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Presenting the *Review*

Centenary of the foundation of the
Communist International

**1919: The International of revolutionary
action**

**100 years after the foundation of the
Communist International: What lessons
can we draw for future combats?**

***Internationalisme* n° 7, 1945**

The left fraction

Method for forming the party

Communism is on the agenda of history

**Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of
breaking with Trotskyism (part II):**

On the content of the communist revolution

The world bourgeoisie

against the October revolution (part II)

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Presenting the *Review*

Like the last two issues of the *Review*, this one continues the celebration of centenaries of the historic events of the world-wide revolutionary wave of 1917-23.

Thus, after the revolution in Russia in 1917 (*International Review* n° 160), the revolutionary attempts in Germany in 1918-19 (*International Review* n° 161), this issue celebrates the foundation of the Communist International. All these experiences are essential parts of the political heritage of the world proletariat, which the bourgeoisie does everything it can to disfigure (as in the case of the revolutions in Russia or Germany) or simply to consign them to oblivion, as is the case with the foundation of the Communist International. The proletariat has to re-appropriate these experiences so that the next attempt at world revolution will be victorious.

This relates in particular to the following questions, some of which are dealt with in this *Review*:

- The world-wide revolutionary wave of 1917-23 was the response of the international working class to the First World War, to four years of butchery and military confrontations between capitalist states with the aim of re-dividing the world.
- The foundation of the Communist International (CI) in 1919 was the culminating point of this first revolutionary wave.
- The foundation of the CI made concrete, first and foremost, the necessity for revolutionaries who remained loyal to the principle of internationalism, which had been betrayed by the right wing of the Social Democratic parties (the majority in most of these parties), to work for the construction of a new International. At the forefront of this effort, this perspective, were the left currents in the Social Democratic parties, grouped around Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, Pannekoek and Gorter in Holland, and of course the Bolshevik fraction of the Russian party around Lenin. It was on the initiative of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolshevik) and the Communist Party of Germany (the KPD, formerly the Spartacus League) that the First Congress of the International was called in Moscow on 4 March 1919.
- The foundation of the new party, the world party of the revolution, was already late in that the majority of revolutionary uprisings by the proletariat in Europe had been violently suppressed. The mission of the CI was to provide a clear political orientation to the working class: the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the destruction of its state and the con-

struction of a new world without war or exploitation.

- The platform of the CI reflected the profound change in historical period opened by the First World War: “*A new epoch is born! The epoch of the dissolution of capitalism, of its inner disintegration. The epoch of the communist revolution of the proletariat*” (Platform of the CI). The only alternative for society was now world proletarian revolution or the destruction of humanity; socialism or barbarism.

All these aspects of the foundation of the CI are developed in two articles in the present *Review*, the first in particular: “1919: the International of Revolutionary Action”. The second article, “Centenary of the foundation of the Communist International: what lessons can we draw for future combats?”, develops an idea already raised in the first article: because of the urgency of the situation, the main parties that founded the International, notably the Bolshevik party and the KPD, were not able to clarify their divergences and confusions in advance.

Moreover, the method employed in the foundation of the new party would not arm it for the future. A large part of the revolutionary vanguard put quantity, in terms of the number adhering to the new parties, above a prior clarification of programmatic and organisational principles. Such an approach turned its back on the very conceptions elaborated and developed by the Bolsheviks during their existence as a fraction within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

This lack of clarification was an important factor, in the context of the reflux of the revolutionary wave, in the development of opportunism in the International. This was to be at the root of a process of

degeneration which led to the eventual bankruptcy of the CI, just as had been the case with the IInd International. This new International was also to succumb through the abandonment of internationalism by the right wing of the Communist Parties. Following that, in the 1930s, in the name of defending the “Socialist Fatherland”, the Communist Parties in all countries trampled on the flag of the International by calling on workers to slaughter each other once again, on the battlefields of the Second World War.

Against this process of degeneration, the CI, like the IInd International, gave rise to left wing minorities which remained loyal to internationalism and to the slogan “The workers have no country, workers of the world unite!”. One of these fractions, the Italian Fraction of the Communist left, and then the French Fraction which subsequently became the Gauche Communiste de France (GCF) carried out a whole balance sheet of the revolutionary wave. We are publishing two chapters from n° 7 (January-February 1946) of the review *Internationalisme*, dealing with the question of the role of the fractions which come out of a degenerating party (“The Left Fraction”) and their contribution to the formation of the future party, in particular the method that has to be applied to this task (“Method for forming the party”).

These revolutionary minorities, more and more reduced in size, had to work in the context of a deepening counter-revolution, illustrated in particular by the absence of revolutionary uprisings at the end of the Second World War – in contrast to what happened at the end of the previous war. Thus this new world conflict was a moment of truth for the weak forces which remained on a class terrain after the CPs had betrayed the case of the proletarian International. The Trotskyist current in turn betrayed, although its passage into the enemy camp engendered proletarian reactions from within it.

Internationalisme n° 43 (June-July 1949) contained an article “Welcome to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*” (republished in *International Review* n° 161 as part of the article “Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism”). The article by *Internationalisme* took a clear position on the nature of the Trotskyist movement, which had abandoned proletarian posi-

tions by participating in the Second World War. The article is a good example of the method used by the GCF in its relations with those who had escaped the shipwreck of Trotskyism in the wake of the war. In the second part of "Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism", published in this issue of the *Review*, it is shown how difficult it was, for those who had grown up in the corrupted milieu of Trotskyism, to make a profound break with its basic ideas and attitudes. This reality is illustrated by the trajectory of two militants, Castoriadis and Munis, who, without doubt, at the end of the 40s and beginning of the 50s, were militants of the working class. Munis remained as such for his whole life, but this wasn't the case with Castoriadis who deserted the workers' movement.

With regard to Munis, our article demonstrates his difficulty in breaking with Trotskyism: *"Underlying this refusal to analyse the economic dimension of capitalism's decadence there lies an unresolved voluntarism, the theoretical foundations of which can be traced back to the letter announcing his break from the Trotskyist organisation in France, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, where he steadfastly maintains Trotsky's notion, presented in the opening lines of the Transitional Programme, that the crisis of humanity is the crisis of revolutionary leadership."*

On Castoriadis, it is underlined that *"In reality, this 'radicalism' that makes highbrow journalists drool so much was a fig leaf covering the fact that Castoriadis' message was extremely useful to the ideological campaigns of the bourgeoisie. Thus, his declaration that marxism had been pulverised (**The rise of Insignificance**, 1996) gave its 'radical' backing to the whole campaign about the death of communism which developed after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of the eastern bloc in 1989"*. He was, in a sense, one of the founding fathers of what we have called the "modernist" current

Also in this issue of the *Review* we continue the denunciation, begun in n° 160, of the union of all the national sectors and parties of the world bourgeoisie against the Russian revolution, to block the revolutionary wave and prevent its spread to the main industrial countries of Western Europe. Faced with the revolutionary attempts in Germany, the SPD played a key role in butchering these uprisings, and the campaigns of slander it used to justify this bloody repression, organised from the very summit of the state, were truly disgusting. Later on, Stalinism also took up its post as the butcher of the revolution, through the imposition of state terror

and the liquidation of the Bolshevik Old Guard. From the moment that the USSR became a bourgeois imperialist state, the great democracies became its accomplice in the physical and ideological liquidation of October 1917. This ideological and political alliance was to last for many years and was to be re-launched, stronger than ever, when the collapse of the Eastern bloc and of Stalinism, a particular form of state capitalism, was falsely presented as the failure of communism.

This *Review* doesn't contain an article on the burning questions of the current world situation. However our readers can find such articles on our website and the next issue of the *Review* will accord the necessary importance to these questions

14.5.19

Centenary of the foundation of the Communist International

1919: The International of revolutionary action

100 years ago, in March 1919, the first congress of the Communist International (CI) was held: the founding congress of the Third International.

If revolutionary organisations did not have the will to celebrate this event, the foundation of the International would be relegated to the oblivion of history. Indeed, the bourgeoisie is interested in keeping silent about this event, while it continues to shower us with celebrations of all kinds such as the centenary of the end of the First World War. The ruling class does not want the working class to remember its first great international revolutionary experience of 1917-1923. The bourgeoisie would like to be able to finally bury the spectre of the revolutionary wave which gave birth to the CI. This revolutionary wave was the international proletariat's response to the First World War, four years of slaughter and military clashes between the capitalist states to carve up the world.

The revolutionary wave began with the victory of the Russian revolution in October 1917. It manifested itself in the mutinies of soldiers in the trenches and the proletarian uprising in Germany in 1918.

The wave spread throughout Europe, it even reached the countries of the Asian continent (especially China in 1927). The countries of the Americas, such as Canada and the United States to Latin America, were also shaken by this global revolutionary upheaval.

We must not forget that it was fear of the international expansion of the Russian revolution that forced the bourgeoisie of the great European powers to sign the armistice to end the First World War.

In this context, the founding of the Communist International in 1919 represented the culmination of this first revolutionary wave.

The Communist International was founded to give a clear political orientation to the working masses. Its objective was to show the proletariat the way to overthrow the bourgeois state and build a new world without war and exploitation. We can recall here what the Statutes of the CI affirmed (adopted at its Second Congress in July 1920):

“The Communist International was formed after the conclusion of the imperialist war of 1914-18, in which the imperialist bourgeoisie of the different countries sacrificed 20 million men.

‘Remember the imperialist war!’ These are the first words addressed by the Communist International to every working man and woman, wherever they live and whatever language they speak. Remember that

because of the existence of capitalist society a handful of imperialists were able to force the workers of the different countries for four long years to cut each other's throats. Remember that the war of the bourgeoisie conjured up in Europe and throughout the world the most frightful famine and the most appalling misery. Remember, that without the overthrow of capitalism the repetition of such robber wars is not only possible, but inevitable.”

The foundation of the CI expressed first and foremost the need for revolutionaries to come together to defend the principle of proletarian internationalism. A basic principle of the workers' movement that the revolutionaries had to preserve and defend against wind and tide!

To understand the importance of the foundation of the CI, we must first recall that the Third International was in historical continuity with the First International (the IWMA) and the Second International (the International of social democratic parties). This is why the Manifesto of the CI stated:

“In rejecting the timidity, the lies, and the corruption of the obsolete official socialist parties, we communists, united in the Third International, consider that we are carrying on in direct succession the heroic endeavours and martyrdom of a long line of revolutionary generations from Babeuf to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. If the First International predicted the future course of development and indicated the roads it would take, if the Second International rallied and organised millions of proletarians, then the Third International is the International of open mass struggle, the International of revolutionary realisation, the International of action.”

It is therefore clear that the CI did not come from nowhere. Its principles and revolutionary programme were the emanation of the whole history of the workers' movement, especially since the Communist League and the publication of the *Manifesto* written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. It was in the *Communist Manifesto* they put forward the famous slogan of the workers' movement: *“The proletarians have no country. Proletarians of all countries, unite!”*

To understand the historical significance of the founding of the CI, we must remember that the Second International died in 1914. Why? Because the main parties of this Second International, the Socialist parties, had betrayed proletarian internationalism. The leaders of these treacherous parties voted for war credits in parliament. In each country, they called the proletarians to join the “Union Sacrée” with their own exploiters. They called on them to kill each other in the world butchery in the name of defending the homeland, when the *Communist Manifesto* affirmed that *“the proletarians have no country”!*

Faced with the shameful collapse of the Second International, only a few social democratic parties were able to weather the storm, including the Italian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Russian parties. In other countries, only a small minority of militants, often isolated, remained faithful to proletarian internationalism. They denounced the bloody orgy of war and tried to regroup. In Europe, it was this minority of internationalist revolutionaries who would represent the left, especially around Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, Pannekoek and Gorter in Holland and of course the Bolshevik fraction of the Russian party around Lenin.

From the death of the Second International in 1914 to the founding of the CI in 1919

Two years before the war, in 1912 the Basle congress of the Second International was held. With the threat of a world war in the heart of Europe looming, this congress adopted a resolution on the issue of war and proletarian revolution. This affirmed:

“Let the governments remember that

with the present condition of Europe and the mood of the working class, they cannot unleash a war without danger to themselves. Let them remember that the Franco-German War was followed by the revolutionary outbreak of the Commune, that the Russo-Japanese War set into motion the revolutionary energies of the peoples of the Russian Empire (...) The proletarians consider it a crime to fire at each other for the profits of the capitalists, the ambitions of dynasties, or the greater glory of secret diplomatic treaties.”

It was also in the Second International that the most consistent marxist theorists, particularly Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, were able to analyse the change in the historic period in the life of capitalism. Luxemburg and Lenin had in fact clearly demonstrated that the capitalist mode of production had reached its peak in the early twentieth century. They understood that the imperialist war in Europe could now have only one goal: the division of the world between the main rival powers in the race for colonies. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg understood that the outbreak of the First World War marked the entry of capitalism into its period of decadence and historical decline. But already, well before the outbreak of war, the left wing of the Second International had to fight hard against the right, against the reformists, centrists and opportunists. These future renegades theorised that capitalism still had good days ahead of it and that, ultimately, the proletariat did not need to make the revolution or overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie.

The fight of the left for the construction of a new International

In September 1915, at the initiative of the Bolsheviks, the Zimmerwald International Socialist Conference was held in Switzerland. It was followed by a second conference in April 1916 in Kienthal, Switzerland. Despite the very difficult conditions of war and repression, delegates from eleven countries participated (Germany, Italy, Russia, France, etc.). But the majority of the delegates were pacifists and refused to break with the social chauvinists who had passed into the bourgeoisie's camp by voting for war credits in 1914.

