one of the most important reactions by the mass of workers to a deteriorating world economic situation”*. The article does not go any further in examining the actual events of 68; that is not its purpose. But it does give some indications about the consequences of the end of the counter-revolution (a period which Marc had lived through from beginning to end) for the future unfolding of the class struggle. It meant that the new generation of the working class was freeing itself from many of the mystifications which had imprisoned it during the previous period, above all Stalinism and anti-fascism; and although the re-emerging crisis would push capitalism towards another world war, today, unlike in the 1930s, *“Capitalism disposes of fewer and fewer themes of mystification capable of mobilizing the masses and sending them to the slaughter. The Russian myth is collapsing; the false choice between bourgeois democracy and totalitarianism is wearing very thin. In these conditions, the crisis can be seen immediately for what it is. Its first symptoms will provoke increasingly violent reactions from the masses in every country”*.

Furthermore, as a series of articles written in 2008, “May 68 and the revolutionary perspective”, insisted, May ‘68 was more than a purely defensive reaction to a deteriorating economic situation. It also gave rise to an intense political ferment, to innumerable debates about the possibility of a new society, to serious attempts by young politicised elements - workers as well as students - to discover the revolutionary traditions of the past. This dimension of the movement was above all what revived the perspective of revolution, not as an immediate or short-term possibility, but as the historic product of a whole period of resurgent class struggle. The more immediate fruit of this new-found interest in revolutionary politics was the constitution of a new proletarian political milieu, including the groups that would form the ICC in the mid-70s.

The question we want to raise here, however, is whether, fifty years later, the predictions contained in Marc’s article have been proved correct or found wanting.

Fifty years of economic crisis

The majority of marxist currents in the first decades of the 20th century considered that the First World War marked the definitive shift from the era in which capitalist relations of production had been “forms of development” for the productive forces to becoming fetters on their further development. This was concretised, at the economic level, by the transformation of the cyclical crises of overproduction which had marked the 19th century to a chronic state of economic crisis accompanied by a permanent militarisation of the economy and a spiral of barbaric wars. This did not mean, as some of the marxists in the revolutionary period that followed the 1914-18 war thought, that capitalism had entered into a “death crisis” from which any kind of recovery would be impossible. Within an overall epoch of decline, there would still be recoveries, expansion into new zones previously outside the capitalist system, and real advances in the sophistication of the productive forces. But the underlying tendency would be one in which economic crisis was no longer a passing storm, but a permanent, chronic illness, which would at certain moments enter into an acute phase. This was already becoming clear with the crisis of the 30s: the idea that “leaving well alone”, relying on the hidden hand of the market, would naturally allow the economy to recover - the initial response of the more traditional bourgeois sectors - had to give way to a more openly interventionist policy by the state - typified by the New Deal in the US, and the Nazi war economy in Germany. And it was above all the latter which revealed, in a period of defeat for the working class, the real secret of the mechanisms which served to alleviate the acute crisis of the 1930s: preparation for a second imperialist war.

The return of the open crisis which our article proclaimed in 1969 was confirmed within the next few years, with the shock of the so-called “oil crisis” of 1973-4 and the growing difficulties of the post-war Keynesian consensus, which expressed itself in mounting inflation and attacks on workers’ living standards, particular the wage levels which had risen steadily during the period of post-war prosperity. But, as we showed in our article “30 years of the open economic crisis” written in 1999, the tendency towards the open crisis becoming a permanent feature of decadent capitalism has become more evident in the entire period since 1968: today we are due an article on “50 years of the open economic crisis”. Our 1999 article traces the course of the crisis through the explosion of unemployment which followed the application of “Thatcherism” and “Rea-

ganomics” in the early ‘80s; the financial crash of 1987; the recession of the early ‘90s; the convulsions in the Far Eastern “Dragons and Tigers”, Russia and Brazil in 1997-8. An updated version would include further recession at the turn of millennium and of course the so-called financial crash or credit crunch of 2007. The 1999 article underlines the principal features of the crisis-ridden economy in these decades: the untrammelled growth of speculation, as investment in productive activities become increasingly unprofitable; the de-industrialisation of whole areas of the old capitalist centres as capital was drawn to the sources of cheaper labour power in the “developing” countries; and, underlying a large part both of the growth and the financial shocks of this whole period, capital’s incurable addiction to debt. And it shows that the crisis of capitalism is not only measured in unemployment figures or rates of growth, but in its social, political and military ramifications. Thus it was the world economic crisis of capitalism which was a decisive factor in the collapse of the eastern bloc in 1989-91, in the sharpening of imperialist tensions and the exacerbation of war and chaos, above all in the weakest zones of the global system. In our putative update we would also seek to show the link between the increased competition demanded by the crisis and the accelerating plunder of the natural environment, the consequences of which (pollution, climate change etc) are already having a direct impact on human populations throughout the world. In brief: the prolonged character of capitalism’s open crisis in the last five decades, with the two major classes caught in a social stalemate, neither able to impose their respective solutions to the crisis - world war or world revolution - underlies the emergence of a new and terminal phase in the decadence of capitalism, the phase of generalised decomposition.

Of course, the trajectory of this period has not shown one long decline or even a permanent state of stagnation, and the ruling class has always made maximum propaganda use out of the various recoveries and mini-booms that have taken place in the advanced countries in the 80s, 90s and 2000s, while for many of its mouthpieces the impressive rise of the Chinese economy in particular is proof positive that capitalism is far from being a senile system. But the fragile, limited and temporary bases of these recoveries in the established centres of the system was cast under a very bright light by the enormous financial crash of 2007, which exposed the degree to which capitalist growth was founded on the shifting sands of unlimited debt. This phenomenon is also an element in the rise of China, even if the latter’s growth has a more

substantial basis than the “vampire recoveries”, the “recoveries without jobs” and the “recoveries without wage rises” which we have seen in the western economies. But in the final analysis China cannot escape the contradictions of the global system and indeed the dizzying scale of its expansion has the potential to make future world crises of overproduction even more destructive. Looking back over the past five decades, it becomes evident that we are not talking about a cycle of boom and bust as in the 19th century, when capitalism really was a system in its prime, but a single, protracted, world-wide economic crisis, itself the expression of an underlying obsolescence of the mode of production. The 1969 article, armed with this understanding of the historic nature of the capitalist crisis, was thus able to diagnose the real significance of the small signs of economic ill-health that were so easily dismissed by the Situationist doctors.

The development of state capitalism

Looking back in this way we can also appreciate the correctness of the article's assertion that “*in today's capitalism the state possesses a whole arsenal of means to slow down, and temporarily to attenuate the crisis' most striking expressions*”.

The main reason why this crisis has dragged on for so long, and has so often been so difficult to perceive, is precisely the capacity of the ruling class to use the state to hold off and postpone the effects of the system's contradictions. The ruling class from the 60s onwards did not make the same mistake as the apologists for “laissez-faire” in the 1930s. Instead, an older and wiser bourgeoisie maintained and strengthened the state capitalist interference in the economy which had enabled it to respond to the crisis in the 30s and which helped to sustain the post-war boom. This was evident with the first Keynesian responses to the reawakened crisis, which often took the form of nationalisations and direct financial manipulations by the state, but, ideological fog notwithstanding, it has continued, albeit in an altered form, throughout the epoch of “Reaganomics” and “neo-liberalism”, in which the state has tended to delegate many of its functions to private sectors with the aim of increasing productivity and the competitive edge.

The 1999 article explains how this revised relationship between state and economy operated:

“The mechanism of ‘financial engineering’ was as follows. On the one hand, the state issued bonds and securities in order to finance its enormous and ever-growing

deficits which were subscribed to by the financial markets (banks, business and individuals). On the other hand, it pushed the banks to search for loans in the financial markets, and at the same time to issue bonds and securities and to carry out successive expansions of capital (issuing of shares). It was a question of a highly speculative mechanism which tried to exploit the development of a growing mass of fictitious capital (idle surplus value incapable of being invested in new capital). In this way, the weight of private funds became more important than public funds in the financing of debt (public and private).

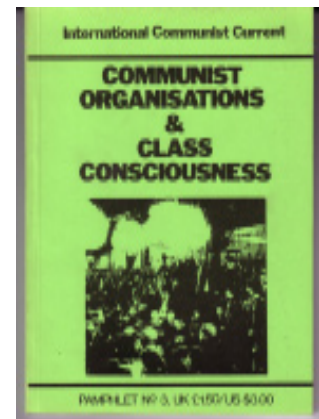
This does not mean that there was a lessening of the weight of the state (as the ‘liberals’ proclaim), but rather there was a reply to the increasing needs of financing (and particularly immediate liquidity) which meant a massive mobilisation of all the available disposable capital.”

The credit crunch of 2007 is perhaps the clearest demonstration that the most ubiquitous cure adopted by the capitalist system in the last few decades – the resort to debt – has also poisoned the patient, postponing the immediate impact of the crisis only to raise future convulsions to an even higher level. But it also shows that, in the final analysis, this cure has been the systematic policy of the capitalist state. The credit bonanza which fuelled the housing boom prior to 2007, so often blamed on the greedy bankers, was in reality a policy decided and supported at the highest echelons of government, just as it was government which had to step in to shore up the banks and the whole tottering financial edifice in the wake of the crash. The fact that they have done this by getting even further into debt, and even by unashamedly printing money (“quantitative easing”) is further evidence that capitalism can only react to its contradictions by making them worse.

It is one thing to show that we were right to predict the reappearance of the open economic crisis in 1969, and to offer a framework to explain why this crisis would be long drawn out affair. It is a more difficult task to show that our prediction of a resurgence of the international class struggle has also been vindicated. We will therefore devote a second part of this article to this problem, while a third part will look at what has become of the new revolutionary movement which was born out of the events of May-June 1968.

Amos, March 2018

ICC Publications



How does class consciousness develop and what is the role of communist organisations in this process?

Why is the consciousness of the class that will make the communist revolution different from that of other revolutionary classes in history?

What are the implications for the revolutionary process?

Report on imperialist tensions

(November 2017)

The report we publish below was presented and discussed at an international meeting of the ICC in November 2017, with the aim of drawing out the main tendencies in the evolution of imperialist tensions. In order to do this, it based itself on the organisation's previous texts and reports which had made an in-depth analyses of these tendencies, i.e. the orientation text "Militarism and Decomposition" in 1991 (published in *International Review* n° 64) and the report to the 20th International Congress (published in *International Review* n° 152, 2013).

Since the latter report was written, there have been two major events in the aggravation of imperialist tensions in the Middle East: first, the direct military incursion by Turkey in Syria on 20 January, to confront the Kurdish troops based in the region of Afrin in the north of Syria. This intervention, which had at least the tacit agreement of Russia, is heavy with future military confrontations, in particular with the USA, which in this region is allied with the Kurdish forces of the YPG, and expresses important divisions within NATO, of which both Turkey and the USA are members. More recently there was the US military strike in Syria (supported by Britain and France), aimed at the presumed sites for the construction of chemical weapons. It highlights the risk of an uncontrolled escalation of conflicts in the region (as we show in our article "Syria: capitalism is a growing threat to humanity"), given that we are seeing a growth in direct tensions between the USA and Russia in a context where tensions and conflicts between different countries are proliferating in a region already hit hard by massacres of all kinds (intensive bombing by Russians, Syrians, Americans and their French, British and other allies, the exactions of the Islamic State, etc) and by the massive displacement of populations.

Over the last four years, imperialist relations have gone through some major developments: the war in Syria and the fight against IS, the Russian intervention in the Ukraine, the refugee crisis and the terrorist attacks in Europe, Brexit and the pressure of populism, the election of Trump in the USA and the accusations about Russia's involvement in his election campaign ("Russiagate"), the tensions between the US and China over the provocations by North Korea, the opposition between Saudi Arabia and Iran (including the tensions over Qatar), the failed coup d'Etat against Erdogan and the subsequent repression in Turkey, the conflict over Kurdish autonomy, the upsurge of nationalism in Catalonia, and so on. It is thus important to evaluate the extent to which these events are consistent with our general analyses of the period, but also to ask what new orientations they reveal.

To do this, it's crucial, as the 1991 orientation text "Militarism and decomposition" puts it right from the start, to use a method that is adequate for understanding a situation which has no precedent:

"Contrary to the Bordigist current, the ICC has never considered marxism as an 'invariant doctrine', but as living thought enriched by each important historical event. Such events make it possible either to confirm a framework and analyses developed previously, and so to support them, or to highlight the fact that some have become out of date, and that an effort of reflection is required in order to widen the application of schemas which had previously been valid but which have been overtaken by events, or to work out new ones which are capable of encompassing the new reality.

Revolutionary organizations and militants have the specific and fundamental responsibility of carrying out this effort of reflection, always moving forward, as did our predecessors such as Lenin, Rosa, Bilan, the French Communist Left, etc, with both caution and boldness:

- basing ourselves always and firmly on the basic acquisitions of marxism,
- examining reality without blinkers, and developing our thought "without ostracism of any kind" (Bilan).

In particular, faced with such historic events, it is important that revolutionaries should be capable of distinguishing between those analyses which have been overtaken by events and those which still remain valid, in order to avoid a double trap: either succumbing to sclerosis, or 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'."

Applying this approach, which is imposed by current reality, has been the basis of our ability to analyse the fundamental evolution of imperialist relations for the past 26 years.

In this perspective, the present report proposes that we should try to grasp recent events at three levels, in order to locate their importance within our framework of analysis:

- To what extent are they in accord with the framework of analysis developed after the implosion of the eastern bloc? Here we will remind ourselves of the main analytical axes of the orientation text on "Militarism and Decomposition" (*International Review* n° 64, first quarter of 1991)
- To what extent do they follow the major trends of imperialist tensions on a world scale, described in the report of the 20th international congress (*International Review* n° 152, second quarter of 2013)?
- What are the most significant developments in imperialist tensions today?

The orientations of the 1991 orientation text

This text puts forward the analytical framework for understanding the question of imperialism and militarism in the period of decomposition. It advances two fundamental orientations for characterising imperialism in the current period:

The disappearance of the blocs does not call into question the reality of imperialism and militarism

On the contrary, they become more barbaric and chaotic: "The constitution of imperi-

alist blocs is not the origin of militarism and imperialism. The opposite is true: the formation of these blocs is only the extreme consequence (which at certain moments can aggravate the causes), an expression (and not the only one), of decadent capitalism's plunge into militarism and war...the end of the blocs only opens the door to a still more barbaric, aberrant, and chaotic form of imperialism".

This is expressed in particular by the outbreak of extreme imperialist appetites and the multiplication of tensions and conflicts: *"The difference with the period that has just ended is that these conflicts and antagonisms, which before were contained and used by the two great imperialist blocs; will now come to the forefront, because with the disappearance of the discipline imposed by the presence of the blocs, these conflicts risk becoming more violent and more numerous, in particular, of course, in zones where the proletariat is weakest."*

Similarly we are seeing the development of "every man for himself" and its corollary, the attempts to contain the chaos, both of which are factors aggravating military barbarism: *"the chaos which is threatening the major developed countries and their inter-relations. ...faced with the tendency towards generalized chaos which is specific to decomposition and which has been considerably accelerated by the Eastern bloc's collapse, capitalism has no other way out in its attempt to hold together its different components, than to impose the iron strait-jacket of military force. In this sense, the methods it uses to try to contain an increasingly bloody state of chaos are themselves a factor in the aggravation of the military barbarism into which capitalism is plunging".*

The orientation text thus centrally underlines the fact that there is a historic tendency towards every man for himself, towards the weakening of US control over the world, particularly over its former allies. And at the same time, there is an attempt on its part to use military force, where it has an enormous superiority, to maintain its status and impose its control over these same ex-allies.