So there was also at the Zimmerwald Conference a left wing united behind the delegates of the Bolshevik fraction, Lenin and Zinoviev. This “Zimmerwald left” defended the need to break with the social democratic party traitors. This left highlighted the need to build a new International. Against the pacifists, it argued,

in Lenin's words, that “*the struggle for peace without revolutionary action is a hollow and untrue phrase*”. The left of Zimmerwald had taken up Lenin's slogan: “*Turn the imperialist war into a civil war!*” A watchword that was already contained in the resolutions of the Second International passed at the Stuttgart Congress in 1907 and especially the Basle Congress in 1912.

The Zimmerwald left would therefore constitute the “*first nucleus of the Third International in formation*” (as Lenin's companion, Zinoviev, would say in March 1918). The new parties that were created, breaking with social democracy, then began to take the name of “communist party”. It was the revolutionary wave opened up by the Russian revolution of October 1917 that gave a vigorous impetus to the revolutionary militants for the founding of the CI. The revolutionaries had indeed understood that it was absolutely vital to found a world party of the proletariat for the victory of the revolution on a world scale.

It was at the initiative of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Russia and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD, formerly the Spartacus League) that the first congress of the International was convened in Moscow on 4 March 1919.

The political programme of the Communist International

The platform of the CI was based on the programme of the two main communist parties, the Bolshevik Party and the Communist Party of Germany (founded on 29 December 1918).

This CI platform began by stating clearly that “*A new epoch is born! The epoch of the dissolution of capitalism, of its inner disintegration. The epoch of the communist revolution of the proletariat*”. By taking up the speech on the founding programme of the German Communist Party by Rosa Luxemburg, the International made it clear that “*the dilemma faced by humanity today is as follows: fall into barbarism, or salvation through socialism*.” In other words, we had entered the “era of wars and revolutions”. The only alternative for society was now: world proletarian revolution or destruction of humanity; socialism or barbarism. This position was strongly affirmed in the first point of the Letter of Invitation to the founding congress of the Communist International (written in January 1919 by Trotsky).

For the International, the entry of capitalism into its period of decadence meant that the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat took on a new form. This was the period in which the mass strike was developing, the

period when the workers' councils were the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as announced by the appearance of the soviets in Russia in 1905 and 1917. But one of the fundamental contributions of the International was the understanding that the proletariat must destroy the bourgeois state in order to build a new society. It is from this question that the First Congress of the International adopted its *Theses on bourgeois democracy and proletarian dictatorship* (drafted by Lenin). These theses began by denouncing the false opposition between democracy and dictatorship “*because, in no civilized capitalist country, is there 'democracy in general', but only a bourgeois democracy*”. The International thus affirmed that to defend “pure” democracy in capitalism was, in fact, to defend bourgeois democracy, the form *par excellence* of the dictatorship of capital. Against the dictatorship of capital, the International affirmed that only the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale could overthrow capitalism, abolish social classes, and offer a future to humanity.

The world party of the proletariat therefore had to give a clear orientation to the proletarian masses to enable them to achieve their ultimate goal. It had to defend everywhere the slogan of the Bolsheviks in 1917: “*All power to the soviets*”. This was the “dictatorship” of the proletariat: the power of the soviets or workers' councils.

From the difficulties of the Third International to its bankruptcy

In March 1919, the International was unfortunately founded too late, at a time when most of the revolutionary uprisings of the proletariat in Europe had been violently repressed. In fact the CI was founded two months after the bloody repression of the German proletariat in Berlin. The Communist Party of Germany had just lost its principal leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, savagely murdered by the social democratic government during the bloody week in Berlin in January 1919. So at the moment when it was constituted the International had suffered its first defeat. With the crushing of the revolution in Germany, this defeat was also and above all a terrible defeat for the international proletariat.

It must be recognised that revolutionaries at the time were facing a terribly urgent situation when they founded the International. The Russian revolution was completely isolated, suffocated and encircled by the bourgeoisie of all countries (not to mention the counter-revolutionary exactions of the White Armies inside Russia).

The revolutionaries were caught by the throat and it was necessary to act quickly to build the world party. It is because of this urgency that the main founding parties of the International, including the Bolshevik Party and the KPD, had not been able to clarify their differences and confusions. This lack of clarification was an important factor in the development of opportunism in the International with the reflux of the revolutionary wave.

Subsequently, because of the gangrene of opportunism, this new International died in its turn. It also succumbed to the betrayal of the principle of internationalism by the right wing of the Communist parties. In particular, the main party of the International, the Bolshevik Party, after the death of Lenin had begun to defend the theory of "building socialism in one country". Stalin, taking the head of the Bolshevik Party, was the mastermind of the repression of the proletariat which had made the revolution in Russia, imposing a ferocious dictatorship against Lenin's old comrades who fought against the degeneration of the International and denounced what they saw as the return of capitalism to Russia.

Subsequently, in the 1930s, it was in the name of defending the "Soviet Fatherland" that the Communist parties in all countries trampled the flag of the International in calling on proletarians, again, to kill each other on the battlefields of the Second World War. Just like the Second International in 1914, the CI had become bankrupt. Just like the International in 1914, the CI was also a victim of the gangrene of opportunism and a process of degeneration. But like the Second International, the CI also secreted a left minority, militants who remained loyal to internationalism and the slogan "*The proletarians have no country. Proletarians of all countries unite!*" These left-wing minorities (in Germany, France, Italy, Holland ...) waged a political fight within the degenerating International to try to save it. But Stalin eventually excluded these militants from the International. He hunted them, persecuted them and liquidated them physically (we recall the Moscow trials, the assassination of Trotsky by GPU agents and also the Stalinist Gulags).

The revolutionaries excluded from the Third International also sought to regroup, despite all the difficulties of war and repression. Despite their scattering in different countries, these tiny minorities of internationalist militants were able to make a balance sheet (*bilan*) of the revolutionary wave of 1917-1923 in order to identify the main lessons for the future.

The revolutionaries who fought Stalinism did not seek to found a new International, before, during or after the Second

World War. They understood that it was "midnight in the century": the proletariat had been physically crushed, massively mobilised behind the national flags of anti-fascism and the victim of the deepest counter-revolution in history. The historic situation was no longer favourable to the emergence of a new revolutionary wave against the World War.

Nevertheless, throughout this long period of counter-revolution, the revolutionary minorities continued to carry out an activity, often in hiding, to prepare for the future by maintaining confidence in the capacity of the proletariat to raise its head and one day overthrow capitalism. .

We want to recall that the ICC reclaims the contribution of the Communist International. Our organisation also considers itself in political continuity with the left fractions excluded from the International in the 1920s and 30s, especially the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left. This centenary is therefore both an opportunity to salute the invaluable contribution of the CI in the history of the workers' movement, but also to learn from this experience in order to arm the proletariat for its future revolutionary struggles.

Once again, we must fully understand the importance of the founding of the Communist International as the first attempt to constitute the world party of the proletariat. Above all, we must emphasise the importance of the historical continuity, of the common thread which connects the revolutionaries of today and those of the past, of all those militants who, because of their fidelity to the principles of the proletariat, were persecuted and savagely murdered by the bourgeoisie, and especially by their old comrades who became traitors: Noske, Ebert, Scheidemann, Stalin. We must also pay tribute to all those exemplary militants (Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches, Trotsky and many others) who paid with their lives for their loyalty to internationalism.

To be able to build the future world party of the proletariat, without which the overthrow of capitalism will be impossible, revolutionary minorities must regroup, today as in the past. They must clarify their differences through the confrontation of positions, collective reflection and the widest possible discussion. They must be able to learn from the past in order to understand the present historical situation and to allow new generations to open the doors of the future.

Faced with the decomposition of capitalist society, the barbarism of war, the exploitation and growing misery of proletarians, today the alternative remains

the one that the Communist International clearly identified 100 years ago: socialism or barbarism, world proletarian revolution or destruction of humanity in an increasingly bloody chaos.

ICC

100 years after the foundation of the Communist International: What lessons can we draw for future combats?

A century ago a wind of hope blew for humanity: in Russia first of all the working class had just taken power. In Germany, Hungary and then in Italy it fought courageously to follow the Russian example with a single agenda: the abolition of the capitalist mode of production whose contradictions had plunged civilisation into four years of war. Four years of unprecedented barbarity that confirmed the entry of capitalism into its phase of decadence.

In these conditions, acknowledging the bankruptcy of the Second International and basing itself on all the work of the reconstruction of international unity started at Zimmerwald in September 1915, then Kienthal in 1916, the Third, Communist International (CI) was founded on March 4 1919 in Moscow. In his *April Theses* of 1917, Lenin had already called for the foundation of a new world party. For Lenin a decisive step was taken during the terrible days of January 1919 in Germany, during the course of which the German Communist Party (KPD) was founded. In a "Letter to the workers of Europe and America" dated January 26, Lenin wrote: "When the Spartacus League became the German Communist Party, then the founding of the 3rd International became a fact. Formally this foundation hadn't yet been decided upon, but in reality the 3rd International exists from now." Leaving aside the excessive enthusiasm of such a judgment, as we will see later, revolutionaries at the time understood that it was now indispensable to forge the party for the victory of the revolution at the world level. After several weeks of preparation, 51 delegates met up from March 2 to March 6 1919, in order to lay out the organisational and programmatic markers which would allow the world proletariat to continue to advance the struggle against all the forces of the bourgeoisie.

The ICC lays claim to the contributions of the Communist International. This centenary is thus an occasion to salute and underline the inestimable work of the CI in the history of the revolutionary movement, but equally to draw the lessons of this experience and draw out its weaknesses in order to arm the proletariat of today for its future battles.

Defending the struggle of the working class in the heat of revolution

As Trotsky's "Letter of invitation to the congress" confirmed: "*The undersigned parties and organisations consider that the convening of the first congress of the new revolutionary International is urgently necessary (...) The very rapid rise of the world revolution, which constantly poses new problems, the danger of strangulation of this revolution under the hypocritical banner of the 'League of Nations', the attempts of the social-traitor parties to join together and further help their governments and their bourgeoisies in order to betray the working class after granting each other a mutual 'amnesty', and finally, the extremely rich revolutionary experience already acquired and the world-wide character of the whole revolutionary movement – all these circumstances compel us to place on the agenda of the discussion the question of the convening of an international congress of proletarian-revolutionary parties*".

In the image of the first appeal launched by the Bolsheviks, the foundation of the CI expressed the will for the regroupment of revolutionary forces throughout the world. But it equally expressed the defence of proletarian internationalism which had been trampled underfoot by the great majority of the social democratic parties who made up the 2nd International. After four years of atrocious war which had divided and decimated millions of proletarians on the field of battle, the emergence of a new world party was witness to the will to deepen the work begun by the organisations who remained faithful to internationalism. In this the CI was the expression of the political strength of the proletariat, which again manifested itself after the profound

defeat caused by the war, and also of the responsibility of revolutionaries to continue to defend the interests of the working class and the world revolution.

During the course of the congress it was said many times that the CI was the party of revolutionary action. As it affirms in its *Manifesto*, the CI saw the light of day at the moment that capitalism had clearly demonstrated its obsolescence. From here on humanity entered "the era of wars and revolutions". In other words, the abolition of capitalism became an extreme necessity for the future of civilisation. It was with this new understanding of the historic evolution of capitalism that the CI tirelessly defended the workers' councils and the dictatorship of the proletariat: "*The new apparatus of power must represent the dictatorship of the working class (...) it must, that is to say, be the instrument for the systematic overthrow of the exploiting class and its expropriation (...) The power of the workers' councils or the workers' organisations is its concrete form*" (Letter of invitation to the congress). These orientations were defended throughout the congress. Moreover, the "Theses on Bourgeois Democracy", written by Lenin and adopted by the congress, focussed on denouncing the mystification of democracy, on warning the proletariat about the danger that it posed in its struggle against bourgeois society. From the outset the CI placed itself resolutely in the proletarian camp by defending the principles and methods of working class struggle, while energetically denouncing the call from the centrist current for an impossible unity between the social-traitors and the communists: "*the unity of communist workers with the assassins of the leading communists Liebknecht and Luxemburg*", according the terms of the "Resolution of the first congress of the CI on the position towards the socialist currents and the Berne Conference". This resolution was evidence of the intransigent defence of proletarian principles and was voted on unanimously by the congress. It was adopted in reaction to the recent meeting held by the majority of the social democratic parties of the 2nd

International¹ which had taken up a certain number of orientations openly aimed against the revolutionary wave. The resolution ended with these words: “*The congress invites the workers of every country to begin the most energetic struggle against the yellow international and to warn the widest numbers of the proletariat about this International of lies and betrayal.*”

The foundation of the CI turned out to be a vital stage for advancing the historical struggle of the proletariat. It took up the best contributions of the 2nd International while discarding those positions and analyses which no longer corresponded to the historic period which had just opened up.² Whereas the former world party had betrayed proletarian internationalism in the name of the Sacred Union on the eve of the First World War, the foundation of the new party strengthened the unity of the working class, arming it for the bitter struggle that it had to undertake across the planet for the abolition of the capitalist mode of production. Thus, despite the unfavourable circumstances and the errors committed - as we will see - we salute and support such an enterprise. Revolutionaries of that time took up their responsibilities; it had to be done and they did it!

A foundation in unfavourable circumstances

Revolutionaries faced with a massive surge from the world proletariat

The year 1919 was the culminating point of the revolutionary wave. After the victory of the revolution in Russia in October 1917, the abdication of Wilhelm II and the precipitous signing of the armistice faced with mutinies and revolts of masses of workers in Germany, workers’ insurrections broke out in numerous places, most notably with the setting up of republics of councils in Bavaria and Hungary. There were also mutinies in the fleets and among French troops, as well as in British military units, refusing to intervene against soviet Russia. In 1919 a wave of strikes hit Britain (Sheffield, the Clyde, South Wales and Kent). But in March 1919, at the moment the CI appeared in Moscow, the great majority of uprisings had been suppressed or were on course to be.

There is no doubt that revolutionaries of that time found themselves in a situation of urgency and they were obliged to act in the fire of revolutionary battle. As the French

Fraction of the Communist Left (FFCL) underlined in 1948: “*revolutionaries tried to fill the gap between the maturity of the objective situation and the immaturity of the subjective factor (the absence of the party) by a gathering in numbers of politically heterogeneous groups and currents and called this coming together the new Party*”³

It’s not a question here of discussing the validity or not of the foundation of the new party, of the International. It was an absolute necessity. On the other hand we want to point to a certain number of errors in the way in which it was realised.

An overestimation of the situation in which the party was founded

Even though the majority of reports submitted by the different delegates on the situation of the class struggle in each country took into account the reaction of the bourgeoisie faced with the advance of the revolution (a resolution on the White Terror was voted on at the end of the congress), it’s striking to see to what point this aspect was largely underestimated during these five days of work. Already, some days after the news of the foundation of the KPD, which followed the founding of the communist parties of Austria (November 1918) and Poland (December 1918), Lenin considered that the die was already cast: “*When the German Spartacus League, led by its illustrious leaders known the world over, these loyal partisans of the class struggle such as Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, Franz Mehring, definitively broke all links with socialists such as Scheidemann (...) when the Spartacus League became the German Communist Party, then the foundation of the 3rd International, the Communist International, truly proletarian, truly international, truly revolutionary, became a fact. This foundation wasn’t formally sanctified, but, in reality, the 3rd International now exists.*”⁴ To add a significant anecdote here: this text was finished and drafted on January 21 1919, the date on which Lenin was told about the assassination of Karl Liebknecht. And yet an unwavering certainty ran through the congress and Lenin announced it with: “*The bourgeoisie can unleash its terror; it may assassinate millions of workers, but victory is ours, the victory of the world communist revolution is assured.*” Consequently all the reporters of the situation overflowed with the same optimism; like comrade Albert, a young member of the KPD who on March 2 expressed himself to the congress in these words: “*I’m not expressing an exaggerated*

optimism by affirming that the German and Russian communist parties continue the struggle, firmly hoping that the German proletariat will also lead the revolution to the final victory and the dictatorship of the proletariat will equally be established in Germany, despite all the national assemblies, despite all the Scheidemanns and despite the national bourgeoisie (...). It is this which motivated me to accept your invitation with joy, convinced that after a short delay we will struggle side by side with the proletariat of other countries, particularly France and Britain, for the world revolution in order to realise the objectives of the revolution in Germany”. A few days later, between March 6 and 9, a terrible repression struck Berlin, killing 3000 workers including 28 sailors imprisoned and then executed by firing squad in the tradition of Versailles! On March 10, Leo Jogisches was assassinated and Heinrich Dorrenbach⁵ met the same fate on May 19.

However, the last words of Lenin of the closing speech of the congress showed that it hadn’t moved one iota on the relationship of force between the two classes. Without hesitation it affirmed: “*The victory of the proletarian revolution is assured throughout the entire world. The foundation of the International Republic of Councils is underway.*”

But as Amedeo Bordiga noted a year later: “*After the slogan ‘Soviet regimes’ was launched onto the world by the Russian and international proletariat we first of all saw the revolutionary wave resurface after the end of the war and the proletariat of the entire world move into action. In every country we saw the old socialist parties filtered out and the communist parties were born, engaging in the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately the period which followed has been a period of check because the German, Bavarian and Hungarian revolutions have all been wiped out by the bourgeoisie.*”

In fact, important weaknesses of consciousness in the working class constituted a major hindrance to a revolutionary development:

- the difficulties of these movements to overcome the struggle against war alone and go towards the higher level of proletarian revolution. This revolutionary wave was above all built up around the struggle against the war;
- the development of the mass strike through the unification of political and economic demands remained very

1. The Berne Conference of 1919 was “an attempt to resuscitate the corpse of the Second International”, to which the “Centre” had sent representatives.

2. For a fuller development see “Foundation of the Communist International”, *International Review*, n° 57.

3. “Apropos du Premier Congrès du Parti Communiste Internationaliste d’Italie”, *Internationalisme* n° 7 Jan-Feb 1946.

4. Lenin, *Works*, volume XXVIII.

5. Dorrenbach was the commander of the People’s Naval Division in Berlin, 1918. After the January defeat, he took refuge in Brunswick and then Eisenach. He was arrested and executed in May 1919.

fragile and thus did little to push it onto a higher level of consciousness;

- the revolutionary peak was on the point of being reached. The movement no longer had the same dynamic after the defeat of the struggles in Germany and Central Europe. Even if the wave continued it had lost the force it had from 1919-1920;
- the Soviet Republic in Russia remained cruelly isolated. It was the sole revolutionary bastion with all that this implied in favour of a regression in consciousness both within Russia and the rest of the world.

A foundation in an urgent situation which opened the door to opportunism

The revolutionary milieu came out of the war in a weakened state

“The workers’ movement on the eve of the first imperialist world war was in a state of extreme division. The imperialist war had broken the formal unity of the political organisations that claimed to be part of the proletariat. The crisis of the workers’ movement, which already existed beforehand, reached its culminating point because of the fact of the world war and the positions to take up in response to it. All the marxist, anarchist and trade union parties and organizations were violently shaken by it. Splits multiplied. New groups arose. A political delimitation was produced. The revolutionary minority of the 2nd International represented by the Bolsheviks, the German left around Luxemburg and the Dutch Tribunists, who already were not very homogeneous, did not simply face a single opportunist bloc. Between them and the opportunists there was a whole rainbow of political groups and tendencies, more or less confused, more or less centrist, more or less revolutionary, representing the general shift of the masses who were breaking with the war, with the Sacred Union, with the treason of the old parties of social democracy. We see here a process of the liquidation of the old parties whose downfall gave rise to a multitude of groups. These groups expressed less the process of the constitution of the new party than the dislocation, the liquidation, the death of the old party. These groups certainly contained elements for the constitution of the new party but in no way formed the basis for it. These currents essentially expressed the negation of the past and not the positive affirmation of the future. The basis for the new class party can only reside in the former left, in its critical and constructive work, in the theoretical positions and programmatic principles which

*the left had been elaborating for the 20 years of ITS FRACTIONAL EXISTENCE AND STRUGGLE inside the old party.”*⁶

Thus the revolutionary milieu was broken apart, composed of groups lacking clarity and displaying a good deal of immaturity. Only the left fractions of the 2nd International, the Bolsheviks, the Tribunists, the Spartacists (in part only because they were also heterogeneous or even divided) were up to it and were based on solid ground for the foundation of the new party.

Moreover a good number of militants lacked political experience. Among the 43 delegates to the founding congress whose ages were known, five were in their twenties, 24 their thirties and only one was older than fifty.⁷ Out of the 42 delegates whose political trajectory could be traced, 17 had joined social democratic parties before the Russian revolution of 1905, whereas 8 only became active socialists after 1914.⁸

Despite their passion and enthusiasm, the indispensable experience in such circumstances was very much lacking amongst them.

Disagreements among the proletariat’s avant-garde

As the FFCL already underlined in 1946, *“It is undeniable that one of the historic causes of the victory of the revolution in Russia and its defeat in Germany, Hungary and Italy resides in the existence of the revolutionary Party at a decisive moment in the former and its absence or its incompleteness in the latter.”* The foundation of the 3rd International was deferred for a long time by the various divisions inside the proletarian camp during the episode of revolution. In 1918-19, and quite conscious that the absence of the party was an irredeemable weakness for the victory of the world revolution, the avant-garde of the proletariat was unanimous on the imperious necessity to set up a new party. However, there was no agreement on when to do it and above all on the approach to adopt. While the great majority of communist organisations and groups were favorable to the briefest delay, the KPD and particularly Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches opted for an adjournment, considering that the situation was premature, that the communist consciousness of the masses remained weak and that the revolutionary milieu

also lacked clarity.⁹ The KPD delegate to the congress, comrade Albert, was thus mandated to defend this position and not to vote for the immediate foundation of the Communist International.

*“When it was said to us that the proletariat needed a political centre in its struggle, we could say that this centre already existed and that all the elements which were found at the base of the system of councils had already broken with elements of the working class which went towards the democratic bourgeoisie: we noted that everywhere a rupture was being prepared and it is about to be realised. But a Third International must not only be a political centre, an institution in which the theoreticians discuss with one another with warm words, it must be the basis of an organisational power. If we want to make the Third International an efficient instrument of struggle, if we want to make it a means for combat, then the necessary conditions have to exist. Thus, in our opinion, the question mustn’t be approached and discussed from an intellectual point of view; we have to ask if the basics of the organisation concretely exist. I’ve always had the feeling that the comrades who are pushing so strongly for its foundation have been greatly influenced by the evolution of the 2nd International and that they wanted, after the Berne Conference, to impose it on the current enterprise. That seems less important to us and when it’s said that clarification is necessary, otherwise indecisive elements will rally to the Yellow International, I say that the founding of the 3rd International will not bring back the elements who are re-joining today’s 2nd, and that if they go there despite everything, then that’s their place.”*¹⁰

As we see, the German delegate warned of the danger of founding a party by compromising on principles and on programmatic and organisational clarification. Although the Bolsheviks took the concerns of the KPD very seriously, it was in no doubt that they were caught up in a race against time. From Lenin to Zinoviev, through to Trotsky and Rakovsky, all insisted on the importance of making all the parties, groups, organisations or individuals who claimed to be more or less close to communism and the soviets join the new International. As noted in a biography of Rosa Luxemburg: *“Lenin*

6. “A propos du Premier Congrès du Parti Communiste d’Italie”, *Internationalisme*, n° 7, Jan-Feb, 1946.

7. *Founding of the Communist International: The Communist International in Lenin’s Time. Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress: March 1919*, Edited by John Riddell, New York, 1987. Introduction, page 19.

8. *Ibid.*

9. It’s this mandate that the KPD gave (in the first weeks of January) to their delegate to the founding congress. This is no way meant that Rosa Luxemburg for example was opposed to the foundation of an International - far from it.

10. Intervention of the German delegate March 4, 1919, in *Premier Congrès de l’Internationale Communiste*, integral texts published under the direction of Pierre Broué, Etudes et Documentation Internationales, 1974.

saw in the *International the means to help various communist parties to set themselves up and strengthen themselves*¹¹ through the decantation produced by the struggle against centrism and opportunism. For the KPD, it was first of all a question of forming “solid” communist parties which had the masses behind them before endorsing the creation of the new party.

A method of foundation which did not arm the new party

The composition of the congress is both the illustration of the precipitation and the difficulties that it imposed on revolutionary organisations at the time. Out of 51 delegates taking part in the work, taking account of lateness, early departures and brief absences, around forty were Bolshevik militants from the Russian party but also the Latvian, Lithuanian, Byelorussian, Armenian and eastern Russian parties. Outside of the Bolshevik Party, only the communist parties of Germany, Poland, Austria and Hungary had a real existence.

The other forces invited to the congress were a multitude of organisations, groups or elements that were not openly “communist” but products of a process of decantation within social democracy and the trade unions. The letter of invitation to the congress appealed to all the forces, near or far, which supported the Russian revolution and seemed to have the will to work for the victory of the world revolution:

“10. It is necessary to ally ourselves with these elements of the revolutionary movement which, although they did not belong to the socialist parties before, today placed themselves on the whole on the terrain of the dictatorship of the proletariat under the form of the power of the councils. In the first place we refer here to the syndicalist elements of the workers’ movement.

“11. Finally, it’s necessary to win over all the proletarian groups and organisations that, without openly rallying to the revolutionary current, show a tendency in this direction.”¹²

This approach led to several anomalies which exposed a lack of representation of a part of the congress. For example, the American Boris Reinstein didn’t have a mandate from his Socialist Labour Party. S. J. Rutgers from Holland represented a league for socialist propaganda. Christian Rakovsky¹³ was supposed to represent the Balkan Federation, the Bulgarian “Nar-

rows” and the Romanian CP. But he’d had no contact with these three organisations since 1915-16.¹⁴ Consequently, despite appearances, this founding congress was at root perfectly representative of the lack of consciousness within the world working class.

All these elements show that a large part of the revolutionary avant-garde’s objective was quantity to the detriment of a prior clarification on organisational principles. This approach turned on its head the conception which the Bolsheviks had developed over the last fifteen years. And this is what the FFCL had already noted in 1946: “As much as the ‘strict’ method of selection on the most precise principled bases, without taking into account immediate numerical success, allowed the Bolsheviks to build a Party which, at a decisive moment, was able to integrate and assimilate into itself all the energies and revolutionary militants of other currents and finally lead the proletariat to victory, so the ‘loose’ method, immediately concerned above all with bringing together the largest numbers at the expense of programmatic precision and principles, had to lead to the constitution of the mass party, a real colossus with feet of clay which fell to its defeat under the domination of opportunism. The formation of the class party turns out to be infinitely more difficult in the advanced capitalist countries – where the bourgeoisie possesses numerous means to corrupt the consciousness of the proletariat – than was the case in Russia.”