The reconstitution of blocs is not on the agenda

The increasingly barbaric and chaotic character of imperialism in the period of decomposition is a major obstacle to the reconstitution of new blocs: *"the exacerbation of the latter (militarism and imperialism) in the present phase of capitalism's life paradoxically constitutes a major barrier to the re-formation of a new system of blocs taking the place of the one which has just*

disappeared.... the very fact that military force has become - as the Gulf conflict confirms - a preponderant factor in any attempt by the advanced countries to limit world chaos is a considerable barrier to this tendency...the reconstitution of a new pair of imperialist blocs is not only impossible for a number of years to come, but may very well never take place again".

The USA is the only power that can play the role of world cop. The only other possible candidates for the leadership of a bloc are Germany and Japan: *"the world appears as a vast free-for-all, where the tendency of 'every man for himself' will operate to the full, and where the alliances between states will be far from having the stability that characterized the imperialist blocs, but will be dominated by the immediate needs of the moment. A world of bloody chaos, where the American policeman will try to maintain a minimum of order by the increasingly massive and brutal use of military force".*

At the same time, the USSR will never be able to regain a role as challenger: *"It is, for example, out of the question that the head of the bloc which has just collapsed - the USSR - could ever reconquer this position".*

Here again the analysis remains essentially accurate: after 25 years in the period of decomposition, there is still no perspective for the reconstitution of blocs.

In conclusion, the framework and the two main axes presented in the orientation text have broadly been confirmed and remain profoundly valid.

However, further reflection is needed about certain elements of the analysis

The role of the USA as sole gendarme of the world has evolved a great deal over the past 25 years: it's one of the key questions to deepen in this report. However, the orientation text puts forward an orientation which has become even more concrete than the predictions we made in 1991: the fact that the actions of the USA would create further chaos. This has been strikingly illustrated by the development of terrorism today, which is to a large extent the result of the US policy in Iraq, and secondarily of the French-British intervention in Libya.

We can also say today that the analysis overestimated the potential role attributed to Japan and even Germany. Japan has been able to build up its weaponry and has gained more autonomy in certain sectors, but this is not at all comparable to the tendency towards the formation of blocs since Japan has had to submit to US protection faced with the threat from North Korea and above all from China. The potential still

exists for Germany without having been seriously strengthened over the last 25 years. Germany has gained more weight, it plays a preponderant and even leading role in Europe, but on the military level it remains a dwarf, even if (unlike Japan) it has had its troops participating in as many UN "mandates" as possible. By contrast, the period has seen the emergence of China as a new rising power, a role we considerably underestimated in the past.

Finally for Russia, the analysis remains basically correct, in the sense that its position as a bloc leader in 1945 was already an "accident" of history. But the prediction that *"despite its enormous arsenals, the USSR will never again be able to play a major role on the international stage"* and that it is *"condemned to return to a third-rate position"* have not really been confirmed: Russia has certainly not become a world-wide challenger to the USA but it plays a far from negligible role as a "troublemaker", which is typical of decomposition, which through its alliances and military interventions is exacerbating chaos all over the world (and it has had a certain success in Ukraine and Syria, has strengthened its position vis-a-vis Turkey and Iran and has developed a cooperation with China). We undoubtedly underestimated the resources of an imperialism with its back to the wall, ready to defend its interests tooth and nail.

The analyses of the report to the 20th ICC Congress (2013)

Locating itself in the framework of an increasingly barbaric and chaotic imperialism and of the growing impasse facing US policy, which could only further exacerbate military barbarism (axes of the report to the 19th congress), the report puts forward four orientations in the development of imperialist confrontations which concretise the axes of the '91 orientation text:

- **The growth of every man for himself**, expressed in particular by a multiplication of imperialist ambitions. This was expressed concretely by:

- 1) the danger of military confrontations and the growing instability of the states of the Middle East: unlike the first Gulf war of 91, which was stirred up by the US and waged by an international coalition under its leadership, this highlights the terrifying extension of chaos;
- 2) the rise of China and the exacerbation of tensions in the Far East. The report's analysis partially corrects the underestimation of the role of China in our previous analyses. However, despite an impressive economic expansion,

growing military power and a more and more marked presence in imperialist confrontations, the report asserts that China does not have the industrial and technological capacities to impose itself as the head of a bloc and constitute itself as a global challenger to the USA.

- **The growing impasse of the policies of the USA as a global cop**, in particular in Afghanistan and Iraq, has led to a further plunge into military barbarism: *"The striking failure of the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan has weakened the world leadership of the USA. Even if the American bourgeoisie under Obama has chosen a policy of controlled withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, and has been able to reduce the impact of the catastrophic policies of Bush, it has not been able to reverse the tendency and this has led to a further plunge into military barbarism. The execution of Bin-Laden was an attempt by the US to react to this retreat in its leadership and underline its absolute military and technological superiority. However, this reaction has not called into question the underlying trend towards retreat."*

- **The tendency towards the explosive extension of zones of permanent instability and chaos**: *"in whole swathes of the planet, from Afghanistan to Africa, to the point where certain bourgeois analysts, such as Jacques Attali in France, talk openly about the 'Somalisation' of the world."*

- **The crisis of the eurozone** (the PIGS – Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain) is accentuating tensions between European states and centrifugal tendencies in the EU: *"On the other hand, the crisis and the drastic measures being imposed are pushing towards the break-up of the EU and a rejection of the idea of submitting to the control of a particular country, i.e. are pushing towards every man for himself. The UK radically oppose the proposed measures of centralisation and in the countries of Southern Europe there is a growing anti-German nationalism. The centrifugal forces can also lead to a tendency towards the fragmentation of states, through the autonomisation of regions like Catalonia, Northern Italy, Flanders or Scotland... Thus the pressure of the crisis, through the complex inter-action of centripetal and centrifugal forces, is accentuating the process towards the break-up of the EU and exacerbating tensions between states".*

The four major orientations developed in the report also remain valid. They show clearly that the tension between on the one hand the push towards every man for himself and the efforts to control chaos, underlined by the '91 orientation text, are leading to an increasingly chaotic and explosive situation.

The general development of instability in imperialist relations

Since the 2013 report, events confirm the slide towards increasingly chaotic inter-imperialist relations. But above all, the situation is marked by its highly irrational and unpredictable character, linked to the impact of populist pressures, in particular the fact that the world's number one power is today led by a populist president whose reactions are extremely unpredictable. An increasingly short-term approach by the bourgeoisie and the strong unpredictability that results from it are above all features of the policy of the US gendarme, but can also be seen in the policies of other imperialist powers, the development of conflicts in the world, and the growth of tensions in Europe.

The decline of the US superpower and the political crisis in the American bourgeoisie

The arrival in power of Donald Trump, surfing on the populist wave, has had three main consequences:

The first concerns the unpredictability of the decisions and the incoherence of US foreign policy. The actions of this populist president and his administration, such as the denunciation of transpacific and transatlantic treaties, of the climate agreement, the putting into question of NATO and the nuclear treaty with Iran, unconditional support for Saudi Arabia, the bellicose set-to with North Korea or the tensions with China, are sapping the bases of international policies and agreements which had been defended by different US administrations. His unpredictable decisions, threats and poker moves have had the effect of undermining the reliability of the US as an ally: the detours, bluffs and sudden changes of position by Trump not only make the US look ridiculous but are leading to less and less countries having any confidence in the US.

At the same time, even if the American bourgeoisie under Obama, by opting for a policy of controlled retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan, was able to reduce the impact of Bush's disastrous policies, it hasn't been able to reverse the basic tendency towards the decline of the sole superpower, and the impasse of US policy has been sharply accentuated by the actions of the Trump administration. At the G20 the isolation of the USA on climate change and the trade war was obvious. What's more, Russia's involvement in Syria to save Assad made the US step back and led to a strengthening of Russia's influence in the Middle East, particularly in Turkey and Iran, whereas the US has not been able to contain China's

advance from outsider status in the 90s to that of a serious challenger which presents itself as a champion of globalisation.

The risk of destabilising the world situation and augmenting imperialist tensions has never been so strong, as we have seen with North Korea or Iran: the policy of the US is more than ever a direct factor in the aggravation of chaos on a global level.

The second consequence of Trump coming to power has been the opening of a major political crisis within the US bourgeoisie. The constant need to try to contain the unpredictable decisions of the president but above all the suspicions that Trump's electoral success was largely due to support from Russia ("Russiagate"), a prospect which is totally unacceptable for the US bourgeoisie, points to a particularly delicate political situation within the US bourgeoisie and a difficulty in controlling the political game.

The incessant battle to "contain" the president plays out at several levels: the pressure exerted by the Republican party (the failed votes on getting rid of Obamacare), opposition to Trump's plans by his own ministers (the minister of Justice Jeff Sessions refusing to resign or the ministers of foreign affairs and defence who "nuance" Trump's proposals), the struggle for control over the White House staff by the "generals" (McMaster, Mattis). And yet these efforts don't always stop things getting out of hand, such as in September when Trump made a deal with the Democrats to stymie Republican opposition to raising the debt ceiling.

Whatever the approach towards Russia (about which there can be divergences within the US bourgeoisie, as we shall see), the accusations that Russia was mixed up in the presidential election campaign and that Trump has ties to the Russian mafia are extremely serious, since this would mean that for the first time ever a US president has been elected with the support of the Russians, which is unacceptable for the interests of the US bourgeoisie. If the inquiries confirm the accusations, they can only lead to impeachment proceedings for Trump.

The final consequence of Trump coming to power is the development of tensions over the options for US imperialism. The question of links with Russia is also a focus for clan confrontations within the US bourgeoisie. Since the main challenger today is China, would a rapprochement with the former head of the rival bloc and an important military power be acceptable for the US bourgeoisie in order to contain chaos, terrorism and the push from China? Could America contribute to the re-emer-

gence of its Cold War rival and accept negotiating with it in certain areas? Would this make it possible to contain Chinese ambitions and also strike a blow against Germany? Within the Trump administration, there are numerous partisans of such a rapprochement, like Tillerson in foreign affairs and Ross in trade, as well as the president's son-in-law Kushner. However, a considerable part of the US bourgeoisie (particularly within the army, the secret services and the Democratic Party) don't seem prepared to make concessions at this level. In this context, the investigations into Russiagate, which imply the possibility of a US president being manipulated and blackmailed by an external enemy, are being widely exploited by these factions to make any rapprochement with Russia totally unacceptable.

The crisis of the US gendarme further exacerbates the push towards every man for himself among the other imperialist powers and the unpredictability of relations between them

Trump's protectionist orientations and the USA's exit from various international agreements is leading various powers, especially those in Europe and Asia, to strengthen their ties – without for the moment completely excluding the US – and to express their wish to become more independent from the USA and defend their own interests. This appeared clearly through the collaboration between Germany and China during the last G20 in Hamburg, and this collaboration between European and Asian countries could also be seen at the Bonn climate conference which aimed to concretise the objectives drawn up at the Paris conference.

The USA's withdrawal is exacerbating the every man for himself tendency among the other big powers: we have already pointed to the aggressive imperialist stance of Russia which has enabled it to regain footholds on the global imperialist battleground (Ukraine, Syria). As regards China, in the previous report we still underestimated (a) the rapidity of its economic modernisation and (b) the internal political stability of China, which seems to have been strongly reinforced under Xi. China presents itself today as the defender of globalisation in the face of US protectionism and as a pole of planetary stability in contrast to the instability of US policies, while at the same time developing a military strategy aimed at increasing its military presence outside of China (the South China Sea).

This development of every man for himself can go hand in hand with the establishment of circumstantial alliances (China and Germany to orient the G20, the Franco-German tandem to reinforce

military cooperation in Europe, China and Russia in relation to Iran), but these remain fluctuating and can't be seen as bases for the emergence of real blocs. Let's consider at this level the example of the alliance between China and Russia. The two powers share common interests, for example in relation to the USA in Syria and Iran, or in the Far East (North Korea) in relation to the US and Japan. They have also held joint military manoeuvres in both regions. Russia has become a major supplier of energy to China, thus reducing its dependency on the West, while China has massive investments in Siberia and supplies Russia with considerable amounts of consumer goods. However, Russia does not want to be subordinated to a powerful neighbor which it is already dependent upon to an unprecedented degree. What's more, the two countries are also rivals in central Asia, South East Asia and the Indian peninsula: the project of the "New Silk Road" goes directly against Russian interests, while Russia is renewing its links with India, the main adversary of China in Asia (along with Japan). Finally, the rapprochement between China and the EU and with Germany in particular represents a deadly threat to Russia which could find itself squeezed between China and Germany.

The extension of zones of war, instability and chaos

Faced with the explosion of every man for himself, the efforts to "*hold together the different parts of a body that is tending to breakup*" seem to be more and more futile, while the instability of imperialist relations makes for an unpredictable extension of areas of conflict.

The defeat of Islamic State will not reduce instability and chaos: the confrontations between Kurdish militia and the Turkish army in Syria, between Kurdish units and the Iraqi army and pro-Iranian Shia militias in Kirkuk in Iraq herald new bloody battles in the region. The stance taken by Turkey, which plays a key role in the region, is both central to the evolution of tensions and full of danger for the stability of the country itself. Turkey has important imperialist ambitions in the region, not only in Syria and Iraq, but in all the Muslim countries, from Bosnia to Qatar and Turkmenistan to Egypt, and is playing its own imperialist cards to the full: on the one hand, its status as a member of NATO is very unstable, given its taut relations with the USA and the majority of countries in Western Europe who are members of NATO, and also the tensions over the refugees and its difficult relations with Greece; on the other hand, it is now heading towards a rapprochement with Russia and even Iran, which is a

direct imperialist competitor in the Middle East, while at the same time opposing itself to Saudi Arabia (refusal to withdraw troops from Qatar). At the same time, the struggle for power inside the country has sharpened, with the increasingly dictatorial practices of Erdogan and the revival of Kurdish guerilla activity. At this level, the USA's refusal to extradite Gülen but also its support, arming and training of Kurdish militias in Iraq by the USA, are heavy with menace for the development of chaos inside Turkey itself.

The unpredictability of certain foci of tension is especially evident in the case of the North Korea. But while the root of this conflict is the increasingly overt confrontation between China and the USA, a certain number of elements make the outcome of this situation highly uncertain:

- The ideology of the besieged fortress in North Korea, the advocacy of atomic weapons to respond to an inevitable attack by the Americans and the Japanese as an absolute priority, implies a high level of distrust towards its Chinese or Russian "friends" (and this in turn is based in certain experiences of the Korean partisans during the Second World War) and means that China's control over North Korea is limited;
- Trump's poker moves, threatening North Korea with total destruction, raises the question of his credibility. This is leading on the one hand to an accelerated rearmament of Japan (already announced by prime minister Abe); but on the other hand, the unbalance in atomic weapons between the USA and North Korea (a different situation from the "balance of terror" between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War) and the sophistication of "limited" atomic weapons, does not rule out the threat of their unilateral use by the USA, which would be a qualitative step in the descent into barbarism.