Blinded by the certitude of the imminent victory of the proletariat, the revolutionary avant-garde enormously underestimated the objective difficulties which stood in front of them. This euphoria led them to compromise the “strict” method for the construction of the organisation that the Bolsheviks in Russia and in part the Spartacists in Germany had defended before everything. They considered that the priority of work had to be given to a great revolutionary coming-together, countering on the way the Yellow International which a few weeks before had re-formed in Berne. This “loose” method relegated the clarification of organisational principles to the status of an annex. Little importance was given to the confusions that could be brought in by groups integrated into the new party; the struggle would take place within it. For now, the priority was given to the regroupment of the greatest numbers.

This “loose” method turned out to be heavy with consequences since it weakened the CI in the organisational struggles

to come. In fact the programmatic clarity of the first congress was circumvented by the opportunist push in the context of the weakening and the degeneration of the revolutionary wave. Within the CI fractions of the left emerged which criticised the insufficiencies of the rupture with the 2nd International. As we will see in the following piece, the positions defended and elaborated by these groups responded to the problems raised in the CI by the new period of the decadence of capitalism.

(to be continued)

Narek, March 4, 2019.

11. Gilbert Badia, *Rosa Luxemburg, Journaliste, Polemiste, Revolutionnaire*, Editions Sociales, 1975.

12. “Letter of invitation to the Congress”, Op. Cit. First Congress of the International.

13. One of the most influential and determined delegates in favour of the immediate foundation of the CI.

14. Pierre Broué, *History of the Communist International (1919-1943)*, Fayard, 1997, p. 79 (in French).

Internationalisme n° 7, 1946

On the first congress of the Internationalist Communist Party of Italy

To stimulate discussion around the formation of the future world party of the revolution, we are publishing two chapters of an article from *Internationalisme* n° 7 from January 1946, entitled “On the First Congress of the Internationalist Communist Party of Italy”. The review *Internationalisme* was the theoretical organ of the French Fraction of the Communist Left (FFCL), the group that was politically the most clear in the period immediately after the Second World War. In 1945 the Fraction transformed itself into the Gauche Communiste de France in order to avoid confusion following a split by militants in France who took the same name for their group as the French Fraction.

This article (which we will publish in full on our website), basing itself on the lessons of the degeneration of the Third International, develops on the criteria which have to apply to the constitution of a future world party. The two chapters published in this *Review* – the first, “The Left Fraction” and the sixth, “Method for forming the party” – look at the political questions posed since the foundation of the Third International and provide a coherent argument for understanding them. They build a bridge between the post World War One period and the period of the Second World War, on the basis of the balance sheet drawn up by the Italian Fraction in the 1930s, whereas the other chapters are more devoted to a polemic with specific currents of the 1940s, such as the RKD (Revolutionäre Kommunisten Deutschlands, a group of former Trotskyists from Austria) and Vercesi. These chapters are also very interesting but would not fit into a printed *Review*.

Summarised briefly, the criteria for the formation of the party are, on the one hand, a course open to the revival and offensive struggle of the proletariat, and, on the other hand, the existence of a solid programmatic basis for the new party.

At that moment, after the first congress of the Internationalist Communist Party, held at the end of December 1945 in Turin, the GCF considered that the first condition – a new favourable course – had been satisfied. Thus, on this basis, they saluted the transformation of the Italian Fraction “by giving birth to a new party of the proletariat”. It was only later, in 1946, that the GCF recognised that the period of counter-revolution was not over and that the objective conditions for the formation

of the party were absent. Consequently it stopped publication of its agitational paper *L’Etincelle*, considering that the perspective for a historical resurgence of class struggle was not on the agenda. The last issue of *L’Etincelle* came out in November 1946.

At the same time, the GCF severely criticised the method used for the constitution of the Italian party, via “an addition of currents and tendencies” on a heterogeneous basis (“Method for forming the party”), in the same way as it criticised, in the same chapter, the method for forming the CI, an “amalgamation around a programme that had deliberately been left incomplete”. And such a programme could only be an opportunist one, which turned its back on the method which had been applied to the construction of the Bolshevik Party.

The merit of this article in *Internationalisme* is that it insists on the rigour needed around the adoption of a programme, which did not exist in the party that had just been formed in Italy. This article – written about a quarter of a century after the foundation of the Comintern, and a few weeks after the congress of the Internationalist Communist Party – was certainly the most consistent critique of the way the foundation of the Communist International went against the methods of the Bolshevik Party. *Internationalisme* was also the only publication of the milieu of the communist left at that time to highlight the opportunist approach of the Internationalist CP.

In this sense, the GCF is an illustration of the continuity with the method of Marx and Engels in the foundation of the German Social Democratic Party at Gotha in 1875 (cf *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*), when they rejected the confused and op-

portunist basis on which the SAPD was founded. Continuity also with the attitude of Rosa Luxemburg faced with the opportunism of the revisionist Bernstein the German Social Democracy 25 years later, but also with that of Lenin on organisational principles against the Mensheviks. Continuity, finally, with the attitude of *Bilan* faced with the opportunism of the Trotskyist current in the 1930s. It was thanks to this intransigence in the defence of programmatic positions and organisational principles that elements coming out of the current around Trotsky (such as the RKD) were able to move towards the defence of internationalism during and after the Second World War. Holding high the banner of internationalism against the “partisans”, intransigently defending internationalism against opportunism was thus a condition for the internationalist forces to find a political compass.

In this presentation we should make more precise a formulation concerning the Spartakusbund during the First World War:

“The experience of the Spartakusbund is highly edifying on this point. The latter’s fusion with the Independents did not, as they hoped, lead to the creation of a strong class party but resulted in the Spartakusbund being swamped by the Independents and to the weakening of the German proletariat. Before her murder, Rosa Luxemburg and other Spartakusbund leaders recognized the error of fusing with the Independents and tried to correct it. But this error was not only maintained by the CI in Germany, but it became the practical method for forming Communist Parties in all countries, imposed by the CP”.

It’s not quite right to talk about the fusion of the Spartakusbund with the USPD. The USPD was formed by the SAG (Sozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft – Socialist Working Group); the *Internationale* group (the Spartakusbund) was integrated into it. But this was not strictly speaking a fusion, which would imply the dissolution of the organisation that has fused with another. In fact the Spartakusbund maintained their organisational independence and their capacity for action while giving themselves

the objective of drawing this formation towards their positions as a left wing inside it. Very different was the approach of the CI through the fusion of different groups within a single party, abandoning the necessary process of selection through an addition, with “*principles sacrificed to numerical mass*”.

The left fraction

At the end of 1945, the first congress of the young, recently constituted Internationalist Communist Party of Italy took place.

This new Party of the proletariat didn't spring out of nothing. It was the fruit of a process which began with the degeneration of the old Communist Party and the Communist International. This opportunist degeneration brought about a historic response from the class within the old party: the Left Fraction.

Like all the communist parties set up following World War I, the Communist Party of Italy, at the moment of its formation, contained both revolutionary and opportunist currents.

The revolutionary victory of the Russian proletariat and of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin in October 1917, through the decisive influence that it exercised on the international workers' movement, accelerated and precipitated the organisational political contrasts and delimitations between revolutionaries and the opportunists who cohabitated in the old socialist parties of the IInd International. The 1914 war had broken this impossible unity between the old parties.

The October revolution sped up the constitution of new parties of the proletariat but, at the same time, the positive influence of the October revolution contained some negative elements.

By rushing towards the formation of new parties, it prevented a construction on the basis of clear, sharp principles and a revolutionary programme. This could only be elaborated following an open and intransigent political struggle which eliminated the opportunist currents and the residues of bourgeois ideology.

With the lack of a revolutionary programme, the old communist parties were set up too hastily on the basis of a sentimental attachment to the October revolution, opening up many fissures for the penetration of opportunism into the new proletarian parties.

Also, from their foundation, the CI and the communist parties of various countries

We should also rectify a factual error in this article where it says “*In Britain, the CI demanded that the communist groups join the Independent Labour Party to form a mass revolutionary opposition inside this reformist party*”. In fact, the CI called for integration of communists

into the Labour Party itself! This error of detail in no way alters the basic argument of *Internationalisme*.

14.5.19

were caught up in the struggle between revolutionaries and opportunists. The ideological struggle - which has to come before and be the precondition for the formation of the party, which can only offer protection from the opportunist gangrene through the enunciation of principles and the construction of the programme - only took place after the constitution of the parties. Through this, not only was the germ of opportunism introduced into the communist parties from the beginning, but it also made the struggle more difficult for the revolutionary currents against the opportunism that survived and was hidden within the new party. Each defeat of the proletariat modified the balance of forces against the proletariat, inevitably producing the strengthening of opportunism within the Party, which in its turn became a supplementary factor in further proletarian defeats.

If the development of the struggle between the currents in the Party became so sharp so quickly it was because of the present historical period. The proletarian revolution came out of the spheres of theoretical speculation. From the distant ideal that it was yesterday, it became a problem of practical and immediate activity

Opportunism no longer took the form of bookish theoretical elaborations acting as a slow poison on the brains of the proletarians. At the present era of intense class struggle it had immediate repercussions and was paid for with the lives of millions of proletarians and bloody defeats of the revolution. As opportunism surged and strengthened itself in the CI and its parties it was the main card and auxiliary of capitalism against the revolution because it meant the strengthening of the enemy class within the most decisive organ of the proletariat: its Party. Revolutionaries could only oppose opportunism by setting up their Fraction and proclaiming a fight to the death against it. The constitution of the Fraction meant that the Party had become the theatre of confrontation between opposed and antagonistic class expressions.

It was the war-cry of revolutionaries to save the class party, against capitalism

and its opportunist and centrist agents who were trying to take hold of the Party and turn it into an instrument against the proletariat.

The struggle between the Fraction of the Communist Left and the centrist and right-wing fractions for the Party isn't a struggle for “leadership” of the apparatus but is essentially programmatic. It is an aspect of the general struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, between capitalism and the proletariat.

This struggle follows the objective course of situations and the modifications of the *rapport de force* between the classes and is conditioned by the latter.

The outcome can only be the victory of the programme of the Left Fraction and the elimination of opportunism, or the open betrayal of a Party falling into the hands of capitalism. But whatever the outcome of this alternative, the appearance of the Fraction means that the historical and political continuity has definitively passed from the Party to the Fraction and that it's the latter alone that henceforth expresses and represents the class.

Just as the old Party can only be salvaged by the triumph of the Fraction, the same goes for the alternative of the betrayal of the old Party, thus completing its ineluctable course under the leadership of centrism: the new class party can only be formed on the programmatic basis given by the Fraction.

The historic continuity of the class, the process of this continuity is made through the succession between Party-Fraction-Party, is one of the fundamental ideas of the International Communist Left. This position was for a long time a theoretical postulate. The formation of the PCI in Italy and its first Congress provide the historic confirmation of this postulate.

The Italian Left Fraction, after a struggle of twenty years against centrism, achieved its historic function by transforming itself and giving birth to a new Party of the proletariat.

Method for forming the party

While it is correct to say that the constitution of the party is determined by objective conditions and cannot be the emanation of individual will, the method employed in constituting the party is more directly subordinated to the “subjectivism” of the groups and militants who take part in it. It is they who feel the necessity for constituting the party and translate this into action. The subjective element thus becomes a decisive element in this process and in what follows; it marks the whole orientation for the ulterior development of the party. Without falling into a helpless fatalism, it would be extremely dangerous to ignore the grave consequences that result from the way in which human beings carry out the tasks whose objective necessity they have become aware of.

Experience teaches us the decisive importance of the method for the constitution of the party. Only the ignorant or the hare-brained, those for whom history only begins with their own activity, can have the luxury of ignoring the whole rich and painful experience of the 3rd International. And it's no less serious to see very young militants, who have only just arrived in the workers' movement and the communist left, not only being content in their ignorance but even making it the basis of their pretentious arrogance.

The workers' movement on the eve of the first imperialist world war was in a state of extreme division. The imperialist war had broken the formal unity of the political organisations that claimed to be part of the proletariat. The crisis of the workers' movement, which already existed beforehand, reached its culminating point because of the world war and the positions that were needed to take up in response to it. All the marxist, anarchist and trade union parties and organizations were violently shaken by it. Splits multiplied. New groups arose. A political delimitation was produced. The revolutionary minority of the 2nd International represented by the Bolsheviks, the German left around Luxemburg, and the Dutch Tribunists, who already were not very homogeneous, did not simply face a single opportunist bloc. Between them and the opportunists there was a whole rainbow of political groups and tendencies, more or less confused, more or less centrist, more or less revolutionary, representing the general shift of the masses who were breaking with the war, with the Sacred Union, with the treason of the old parties of social democracy. We see here a process of the liquidation of the old parties whose downfall gave rise to a multitude of groups.

These groups expressed less the process of the constitution of the new party than the dislocation, the liquidation, the death of the old party. These groups certainly contained elements for the constitution of the new party but in no way formed the basis for it. These currents essentially expressed the negation of the past and not the positive affirmation of the future. The basis for the new class party could only reside in the former left, in its critical and constructive work, in the theoretical positions and programmatic principles which the left had been elaborating for the 20 years of its existence and struggle as a fraction inside the old party.

The October 1917 revolution in Russia provoked great enthusiasm in the masses and accelerated the process of the liquidation of the old parties who had betrayed the working class. At the same time, it posed very sharply the problem of the constitution of the new party and the new International. The old left, the Bolsheviks and the Spartacists, were submerged by the rapid development of the objective situation, by the revolutionary push of the masses. Their precipitation in building the new party corresponded to and was the product of the precipitation of revolutionary events around the world. It is undeniable that one of the historical causes of the victory of the revolution in Russia and of its defeat in Germany, Hungary and Italy lies in the existence of the revolutionary party at the decisive moment in the first country and its absence or incomplete character in the others. Thus the revolutionaries tried to overcome the gap between the maturation of the objective situation and the immaturity of the subjective factor (the absence of the party) through a broad gathering of politically heterogeneous groups and currents and proclaiming this gathering as the new party.

Just as the “narrow” method of selection on the most precise principled bases, without taking into account immediate numerical success, enabled the Bolsheviks to build a party which, at the decisive moment, was able to integrate and assimilate all the revolutionary energies and militants from other currents and ultimately lead the proletariat to victory, so the “broad” method, with its concern above all to rally the greatest possible numbers straight away at the expense of precise principles and programme, led to the formation of mass parties, real giants with feet of clay which were to fall under the sway of opportunism after the first defeat they went through. The formation of the class party proved to be

infinitely more difficult in the advanced capitalist countries, where the bourgeoisie possesses a thousand means for corrupting the consciousness of the proletariat, than it was in Russia.

Because of this, the CI thought it could get round the difficulties by resorting to other methods than those which had triumphed in Russia. The construction of the party is not a question of skill or savoir-faire but essentially a problem of programmatic solidity.

Faced with the enormous power of ideological corruption wielded by capitalism and its agents, the proletariat can only put forward its class programme with the greatest rigour and intransigence. However slow this path towards building the party might seem, revolutionaries can follow no other, as the experience of past failures has shown.

The experience of the Spartakusbund is highly edifying on this point. The latter's fusion with the Independents did not, as they hoped, lead to the creation of a strong class party but resulted in the Spartakusbund being swamped by the Independents and to the weakening of the German proletariat. Before her murder, Rosa Luxemburg and other Spartakusbund leaders recognized the error of fusing with the Independents and tried to correct it. But this error was not only maintained by the CI in Germany, but it became the practical method for forming Communist Parties in all countries, imposed by the CI.

In France, the CI “created” the Communist Party by imposing the amalgamation and unification of groups of revolutionary syndicalists, the internationalists of the Socialist Party and the rotten, corrupt centrist tendency of the parliamentarians, led by Frossard and Cachin.

In Italy, the CI obliged Bordiga's abstentionist fraction to found a single organisation with the centrist and opportunist tendencies of Ordino Nuovo and Serrati.

In Britain, the CI demanded that the communist groups join the Independent Labour Party to form a mass revolutionary opposition inside this reformist party.

In sum, the method used by the CI in the “construction” of Communist Parties was everywhere opposed to the method which proved effective in the building of the Bolshevik Party. It was no longer the ideological struggle around the programme, the progressive elimination of opportunist tendencies which, through the victory of the most consistently revolutionary fraction,

served as the basis for the construction of the party. Instead the basis was an addition of different tendencies, their amalgamation around a programme that had deliberately been left incomplete. Selection was replaced by addition, principles sacrificed for numerical mass.

How could the Bolsheviks and Lenin follow this path, which they had condemned and fought against in Russia for 20 years? How can we explain this change in method for forming the party by the Bolsheviks before and after 1917? Lenin did not harbour any illusions about the opportunist and centrist leaders, on the conversion to the revolution of the Frossards, the Lebedours, on the real value of these last-minute revolutionaries. Lenin could not have been unaware of the danger represented by admitting this whole mob into the Communist Parties. If he did decide to let them in, it was because he had been subjected to the pressure of events, because he believed that these elements would, by the very unfolding of events, be progressively and definitively eliminated from the Party. This allowed Lenin to inaugurate a new method, based on two new facts which, in his eyes, offered a sufficient guarantee: the political preponderance of the Bolshevik party in the CI and the objective development of the revolutionary course. Experience has since shown that Lenin made a colossal error in underestimating the danger of an opportunist degeneration which is always possible in a revolutionary party, and which is facilitated all the more if the formation of the party is done not on the basis of eliminating the opportunist elements but on camouflaging them, adding and incorporating them as elements constituting the new Party.

Against the "broad" method of addition which won out in the CI, the left vigorously recalled the method of selection, the method of Lenin before the October revolution. And it was one of the great merits of Bordiga and his fraction that they were the most energetic in combating the method of the CI, highlighting the error in the method for forming the Party and the grave consequences it contained for the later development of the Communist Parties. If Bordiga's fraction in the end accepted forming the Communist Party of Italy with the Ordino Nuovo fraction, it did so out of submitting to the CI's decisions, after formulating the most severe criticisms and maintaining its own positions, which it would seek to bring to victory in the inevitable crises within the Party and in the wake of living, concrete historical experience.

Today we can affirm that just as the absence of communist parties during the

first wave of revolution between 1918 and 1920 was one of the causes of its defeat, so the method for the formation of the parties in 1920-21 was one of the main causes for the degeneration of the CPs and the CI.

One of the most astonishing things we are seeing today, 23 years after the discussion between Bordiga and Lenin at the time of the formation of the CP of Italy, is the repetition of the same error. The method of the CI, which was so violently combated by the left fraction of Bordiga, and whose consequences were catastrophic for the proletariat, is today being taken up by the Fraction itself in the construction of the PCI of Italy.

Many comrades of the International Communist left seem to be suffering from political amnesia. And, to the degree that they do recall the critical positions of the left on the constitution of the party, they think that today they have gone beyond them. They think that the danger of this method is being circumscribed if not completely removed because it's the Left Fraction applying it, i.e. the organism which for 25 years was able to resist the opportunist degeneration of the CI. We are again falling into the arguments of Bolsheviks. Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that because it was them applying this method, the guarantee was given. History proves that there is no such thing as infallibility. No party, whatever its revolutionary past, is immunised against opportunist degeneration. The Bolsheviks had at least as many revolutionary credentials as the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left. They had not only resisted the opportunism of the Second International, its betrayal in the face of imperialist war; they had not only formed the party but had led the proletariat to victory. But all this glorious past – which no other fraction can equal – immunised the Bolshevik party. Each error, each fault is a breach in the armour of the party through which the influence of the class enemy can infiltrate. Mistakes have their logical consequences.

The Internationalist Communist Party of Italy is being "constructed" through the fusion, the adhesion, of groups and tendencies which are no less opposed to each other than Bordiga's Abstentionist Fraction was to Ordino Nuovo when the CP of Italy was formed in 1921. In the new Party we have, as equal partners, the Italian Fraction and the Vercesi Fraction excluded for participating in the Antifascist Coalition. This is not only a repetition of the error of method of 25 years ago but an aggravated repetition.

In formulating our critique of the method for constituting the PCI of Italy we are only taking up the position which used to be

that of the Italian Fraction and which it is abandoning today. And just as Bordiga was the continuation of Lenin against the error of Lenin himself, we are only continuing the policy of Lenin and Bordiga against the abandonment by the Italian Fraction of its own positions.

The new party is not a political unity but a conglomeration, an addition of currents and tendencies which cannot fail to clash with each other. The present armistice can only be very provisional. The elimination of one or other of these currents is inevitable. Sooner or later a political and organisational demarcation will be imposed. Again, as it was 25 years ago, the problem that is posed is WHO WILL WIN OUT?

Communism is on the agenda of history

Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism (part II)

On the content of the communist revolution

In the previous part of this series, we re-published the article “Welcome to Socialisme ou Barbarie” written by the Gauche Communiste de France in 1948. The article took up a clear position on the nature of the Trotskyist movement, which had abandoned its proletarian credentials by participating in the second imperialist world war:

“Trotskyism, which was one of the proletarian reactions within the Communist International during the first years of its degeneration, never went beyond this position of being an opposition, despite its formal constitution into an organically separate party. By remaining attached to the Communist Parties – which it still sees as workers’ parties – even after the triumph of Stalinism, Trotskyism itself functions as an appendage to Stalinism. It is linked ideologically to Stalinism and follows it around like a shadow. All the activity of Trotskyism over the last 15 years proves this.”

And it goes on to say:

“This doesn’t mean that revolutionary workers who only have a little political education have not been drawn into its ranks. On the contrary, as an organisation, as a political milieu, Trotskyism, far from favouring the development of revolutionary thought and of the organisms (fractions and tendencies) which express it, is an organised milieu for undermining it. This is a general rule valid for any political organisation alien to the proletariat, and experience has demonstrated that it applies to Stalinism and Trotskyism. We have known Trotskyism over 15 years of perpetual crisis, through splits and unifications, followed by further splits and crises, but we don’t know examples which have given rise to real, viable revolutionary tendencies. Trotskyism does not secrete within itself a revolutionary ferment. On the contrary, it annihilates it. The condition for the existence and development of a revolutionary ferment is to be outside the organisational and ideological framework of Trotskyism.”¹

Having constituted itself as a tendency within the French Trotskyist party, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, the initial reaction of the GCF towards the “Chaulieu-Montal tendency”² was thus to express severe doubts about its potential for evolution. And yet, with the rupture from the PCI and the formation of the SouB group, the GCF recognised that a genuine break had taken place, and was thus to be welcomed. This did not however prevent the GCF from warning that the new group continued to be marked by vestiges of its Trotskyist past (for example on the union question, or its ambiguous relationship with the review *Les Temps Modernes* published by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre) as well as displaying an unwonted arrogance towards the revolutionary currents who

had come to similar conclusions to those of SouB well in advance of its break from Trotskyism.

In this new article, we will seek to show how right the GCF were to be cautious in their welcome to SouB, and how difficult it is for those who have grown up in the corrupt milieu of Trotskyism to make a really profound break with its fundamental ideas and attitudes. We will examine the political trajectory and work of two militants - Castoriadis and Grandizo Munis - who formed parallel tendencies in the Trotskyist movement in the late 40s, and who broke with it at around the same time. The choice of these two militants is apt not only because they illustrate the general problem of breaking with Trotskyism, but also because both of them wrote at length about the question on which this series is based: the content of the socialist revolution.

Breaking with the IVth International

There is no question that in the late 40s and early 50s, both Castoriadis and Munis were militants of the working class. Munis remained one all his life.

As a young man in occupied Greece Castoriadis quit the Communist Party because he opposed their policy of support for (and even leadership of) the nationalist Resistance. He found his way to the group around Aghis Stinas,³ which though officially part of the Fourth International maintained an intransigent opposition to both camps in the imperialist war, including the Resistance fronts. Ill-informed about the real betrayals of the Trotskyist movement, they assumed that this would be the “normal” position for any internationalist group since it was in continuity with Lenin’s position on the First World War.

In danger from both fascist and Stalinist agents, Castoriadis left Greece at the end of the war and settled in France, becoming a member of the main Trotskyist organisation in that country, the PCI. After forming an opposition tendency within the PCI (the Chaulieu-Montal tendency referred to by the GCF), they split from the Party in 1948 to found the SouB group. The tendency’s splitting document, “Open letter to the militants of the PCI and the IVth International...”,⁴ published in the first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, develops a far-reaching critique of the theoretical vacuity of the Trotskyist movement and its inability to function as anything more than an appendage to Stalinism, both in its view that the USSR was still playing a progressive world historical role in setting up new (though deformed) workers’ states in eastern Europe, or in its tail-ending of the Socialist Party/Communist Party coalition which had been made part of the reconstruction government in France

1. “Communism is on the agenda of history: Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism”, *International Review* n° 161.

2. Chaulieu being a nom de guerre for Cornelius Castoriadis – along with Paul Cardan and others; Montal for Claude Lefort

3. On this subject, read: “Memoirs of a revolutionary (A. Stinas, Greece): Nationalism and anti-fascism”, *International Review* n° 72; “Revolutionary defeatists in Greece” on the Libcom website.

4. This document is available in French on the website www.marxists.org.

and which was charged with overseeing a ferocious intensification of exploitation. It was particularly sharp in its critique of the Fourth International's toadying to the dissident Stalinist Tito in Yugoslavia, which expressed a clear break with Trotsky's view that Stalinism could not be reformed.

At the end of his life Trotsky had argued that if the USSR emerged from the war without being overthrown by a proletarian revolution his current would have to revise their view of it as a workers' state, and might have to conclude that it was the product of a new age of barbarism. There are traces of this approach in the group's initial characterisation of the bureaucracy as a new exploiting class, echoing the "bureaucratic collectivism" analyses of Rizzi and Shachtman, which defined Russia as neither capitalist nor socialist; although as the GCF recognises, the group soon moved away from this notion towards the idea of a new bureaucratic capitalism. In a text from SouB 2, "The relations of production in Russia", Castoriadis does not hesitate to criticise Trotsky's own view of the USSR as a system with a capitalist mode of distribution but an essentially socialist mode of production. Such a separation between production and distribution was, it argued, contrary to the marxist critique of political economy. In line with this effort to apply a marxist analysis to the world historic situation, the group considered this tendency towards bureaucratisation to be both global and an expression of the decadence of the capitalist system. This position also explains why the new group's review was entitled *Socialism or Barbarism*. In particular, in its open letter and in the first years of SouB, the group considered that in the absence of a proletarian revolution, a third world war between the western and eastern blocs was inevitable.