In short, the zone of war, decomposition of states and of chaos is tending to widen more and more, stretching from Ukraine to South Sudan, from Nigeria to the Middle East, from Yemen to Afghanistan, from Syria to Burma and Thailand. Here we also have to point to the extension of zones of chaos in Latin America: the growing political and economic destabilisation in Venezuela, the political and economic chaos in Brazil, the destabilisation in Mexico which will get worse if Trump's protectionist policies towards the country are carried through. To all this must be added the extension of terrorism, its presence in the day-to-day reality of Europe, the USA, etc. The chaos spreading across the planet means that there is less and less

possibility for reconstruction (whereas this could still be envisaged for Bosnia or Kosovo), as shown by the failure of the policy of the reconstruction and re-establishment of state structures in Afghanistan.

The development of tensions in Europe

This factor, already seen as potentially present in the report to the 20th congress, has been accentuated in a spectacular manner in the last few years. With Brexit, the EU has entered a zone of considerable turbulence, while under the cover of protecting citizens against terrorism police and army budgets have risen noticeably in Western Europe and still more in Eastern Europe.

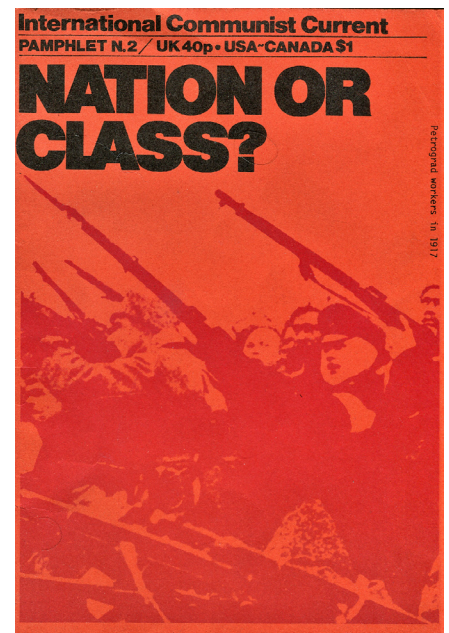
Under the pressure of economic measures, the refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and above all the electoral victories of populist movements, fractures within Europe are multiplying and antagonisms sharpening: economic pressure by the EU on Greece and Italy, the result of the Brexit referendum, the pressure of populism on European policies (Holland, Germany) and victories in the countries of Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary and recently the Czech Republic), internal tensions in Spain with the “Catalan crisis”. A gradual dismemberment of the EU, for example via a “several speed Europe”, as currently advocated by the Franco-German duo, would produce a marked intensification of imperialist tensions in Europe.

The relationship between populism (against the “elites” and their globalist, cosmopolitan ideas, and for protectionism) and nationalism was highlighted by Trump’s speech to the UN in September: “nationalism serves an international interest: if every country thinks of itself first, things will arrange themselves for the world”. This exacerbated glorification of every man for himself (Trump’s “America First”) weighs heavily on the Catalan conflict. Against the background of the euro crisis and the drastic austerity which came in its wake, we are seeing a dramatic interaction between populism and nationalism: on the one hand a part of the Catalan bourgeoisie which no longer wants to pay for the problems of the rest of Spain, or the provocations of the Catalan left in government (the ERC and CUP coalition under Puigdemont) faced with a loss of credibility in power; on the other hand the nationalist reaction of the Spanish prime minister Rajoy who has to deal with a crisis in the Partido Popular, which is deeply mired in corruption.

“Militarism and war have been a fundamental given of capitalism’s life since its entry into decadence... if militarism, imperialism, and war are identified to such

an extent with the period of decadence, it is because the latter corresponds to the fact that capitalist relations of production have become a barrier to the development of the productive forces: the perfectly irrational nature, on the global economic level, of military spending and war only expresses the aberration of these production relations’ continued existence”. (“Militarism and decomposition”). The level of imperialist chaos and military barbarism today, far worse than we could have imagined 25 years ago, expresses very clearly the obsolescence of the system and the need for its overthrow.

ICC Publications



Nationalism has weighed on the working class for over a hundred years. It helped to draw it into two world wars and countless subsequent wars. The ruling class uses it to enlist one part of the working class in bloody slaughter against another. It is no less dangerous today, whether in the election of Trump in the US, in the Brexit vote in Britain or the chaos in Catalonia. This pamphlet attempts to set out the Marxist position on this question, showing the role that nationalism played first in the development of capitalism and then in its decline. Today nationalism in all its forms and wherever it appears can only undermine and divide the working class and its struggle against capitalism.

The world bourgeoisie against the October Revolution (part one)

As we expected, the megaphones of the bourgeoisie have not remained quiet on the centenary of the 1917 October revolution. As in every decade, lies and contempt have animated newspaper articles, documentaries and televised speeches which have followed one after the other for several weeks. Without any great originality, intellectuals have rehearsed the story of a coup d'état made by a handful of men in the service of a neurotic boss greedy for power and motivated by personal vengeance.¹ Thus, in this view, the struggle for a society without social classes and without the exploitation of man by man is just a fig-leaf for an expressly totalitarian undertaking which has its origins in the thoughts of Marx himself.²

It would be useless to look for any semblance of honesty among these guard dogs of democracy and the capitalist mode of production. But if this event is so well classified in the archives of history, why the desperation to deform it every ten years with so much arrogance? Why does the bourgeoisie denigrate one of the most precious episodes in the history of the struggle of the proletariat? Contrary to the words that it spreads through its media, the bourgeoisie knows very well that the class that failed to overturn its world a hundred years ago still exists today. It is also aware that its world is still more ailing than it was in 1917. And its survival depends on its capacity to intelligently and unfailingly use the weapons at its disposal so as to avoid a new October which could, this time, see a result for the historic aim of the working class.

Very quickly the bourgeoisie understood the weight that the revolution in Russia could have on the world's social order. Thus, after tearing themselves apart for four years, the principal powers of the time made common cause in order to stem the proletarian wave which threatened to submerge a society which had nothing more to offer, except war.

Against official history, according to which the October '17 revolution contained in embryo the traces of its degeneration, this article aims to show that the isolation of the Russian proletariat is first of all due to the coordination of bourgeois governments ready to take up this class war whose outcome would turn out to be decisive for the course of history. It will also show that from 1917 to today, different factions of the dominant class have used all the weapons at their disposal to block and repress the revolution, then mislead and denigrate its memory and its lessons.

The provocation of the July days

In June 1917, faced with continuing war and the imperialist programme of the Provi-

sional Government, the proletariat reacted with animation. During the enormous demonstrations of June 18th in Petrograd the internationalist slogans of the Bolsheviks became the majority for the first time. At the same time, the Russian military offensive ended in a fiasco when the German army pierced the front in several places. The news of the setback for the offensive arrived in the capital and stoked the revolutionary flames. In order to confront this very tense situation, the idea appeared of provoking a premature revolt in Petrograd: crush the workers and the Bolsheviks by putting the responsibility for the military offensive's setback on the proletariat of the capital who had "stabbed in the back" those at the front. For this the bourgeoisie came up with several machinations aimed at pushing the workers in the capital into a revolt. The resignation of four members of the Cadet Party from the government and pressure from the Entente on the Provisional Government led the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries to rally to the bourgeois government,³ which only re-launched the clamour for the immediate taking of power by the soviets. Further, the threat of sending the regiments of the capital to the front only increased the soldier's discontent, which then moved in the direction of an armed uprising against

the Provisional Government. The July 3rd demonstration would have turned out to be catastrophic for the continuation of the revolution if the Bolshevik Party hadn't succeeded in calming the ardour of the masses and preventing them from a premature confrontation with troops under the command of the government. In these crucial days the party remained faithful to the proletariat by turning it away from the trap laid by the bourgeoisie. But these provocations were small-scale compared to the repression and the campaigns of lies that confronted the Bolsheviks in the days following. As today, the Bolsheviks were charged with the worst accusations: German agents paid by the Kaiser, snipers who fired isolated shots at the troops entering Petrograd. All means were used in order to discredit the party in the eyes of the workers in the capital. It was the deployment of enormous energy and thanks to a great political discernment that the Bolsheviks were able to defend their honour. If the July Days revealed the indispensable role of the party, they also revealed the real nature of the Mensheviks and S-Rs. In fact their support for the bourgeois government in these crucial days⁴ was the cause of their discrediting among the masses. Thus, as Lenin wrote: *"A new period is coming in. The victory of the counter revolutionaries is making the people disappointed with the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties and is paving the way for the masses to adopt a policy of support for the revolutionary proletariat."*⁵

The bourgeoisie tries to prevent the proletarian revolution

In an interview given to the journalist and militant socialist John Reed some time before the taking of the Winter Palace, Rodzianko, the Russian "Rockefeller" stated: *"the revolution is a sickness. Sooner or later, the foreign powers will have to intervene, as one must care for a sick child and teach him how to walk."*⁶

This intervention wasn't long in coming. Very quickly, diplomats of the big pow-

1. These are more or less the terms that Stephane Courtois used in a radio programme to describe the personality and motivations of Lenin.

2. A view expressed by Thierry Wolton at the start of the programme "28 minutes" on the Arte channel of October 17, 2017.

3. The article by Lenin, "What can the Cadets have counted on when they withdrew from the cabinet", written July 3, shows the clarity of the Bolsheviks on this issue.

4. Particularly in the repression of the demonstration of July 3rd.

5. Lenin, "Constitutional illusions". <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jul/26.htm>.

6. Quoted in Pierre Durant, *Les sans-culottes du bout du monde. 1917 - 1921*, Editions du Progres, 1977.

ers were in agreement with the Russian bourgeoisie in order to settle this question with some urgency. For the chief of British intelligence in Russia, Sir Samuel Hoare, the best solution was the installation of a military dictatorship. The Officer's Union of the army and the fleet proposed the same solution. This was also expressed by the Culture Minister, Kartachev, a member of the Cadet Party: "whoever is not afraid of being cruel and brutal will take the power in their hands."⁷

The attempted Kornilov coup d'état⁸ in August 1917 was supported by London and Paris and the setback for this first counter-revolutionary attempt was far from discouraging for the world bourgeoisie. Henceforth for the Allies, it was a question of stopping the growing influence of the Bolsheviks among the ranks of the proletariat of Russia. On November 3rd, a secret conference took place of military allies in Russia in the office of the chief of the Red Cross, Colonel Thompson. Faced with the "Bolshevik peril", the American, General Knox quite simply proposed picking up the Bolsheviks and shooting them.⁹ But on November 7th, the Military Revolutionary Committee took the Winter Palace and power was in the hands of the Petrograd Soviet. For the world bourgeoisie, military intervention now remained the sole option; much more so as the echo of the revolution was being felt throughout Europe.

Straightaway, the 2nd Congress of Soviets adopted the decree on peace which proposed to the belligerents an immediate peace without annexations. But this appeal found no response among the allied powers who wanted to draw the conflict out while waiting for American help. For the Central Powers, the liberation of the Eastern front allowed them to reorganise before the United States entered the war. A truce of three weeks was thus signed at Brest-Litovsk November 22nd, with the General Staff of Austria and Germany. Negotiations opened on December 9th between the two parties, but the same day, the battle of Rostov-on-Don between the Red Guards and the White armies, heralded the opening of the civil war.¹⁰ After seizing power, the hardest test now stood in front of the proletariat of Russia. While waiting for an extension of the revolution to the rest of Europe, it was necessary to prepare for a confrontation with the counter-revolutionary forces of the interior that were well supported by the major powers.

7. Jean-Jaques Marie, *La guerre civile russe. 1917 - 1922. Armées paysannes rouges, blanches et vertes*. Editions autrement, 2005.

8. For complementary information on the coup d'état of Kornilov, see the ICC's *Manifesto on the October Revolution 1917*.

9. Pierre Durant *Op. cit.*

10. Jean-Jaques Marie, *Op. cit.*

Beginning of the civil war and of the encirclement

The counter-revolution was really organised in the days following the elections to the Constituent Assembly which was marked by a majority hostile to the Soviet government. At the end of November, generals Alexiev, Kornilov and Denikin, and the Cossak Kaledin, set up the army of volunteers in the south of Russia. At the beginning it was composed of about 300 officers. This army was the first military reaction of the Russian bourgeoisie. Its financing was provided by "the plutocracy of Rostov-on-the-Don which raised six-and-a-half million roubles, that of Novocheerkassk about two million". Made up of officers favourable to a restoration of the monarchy, it held, "the embryo of a class character" according to the Russian general Denikin.¹¹

The Soviet government couldn't allow this army to be set up without reacting and the revolution had to strengthen itself on the military level. On January 28th, 1918, the Council of People's Commissars adopted a decree aimed at transforming the Red Guard into a workers' and peasants' Red Army made up "of the most conscious and best organised elements of the labouring classes".¹² But the organisation of this army remained a difficult task. In fact, due to the lack of competent communist leaders, Trotsky recruited from the officer corps of the Tsarist army. By the beginning of 1918, the balance of force was hardly in favour of the Russia of the Soviets. Germany and Austro-Hungary profited from the breakdown of the army and then from its demobilisation on January 30th in order to put an end to the armistice signed some weeks before. In a radio programme reported in *Pravda*, the Council of People's Commissars protested: "regarding the offensive launched by the German government against the Soviet Republic of Russia which proclaimed the end of the state of war and begun to demobilise the army on all fronts. The workers and peasants government of Russia could expect a less similar attitude; the armistice had not been denounced by any of the contracting parties neither directly nor indirectly, neither February 10, nor any other moment as both parties were bound by the agreement of December 2, 1917."¹³

11. Quoted by Jean-Jaques Marie, *Op. cit.*

12. While we think that in such circumstances the formation of a Red Army was indeed necessary, we consider that the dissolution of the Red Guard, the specific organ of the arming of the workers, was a mistake that amounted to the disarming of the revolutionary class

13. "Planned radio programme to the government of the German Reich" drawn up by Trotsky in Lenin, *Oeuvres choisies*, Editions du Progres, Moscow, 1968.

In fact Germany used the pretext of the independence of Ukraine to go onto the offensive with the consent of the Rada, the bourgeois government of Ukraine. A rout of the Red Guard followed, recalled by the Bolshevik Primakov:

*"The retreat of the Red Guard resembles a great exodus. More than a hundred thousand, accompanied by their families, fled Ukraine. Tens of thousands of others dispersed into the villages, the hamlets, the forests and the ravines of Ukraine (...) The heavy burden of war, the violence of the occupying troops, the arrogance of the German lieutenants, the impudence of the haidamaks (Cossack paramilitaries), the bloody vengeance of the big owners, the betrayal of the Rada central, the open pillage of the country only inflamed popular hatred. The government of the central Rada was known as the Government of Betrayal."*¹⁴

It is in this very difficult situation that the first mass levies of the Red Army took place while the question of peace was more and more pressing for the survival of the revolution.

The peace of Brest-Litovsk and the military offensive of the bourgeoisie

If, in order to gain time in the first place, the Republic of Soviets adopted a strategy of "neither war, nor peace", the delayed European revolution made the signing of the peace inevitable despite the shameful conditions imposed by the Central Empire which amputated a huge part of Russian territory. We know that afterwards the question of the peace gave rise to debates within the Bolshevik Party and the left S-R's. It's not the place here to dwell on these. But with this setback the position defended by Lenin, accepted by the Seventh Party Congress, turned out to be the best adapted to the situation.¹⁵

In the weeks and months that followed, the Republic of Soviets was encircled on all fronts and the White Armies were set up in several parts of the country. In Samara, the Czechoslovakian legion was set up by the Entente powers¹⁶ sowing terror along the Trans-Siberian railway line in important conurbations, thus facilitating the uprisings. Subsequently, the Anglo-Americans landed at Murmansk, the Whites occupied the south of western Russia, the Germans and Austrians came into the Don region and

14. Quoted by Jean-Jaques Marie, *Op. cit.*

15. For more detail on this question see: "Brest-Litovsk: gaining time for the world revolution", *International Review*, n° 48.

16. See Jean-Jaques Marie, *La Guerre des Russes Blancs, 1917 - 1920*, Tallandier, 2017.

Japanese troops landed at Vladivostok...

At the beginning of summer 1918, the situation of the Republic of Soviets was becoming very alarming. On July 29th Lenin wrote: "*Murmansk to the north, the Czechoslovak front in the east, Turkestan, Baku and Astrakhan in the south-east, we are seeing that all the chains forged by imperialism are in place.*" We can see that the engagement of the powers of the Entente was decisive for the organisation of the counter-revolution - a detail that our good democrats prefer to avoid. At the beginning of 1919, about 25,000 British, French, Italian, American and Serb soldiers were mobilised between Archangel and Murmansk¹⁷ in a fight to the death against "the Bolshevik peril", which would continue to spread "if it wasn't stopped", according to Clemenceau.

The testimony of a member of the Expeditionary Force, Ralph Albertson, bears eloquent witness to the determination and barbarity used by this anti-communist coalition: "*We used all the exploding gas shells possible against the Bolsheviks... We laid all the booby-traps possible when we evacuated the villages. Once we shot more than twenty prisoners... And when we took the commissar at Borok, a sergeant told me that his body had been left in the street, wounded by more than sixteen bayonet cuts. We took Borok by surprise and the commissar, a civilian, had no time to take up arms... I heard an officer tell his men that they weren't to take prisoners, that they had to kill them even if they were unarmed... I saw unarmed Bolshevik prisoners, causing no trouble, slaughtered in cold blood... Every night a battalion of incendiaries caused masses of victims.*"¹⁸

The peace of Brest-Litovsk only stirred up the hatred of the different counter-revolutionary factions but also of the left S-R's against the Bolsheviks. From this time on, the Russia of the Soviets appeared like a besieged fortress where hunger "*is at the door of many towns, villages, factories and mills*", as Trotsky related. The alliance of the Whites and the western powers plunged the revolution into a situation of a permanent struggle for survival. Moreover, from March 15, 1918, the different governments of the Entente decided to reject the peace of Brest-Litovsk and organised an armed intervention. But while the Entente powers were intervening directly in Russia, they also counted on the betrayal of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in order to advance the counter-revolution. In June 1918, the ex-assistant of Kerensky, the S-R Boris Savinkov, forecast the assassination of Lenin and Trotsky and started up an

insurrection in Rybinsk and Yaroslav so as to facilitate landings by the Allies. In other words, in view of the extreme weakness of the Red Army, a great offensive was put into action in order to finish with the revolution once and for all.

As Savinkov relates, the Whites hoped to "*encircle the capital with uprisings in the towns and, using the support of the Allies and Czechoslovaks to the north, who had just taken Samara on the Volga, putting the Bolsheviks in a difficult situation*". We now know, thanks to the memoirs published by several foreign secret agents and to investigations appearing in *Pravda* some years later, as well as diplomatic sources, that Britain and France were at the heart of this plot. The plans for insurrections in the towns around Moscow, the foreign landings, the Czechoslovak offensive were part of one and the same scheme orchestrated by the foreign military and diplomats and executed by leading S-R's who were ferociously opposed to peace with Germany and to the extension of the revolution.¹⁹

The Czechoslovak regiments, guided by the Allies, took Samara on June 8th and then laid siege to Omsk. A month later they took Zlatoust in the Urals then, a few days later, they approached Yekaterinburg where the Imperial family was interned. The liberation of this family would have allowed the unification of the counter-revolutionary forces that were having a difficult time settling their own arguments and divergences. The Bolsheviks didn't want to run this risk and decided to execute the whole family. This decision was motivated by the necessity to intimidate the enemy and to show it, as Trotsky wrote some years later, "*that there was no retreat possible, that the issue was total victory or total defeat*". Despite everything, this decision was turned back against the Bolsheviks. The execution of the Tsar's children was utilised by the international bourgeoisie in its propaganda campaigns so as to present the Bolsheviks as barbarians thirsty for blood.

In July and August the offensive continued with the French and British landing in Murmansk in the north where they installed an "autonomous" government. The Turks and the British occupied Azerbaijan. The Germans went into Georgia with the consent of the Mensheviks while the Czech legions continued their advance towards the west. These weeks turned out to be decisive for the defence of the revolution, whose survival was hanging by a thread. At Svijsk, close to Kazan, after several days of fighting, the extremely weakened high-command of the 5th Army could have all been captured with its main military

chiefs beginning with Trotsky. A lack of information and strategic errors by the White generals allowed Trotsky and his men to escape. Given the extreme weakness of the Soviet power, the capture of its main leaders would have dealt a fatal blow to the morale and determination of the troops.

In the north, the British took command of all the armies of the region. Outside of four or five British battalions, the force was composed of four or five American battalions, one French, one Polish and one Italian plus some mixed formations.²⁰ A Russian army was also organised but remained under the command and supervision of the British. At the beginning of August, this northern army took Archangel, overthrew the soviet and set up a provisional government composed of S-R cadets and controlled by British general Pool.

At the same time, the Commune of Baku fell in mid-August faced with an offensive by the Turkish army, some *moussavatists* (Azerbaijan nationalists) and some British regiments. Twenty-six people's commissars were gunned down on September 18 by the British.²¹

Different factions of the Russian bourgeoisie profited from this difficult context in order to destabilise the power of the Soviets by fomenting plots which could have turned out to be disastrous for the revolution.

The time of plots

A counter-revolutionary bloc was formed from May and June 1918, going from monarchists to some Mensheviks and S-R's. All these rallied around a "National Centre" that was originally created by the Cadets. The main leaders of the movement worked to collect political and military information which they transmitted to different White armies and maintained close relations with British, French and American secret agents. Moreover, a special conference was held in October 1918, composed of representatives of the Entente countries and the National Centre. The Cheka reacted rapidly, taking account of the existence of this single centre of the counter-revolution.

But that didn't prevent attempts aiming to destabilise the Soviet Republic. August 30th, the chief of the Cheka, Ouritsky, was assassinated by an S-R. Some hours later an attempt was made on the life of Lenin when he came out of the Michaelson factory. But these two attempts were part of a much wider enterprise aimed at liquidating all of the leading Bolsheviks: "*On August 15th,*

17. Pierre Durant, *Op. cit.* p. 191.

18. Quoted by Pierre Durant, *Op. cit.* p. 190.

19. Pierre Durant, *Op. cit.* p. 89.

20. Jean-Jaques Marie, *Op. cit.* p. 79.

21. *Ibid.* p. 81.

Bruce Lockhart [a British secret agent] received a visit from an officer who presented himself as Colonel Berzine, the commander of the Latvian Guard of the Kremlin. He handed over a letter of recommendation written by Cromey, the British naval attaché to Petrograd. Berzine declared that, although they had initially supported the Bolsheviks, the Latvians didn't want to fight against the British who had landed at Archangel. After discussing with Groener, the French General Counsel, Lockhart put Berzine in touch with Railey. At the end of August, Groener presided over a secret meeting of certain Allied representatives. It was held at the General Consulate of the United States. Railey and another spy, George Hill, as well as Moscow's *Figaro* correspondent, René Marchand, were in attendance. Railey recounts in his memoirs that he made it known that he had bought Berzine for two million roubles. It was a question of a single blow seizing the leading Bolsheviks who were due at a meeting of their Central Committee. The British were in touch with General Yudenitch and were preparing to supply him with arms and material. (...) After the assassination of Ouritski, the Cheka, who were on the plotters' scent, had penetrated the British embassy in Petrograd. Cromey fired on the police, killing a commissar and several agents. He was shot and so was the naval attaché who was about to burn some compromising papers. But there was still enough left to enlighten the investigators; Railey managed to escape. After several months he got back to London where he accused Marchand of having betrayed him... As to Berzine, the Soviet press subsequently revealed that he had indicated to his chiefs that Bruce Lockhart and Railey had offered him two million roubles to participate in the assassination of the leading Bolsheviks.²²

The arrest of Bruce Lockhart concluded an enquiry that fully demonstrated the foreign participation in the plot and the scheming of the Whites.²³

This failed plot was nonetheless one of the culminating points of the counter-revolution. At this stage the fall of the Soviet Republic seemed imminent. Faced with such a situation, the Red Terror was decreed on September 6. But if this measure was a major error²⁴ we must admit that it was

imposed by the force of events, that's to say by the terrorist practices of the foreign powers and the White armies.

"Without the help of the Allies, it is impossible to liberate Russia"

Officially, the bourgeois governments intervened in Russia in defence of democracy and against the "Bolshevik Peril". But in reality, the installation of a democracy was the last thing on the minds of the powers of the Entente who, before everything, were determined to avoid the extension of the revolutionary wave which was gaining ground in Germany by the end of 1918. The French, British and American bourgeoisies were prepared to do anything in order to defend their interests. Thus, from the beginning of the civil war, the invading armies acted like bloody hordes, supporting or installing military dictatorships in the territories re-taken from the Red Army. This is what happened for example at the beginning of January 1919, when General Miller landed at Archangel and proclaimed himself Governor General of the town and Minister of War. Leading an army of 20,000 men, made up of peasants and monarchist fishermen who hated the communists, he unleashed a reign of terror on the region. The old prosecutor of the province, Dobrovolsky, recalls that "the partisans of Pinet were so ferocious that the commander of the 8th regiment, a Colonel B., decided to produce a pamphlet on the human attitude to have towards prisoners."²⁵

Moreover, the Allies didn't hesitate in directly supporting the armies of the main White army chiefs, partisans of a very authoritarian power such as Denikin and Kolchak. The offensive of the latter, undertaken from Siberia to the outskirts of Moscow at the end of 1918, was in great part made with a military arsenal supplied by the foreign powers: "The United States delivered 600,000 rifles and hundreds of cannons, many thousands of machine-guns, munitions, tools, uniforms, Britain 200,000 tools, 2000 machine-guns, 500 million bullets. France 30 planes and more than 200 automobiles. Japan 70,000 rifles, 30 cannons, 100 machine-guns, the necessary munitions and 120,000 tools. In order to pay for these deliveries which allowed him to furnish an army of more than 400,000 men, Kolchak sent from Hong-Kong 184 tonnes of gold, treasure which had been given to him."²⁶

It was this military division of labour between the Allies and the White Armies

which the proletariat in Russia had to face up to throughout the year 1919. Lenin was well aware of the extreme fragility of the Soviet power and this is why he saw the need to denounce the role of the Tsarist generals in collaborating with the foreign armies:

"Kolchak and Denikin are the chief, and the only serious, enemies of the Soviet Republic. If it were not for the help they are getting from the Entente (Britain, France, America) they would have collapsed long ago. It is only the help of the Entente which makes them strong. Nevertheless, they are still forced to deceive the people, to pretend from time to time that they support 'democracy', a 'constituent assembly', 'government by the people', etc. The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries are only too willing to be duped.

"The truth about Kolchak (and his double, Denikin) has now been revealed in full. The shooting of tens of thousands of workers. The shooting even of Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. The flogging of peasants of entire districts. The public flogging of women. The absolutely unbridled power of the officers, the sons of landowners. Endless looting. Such is the truth about Kolchak and Denikin."²⁷

This great counter-revolutionary alliance was even more vital when the revolution broke out in Germany in 1918. As the American historians, M. Sayers and A. Khan relate in *The Great Conspiracy against Russia*:

"The reason why the Allies didn't march on Berlin, and definitively disarm German militarism, resides in their fear of Bolshevism. The Allied Commander-in-Chief, Marshall Foch, revealed in his memoirs that, from the opening of peace negotiations, the German spokesmen constantly evoked the threat of the 'Bolshevik invasion of Germany'... General Wilson of the British High Command recalled in his 'War Diary' that, November 9, 1918, two days before the signature on the Armistice, 'the cabinet met this night, from 6.30 to 8 o'clock, Lloyd George read two telegrams from 'Tiger' (Clemenceau) in which he told of an interview of Foch with the Germans: Tiger dreads the fall of Germany and the victory of Bolshevism in this country: 'Lloyd George asked me if I wanted that to happen or if I preferred an armistice. I replied without hesitation 'Armistice'. The whole cabinet agreed with me. For us, the real danger from now on wasn't the Germans, but Bolshevism'."

22. Ibid, pages 116-117.

23. Pierre Durand, *Op. cit.*

24. Along with Rosa Luxemburg, the ICC rejects the idea of Red Terror: "Even if it was necessary to respond firmly to the counter-revolutionary plots of the old dominant class and create a special organ with the aim of repressing them, the Cheka, this organ rapidly escaped the control of the Soviets and had the tendency to become infected with the moral and material corruption of the old social order". <http://en.internationalism.org/international->

review/201801/14779/manifesto-october-revolution-russia-1917-world-revolution-humanity.

25. Quoted in Jean-Jaques Marie, *La guerre civile russe*, *Op. cit.* P. 94.

26. Quoted in Jean-Jaques Marie, *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

27. "All out for the fight against Denikin. Letter of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) to party organizations" <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/jul/03.htm>

The fear of the extension of the revolution to the whole of Europe sharpened the determination of the bourgeois powers to definitively break the power of the Soviets. At the Peace Conference, Clemenceau was the most ferocious defender of this policy: *"The Bolshevik danger is very great at this present hour; it is spreading. It has won over the Baltic Provinces and Poland; and, this morning, we have received very bad news, because it has spread to Budapest and Vienna. Italy is also in danger. The danger is probably greater there than in France. If Bolshevism, after spreading to Germany, crossed Austria and Hungary, taking in Italy, Europe would have to face a very great danger. That is why it is necessary to do something against Bolshevism."*

Affirming loud and clear at this conference, "the right of peoples to self-determination", the bourgeoisie would not leave the world proletariat to make up its own mind at the risk of putting bourgeois society in peril. For both camps, the key to victory resided in the extension or isolation of the revolution. Also the fear of the bourgeoisie can be measured against the degree of violence and the atrocities which they carried out in Russia, Germany, Hungary and Italy. Because behind the veil of "the rights of man" hides the interests of a ruling class which always uses the worst measures when it's a question of its own survival.

Economic strangulation

The striking speeches of Clemenceau (above) allow us to understand his insistence on decreeing a total blockade of Russia and working for the neighbouring states to remain hostile to the Soviet Republic.²⁸

And also arising from this, his determination to combat the revolutionary wave. The delay in making the revolution by the European and world proletariat plunged the Russian bastion into complete isolation. The Soviet Republic henceforth became a "besieged fortress" trying to resist immense difficulties. In 1919-1920, the effects of rationing and the subjugation of production to the needs of war applied during the course of the war, was making itself felt still more in this country. To this could be added the devastation of the civil war and the economic blockade imposed by the democratic powers between March 1918 and the beginning of 1920. All imports were blocked, including solidarity parcels sent by the proletariat of other countries. The White armies and those of the Entente had the coal of the Ukraine and the oil of Baku and the Caucasus in their grip,

engendering a shortage of combustible material. The combustibles which reached the towns were down to 10% of that consumed before World War I. Famine in the towns was terrible where everything was in short supply. Heavy industry workers received first category rations which didn't go beyond 900 calories.