As for Munis, his courage as a proletarian militant was particularly remarkable. Along with his comrades in the Bolshevik Leninist group, one of the two Trotskyist groups active in Spain during the civil war, and alongside the dissident anarchists of the Friends of Durruti, Munis fought on the barricades erected by the workers' uprising against the Republican/Stalinist government in May 1937. Imprisoned by the Stalinists towards the end of the war, he narrowly escaped an execution squad and fled to Mexico, where he resumed his activity within the Trotskyist milieu, speaking at Trotsky's funeral and becoming influential on the political evolution of Natalia Trotsky, who like Munis was becoming increasingly critical of the official Trotskyist stance on the imperialist war and the defence of the USSR.

One of his first major criticisms of the Fourth International's position on the war was contained in his response to James Cannon's defence, at his trial for "sedition" in Minneapolis, of the policy of the Socialist Workers Party in the US – an application of the "proletarian military policy" which essentially consisted of a call to place the USA's war against fascism under "workers' control". For Munis this represented a complete capitulation to the war effort of an imperialist bourgeoisie. Although quite late in clearly rejecting the defence of the USSR,⁵ by 1947 Munis, also in an open letter to the PCI written with Natalia and the surrealist poet Benjamin Peret, was insisting that rejecting the defence of the USSR was now an urgent necessity for revolutionaries.⁶ Like the Chaulieu-Montal letter, the text denounced the Trotskyists' support for the Stalinist regime in the east (though not yet putting forward a definite analysis of its social nature) and for CP/SP governments in the west. The letter is much more focused than that of Chaulieu-Montal on the question of the Second World War and the betrayal of internationalism by large parts of the Trotskyist movement through their support for antifascism and the Resistance alongside their defence of the USSR. It also clearly rejects the idea that nationalisations – the call and support for which was a central plank of Trotskyism's "programmatic demands" – could be viewed as anything but a reinforcement of capitalism. Although the letter still harbours hopes for a revived IVth International purged of opportunism, and to this end called for joint work between his group and the Chaulieu-Montal tendency within the International, in reality the current around Munis soon broke all links with this false International and formed an independent group (the Union Ouvrière Internationale) which, like SouB, entered into discussion with the groups of the communist left.

Castoriadis on "The content of socialism": beyond Marx or back to Proudhon?

We will return later on to the subsequent political trajectory of Castoriadis and Munis. Our main aim is to examine how, in a period dominated by Stalinist and social democratic definitions of socialism, a period of retreat for the working class and of growing isolation of the revolutionary minority, both militants tried to elaborate a vision of an authentic path to the communist future. We begin with Castoriadis,

whose three articles on "The Content of Socialism" (CS), published between 1955 and 1958 in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*⁷ are without doubt his most ambitious attempt to criticise the dominant falsities about the meaning of socialism and to put forward an alternative. These texts, but above all the second, were to have an influence on a number of other groups and currents, not least the Situationist International, which took up Castoriadis' notion of generalised self-management, and the UK libertarian socialist group Solidarity, which was to rework article two in their *pamphlet Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-managed Society*.⁸

The dates of publication are significant; in between the first article and the second there were momentous events in the "eastern" empire: Kruschev's famous speech about Stalin's excesses, the revolt in Poland and above all the proletarian uprising in Hungary, which saw the emergence of workers' councils. These events evidently had a major impact on Castoriadis' thought and on the rather detailed description of a projected socialist society in the second article. The problem is that these articles persist in the theoretical arrogance noted by the GCF in 1948 with their claim to having understood key elements of capitalism and its revolutionary negation which had not been grasped in the workers' movement, including by Marx. But in reality, rather than going "beyond" Marx, they tend to take us back to Proudhon, as we shall explain.

That is not to say that there are no positive elements in these texts. They confirm Castoriadis' rejection of the Trotskyist view of Stalinism as a misguided expression of the workers' movement, insisting that it defends a class interest which is opposed to that of the proletariat. Although Castoriadis freely accepts that his conception of the post-revolutionary society is very close to the one put forward by Pannekoek in his pamphlet *Workers' Councils*,⁹ he does not fall into some of the crucial errors of the "late" Pannekoek: the rejection of the Russian revolution as bourgeois and of any role for a revolutionary political organisation. Instead the Russian revolution is still treated as an essentially proletarian experience whose degeneration must be understood and learned from. Neither do the texts fall explicitly into the anarchist position that rejects centralisation on principle: on the contrary, he strongly criticises

7. See "On the content of socialism" parts I to III on the Libcom website.

8. Available on the Libcom website.

9. Pannekoek's pamphlet was written during the war but published in full in the years that followed. The reference to it by Castoriadis is in part III of the series "On the content on socialism" published on the Libcom website.

5. See for example the text of 1945 "Defence of the Soviet Union and Revolutionary tactics" on the website www.marxists.org.

6. See "Open letter to the Parti Communiste Internationaliste" of 1947 in French on the website www.marxists.org.

the classical anarchist view and argues that “*To refuse to face up to the question of central power is tantamount to leaving the solution of these problems to some bureaucracy or other.*”¹⁰

Rejecting the Trotskyist view that a mere change in the forms of property can bring about an end to the mechanics of capitalist exploitation, Castoriadis rightly insist that socialism has no meaning unless it brings about a total transformation in humanity’s relationship with all aspects of social and economic life, a change from a society in which mankind is dominated by the products of his own hands and brains to one in which human beings consciously control their own activity, and above all the process of production. For this reason, Castoriadis stresses the central importance of the workers’ councils as the forms through which this profound change in the way society operates can be brought about. The difficulty arises less with this general notion of socialism as the restoration of “human power as its own end”, but with the more concrete means Castoriadis advocates to achieve this goal, and with the theoretical method that lies behind the measures he advocates.

To begin with the idea of criticising the contributions of the past workers’ movement: there is nothing wrong in this per se. In fact it is an essential element in the development of the communist project. We cannot disagree with Castoriadis’ idea that the workers’ movement is necessarily affected by the dominant ideology and that it can only throw off this influence through a process of constant reflection and struggle. But Castoriadis’ criticisms are very often inaccurate and lead to conclusions that tend to “throw the baby out with the bathwater” – in short, they lead him towards a break with marxism that was to become explicit not long after these articles were published, and the premises of this break can already be seen in these texts. To give an example: he already rejects the marxist theory of crisis as a product of the internal economic contradictions of the system. For him the crisis is not the result of overproduction or the falling rate of profit but a result of the growing rejection, by those “below”, of the division of society into order givers and order takers, which he sees not as the inevitable product of capitalist exploitation, but its actual foundation: “*The abolition of exploitation is only possible when every separate stratum of directors ceases to exist, for in modern societies it is the division between directors and executants that is at the root of exploitation.*”¹¹ By the same token, in CSII he offers us an extremely

reductionist (albeit very common) caricature of Rosa Luxemburg’s theory of crisis as one that predicts a purely automatic collapse of capitalism.

Seizing on a quote from Marx about the persistence of a “realm of necessity” even in communism, Castoriadis thinks he has discovered a fatal flaw in Marx’s thinking: that for Marx, production would always be a sphere of denial and essentially of alienation, whereas he, Castoriadis, alone has discovered that alienation cannot be overcome unless the sphere of production is also one in which our humanity is expressed. The reference (in CS II) is to the passage in Capital volume 3 where Marx says that “*the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.*”¹² This passage does imply that labour or material production can never be an area of human fulfilment, and for Castoriadis this represents a decline from the early Marx who looked forward to the transformation of labour into free activity (especially in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*). But presenting things in this way distorts the complexity of Marx’s thought. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written in 1875, Marx also insists that the aim of the proletarian revolution is a society in which “labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want”. We can find similar ideas in the *Grundrisse*, another “mature” work.¹³

The self-management of a market economy

A common criticism of “On the content of socialism” is that it violates Marx’s admonition against “drawing up recipes for the cookbooks of the future”. In CSII Castoriadis anticipates this criticism by denying that he is trying to draw up statutes or a constitution for the new society. It is interesting to see how much capitalist society has changed since CSII was written, posing problems which don’t quite fit into the schema – above all the tendency towards the elimination of large factory production at the centre of many of the central capitalist countries, the growth of precarious employment, and the practise of “outsourcing” to areas of the globe where labour power is cheaper. We can’t blame Castoriadis for failing to predict such developments, but it does show the pitfalls of schematic anticipations of future

society. However, we prefer to look at the ideas contained in the text and to show why so much of what Castoriadis puts forward would in any case not be part of a really evolving communist programme.

We have already mentioned Castoriadis’ rejection of Marx’s theory of crisis in favour of his own innovation: exploitation, and the fundamental contradiction of “modern” capitalism, as being rooted in the division between order givers and order-takers. And this bold “revisionism”, this shelving of the economic contradictions inherent in the wage relationship and the accumulation of capital, means that Castoriadis has no qualms about describing his socialist society of the future as one where all the essential categories of capital remain intact and present no danger of engendering a new form of exploitation and no obstacle to the transition to a fully communist society.

In 1972, when the UK Solidarity group produced their pamphlet *Workers’ Councils and the Economics of a Self-managed Society*, their introduction was already rather defensive about the fact that the “socialist” society described by Castoriadis still retained a number of the key features of capitalism: wages (although Castoriadis insists on the absolute equality of wages from day one), prices, labour value as the source of accounting, a consumer market, and “the criterion of profitability”. And indeed in a polemic written in 1972, Adam Buick of the Socialist Party of Great Britain showed the degree to which the Solidarity version had bowdlerised some of the most embarrassing passages in the original:

“*Nobody who has read the original article can deny that Cardan was an advocate of so-called ‘market socialism’. Solidarity themselves clearly found this embarrassing because they have edited out its more crude manifestations. In their introduction they apologise:*

‘*Some will see the text as a major contribution to the perpetuation of wage slavery - because it still talks of ‘wages’ and doesn’t call for the immediate abolition of ‘money’ (although clearly defining the radically different meanings these terms will acquire in the early stages of a self-managed society)*’ (p.4)

and, again, in a footnote:

‘*All the preceding talk of ‘wages’, ‘prices’ and ‘the market’ will, for instance, undoubtedly have startled a certain group of readers. We would ask them momentarily to curb their emotional responses and to try to think rationally with us on the matter*’ (p. 36).

But Cardan did not speak only of “wages”, “prices” and “the market”. He also

10. “On the content of Socialism” part II. Referred to as CSII from here onwards.

11. CSII.

12. See chapter XLVIII, “The trinity formula”.

13. See our earlier article in this series “Capital and the principles of communism: The overthrow of commodity fetishism”, *International Review* n° 76.

spoke of “profitability” (*rentabilité*) and “rate of interest” (“*taux d’intérêt*”). This was evidently too much even for *Solidarity’s* curbed emotion since these words nowhere appear in the edited translation.

It is very revealing to give some examples of the way *Solidarity* has toned down the “market socialism” aspects of Cardan’s original articles:

- Original: *shops selling to consumers (magasins de vente aux consommateurs)*. *Solidarity’s* version: ‘stores distributing to consumers’ (p. 24).
- Original: *The market for consumer goods (le marché des biens de consommation)*. *Solidarity’s* version: ‘consumer goods’ (heading p. 35).
- Original: *This implies the existence of a real market for consumer goods (ce qui implique l’existence d’un marché réel pour les biens de consommation)*. *Solidarity’s* version: ‘This implies the existence of some mechanism whereby consumer demand can genuinely make itself felt’ (p.35)
- Original: *Money, prices, Wages and value*. *Solidarity’s* version: “money”, “wages”, “value” (heading p. 36)..

In fact Cardan envisaged a market economy in which everybody would be paid in circulating money an equal wage with which to buy goods which would be on sale at a price equal to their value (amount of socially necessary labour embodied in them). And he as the cheek to claim that Marx also held that under Socialism goods would exchange at their values...¹⁴

The real continuity here is not with Marx but with Proudhon, whose future “mutualist” society is a society of independent commodity producers, exchanging their products at their value.

“Socialism” as a transitional society?

Castoriadis does not claim that the society he describes is the final goal of the revolution. In fact, his position is very similar to the definition that arose during the period of social democracy and was theorised by Lenin in particular: socialism is a stage on

the road to communism.¹⁵ And of course Stalinism took full advantage of this idea to argue that the fully stratified economy of the USSR was already “real socialism”. But the problem with this idea lies not only in the way it was used by Stalinism. A deeper difficulty is that it tends to freeze the transition period into a stable mode of production, when it can really only be understood in a dynamic and contradictory manner, as a period marked by a constant struggle between the communist measures unleashed by the political power of the working class, and all the remnants of the old world which tend to drag society back towards capitalism. Whether the political regime of this “socialist” stage is envisaged despotically or democratically, the fundamental illusion remains: that you can arrive at communism through a process of accumulating capital. One can even see Castoriadis’ attempt to develop a balanced economy, where production is harmonised with the consumer market, as a reflection of the Keynesian methods of the day, which aimed to do away with economic crises precisely by achieving such a planned equilibrium. And this in turn reveals the degree to which Castoriadis was bewitched by the appearance of capitalist economic stability in the period that followed the Second World War.¹⁶

In an early section of CS II, Castoriadis rightly takes up Marx’s view that the future society of free producers must profoundly simplify the whole process of production and distribution – must make its operations “perfectly simple and intelligible”, to use the term used by Marx in one of the rare descriptions of communist society contained in *Capital*.¹⁷ But by retaining the categories of value production, not only will any attempt to rationally plan production and distribution be fettered by the concerns of the market and of profitability, it will also lead sooner or later to the same old shit – to economic crisis and to hidden, then open, forms of exploitation. It also seems rather ironic that having developed, in the early part of CSII, the argument that capitalist technology cannot be seen as neutral but is profoundly connected to the goals of capitalist production, Castoriadis then appears to opt for something of a technical fix, in which the “Plan Factory”, using very big computers, is able to work out how the self-managed market will achieve a perfect economic balance.

15. For ourselves – and we think we are closer to Marx here, even if he much preferred the term “communism” – we take socialism and communism to mean the same thing: a society where wage labour, commodity production and national frontiers have been overcome.

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

17. *Capital* Volume 1, chapter 1.

Castoriadis’ inability to envisage a real overcoming of the wage relation is connected to his fixation on the notion of the socialist “enterprise” as a self-managed unit, albeit one that coordinates with other enterprises and branches of production at various levels. CSII’s description of relations in the future socialist society begins with a long section on how the factory of the future will be managed, and only later in the text does it discuss how society as a whole will be run at the political and economic level. CSIII is almost entirely devoted to analysing the reality of day to day resistance on the factory shop floor, seeing it as the soil in which a future revolutionary consciousness will develop. Castoriadis is not wrong to stress the importance of the workplace as a focus for the association of the workers, for their collective resistance, and in any revolutionary process the base assemblies at the workplace will certainly play a vital role as “cells” of a wider network of councils. But Castoriadis goes further than this and suggests that in socialist society the factory/workplace will maintain itself as a kind of fixed community. On the contrary, as Bordiga for one always stressed, the emergence of communism necessarily involves the end of the individual enterprise, and the real overcoming of the division of labour will surely imply that producers are less and less tied to a single unit of production.

Perhaps more importantly, Castoriadis’ “factoryism” leads to a profound underestimation of the primary function of workers’ councils, which is not the management of the factory but the unification of the working class at both the economic and political levels. For Castoriadis, a workers’ council is essentially a council elected by the workers’ assembly of a given unit of production, and towards the end of CSII he clearly distinguishes this from the Russian soviets which he sees as essentially based on territorial units:¹⁸

“Although the Russian word ‘soviet’ means ‘council,’ one should not confuse the workers’ councils we have been describing in this text with even the earliest Russian Soviets. The workers’ councils are based on one’s place of work. They can play both a political role and a role in the industrial management of production. In its essence, a workers’ council is a universal organ. The 1905 Petrograd Soviet (Council) of Workers’ Deputies, although the product of

14. “Solidarity, the market and Marx”, available on the Libcom website. The text is also interesting in that it welcomes the appearance of new groups like Workers Voice in Liverpool, Internationalism in the US and the London group which, after splitting from solidarity, formed World Revolution, who are much clearer than Solidarity on the content of socialism/communism. What it doesn’t do is take issue with the essentially national conception of socialism contained in CSII – a weakness also that inevitably afflicts the SPGB with their vision of a parliamentary road to socialism. See below.

18. Interestingly, in a letter to Socialisme ou Barbarie in 1953, Anton Pannekoek already noticed the French group’s restrictive conception of workers’ councils: “While you restrict the activity of these organisms to the organisation of labour in the factories after the taking of social power by the workers, we consider them as also being the organisms by means of which the workers will conquer this power”. Available on the website www.marxists.org.

a general strike and, although exclusively proletarian in composition, remained a purely political organ. The Soviets of 1917 were as a rule geographically based. They too were purely political institutions, in which all social layers opposed to the old regime formed a united front."

Castoriadis does envisage a network of councils taking on the running of local and national political affairs, and Solidarity helpfully draws us a diagram, but it seems to involve a central assembly of factory delegates at national level without anything in between. But, fixated on the problem of managing the factory (an issue that in Russia was taken up by the factory committees), Castoriadis underestimates the significance of the fact that the soviets emerged both in 1905 and 1917 to coordinate the workplaces engaged in a mass strike: they were a "council of war" of delegates from all the enterprises in a given town or city, and from the very beginning took up the direction of a movement that was moving from the terrain of economic defence to one of political confrontation with the existing regime.

It's true that alongside, and often in conjunction with, the soviets of workers' deputies there were soviets of soldiers' and sailors' delegates, elected from the barracks and on the ships, and soviets of peasants' deputies elected from the villages, as well as comparable forms elected on the basis of urban neighbourhoods, blocks of flats, etc. In that sense there was a strongly territorial or residential basis to many of the soviets. But this raises a further question: the relationship between the workers' councils and the councils of other non-exploiting strata. Castoriadis is aware of this problem as his "diagram" envisages the central assembly of delegates containing delegates from peasant councils and councils of professionals and small traders. For us this is the central problem of the state in the period of transition: a period in which classes still exist, in which the working class has to exercise its dictatorship while at the same time integrating the other non-exploiting strata into political life and into the process of transforming social relations. Castoriadis envisages a similar process but he rejects the idea that this transitional organisation of society constitutes a state. In our view this approach is more rather than less likely to permit a situation where the state becomes an autonomous force opposing the organs of the working class, as happened rather rapidly in Russia given the isolation of the revolution after 1917. For us, the real independence of the working class and its councils is better served by calling the state what it is, by recognising its inherent dangers, and ensuring that there is no subordination of the organs of

the working class to the organs of "society as a whole".

A final expression of Castoriadis' failure to envisage a real break with the categories of capital: the limitation of his vision to the national level. Hints of this are given here and there in CSII where he talks about how things might work "in a country like France", and how "the population of the entire country" might run their affairs through an assembly of council delegates which is depicted as existing on a national scale only. But the danger of seeing "socialism" in a national framework comes through much more explicitly in this passage:

*"...the revolution can only begin in one country, or in one group of countries. As a result, it will have to endure pressures of extremely varying kinds and durations. On the other hand, however swiftly the revolution spreads internationally, a country's level of internal development will play an important role in how the principles of socialism will be concretely applied. For example, agriculture might create important problems in France—but not in the United States—or Great Britain (where, inversely, the main problem would be that of the country's extreme dependence on food imports). In the course of our analysis, we have considered several problems of this kind and hope to have shown that solutions tending in a socialist direction existed in each case. We have not been able to consider the special problems that would arise if the revolution remained isolated in one country for a long time—and we can hardly do it here. But we hope to have shown that it is wrong to think that the problems arising from such isolation are insoluble, that an isolated workers' power must die heroically or degenerate, or that at the most it can 'hold on' while waiting. The only way to 'hold on' is to start building socialism; otherwise, degeneration has already set in, and there is nothing to hold on for. For workers' power, the building of socialism from the very first day is not only possible, it is imperative. If it does not take place the power held has already ceased to be workers' power."*¹⁹

The idea that a proletarian power can hold on in a single country by building socialism reverses the reality of the problem and takes us back, finally, to the errors of the Bolsheviks after 1921, and even to the counter-revolutionary positions of Stalin and Bukharin after 1924. When the working class takes power in one country it will, of course be compelled to take economic measures to guarantee the provision of basic needs, and as far as possible they should be compatible with communist principles and antithetical to the categories of capital.

19. CSII

But it must always be recognised that any such measures (like "war communism" in Russia) will be deeply distorted by conditions of isolation and scarcity and will not necessarily have any direct continuity to the authentic communist reconstruction that will only begin once the working class has defeated the bourgeoisie on a global scale. In the meantime, the essentially political task of extending the revolution will have to take precedence over the contingent and experimental social and economic measures that will take place in the first stages of a communist revolution.

We will return later to the political trajectory followed by Castoriadis, which would be significantly moulded by this departure from marxism at the theoretical level

Munis: "For a Second Communist Manifesto"

Munis returned to Spain in 1951 to intervene in a widespread outbreak of class struggle, seeing the possibility of a new revolutionary upsurge against the Franco regime.²⁰ He was arrested and spent the next seven years in jail. It can be argued that Munis failed to draw some key political lessons from this experience, particularly about the revolutionary possibilities of the post-war period, but it certainly did not dampen his commitment to the revolutionary cause. He took very precarious refuge in France – the French state soon expelled him – and he spent several years in Milan, where he entered into contact with the Bordigists and with Onorato Damen of Battaglia Comunista, with whom he developed a strong mutual respect. It was during this period, in 1961 that Munis, in company with Peret, founded the group Fomento Obrero Revolucionario. In this context, he produced two of his most important theoretical texts: *Unions against revolution* in 1960 and *For a second Communist Manifesto (FSCM)* in 1961.²¹

At the beginning of this article we noted the similarities in the political trajectories of Castoriadis and Munis in their break with Trotskyism. But by the early 60s their paths had begun to diverge rather radically. In its early days, the title *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was consistent with the real choice facing humanity: Castoriadis considered himself to be a marxist and the alternative announced in the title expressed the group's adherence to the notion that capitalism had

20. See the article on Libcom: "1951: Barcelona general strike".

21. Available on the Libcom website. This text was also published in *Internationalism* n°3 in the early 70s, with an introduction by Judith Allen, "Unions and Reformism". Munis' reply is published on the website www.marxists.org. The "Second manifesto" has not been translated into English. A French edition can be found on the website: www.matierevolution.org.

entered its epoch of decline.²² But in the introduction to the first volume of a collection of his writings, *The Bureaucratic Society*,²³ Castoriadis describes the period 1960-64 as the years of his break with marxism, considering not only that capitalism had essentially resolved its economic contradictions, thus disproving the basic premises of the marxist critique of political economy; but also that marxism, whatever its insights, could not be separated from the ideologies and regimes which laid claim to it. In other words, Castoriadis, like other former Trotskyists (such as the remnants of the German RKD) went from a wholesale rejection of “Leninism” to a rejection of marxism itself (and thus ended up in a “new look” kind of anarchism).

Even though, as we shall also examine, *FSCM* indicates the degree to which Munis had not entirely thrown off the weight of his Trotskyist past, it argues quite clearly that, despite all the contemporary propaganda about the affluent society and the integration of the working class, the real trajectory of capitalist society confirmed the fundamentals of marxism: that capitalism had, since the first world war, entered its epoch of decadence, in which the crying contradiction between the relations of production and the productive forces were threatening to drag humanity to ruin, above all because of the historic danger of war between the two imperialist blocs that dominated the globe. The affluent society was in essence a war economy.

Far from blaming marxism for in some sense giving birth to Stalinism, *FSCM* eloquently denounces the Stalinist regimes and parties as the purest expression of capitalist decadence, which, in different forms around the world, was engendering a drive towards totalitarian state capitalism. From the same theoretical starting point, the text argues that all national liberation struggles had become moments in the global imperialist confrontation. At a time which saw a widespread dissemination of the idea that national struggles in the Third World were the new force for revolutionary change, this was a striking example of revolutionary intransigence, and the arguments that accompanied it would be amply confirmed by the evolution of the “post-colonial” regimes produced by the struggle for national independence. And it stood in contrast with the ambiguities of the SouB group on the war in Algeria and other basic class issues. *FSCM* makes it clear that SouB has followed a path of compromise and workerism rather than of fighting for communist clarity, against the

stream where necessary:

“For its part, the ‘Socialisme ou Barbarie’ tendency, which also came out of the IVth International, operates at the tail end of the decaying French ‘left’ on all problems and in all important movements: on Algeria and the colonial problem, 13 May 1958 and the Gaullist power, trade unions and contemporary workers’ struggles, attitude towards Stalinism and state direction in general. To the point where, although it sees the Russian economy as a form of state capitalism, it has only served to spread further confusion. By expressly renouncing the task of struggling against the current and by only saying to the working class ‘what it can understand’, it dooms itself to its own failure. Lacking in nerve this ‘tendency’ has given in to a kind of versatility which has the air of existentialist tight-rope walking. To them, as towards other currents in the US, it’s worth recalling Lenin’s words: ‘a few pitiful intellectuals who think that with the workers it’s enough to talk about the factory and blather on about what they have already known about for a long time’”.

Again, in contrast to the evolution of SouB, *FSCM* has no hesitation in defending the proletarian character of the October revolution and of the Bolshevik party. In a document written about 10 years later, and which takes up similar themes to *FSCM*, *Party-state, Stalinism, Revolution*,²⁴ Munis argues against those currents from the German and Dutch left who had reneged on their initial support for October and decided that the Russian revolution and Bolshevism were essentially bourgeois in nature. At the same time, *FSCM* focuses on certain key errors which accelerated the degeneration of the revolution in Russia and the rise of the Stalinist counter-revolution: the confusion of nationalisations and state property with socialism, and the idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat meant the dictatorship of the party. In *Party-State*, Munis also has a definite insight into the idea that the transitional state cannot be seen as the agent of communist transformation, echoing the position of Bilan and the GCF:

“From the Paris Commune, revolutionaries drew a lesson of great importance, among others: the capitalist state could not be conquered or used; it had to be demolished. The Russian revolution deepened this same lesson in a decisive manner: the state, however workers’ or soviet it might be, cannot be the organiser of communism. As the proprietor of the instruments of labour, as the collector of necessary (or superfluous) social surplus labour, far from withering away, it acquires an unlimited

smothering force and capacity. Philosophically the idea of an emancipating state is pure Hegelian idealism, unacceptable to historical materialism.”

And where Castoriadis in “The content of socialism” advocates a form of self-managed capitalism, Munis offers no room for doubt about the economic/social content of the communist programme – the abolition of wage labour and commodity production.