Evidently, this situation also had repercussions on the state of the soldiers of the Red Army who were prey to hunger, cold and sickness. In October 1919, the White troops of Yudenitch threatened Petrograd and the brigade commander, Kotovsky from the Ukraine, appealed for reinforcements. On November 4 Kotovsky sent an edifying report: *"A generalised epidemic of typhus, scabies, eczema and sickness due to the cold following a lack of laundry, uniforms and baths. All this puts out of action 75 to 85% of our old fighting force who are, on the way to, or remaining in clinics and hospitals"*. Faced with the protests of some regiments, the brigade was rested. It could have been worse: *"we were confronted with other difficulties, wrote a soldier. A typhoid epidemic has broken out and sicknesses due to the frost have ravaged the brigade. Soldiers and officers live in unheated barracks and receive starvation rations: 200 grams of 'soukhari' (a sort of grilled bread) and 300 grams of cabbage. It makes my heart ache to see our horses dying for lack of forage."*²⁹ Trotsky depicted in sombre terms the appearance of these same troops who were supposed to defend the main bastion of the Russian proletariat: *"The workers of Petrograd do not look good: pasty-faced because of their hunger and lack of food, ragged clothed, boots with holes in, mismatched clothes."*

After 1921, shortages continued and rationing became yet more drastic: *"the ration of black bread was still on 800 grams for the workers of refineries and 600 grams for the model workers. The ration was decreased to 200 grams for holder of a 'B card' (unemployed). Herring stocks, which in other circumstances had saved the day, were completely lacking. Potatoes arrived frozen in the towns because of the lamentable state of the railways (running at hardly 20% of their pre-war potential). At the beginning of spring, 1921, an atrocious famine ravaged the western provinces of the Volga region. According to statistics recognised by the Congress of Soviets, between 2 and 2.7 millions suffered from hunger, cold, typhoid, diphtheria, influenza, etc."*³⁰

In the factories, the super-exploitation of workers didn't prevent the fall in production. The lack of food and the chaos of the economy pushed some to migrate to the countryside and others to leave the big firms for small workshops making barter easier. In these conditions, it was decided to enact the New Economic Policy (NEP) which put a brake on the statification of production.

The civil war left behind it a country bled white. Close to 980,000 deaths in the ranks of the Red Army and 3 million in the civil population. The already existing famine was amplified in the summer of 1921 with a terrible drought spreading throughout the Volga basin.

Even if, faced with the development of mutinies and the revolutionary "danger" on their own territory, the foreign powers withdrew their own troops during 1920, and if the counter-revolutionary armies had never really been up to re-taking power, gangrened as they were by internal quarrels, the lack of discipline and the absence of coordination, the world bourgeoisie nevertheless succeeded in stopping the revolutionary wave which had burst out after four years of imperialist war. The total isolation of Soviet Russia signalled the kiss of death for the revolution and plunged it into degeneration.³¹

As we will see in the second part of this article, it is in this context that Social Democracy and then Stalinism delivered the coup de grace to the October revolution and to its heritage.

Narek, April 8 2018.

28. Jean-Jaques Marie, *La guerre des Russes blancs*, Op, cit., p. 436..

29. Quoted in Jean-Jaques Marie, *La guerre civile*, op. cit., p. 164

30. ICC pamphlet, *Octobre 17, debut de la revolution mondiale. L'isolation c'est le mort de la revolution*.

31. "The degeneration of the Russian revolution", *International Review* n° 3.

Belated response to a revolutionary anarchist

Emma Goldman and the Russian Revolution

We are publishing here a response to the analysis drafted by Emma Goldman (1869-1940) in the first years after the October 1917 revolution. After her expulsion from the United States in January 1920 she spent two years in Russia, then published three books:¹ *"I consider then, and still consider, that the Russian problem is entirely too complex to speak lightly of it"*, she wrote in the introduction to her first book. We are responding to Emma Goldman because she was a central figure of the revolutionary workers' movement in the United States at the time of the First World War. Because of her determination to defend a clearly internationalist position against the war she was nicknamed *"Emma the Red - America's Most Dangerous Woman"* by the American ruling class. But there are two other reasons to examine Goldman's positions in more detail. On the one hand, her important influence in the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist milieu up until today – *"the Rosa Luxemburg of the anarchists"*; and on the other because her early analysis of the Russian Revolution and the problems it faced shows great honesty and responsibility. Today, although we do not share at all some of her positions, Goldman's efforts are a valuable contribution to the understanding of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

Goldman, an anarchist of Russian origin, was inspired by the theories of the influential anarchist Peter Kropotkin, but defended an anarcho-syndicalist position in her activity. She clearly rejected marxism as a political and theoretical orientation. What distinguished Goldman from Kropotkin was her determination, along with Malatesta, Berkman, and others, in February 1915, to take a firm stand against the *"Manifesto of the Sixteen"*, whereby Kropotkin and other anarchists debased themselves by their shameful approval of the First World War. Goldman defended a clear internationalist position condemning any participation, support or tolerance of the war, thereby providing an internationalist point of reference in the United States.

Our aim in this article is to examine Goldman's political assumptions regarding the Russian Revolution, her experiences and conclusions. To anticipate: Goldman's observations, underpinned by a deep proletarian instinct, and her significant advances, must in our view be distinguished from some of her central political conclusions. In order to allow sufficient insight into Goldman's position, it is necessary to include long quotations. Since it is not possible to address all aspects of her analysis, we are forced to make a selection and so urge a direct reading of her writings on the Russian Revolution and her autobiography.

1. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution* (1922), her first and most comprehensive analysis; *My Disillusionment in Russia* (1923/24); *Living My Life* (1931), Chapter 52.

Goldman was constantly preoccupied with two questions: the fusion of the Bolsheviks with the state apparatus and its consequences; and her own self-laceration over the moment that would allow or even force her to expose her criticism of the Bolsheviks – which she eventually did after months of painful hesitation. We cannot address here Goldman's other political concerns, like the *"red terror"*, the Cheka, Brest-Litovsk, Makhno's movement in the Ukraine, the *Razvyorstka* (the relentless requisition of food from the peasants, which therefore includes the relationship between the working class and the peasantry), the catastrophic situation of children² or her position regarding the workers' councils. However, her experiences and analyses of the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921 are important because they signified Goldman's break with the Bolsheviks.

"The truth about the Bolsheviks"

The outbreak of the October Revolution filled her with great enthusiasm: *"From November, 1917, until February, 1918, while out on bail for my attitude against the war, I toured America in defence of the Bolsheviks. I published a pamphlet in*

2. This was a subject of great concern to her, which is understandable because the situation of children was catastrophic. In conditions of widespread misery, having lost one or both parents, often in war, they were the most vulnerable, especially when faced with the petty, unscrupulous and morally dehumanised bureaucrats. Perhaps she was more sensitive to this situation because she herself was a nurse and had had the opportunity to visit *"model"* institutions for children.

*elucidation of the Russian Revolution and in justification of the Bolsheviks. I defended them as embodying in practice the spirit of the revolution, in spite of their theoretic Marxism."*³

In 1918, in the anarchist magazine *Mother Earth*, she published an article entitled *"The Truth about the Bolsheviks"*:

*"The Russian Revolution can mean nothing to him unless it sets the land free and joins to the dethroned Tsar his partner, the dethroned land-owner, the capitalist. That explains the historic background of the Bolsheviks, their social and economic justification. They are powerful only because they represent the people. The moment they cease to do that, they will go, as the Provisional Government and Kerensky had to go. For never will the Russian people be content, or Bolshevism cease, until the land and the means of life become the heritage of the children of Russia. They have for the first time in centuries determined that they shall be heard, and that their voices shall reach the heart of, not of the governing classes – they know these have no heart – but the hearts of the peoples of the world, including the people of the United States. Therein lies the deep import and significance of the Russian Revolution as symbolised by the Bolsheviks (...) The Bolsheviks have come to challenge the world. It can nevermore rest in its old sordid indolence. It must accept the challenge. It has already accepted it in Germany, in Austria and Romania, in France and Italy, aye, even in America. Like sudden sunlight Bolshevism is spreading over the entire world, illuminating the great vision and warming it into being – the new life of human brotherhood and social well-being."*⁴

So Goldman's view of the Bolsheviks in 1918 was anything but negative. On the contrary, her defence of the Russian Revolution and of the Bolsheviks was a highly responsible reaction to the American bourgeoisie's campaign of lies and its role in the brutal, internationally coordinated campaign against revolutionary Russia. Her radical criticism after two years in Russia was always motivated by the intention of

3. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Preface to the first American edition.

4. *"The Truth about the Bolsheviks"*, *Mother Earth*, 1918.

defending the October Revolution against its external enemies, as well as against internal degeneration; this was the main concern of her activities and writings.

Enthusiasm and disappointment

Two brief quotes impressively illustrate the change in Goldman's assessment of the evolution of the Russian situation. She describes her arrival in Petrograd in January 1920 in exuberant terms: "*Soviet Russia! Sacred ground, magic people! You have come to symbolise humanity's hope, you alone are destined to redeem mankind. I have come to serve you, beloved Matushka. Take me to your bosom, let me pour myself into you, mingle my blood with yours, find my place in your heroic struggle, and give to the uttermost to your needs!*"⁵

But then, two years later, as a final description of her stay in Russia, we find the following: "*In the train, December 1, 1921! My dreams crushed, my faith broken, my heart like a stone. Matushka Rossiya [Mother Russia] bleeding from a thousand wounds, her soil strewn with the dead. I clutch the bar at the frozen window-pane and grit my teeth to suppress my sobs.*"⁶

"*It was just one year and eleven months since I had set foot in what I believed to be the promised land. My heart was heavy with the tragedy of Russia. One thought stood out in bold relief: I must raise my voice against the crimes committed in the name of the Revolution. I would be heard regardless of friend or foe.*"⁷

What happened between her arrival in 1920 and her departure two years later? And was her disappointment exclusively the result of a naive expectation overtaken by reality? We will return to this second question at the end of the article.

The encirclement of the Russian Revolution

Goldman rightly attaches great importance to the question of the encirclement of the Russian Revolution, which, according to her, was a real cause of the difficulties of the first years of soviet rule. But, as we will show later, she speaks little of its political isolation as due to the fact that the world proletariat had not been able to take power in other countries, which was the essential question, and which did not allow the important errors of Bolshevik power to be corrected.

In her book *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution* written in 1922, Goldman

stresses from the outset how the encirclement of Russia stifled the revolution and that the situation of a world war created the worst conditions for the revolution.

"*The march on Russia began. The interventionists murdered millions of Russians, the blockade starved and froze women and children by the hundred thousands. And Russia turned into a vast wilderness of agony and despair. The Russian Revolution was crushed and the Bolshevik regime immeasurably strengthened. That is the net result of the four years conspiracy of the imperialists against Russia.*"⁸

The internationally coordinated war against Russia resulted in a brutal strangulation. It would be very erroneous not to take this tragic situation into account in the analysis of the degeneration and failure of the Russian Revolution. Goldman constantly evokes it in her personal experiences; for example she describes the terrible situation resulting from the ruthless starvation of Russia and its consequences for millions of children in 1920-21, a situation further aggravated by the scheming of many state bureaucrats to enrich themselves. On this issue, despite all her harsh criticisms, Goldman defended the Bolsheviks' efforts to improve the situation of the children:

"*It is true that the Bolsheviks have attempted their utmost in regard to the child and education. It is also true that if they have failed to minister to the needs of the children of Russia, the fault is much more that of the enemies of the Russian Revolution than theirs. Intervention and the blockade have fallen heaviest upon the frail shoulders of innocent children and the sick. But even under more favourable conditions the bureaucratic Frankenstein monster of the Bolshevik state could not but frustrate the best intentions and paralyse the supreme effort made by the communists on behalf of the child and education (...) More and more I came to see that the Bolsheviks were trying to do all they could for the child, but that their efforts were being defeated by the parasitic bureaucracy their state had created*"⁹

So, concretely, she describes what were called the "Dead Souls"¹⁰; names of children who had already died and were registered on the lists of those entitled to food rations by the lower bureaucracy, who then diverted these fraudulent rations for their own consumption or to sell for them-

selves; all this to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of starving children, the most vulnerable victims of the asphyxiation caused by the international blockade!

Goldman cannot be reproached for having analysed the decline of the Russian Revolution without taking into account the decisive and deadly situation of its isolation in Russia. She also attempted, as is shown by the quotes from her texts, to distinguish between the Bolsheviks and the state bureaucracy, to which we will return later.

Her weakness lies rather in the absence of a clear analysis of the fact that the war and the blockade against Russia were only possible because the working class, specifically in western Europe, was progressively defeated, particularly in Germany. The working class in western Europe, and also in the United States, was confronted with a much more experienced bourgeoisie and a more sophisticated state apparatus than in Russia. But it is not only the defeat of the international revolutionary wave that produced the desperate situation of Russia; it is also the backwardness of the international working class compared to Russia.

In Germany, the attempted revolution only began more than a year after October 1917, which left a long time free for the strategy of Russia's isolation, as shown in the months following the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. The seizure of power by the proletariat in the central states of western Europe was the only way to break the strangling of the Russian Revolution and put a stop to armed intervention. It is only possible to understand the roots of the defeat of the Russian Revolution by examining precisely the international balance of forces between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; this aspect appears only occasionally in the writings of Goldman, barely developed, and which leaves the impression that the fate of the revolution was sealed mainly on Russian soil.

The isolation and strangulation of Russia after October 1917 in no way explains every aspect of its internal degeneration, which was ultimately the most traumatic experience for the working class, nor should it serve as justification for this internal degeneration. With regard to the problem of the Bolsheviks' catastrophic errors, in particular their policy of identification with the state apparatus, it is crucial to see that this could only have been corrected under the influence of a victorious revolutionary working class in other countries, which was tragically not to be the case.¹¹

5. *Living My Life*, Chapter 52.

6. *Living My Life*, loc. cit.

7. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Chapter 32.

8. Introduction to *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*.

9. *Op. Cit.*, Chapter "The Care of the Children".

10. Title of the famous book by Nicolas Gogol in 1842. The methods and the parasitism of the state bureaucracy were an exact copy of certain techniques of personal enrichment under feudalism.

11. See our article "The degeneration of the Russian Revolution", <http://en.internationalism.org/node/2514>

On closer inspection, there is a contradiction in Goldman's central theses about the relationship between the international situation and the causes of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. On the one hand she writes: "*All my observations and studies over two years gave me the clarity that the Russian people, if not continuously threatened from without, would have soon realised the danger from within and would have known how to meet that danger (...)*". On the other hand, however: "*If there was ever a doubt as to what constitutes the greatest danger to a revolution - outside attacks or the paralysed interest of the people within - the Russian experience should dispel that doubt completely. The counter-revolutionists, backed by Allied money, men and munitions, failed utterly (...)*"¹²

As we have already said, Russia's isolation must in no way serve as an excuse for its errors. But Goldman draws a curious conclusion in which she contradicts all her "observations and studies" quoted above: the salvation of the revolution depended essentially on the forces and politics of the working class in Russia, the international situation becoming for her a much more secondary factor. Goldman develops a logic here that reminds us of Voline, without however going so far;¹³ she presents the defeat of the Allied counter-revolutionary forces as proof that the counter-revolution had been a perfectly surmountable obstacle for the revolution, which is shockingly simplistic when you consider the huge damage caused by the this bloody confrontation,¹⁴ including the deaths of tens of thousands of determined revolutionaries, which Goldman herself had well described. Those conscious revolutionaries who had voluntarily put themselves in the front line in their thousands and fallen in battle could probably have opposed in some way the internal counter-revolution.

These two factors; isolation and strangulation on the one hand, and the errors of the Bolsheviks on the other, were mutually reinforcing. The main difference between them was that the war against Russia was obvious to all, while the internal degeneration began in a much more hidden way, eventually becoming the trauma of the century for the international working class. Goldman's conclusions are, in essence,

a common way of taking into account both the question of the external counter-revolution and that of the internal counter-revolutionary degeneration; a problem with which all the revolutionaries of the 1920s were confronted.

War does not create the best conditions for revolution

One of Goldman's notable contributions to understanding the defeat of the Russian Revolution – even though we do not share her conclusion – is her reflection on the conditions for a revolution during and after a war: "*Perhaps the Russian Revolution was doomed at its birth. Coming as it did upon the heels of four years of war, which had drained Russia of her best manhood, sapped their blood, and devastated her land, the revolution may not have had the strength to withstand the mad onslaught of the rest of the world.*"¹⁵

Here she rightly points out the direct result of the war and responds to the false and schematic ideas whereby the crisis automatically aggravates the war and war automatically strengthens the consciousness of the working class, thus leading to the break out of revolution. Goldman emphasises that fundamentally the revolution suffered from exhaustion in Russia resulting from the war itself. But the idea that the fate of the revolution could somehow be "*doomed at its birth*" shows a fatalistic approach.

An important potential factor must be considered that was not realised. The First World War ended in November 1918, one year after October 1917. As we have already pointed out, the only hope for October was for the revolution to break as quickly as possible in other countries and, above all, for a rapid revolutionary surge in western Europe. This was a historically possible perspective, and the working class had no choice but to engage the struggle in that direction.

The war ended with victorious and defeated countries. If the defeat shook the defeated governments and could, therefore, facilitate their weakening and the revolutionary dynamic, this was not the case for the victorious governments which, on the contrary, were strengthened. In the victorious states where the working class had been painfully dragged to slaughter by the bourgeoisie for four years, it was the aspiration for peace and stability that prevailed and significantly undermined the possibilities for a revolutionary assault by the proletariat in France, Britain, Belgium, Holland and Italy. It was not only the

balance of power between the imperialist states that was different after the war, but also the state of mind of the masses who were thus divided according to whether they were in a victorious or vanquished country. Goldman raises the problem of the war which creates poor conditions for the revolution, but she reduces it mainly to the case of Russia itself

What possibilities for change after a revolution?

What possibilities for change existed in Russia at a time of total encirclement and famine? In the anarchist camp, there were very different opinions on this subject but what was significant was the great expectation of immediate improvements in living conditions, especially in terms of economic measures and the fundamental reorganisation of production. So what were Goldman's expectations at that time, just two years after October 1917? Was she expecting on her arrival in Russia in January 1920 to find a society that already met human needs? At her first meeting with Maxim Gorky, on a train to Moscow, she told him: "*I also hope you will believe me when I say that, though an anarchist, I had not been naive enough to think that anarchism could rise overnight, as it were, from the debris of old Russia.*"¹⁶

She describes conversations with Alexander Berkman, her closest political and personal companion for decades, as follows: "*He dismissed the charges [against the Bolsheviks] as the irresponsible prattle of ineffective and disgruntled men. The Petrograd anarchists were like so many in our ranks in America who used to do least and criticise most, he said. Perhaps they had been naive enough to expect anarchism to emerge overnight from the ruins of autocracy, from the war and blunders of the Provisional Government.*"¹⁷ Goldman did not judge the Russian Revolution by a naive measure based exclusively on the immediate improvement of living conditions and the economy.¹⁸

On the question of the immediate pos-

12. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Chapter "The Forces that Crushed the Revolution".

13. Voline (W.M. Eichenbaum), *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921*, Chapter "Counter-Revolution". Voline goes so far as to claim that the international intervention against Russia was largely exaggerated and transformed into a legend spread by Bolsheviks around the world.

14. See on this subject our article "The world bourgeoisie against the October Revolution", in this issue.

15. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Loc. Cit.

16. *Living My Life*, Chapter 52.

17. *Ibid.*

18. The period of transition covers the entire period after the workers' councils take power until the state becomes extinct. During this period, a series of measures will have to be taken to eliminate wages and the money form, to socialise consumption and to meet needs (transport, leisure, rest, etc.). Read our article on "Problems of the Transition Period" in *International Review* n° 1. Although the measures to be taken right after the revolution are necessarily limited, certain measures however must be implemented immediately and with determination: for example, free transportation, immediate housing of homeless people in unneeded public buildings, homes of the rich, etc., but also the prohibition of child labour and any form of forced labour or prostitution.

sibilities of a social upheaval in the interest of the working class and other oppressed layers, like the millions of peasants in Russia, Goldman puts her point of view again in a framework that does not ignore the international situation. Nor did she hesitate to defend the efforts of the Bolsheviks (as we have seen with regard to the situation of children which demanded immediate and drastic action) and to severely criticise the positions of other anarchists. Goldman did not submit to the law of silence and the rejection of any mutual criticism within the anarchist camp. We do not know what arguments she used against impatient anarchists who expected the immediate upheaval of society. But these controversies between anarchists show that there was no homogeneous anarchism in Russia during the revolution.

The question of possible immediate measures to rapidly relieve suffering was of crucial importance for the working class and for the peasantry as a whole, and was not only a theme of the most impatient parties of anarchism, among whom this question often uniquely decided their attitude towards the Bolsheviks. For the working class, revolution is not an abstract historical logic. After decades of brutal exploitation, and having endured the sufferings of the butchery of 1914-1918, the great hopes of a sunrise on the horizon of life were more than understandable and fitting. They constituted an important driving force of the revolutionary conviction and combativity that enabled October. Given the immediate reality of the strangulation of revolutionary Russia, of hunger and the war against the white armies, the expected sun had not risen on the horizon. Hunger and demoralisation weighed heavily on the working class. In this almost desperate situation, Goldman adopted a responsible attitude of patience and perseverance which, with the progressive defeat of the world revolutionary wave after the war and for all revolutionaries could only be maintained with enormous political will and clarity.

The Bolsheviks and the state apparatus: the shipwreck of marxism?

In her analysis of the dynamic of the state apparatus in full growth after October, Goldman was totally faithful to her own idea according to which the Russian problem was much too complicated to be explained away by a few superficial phrases. She gave a great deal of attention to this question and distinguished herself by precise observations and reflections. Nevertheless, we absolutely do not share a good number of these conclusions! Her writings contain contradictions on the ques-

tion of the relations between the Bolsheviks and the developing state apparatus.

In 1922 she was not yet ready to make a profound analysis; this was only possible at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s when the Italian Communist Left took up the task. There was no doubt that certain anarchist principles on the question of the state strongly dominated her analyses and the conclusions that flowed from it.

First of all it's indispensable to broadly present Goldman's vision on the issue:

*"The first seven months of my stay in Russia had almost crushed me. I had come with so much enthusiasm, with a passionate desire to throw myself into the work, into the holy defence of the revolution. What I found completely overwhelmed me. I was unable to do anything. The chariot wheel of the Socialist State rolled over me paralysing my energy. The wretchedness and distress of the people, the callous disregard of their needs, the persecutions and the repression tore at my mind and heart and made life unbearable. Was it the revolution which had turned idealists into wild beasts? If so the Bolsheviks were mere pawns in the hands of the inevitable. Or was it the cold, impersonal nature of the state which by foul means had harnessed the revolution to its heart and was now whipping it into channels indispensable to the state? I could not answer these questions. Not in July 1920, at any rate."*¹⁹

*"Yet neither in the conservative not even in the revolutionary sense do the trade unions in Russia represent the need of the workers. What they really are is the coerced and militarised adjunct of the Bolshevik state. They are 'the school of communism' as Lenin insisted in his thesis on the functions of the trade unions. But they are not even that. A school presupposes the free expression and initiative of the pupils, whereas the trade unions in Russia are military barracks for the mobilised labour army, forced into membership by the whip of the state driver."*²⁰

"I am certain that neither Lunacharsky nor Gorky knew about it [the imprisonment of children by the Cheka]. But therein lies the curse of the vicious circle; it makes it impossible for those at the head to know what the host of their subordinates are doing (...) Does Lunacharsky know of such cases? Do the leading communists know? Some no doubt do. But they are too busy with 'important state affairs'. And they have become callous to all such 'trifles'. Then,

*too, they themselves, are caught in the vicious circle, in the machinery of Bolshevik officialdom. They know that adherence to the party covers a multitude of sins."*²¹

And concerning relations between the state apparatus and its bureaucrats:

*"In the village where he [Kropotkin] lived in little Dimitrov, there were more Bolshevik officials than ever existed there during the reign of the Romanov's. All those people were living off the masses. They were parasites on the social body, and Dimitrov was only a small example of what was going on throughout Russia. It was not the fault of any particular individual, rather it was the state that they had created, which discredits every revolutionary ideal, stifles all initiative and sets a premium on incompetence and waste."*²²

Goldman's observations on the concrete reality of the state very precisely describe how it developed more and more and began inexorably to consume everything. It's to her great credit that she gives a detailed perception of the "daily life" of the bureaucratic apparatus and its profound contradiction with the interests of the working class and other exploited classes. In 1922, her descriptions were highly pertinent faced with all the glorifications circulating in the international workers' movement on the situation in Russia and faced with a blindness towards the problems it confronted. There's no doubt that Goldman's efforts to warn against the dangers of the state as it was developing in Russia were precious at this time, even if her analysis was based on what she saw and only provisional.

But what conclusions did she draw from it?

"It would be an error to assume that the failure of the revolution was due entirely to the character of the Bolsheviks. Fundamentally it was the result of the principles and methods of Bolshevism. It was the authoritarian spirit and principles of the state which stifled the libertarian and liberating aspirations. Were any other political party in control of the government in Russia the result would have been essentially the same. It is not so much the Bolsheviks who killed the Russian Revolution as the Bolshevik idea. It was marxism, however modified; in short, fanatical governmentalism (...) I have further shown that it is not only Bolshevism that failed, but Marxism itself. That is to say, the STATE IDEA, the authoritarian principle, has been proven bankrupt by the experience of the Russian Revolution. If I were to sum up my whole argument in one sentence I should say: The inherent tendency of the State is to

19. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Chapter "A Visit to Peter Kropotkin".

20. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Chapter "The Trade Unions".

21. *Op. Cit.*, Chapter "Dead Souls".

22. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Chapter 17.

concentrate, to narrow, and monopolise all social activities; the nature of revolution is, on the contrary, to grow, to broaden, and disseminate itself in ever-wider circles. In other words, the State is institutional and static; revolution is fluent, dynamic. These two tendencies are incompatible and mutually destructive. The State idea killed the Russian Revolution and it must have the same result in all other revolutions, unless the libertarian idea prevails. (...) The main cause of the defeat of the Russian Revolution lies much deeper. It is to be found in the whole Socialist conception of revolution itself.”²³

“And while the workers and peasants of Russia were laying down their lives so heroically, this inner enemy rose to ever greater power. Slowly but surely the Bolsheviks were building up a centralised state, which destroyed the Soviets and crushed the revolution, a state that can now easily compare, in regard to bureaucracy and despotism, with any of the great powers of the world.”²⁴

“The marxist policies of the Bolsheviks, the tactics first extolled as indispensable to the life of the revolution only to be discarded as harmful after they had wrought misery, distrust and antagonism, were the factors that slowly undermined the faith of the people in the revolution.”²⁵

Goldman’s thesis is the following: marxism, because of the policy of the Bolsheviks towards the state following the revolution, has turned out to be useless. Contrary to the viscerally anti-organisation sections of anarchism, Goldman never defended the position that the problems of the Bolsheviks fundamentally resulted from the organisational strength of their political party. She rejected rather their concrete policy. And she had good reason to on two counts when she said that the state is by nature “institutional and static”. Manifestly, she refers here to the experience concerning the bourgeois state and its nature before the revolution. Goldman’s position is not exclusively emotional, as some anarchists constantly reproached her for at the time, but is based on historic experience. The state in feudalism and capitalism is by its nature completely static and, above all, unconditionally defends the interests and power of the dominant class; it is openly reactionary. Secondly, we share the point of view according to which the problem is not that of individual personalities in the ranks of the Bolsheviks, but the enormous confusion within the party concerning the state after the revolution, which in fact

reflected the immaturity of the workers’ movement at that time on the question of the state.

Even after a world proletarian revolution (which was never the case at the time of the Russian Revolution, being largely limited to that country), the “semi-state” – necessary but limited to minimal functions and subordinate to the workers’ councils – remains in its essence always conservative and static, and in no way constitutes a driving force for the establishment of a communist society; nor is it an organ of the working class. The Italian Communist Left described it thus: “... the state, even with the adjective ‘proletarian’ attached to it, remains an organ of coercion, and in sharp and permanent opposition to the realisation of the communist programme. In this sense it is an expression of the capitalist danger throughout the development of the transition period ...”²⁶

Consequently, it is absolutely false to speak of a “proletarian state” as an organ of the revolution, as the Trotskyists claim with regard to Russia, but also the Bordigist current concerning the theoretical analysis of the transition period. Such an idea is completely incapable of grasping the danger of identifying the workers’ councils and the political party with the state apparatus – as tragically happened in Russia.

To avoid any false debate, a remark is necessary: Goldman often speaks of a “centralised state” built by the Bolsheviks. But this was not because she was a partisan of the federalist concept, like Rudolf Rocker who advocated the principle of an extremely federalist class struggle.²⁷ The term “centralist” used by Goldman was rather a characterisation of the impenetrable, unresponsive, corrupt and hierarchical state apparatus in Russia, which sabotaged the implementation of even the smallest measures for the working class and other oppressed layers of society, like the peasantry.

But does the test of revolution signify the collapse of marxism as Goldman claims? And was anarchism, on the contrary, confirmed by the Russian Revolution? If one wants to understand the events around the Russian Revolution, standing as an arbiter of two historical political currents on the “field of the revolution” to give a winner and a loser is hardly useful.

We cannot deal with all aspects of the tragic degeneration of the Bolshevik party and the Russian Revolution in this response,

but we have already dealt with these in numerous ICC texts. But we must respond to Goldman on the alleged shipwreck of marxism as a whole. The Bolshevik party degenerated, which was clearly expressed by its fusion with the state apparatus; that’s a fact – but marxism has not failed.

With her method, how does Goldman explain the fact that faced with the question of war, it was precisely within the marxist workers’ movement, and on the basis of its historical legacy, that the clearest, most determined internationalist positions emerged, such as those embodied in the Kienthal Conference of 1916? And all this led by a marxist organisation, the Bolsheviks, a spearhead against the reformism which was gaining ground faced with the question of war.

With her method, how does Goldman explain the fact, mentioned at the beginning of this article and correctly denounced by herself, that within anarchism and even around the central figure of anarchism at the time, Kropotkin, a tendency appeared which abandoned internationalist principles and openly proclaimed so in a manifesto – a deviation that gave rise to great uncertainty, tensions and resistance within the anarchist ranks? According to Goldman’s own method anarchism hit the rocks here since internationalism had just been thrown overboard by its most influential representatives. As in the marxist workers’ movement this produced a lively confrontation faced with the test of war and a determined part of anarchism, which also included Goldman, fought against any support for either of the two imperialist camps involved.

It would be absolutely false to say that anarchism as a whole became bankrupt in 1914. On the contrary, it’s precisely because such a drastic decantation took place within the anarchist and marxist workers’ movement that it was possible in the struggle against war and in October ‘17, revolutionary, internationalist anarchists fought side-by-side with revolutionary marxists. If the necessary positioning between war and the revolution indeed produced such a result, it was just as much among marxists as among anarchists, producing a determined and intransigent defence of internationalism and the interests of the working class.

And that’s not all. With her approach and the thesis of the bankruptcy of marxism, how does Goldman explain the fact that the Bolsheviks, an organisation of the marxist tradition, were able in 1917, with the *April Theses* formulated by its most determined representatives, to bring clarity against the democratic confusions still existing in the Russian working class?

23. Afterword to *My Disillusionment in Russia*.

24. Introduction to *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*.

25. *Op. Cit.*, Chapter “The forces that Crushed the Revolution”.

26. “The question of the state”, *Octobre* n° 2, March 1938, quoted in “Some Answers from the ICC”, *International Review* n° 12, 1978, <http://en.internationalism.org/node/2636>

27. Rudolf Rocker, *Über das Wesen des Federalismus im Gegensatz zum Zentralismus*, 1922.

It's a fact that the majority of the Bolsheviks gradually moved away the spirit of the October revolution, turning their backs on it. By identifying with the state apparatus and taking repressive measures against those who criticised, they became locked into the absurd belief that they could save the revolution and thus became the incarnation of the counter-revolution from within. But it wasn't the totality of the Bolsheviks who embarked on this path, because there were different organised reactions within the party in the face of these signs of degeneration.

Goldman describes her great sympathy for and closeness to one of these oppositional groups within the party; the "Workers' Opposition" around Kollontai and Shliapnikov. Clearly, marxism was capable of producing a militant revolutionary opposition, which Goldman expressly welcomed. On the other hand, she (and more so still her political comrade Alexander Berkman) described the organised tendencies within anarchism in Russia, the so-called "soviet anarchists", who openly supported the policies of the Bolsheviks; and this even in 1920 when the terror of the Cheka²⁸ was already set up. She also honestly describes what followed: "Unfortunately, as was unavoidable under the circumstances, some evil spirits had found entry into the Anarchist ranks – debris washed ashore by the Revolutionary tide. (...) Power is corrupting and anarchists are no exception".²⁹ So, if we follow Goldman's method, has anarchism in its entirety failed because of such facts? Such a conclusion would be wrong from our point of view. Her approach and conclusion does not take into account all the post-October 1917 debates within a so-called "bankrupt marxism".

The question of the state after the revolution wasn't resolved within the workers' movement of the time and this is equally valid for the anarchists. An essential reason was the absence of any concrete historical experience for what happened in Russia after 1917. Up to then the workers' movement had always started from the perspective of a rapidly extending revolution. The insurmountable isolation of the Russian Revolution and the obligation to defend its territory brutally and rapidly reinforced its suffocation and its degeneration; the state and the Bolshevik Party "fused" to become

an active factor in this dynamic.

Even Goldman's political reference point, "Father Kropotkin" as his political entourage called him, was also unable to answer the questions of the role and function of the state after a revolution in his book *The State: its Historic Role*. The radical rejection of the state by the great majority of anarchists on the basis of an instinctive distrust, came from the experience of a brutal confrontation with the state under feudalism and the capitalist state apparatus; it rightly demanded the destruction of the bourgeois state by the proletarian revolution as was advocated by Lenin in his book *The State and Revolution*.

Even though this merit of the anarchist movement must be recognised, a false conception nevertheless prevailed in its ranks: the reorganisation of society, immediately after the revolution, by the workers' councils, the unions and cooperatives. Such a scenario hopelessly pushes the organs of the defence and political interests of the working class, the workers' councils, which constitute the dynamic element of the society, to fuse with the organism charged with the management of society (what we call a reduced and controlled transitional state.³⁰ If this happens, the workers' councils can only lose their autonomy in relation to the state (which would mean the working class losing its autonomy as a class), and themselves becoming a cog in the bureaucratic machine. Goldman also shares this position, even if only in an implicit and undeveloped form.

Let's return to the question of the so-called shipwreck of marxism. The majority of anarchists criticised the tragic developments in Russia. But anarchism wasn't confirmed in its totality in the Russian Revolution, just as marxism did not fail as a whole. There were without any doubt two false ideas among the Bolsheviks on the subject of the relations between workers' councils, party and state. At the time of the Russian Revolution the idea of unity between party and state apparatus dominated, and of a party which, alongside the workers' councils, had to be involved in the exercise of power. The dominant conception was that a minority within the class, its party, because of the confidence placed in it, would be called to take power in the name of the working class. This point of view clearly expressed the immaturity that existed on the question of the state after the revolution.

Through their conceptions of the post-revolutionary state and their relationship with it, the Bolsheviks became caught in a destructive spiral which, in the situation of

complete isolation of the revolution, saw a false idea turn into a tragedy. Although the Bolsheviks never openly rejected the principle of the seizure of power by the workers' councils, one of the first signs of degeneration was the gradual denial of the powers of the workers' councils, a process in which the Bolsheviks played a decisive role.

It's not fatalistic sarcasm but a historical fact to say it was the tragic experience of the Russian Revolution that clarified all these questions. Salvation could only come from the international extension of the revolution on the basis of the vitality of the soviets. This would also have denied any retrospective determinism according to which the fate of the Russian Revolution was already sealed at its birth. But wanting to save the revolution with "the strong arm of the state", as the Bolsheviks initially attempted, was a pure and simple impossibility.

Goldman draws a static conclusion from the reality of the growing domination of the state apparatus after October and of the process of degeneration. The weakness in her method is not to take into account the struggle in the marxist ranks against the dynamic of state domination: nor does it take into account the enormous difficulties that this situation generated among the anarchists, even if this figures in the detail of her observations. Added to this weakness is her idea that the Bolsheviks – as a party of marxism and for that very same reason – were doomed to failure from the very start because of their supreme goal, that of seizing power, just as all the detractors of the Bolshevik Party claimed. It seems that, according to Goldman, it is the elementary existence of marxist positions which decided the fate of the revolution. In her conclusion on the question of the state she also expressly denies the fact that it was a process of degeneration resulting from the world context rather than a question "settled" from the start. With her proclamation of "the failure of marxism" in the experience of the Russian revolution, she gives too much away too easily, finally leading to another thesis.

"The end justifies the means" and Kronstadt: a break with the Bolsheviks

One of Goldman's theses where she goes furthest in her criticism is:

"The Bolsheviks are the Jesuit order in the Marxist church. Not that they are insincere as men or that their intentions are evil. It is their Marxism that has determined her policies and methods. The very means they have employed have destroyed the realisa-

28. Goldman describes the Cheka very well with the following words: "Originally the Cheka was controlled by the Commissariat of the Interior, the Soviets and the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Gradually it became the most powerful organisation in Russia. It was not merely a state within the state; it was a state over a state. The whole of Russia is covered to the remotest village with a net of Chekas". (*The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Chapter "The Cheka").

29. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Chapter 28.

30. See our pamphlet, *The Period of Transition*, <http://en.internationalism.org/pamphlets/transition>.

tion of their end. Communism, Socialism, equality, freedom – everything for which the Russian masses have endured so much martyrdom – have become discredited and besmirched by her tactics, by their Jesuit motto that the end justifies the means.” (...) “But Lenin is a shrewd and subtle Jesuit; he joined in the popular cry: ‘All power to the Soviets!’ When he and his follow-Jesuits were firmly in the saddle, the breaking up of the Soviets begun. Today they are like everything else in Russia – a shadow with the substances utterly crushed.” (...) “To be sure, Lenin often repents. At every All-Russian Communist conclave he comes forth with his mea culpa. ‘I have sinned’. A young Communist once said to me: ‘It would not surprise me if Lenin should some day declare that the October Revolution was a mistake.’”³¹

Yes, the objectives of the Bolsheviks, communism, socialism, equality and freedom, which Goldman did not deny to be the true goals of the Bolsheviks, could not be realised. In other places in her writings on Russia, she describes how she was confronted with a question that was full of hope and asked many times by many Bolshevik leaders: “Will we soon see the revolution in Germany and the United States?” This too from Lenin in a meeting with Goldman. The Bolsheviks she spoke to were eager to receive a positive reply from her, she being closely in touch with the situation in the United States. It was clear from her descriptions that the Bolsheviks lived in constant fear of isolation and desperately awaited the least sign of revolutionary developments in other countries. This itself proves that in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party, which was anything but homogeneous, the hope of a world revolution had continued to live despite the increasingly clear degeneration. And so it was not just about a greed for power in Russia, as she runs the risk of claiming with the idea of the “Jesuitism” of the Bolsheviks.

Goldman’s concerns revolved around the contradiction between the initial objectives of the Bolsheviks and their specific policies and methods. This led to a definitive break after the bloody repression of the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921 under the banner of saving the revolution, and where there was use of brutal violence within the working class, which was in stark contradiction with communist principles. Her experience with the Cheka also played a decisive role in her break with the Bolsheviks.

The method according to which the end justifies the means must be vehemently fought against by the working class. Goldman is honest in not hiding her own hesitations about it. But her descriptions clearly refute the thesis that the Bolsheviks’ thinking was that of the “Jesuits of Marxism”, who would stop at nothing in the pursuit of their goals, and that here there would be a fundamental difference between the Bolsheviks and the anarchism.

How was this question posed among anarchists? She described her discussions with Berkman on the question of the legitimate means for defending the revolution:

“It was absurd to denounce the Bolsheviks for the drastic measures they were using, Sasha urged. How else were they to free Russia from the stranglehold of counter-revolution and sabotage? So far as he was concerned, he did not think any methods too harsh to deal with this. Revolutionary necessity justified all measures, however we might dislike them. As long as the Revolution was in jeopardy, those seeking to undermine it must pay the penalty. Single-hearted and clear-eyed as ever was my old pal. I agreed with him; still, the ugly reports of my comrades kept disturbing me.”³²

This debate with Berkman went on in the sharpest way:

“For hours he would argue against my ‘impatience’ and deficient judgement of far-reaching issues, my kid-glove approach to the Revolution. I had always depreciated the economic factor as the main cause of capitalist evils, he declared. Could I fail to see now that economic necessity was the very reason which was forcing the hand of the men at the Soviet helm? The continued danger from the outside, the natural indolence of the Russian worker and his failure to increase production, the peasants’ lack of the most necessary implements, and their resultant refusal to feed the cities had compelled the Bolsheviks to pass those desperate measures. Of course he regarded such methods as counter-revolutionary and bound to defeat their purpose. Still, it was preposterous to suspect men like Lenin or Trotsky of deliberate treachery to the Revolution. Why, they had dedicated their lives to that cause, they had suffered persecution, calumny, prison, and exile for their ideals! They could not go back on them to such an extent!”³³

For the working class, the means used must not be in contradiction with its fundamental objectives.³⁴ However, we

reject the assertion that marxism alone, and the Bolsheviks in particular, would be vulnerable to the penetration of the dominant class ideology by adopting means that conflict with the goal of communism. The discussions described by Goldman are characteristic of the fact that anarchism has always had enormous difficulties in this regard. An example of the use by many anarchists of means that contradict the goal is the attack on Lenin by Fanny Kaplan on August 30th, 1918, justified by allegations of Lenin’s so-called betrayal of the revolution. Given the long tradition of assassinations of representatives of the hated tsarist regime, which exposed the anarchists to a brutal repression, part of Russian anarchism resorted to what is called “propaganda by deed” by having recourse to “the ends justifies the means”. This included targeting working class fighters, as the attack on Lenin shows!

It is not a matter of mourning the hated figures of Tsarism targeted by the methods of one part of Russian anarchism, which expressed a reductive understanding of feudalism, identifying it with some individuals. But, as Berkman defended it correctly against Goldman, this system was not based on the malevolence of individuals, but on social and economic bases in contradiction with the needs of the exploited classes. The “propaganda by deed”, the individual violence against the hated representatives of feudalism, conceived as “triggering reflection” also expressed a false conception of the development of class consciousness, since these methods in no way demonstrate the necessity for a united struggle of the whole class against the foundations of exploitation.

It is understandable that Goldman showed allegiance to Kaplan as a prisoner, since she was tortured by the Cheka. She did not herself call for the same methods as Kaplan. But why in this situation did she not dare go a step further and criticise the “Jesuit” methods in the ranks of anarchism, rather than circumscribing it to the Bolsheviks?

Goldman suffered greatly in September 1921 with the Cheka’s execution of friends, of anarchists such as Fanya Baron, with the approval of Lenin. Although Lenin was one of the most determined and clearest personalities of the October Revolution, such measures are unacceptable. Goldman developed a growing antipathy, especially towards Trotsky and Lenin, describing them as clever and cunning Jesuits.³⁵

31. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Chapters “The forces that Crushed the Revolution” and “The Soviets”. The Jesuit order is generally used as a symbol of a politics obsessed with power and ruthlessness according to the slogan “the end justifies the means”.

32. *Living My Life*, Chapter 52.

33. *Ibid.*

34. See our article, “Resolution on Terror, terrorism

and class violence”, *International Review*, n° 15, <http://en.internationalism.org/node/2649..>

35. Voline went so far as to describe Lenin and Trotsky as brutal reformists who had never been revolutionaries and who used bourgeois methods (see *The Unknown Revolution*, Chapters “The Nature of the

The Cheka had become uncontrollable and used hostage-taking and torture to extract information and carried out executions to spread fear. It was often used against political opposition groups coming from the very ranks of the Bolsheviks and anarchists, but also against workers who participated in strikes. Goldman's criticism of prisoners—defenceless individuals—being condemned to death, whether members of bourgeois counter-revolutionary organisations, criminals, or those taken prisoner from the white armies, is absolutely justified because such measures were not only meaningless acts of violence, but were also an expression of the view that people cannot change their opinions, their behaviour and political positions and they must, in a word, be liquidated.³⁶ Within the Bolsheviks, the fight against the suppression of opposition voices inside the party and the working class began in 1918. Although Goldman herself witnessed debates and the existence of different positions among the Bolsheviks, she draws too simplistic a picture in order to condemn the latter as "Jesuits of Marxism", as if they were forged from a single block, which never corresponded to reality. The central problem was the sliding into a militarist approach to political problems rather than turning to working class consciousness, to which most of the Bolsheviks succumbed in the false belief that they were saving the besieged revolution. But this does not correspond to a thirst for power allegedly rooted inside the Bolshevik Party.

Marxism has never defended the principle according to which the end justifies the means; this was never a principle or practice of the Bolsheviks before and during the October Revolution. Kronstadt's suppression, however, the tragic culmination of a growing repression, showed how much the degeneration had already progressed, the forms it would take and the logic behind it. Its political justification was derived from its underlying goal (the "iron cohesion" of Russia against the international attacks) justifying the means (bloody repression).

Goldman's personal and utterly demoralising experiences of Kronstadt led to a break with the Bolsheviks and marked a turning point. In the last days before the crushing of the sailors, soldiers and workers of Kronstadt, she was part of a delegation (including in addition to her, Perkus, Petrowski, Berkman) who tried to negotiate with the Red Army. "*Kronstadt broke the last thread that held me to the Bolsheviks.*

The wanton slaughter they had instigated spoke more eloquently against them than aught else. Whatever their pretences in the past, the Bolsheviks now proved themselves the most pernicious enemies of the revolution. I could have nothing further to do with them."³⁷

Kronstadt was a terrible tragedy, a tragic mistake much more than a simple "error".

The crushing of Kronstadt with several thousand dead proletarians (on both sides!) was based on an absolutely false assessment of the character of this uprising by Bolshevik leaders that could have had several causes: the fact that the international bourgeoisie had perfidiously seized this opportunity to hypocritically declare its "solidarity" with the insurgents; also the growing fear that Kronstadt had passed into the camp of the counter-revolution or was even already an expression of the counter-revolution. Goldman responded correctly to both of these aspects. In her autobiography dating back to 1931, however, she was unable to draw the most important lesson from the Kronstadt tragedy, as was the case for the entire Marxist Left during the repression, which mostly supported it. Neither, even with the passage of time, would she be able to understand, contrary to certain currents of the Communist Left, that violence within the working class must be firmly rejected and that this must be a principle.³⁸

As with the question of the state, Goldman falls far too easily into the question of the so-called "continued Jesuitism of the Bolsheviks". She calls the Bolsheviks Jesuit, which is in total contradiction with their history. The dynamism of the majority of the Bolsheviks, who did not hesitate to use violence in Kronstadt in 1921 as an alleged means of class struggle, was by no means "their tradition" but rather, as we have seen, an expression of the process of their progressive degeneration.

Instead of looking fundamentally at the question that all revolutionaries without exception faced, namely what means can be used in the class struggle and in the revolution, the "Jesuit" label that Goldman loosely attributed to the Bolsheviks was rather an obstacle to understanding the degeneration of the revolution as a process.

Silence or criticism?

One question is found in Goldman's writings on Russia like a red thread: when was

it justified to formulate an open criticism of the Bolsheviks? She described an encounter with anarchists in Petrograd with great indignation:

*"These charges and denunciations beat upon me like hammers and left me stunned. I listened tense in every nerve, hardly able clearly to understand what I heard, and failing to grasp its full meaning. It couldn't be true — this monster indictment! (...) The men in that dismal hall must be mad, I thought, to tell such impossible and preposterous stories, wicked to condemn the Communists for the crimes they must know were due to the counterrevolutionary gang, to the blockade and the White generals attacking the Revolution. I proclaimed my conviction to the gathering, but my voice was drowned in the laughter of derision and jeers."*³⁹

As regards the question of the changes to come immediately after the revolution, Goldman's despondency with the positions of the other anarchists shows that anarchism was anything but homogeneous, especially with regard to the attitude towards the Bolsheviks. Anarchism in Russia had again divided into different camps.⁴⁰ The following passages from Goldman's writings once again testify to her responsible attitude in not ignoring her own uncertainties, but they also show the evolution of her attitude towards the Bolsheviks.

"Well could I understand the attitude of my Ukrainian friends. They had suffered much during the last year: they had seen the high hopes of the Revolution crushed and Russia breaking down beneath the heel of the Bolshevik state. Yet I could not comply with their wishes. I still had faith in the Bolsheviks, in their revolutionary sincerity and integrity. Moreover, I felt that as long as Russia was being attacked from outside I could not speak in criticism. I would not add fuel on the fires of counterrevolution. I therefore had to keep silent, and stand by the Bolsheviks as the organised defenders of the Revolution. But my Russian friends scorned this view. I was confounding the Communist Party with the revolution, they said; they are not the same,

Bolshevik State" and "Counter-Revolution").

36. This question is dealt with in detail in the book *Moral Face of the Revolution* (1923) by the People's Commissar for Justice until March 1918, Isaac Steinberg.

37. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Chapter "Kronstadt".

38. See *International Review* n°104, "1921: Understanding Kronstadt", http://en.internationalism.org/ir/104_kronstadt.html.

39. *Living My Life*, Chapter 52.

40. In the spring of 1918 the question of relations with the Bolsheviks strongly polarised the anarchist milieu (already historically divided into pan-anarchists, individualist anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists, where the demarcations are equally difficult to define). The question of violence or the analysis of the nature of the October Revolution played a secondary role. From open support to the Bolsheviks (from the "anarchists of soviets") to the idea of the Bolsheviks as traitors to the revolution who must be fought, one finds all kind of intermediary positions. See Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (1967), Chapter on "The Anarchists and the Bolshevik regime".

on the contrary they were opposed, even antagonistic.”⁴¹

“At the first news of war with Poland I had set aside my critical attitude and offered my services as a nurse at the front (...) But he (Zorin) never did. That of course could have no bearing on my determination to help the country, in whatever capacity possible. Nothing seemed so important just then.” (...) “I was not denying Makhno’s services to the Revolution in the struggle against the White forces, nor the fact that his povstantsy army was a spontaneous mass movement of the toilers. I did not think, however, that anarchism had anything to gain from military activity or that our propaganda should depend on military or political spoils. But that was beside the point. I was not in a position to join their work, nor was it a question of the Bolsheviks any more. I was ready to admit frankly that I had erred grievously when I had defended Lenin and his party as the true champions of the Revolution. But I would not engage in active opposition to them so long as Russia was still being attacked by outside enemies.”⁴²

“I was oppressively conscious of the great debt I owed to the workers of Europe and America: I should tell them the truth about Russia. But how could I speak out when the country was still besieged on several fronts? It would mean working into the hands of Poland and Wrangel. For the first time in my life I refrained from exposing grave social evils. I felt as if I were betraying the trust of the masses, particularly of the American workers, whose faith I dearly cherished.”⁴³

“I found it necessary to observe silence so long as the combined imperialist forces were at the throat of Russia. (...) Now, however, the time for silence has passed. I therefore mean to tell my story. I am not unmindful of the difficulties confronting me. I know I shall be misappropriated by the reactionaries, the enemies of the Russian Revolution, as well as excommunicated by its so-called friends; who persist in confusing the governing party of Russia with the Revolution. It is, therefore, necessary that I state my position clearly towards both.”⁴⁴

At that time other revolutionaries, such as Rosa Luxemburg, were quick to make criticisms of the Bolsheviks, even when they expressed total solidarity with them and defended the decisive role they had

played in the Russian Revolution. Rosa Luxemburg wrote her pamphlet *The Russian Revolution* in 1918 at the same time as Goldman published the article “The Truth about the Bolsheviks” in *Mother Earth* with boundless enthusiasm. The example of Rosa Luxemburg shows how difficult it was to make the decision to publish her own criticism at the right time, and always with the concern not to strike a blow to the revolution. In her text written in the Moabit Prison, Luxemburg expressed a criticism of the Bolsheviks, where her concern was, by clarifying the problems posed in Russia, to show her support and solidarity:

“Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favour of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy, and thereby, in favour of the dictatorship of a handful of persons, that is, in favour of dictatorship on the bourgeois model.” (...) “But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people. Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles. (...) The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics.”⁴⁵

Luxemburg did not refrain from criticism. Why did Goldman not follow the example of Rosa Luxemburg when, in her writings, she repeatedly expressed her sadness following the assassination in January 1919 of Luxemburg, whose positions she knew? Why in her pamphlet *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution* did she never make reference to Luxemburg’s criticisms written three years previously?

The reason is simple: she did not know of it. Indeed, Luxemburg’s text became the victim of a gross fear of “stabbing the revolution in the back” and of playing the bourgeoisie’s game in raising criticisms. The publication of Luxemburg’s criticism of the Bolsheviks, which she wanted to make known immediately after drafting it, was deliberately withheld by her closest

political friends and did not appear until four years later, in 1922.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, Goldman did not have the opportunity to draw inspiration from Luxemburg’s criticism of the Bolsheviks. Her excitement on arrival in Russia is understandable given the horrors in which the World War had plunged humanity. Goldman’s “*Soviet Russia! Sacred ground*” and her subsequent utter disillusionment is also an example that euphoria is most of the time condemned to suffer great disappointment. It is not surprising that 13 years later she rejected as “naïve” her initial defence of the Bolsheviks.

Luxemburg was never inclined to political excitement and formulated her criticism on the basis of the first experiences of the months following October 1917, concluding with the famous words that the future belongs to Bolshevism. Goldman wrote her criticism three years later, based on her own experience of a later phase of the revolution in Russia, after the workers’ councils were dispossessed of their power at the time of the unleashing of the Cheka and the inescapable identification of the Bolshevik Party with the state apparatus. Nevertheless, it harboured great hopes: “*Lenin and his retinue are sensing the danger. Their attack upon and the persecution of the Labour Opposition and the Anarcho-Syndicalists are continuing with even greater intensity. Is it that the Anarcho-Syndicalist star is rising in the east? Who knows- Russia is the land of miracles.*”⁴⁷ What would have been Luxemburg’s analysis at the end of 1921, after the onset of a clear degeneration and after Kronstadt? Sadly, we will never know.

Goldman oscillated between silence and her “*I have to raise my voice against the crimes committed in the name of the Revolution*”. But how should that happen? During her stay in Russia, the bourgeois newspaper *World* in New York repeatedly asked her to publish articles on Russia. Goldman at first refused, after hard discussions with Berkman, who was

41. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Chapter “In Kharkov”.

42. *Living My Life*, Chapter 52.

43. *My Disillusionment in Russia*, Chapter “Back in Petrograd”.

44. Introduction to *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*.

45. *The Russian Revolution*.

46. Paul Frölich, one of her political allies, describes this legendary sequence of events in his biography *Rosa Luxemburg. Her Life and Work* (1939). Paul Levi published Luxemburg’s *The Russian Revolution* in the course of 1922 (hence after Goldman’s pamphlet) after having broken with the KPD. Levi claimed that Leo Jogiches (who was opposed to publication, arguing that Luxemburg had subsequently changed her mind) had destroyed the manuscript. J.P. Nettl credibly asserts that it was Levi himself who put strong pressure on Luxemburg not to publish the text, arguing that the bourgeoisie would misuse it against the Bolsheviks. It is clear that Luxemburg’s text was not accidentally passed over in the disarray of the revolution in Germany, but, quite the contrary, it was avoided in the storm of confusion over the need for open criticism!

47. *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, Chapter “The Trade Unions”.

strictly against such an approach, with the argument that everything published in the bourgeois press could only be used in the service of the counter-revolution and proposed she produce her own leaflets for distribution to the workers. A few weeks later, as Goldman had left Russia at the end of 1921, she allowed *World* to publish her texts.

*"I wrote her that I preferred to have my say in the liberal and labour press in the United States, and that I should be willing to have them publish my articles without any pay rather than have them appear in the New York World or similar publications. (...) Now that I knew the truth, was I to be forced to slay it and keep silent? No, I must protest. I must cry out against the gigantic deception posing as truth and justice."*⁴⁸

Goldman had waited a few months in Russia to make public her criticism because she did not want to "*stab the revolution in the back*". And because of this unthinking decision, she was pilloried from various directions:

*"My Communist accusers were not the only ones to cry 'Crucify!' There were also some anarchist voices in the chorus. They were the very people who had fought me on Ellis Island, on the Buford and the first year in Russia because I had refused to condemn the Bolsheviks before I had a chance to test their scheme. Daily the news from Russia about the continued political persecution strengthened every fact I had described in my articles and in my book. It was understandable that Communists should close their eyes to the reality, but it was reprehensible on the part of people who called themselves anarchists to do so, especially after the treatment Mollie Steimer had received in Russia after having valiantly fought in America for the Soviet régime."*⁴⁹

The charge of treason by some parts of the American workers' movement had largely deprived her analysis and reflections of the attention and recognition they deserved. But in a world where two classes confront each other in an absolutely antagonistic way, it was a desperate act to criticise herself and to explain it from the fact that she had no other choice. Indeed it was extremely dangerous to want to use an instrument of the bourgeoisie, whatever it may be, even briefly, as a means of expressing a working class position. What a pity that such a strong militant had fallen into this trap!

What Goldman and Rosa Luxemburg have in common is undoubtedly the enor-

mous desire to understand the problems of the Russian Revolution, to defend the revolutionary character of October 1917 and to not succumb to the dramatic situation without criticising. Goldman never accepted the tactical method of simply considering the Bolsheviks as a "lesser evil" and to support them only for the duration of the war against the white armies, a position openly defended in Russia by the anarchist Machajski in the journal *The workers' revolution*.

Expressing open criticism of the policies of the Bolsheviks was from the outset less risky outside Russia than in Russia itself. But Goldman's doubts did not stem from fear or repressive measures against her. Owing to her status as a well-known American revolutionary, she enjoyed much greater protection than other revolutionary immigrants. Although she did not hide her sympathy for the Workers' Opposition and allied herself with the imprisoned anarchists (for example when she spoke at Kropotkin's funeral), she was only placed under "soft" surveillance by the Cheka, to intimidate her.

Would her criticisms have destroyed the shining example of the October revolution within the international working class? Certainly not. The alternative was posed not in the terms of "either being silent or denouncing the Bolsheviks". On the contrary, a mature political critique of Bolshevik policies at that time provided support for the entire international revolutionary wave. The working class is the class of consciousness, not of thoughtless action. Therefore, criticism of its own actions and mistakes is a legacy of the workers' movement which had to be maintained even in such tragic times. It is not part of the nature of the working class to conceal its problems, unlike the bourgeoisie. As Luxemburg's text shows, criticism of the Bolsheviks must not be limited to indignation but should also be mature enough to support the struggle against the degeneration of the revolution. Later it was a criterion for the Italian Communist Left to refrain from expressing hasty analyses and criticisms that did not permit lessons to be drawn.

Goldman's analysis of the Russian Revolution went beyond mere indignation. But in different places, with its characterisation of Lenin and Trotsky as "cunning Jesuits", she slipped into a method of criticism which fixated on charismatic individuals, which cannot be justified by the great influence that these individuals had on the policy of the Bolsheviks. Lenin does not personify the disarming of the councils and their fusion with the state, any more than Trotsky personifies the crushing of Kronstadt.

Later on, Goldman developed the po-

sition vis-à-vis Trotsky that his actions – especially Kronstadt – were sufficient to make him a pioneer of Stalinism.⁵⁰ The use of violence that he had directed as commander of the Red Army at Kronstadt did not reflect his personal inclinations but was the implementation of a decision of the whole Bolshevik power and, let us again recall, was supported at the time by the entire marxist left. The tragic error of Kronstadt was an illustration of both the immaturity of the workers' movement on the question of violence (no violence within the working class) and the degenerate course of the revolution in Russia, which would much later end up in to the openly counter-revolutionary politics of socialism in one country and the emergence of Stalin as leader of the world counter-revolution. Whatever the inadequacies of Trotsky's political denunciation of Stalinism and its organised apparatus of repression aimed at the complete physical and ideological crushing of the working class, it nonetheless expressed a proletarian reaction against them.

The value of Goldman's analysis lies in her raising the central questions confronting the Russian Revolution. The contradictions in her analysis and the conclusions, that we absolutely do not share, are not a reason to reject or ignore her efforts altogether. On the contrary, they are the expression of the enormous difficulty of producing a complete analysis of the Russian problem since 1922. She was not alone in this matter. She has the merit of having rejected the fusion of the party with the state apparatus, the seizure of power by the party and the repression of Kronstadt.

In this sense, she made an important contribution to the working class, which must be welcomed but also criticised. Goldman never claimed that October 1917 ultimately gave birth to Stalinism, as the ruling class still does today, in its deceitful campaigns, but stubbornly defended the October Revolution.

Mario 07/01/2018

48. *Living My Life*, Chapter 53.

49. *Living My Life*, Chapter 54.

50. *Trotsky Protests Too Much*, July 1938.

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BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

The International Communist Current defends the following political positions:

* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

* The statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a 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*.

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