“The aim of a really planned economy can only be to bring production into accord with consumption; only the full satisfaction of the latter – and not profit or privileges, nor the demands of ‘national defence’ or an industrialisation alien to the daily needs of the masses – can be considered as the spur of production. The first condition for such an approach can thus only be the disappearance of wage labour; the foundation stone of the law of value, universally present in capitalist societies, even if many of them claim today to be socialist or communist.”

At the same time, this strength of *FSCM* regarding the content of the communist transformation also has a weak side – a tendency to assume that wage labour and commodity production can be abolished from the first day, even in the context of a single country. It’s true, as the text says, that “from the first day, the society in transition born from this victory must aim towards this goal. It must not lose sight for an instant of the strict interdependence between production and consumption”. But as we have already remarked, the proletariat in a single country must also never lose sight of the fact that whatever measures it undertakes can only be temporary as long as the revolutionary victory has not been achieved on a world scale, and that they remain subject to the global operation of the laws of capitalism. The fact that Munis does not keep this in mind at all times is confirmed in particular in *Party-state* where he presents war communism as a kind of “non-capitalism” and sees the NEP as the restoration of capitalist relations. We have already criticised this approach in two articles in *International Review* n°s 25 and 52.²⁵ It is also confirmed by what Munis always maintained about the events in Spain 36-37: for him the Spanish revolution went even deeper than the Russian revolution. This was partly because in May 1937 the workers for the first time showed, arms in hands, an understanding of the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism. But he also considered that the Spanish industrial and

22. See for example “The relations of production in Russia” on the website www.marxists.org.

23. *La société bureaucratique 1: les rapports de production en Russie*, éditions 10:18, 1973.

24. *Parti-Etat, Stalinisme, Révolution*, ed Spartacus, 1975.

25. “The confusions of Fomento Obrero Revolucionario (FOR): on Russia 1917 and Spain 1936”, *International Review* n° 25. “Where is the FOR going?” *International Review* n° 52.

agrarian collectives had established small islands of communism. In sum: communist relations are possible even without the destruction of the bourgeois state and the international extension of the revolution. In these conceptions we see, once again, a renewal of anarchist ideas and even an anticipation of the “communisation” current which was to develop in the 1970s and which has a definite influence within the wider anarchist movement today.

And while an incomplete break with Trotskyism sometimes takes this anarchist direction, it can also manifest itself in more explicit hangovers from Trotskyism. Thus *FSCM* ends with a kind of updated version of the 1938 transitional programme. We quote at length from our article in *International Review* n° 52:

“In its ‘For a Second Communist Manifesto’ the FOR considered it correct to put forward all kinds of transitional demands in the absence of revolutionary movements of the proletariat. These go from the 30 hours week, the suppression of piece work and of time and motion studies in the factories to the ‘demand for work for all, unemployed and youth’ on the economic terrain. On the political level the FOR demands democratic ‘rights’ and ‘freedoms’ from the bourgeoisie: freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly; the right of workers to elect permanent workshop, factory or professional delegates ‘without any judicial or trade union formalities’.

This is all within the Trotskyist logic, according to which it is enough to pose the right demands to gradually arrive at the revolution. For the Trotskyists, the whole trick is to know how to be a pedagogue for the workers, who don’t understand anything about their demands, to brandish in front of them the most appetising carrots in order to push the workers towards their ‘party’. Is this what Munis wants, with his Transitional Program Mark 2?

The FOR still doesn’t understand today:

- that it is not a question of drawing up a catalogue of demands for future struggles: the workers are big enough to formulate their own precise demands spontaneously, in the course of the struggle;
- that this or that precise demand -- like the ‘right to work’ for the unemployed -- can be taken up by bourgeois movements and used against the proletariat (labour camps, public works, etc.);
- that it’s only through the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie that the workers can really satisfy their demands...

It’s very characteristic that the FOR should put on the same level its reformist slogans about democratic ‘rights and freedoms’ for workers, and slogans which could only arise in a fully revolutionary period. We thus find mixed pell-mell such slogans as: ‘expropriation of industrial, finance, and agricultural capital; workers’ management of the production and distribution of goods; destruction of all the instruments of war, atomic as well as classical, dissolution of armies and police, reconversion of war industries into consumer industries; individual armament of those exploited by capitalism, territorially organised according to the schema of democratic committees of management and distribution; suppression of frontiers and constitution of a single government and a single economy to the extent of the proletariat’s victory in diverse in countries.’All these slogans display enormous confusions. The FOR seems to have abandoned any marxist compass. There is no distinction made between a pre-revolutionary period in which capital still rules politically, a revolutionary period in which a dual power is established, and the period of transition (after the seizure of power by the proletariat) which alone can put on the agenda (and then not immediately!) the ‘suppression of wage labour’ and the ‘suppression of frontiers.’²⁶

The later trajectory of Munis and Castoriadis

Munis died in February 1989. The ICC published a tribute to him that began by saying that “the proletariat has lost a militant who devoted his whole life to the class struggle”.²⁷ After briefly tracing the political history of Munis through Spain in the 30s, his break with Trotskyism over the Second World War, his sojourn in Franco’s jails in the early 50s and the publication of *For a Second Communist Manifesto*, the article takes up the story in the late 60s:

“In 1967, along with comrades from the Venezuelan group *Internacionalismo*, he participated in efforts to restore contacts with the revolutionary milieu in Italy. Thus, at the end of the ‘60s, with the resurgence of the working class onto the scene of history, he took his place alongside the weak revolutionary forces existing at that time, including those who were to form *Révolution Internationale* in France. But at the beginning of the ‘70s, he unfortunately remained outside the discussions and attempts at regroupment which resulted in particular in the constitution of the ICC

in 1975. Even so, the *Ferment Ouvrière Révolutionnaire* (FOR), the group he formed in Spain and France around the positions of the ‘Second Manifesto’, at first agreed to participate in the series of conferences of groups of the communist left which began in Milan in 1977. But this attitude altered during the course of the second conference; the FOR walked out of the conference, and this was the expression of a tendency towards sectarian isolation which up to now has prevailed in this organisation”.

Today the FOR no longer exists. It was always highly dependent on the personal charisma of Munis, who was not able to pass on a solid tradition of organisation to the new generation of militants who rallied round him, and which could have served as a basis for the continued functioning of the group after Munis’ death. And as the tribute notes, the group suffered from a tendency towards sectarianism which further weakened its capacity to survive.

The example of this attitude referred to in the tribute is the rather showy departure of Munis and his group from the second conference of the communist left, citing his disagreement with the other groups on the problem of the economic crisis. This is not the place to examine this problem in detail, but we can see the core of Munis’ position in the *FSCM*:

“The recovery of the fighting spirit and the resurgence of a revolutionary situation cannot be expected, as claimed by certain marxists who lean towards economic automatism, to be the result of one of these cyclical crises, wrongly called ‘crises of overproduction’. These are the tremors which regularise the chaotic development of the system, and are not the result of its exhaustion. Managed capitalism knows how to attenuate them and besides, even if one of them does arise, it could easily favour the tortuous designs of new reactionaries, who await their moment, five year plans in one pocket, and production norms in the other. The general crisis of capitalism is its exhaustion as a social system. It consists, summarily speaking, in the fact that the instruments of production as capital and the distribution of products, limited by wage labour, have become incompatible with human necessities, and even with the maximum possibilities that technique could offer to economic development. That crisis is insurmountable for capitalism, and in the West as well as in Russia it gets worse every day.”

Munis’s position is thus not one of simply denying the crisis of overproduction, and indeed earlier on in the *FSCM* he attributes them to a fundamental contradiction in the system, that between use value and exchange value. Furthermore, in his

26. “Where is the FOR going?” *International Review* n° 52.

27. “Farewell to Munis: A revolutionary militant”, *International Review* n° 58.

rejection of “automatism”, any idea that an economic crash will mechanically lead to an upsurge in revolutionary consciousness, Munis is correct. He is also right to see that the emergence of a truly revolutionary consciousness involves the recognition that the very social relations underlying civilisation have become incompatible with the needs of humanity. These are points which could have been discussed with other groups of the communist left and certainly didn’t justify leaving the Paris conference without even explaining his real differences.

Again, in his pamphlet *Mistaken Trajectory of Révolution Internationale*,²⁸ where his views on the relationship between economic crisis and class consciousness are explained at greater length, Munis does sometimes hit the target, since, as we argued in our resolution on the international situation from the 21st international congress, the ICC has sometimes drawn an immediatist and mechanical link between crisis and revolution.²⁹ But reality was not really on the side of Munis, since whether we like it or not, the capitalist system has indeed been stuck in a very profound economic crisis ever since the 1970s; the idea that economic crises are simply part of the mechanism for “regularising” the system seems to reflect the pressures of the time the *FSCM* was written – the early 60s, the zenith of the post-war boom. But this peak was followed by a rapid descent into a global economic crisis that has proved fundamentally intractable, despite all the energies that a state-managed system has expended in slowing down and delaying its worst effects. And while it’s true that a genuinely revolutionary consciousness must grasp the incompatibility between capitalist social relations and the needs of humanity, the visible failure of an economic system which presents itself as no less than an incarnation of human nature will surely play a key part in enabling the exploited to throw off their illusions in capitalism and its immortality.

Underlying this refusal to analyse the economic dimension of capitalism’s decadence there lies an unresolved voluntarism, the theoretical foundations of which can be traced back to the letter announcing his break from the Trotskyist organisation in France, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, where he steadfastly maintains Trotsky’s notion, presented in the opening lines of the Transitional Programme, that the crisis of humanity is the crisis of revolutionary leadership:

*“The crisis of humanity – we repeat this a thousand times along with L.D. Trotsky – is a crisis of revolutionary leadership. All the explanations which try to lay the responsibility for the failure of the revolution on the objective conditions, the ideological gap or the illusions of the masses, on the power of Stalinism or the illusory attraction of the ‘degenerated workers’ state’, are wrong and only serve to excuse those responsible, to distract attention from the real problem and obstruct its solution. An authentic revolutionary leadership, given the present level of the objective conditions for the taking of power, must overcome all obstacles, surmount all difficulties, triumph over all its adversaries.”*³⁰

It was this “heroic” attitude which led Munis to see the possibility of revolution just under the surface at all times during the decadent period: in the 1930s, when Munis sees the events in Spain not as proof of a triumphant counter-revolution but as the highest point of the revolutionary wave that began in 1917; at the end of the Second World War, when, as we have seen, Munis saw the movements in Spain 1951 as the precursor to a revolutionary onslaught; at the height of the “boom” period of the 60s, since the *FSCM* already refers to “the accumulation of formidable revolutionary energies” taking place at the time it was written. And just as he rejected the ICC’s efforts to examine the evolution of the economic crisis, he equally rejects our argument that even if decadence means that the proletarian revolution is on the agenda of history, there can be phases of profound defeat and disarray in the class during this period, phases which make revolution almost impossible and which confer different tasks on the revolutionary organisation.

But however costly these errors might have been, they are understandable errors of a revolutionary who desires with his whole being to see the end of capitalism and the beginning of the communist revolution. This is why our tribute concludes:

“It’s thus clear that we have very important differences with the FOR, which has led us to polemicise with them a number of times in our press (see in particular the article in International Review 52). However, despite the serious errors he may have made, Munis remained to the end a militant who was deeply loyal to the combat of the working class. He was one of those very rare militants who stood up to the pressures of the most terrible counterrevolution the proletariat has ever known, when many deserted or even betrayed the militant fight; and he was once again there alongside the class with the historical resurgence of its

struggles at the end of the ‘60s.

We pay our homage to this militant of the revolutionary struggle, to his loyalty and unbreakable commitment to the proletarian cause. To the comrades of the FOR, we send our fraternal greetings.”

Castoriadis deserts the workers’ movement

One of the best accounts of the life of Munis was written by August Guillamon in 1993. Its title – “G Munis, a little known revolutionary”³¹ – summarises one of the main points of the article: that most of those militants who, through the trials and tribulations of the 20th century, remained loyal to the proletarian cause, were not rewarded by fame or fortune: alongside Munis he mentions Onorato Damen, Amadeo Bordiga, Paul Mattick, Karl Korsch, Ottorino Perrone, Bruno Maffi, Anton Pannekoek and Henk Canne-Meijer.³² By contrast, our obituary for Castoriadis was entitled, “Death of Cornelius Castoriadis: bourgeoisie pays homage to one of its servants”.³³ We can let the article speak for itself, adding a few further comments.

“The bourgeois press, especially in France, has made a certain amount of noise about the death of Cornelius Castoriadis. Le Monde referred to it in two successive issues (28-29 December and 30 December 1997) and devoted a full page to it under a significant title: ‘Death of Cornelius Castoriadis, anti-marxist revolutionary’. This title is typical of the ideological methods of the bourgeoisie. It contains two truths wrapped around the lie that they want us to swallow. The truths: Castoriadis is dead, and he was anti-marxist. The lie: he was a revolutionary. To shore up the idea, Le Monde recalls Castoriadis’ own words, ‘repeated until the end of his life’: ‘Whatever happens, I will remain first and above all a revolutionary’.

And indeed, in his youth, he had been a revolutionary. At the end of the 1940s he broke with the Trotskyist ‘4th International’ in company with a number of other comrades and animated the review Socialisme ou Barbarie. At this time SouB represented an effort, albeit confused and limited by its Trotskyist origins, to develop a proletar-

31. Available on the website bataillesocialiste.wordpress.com.

32. Curiously, he doesn’t include Marc Chirik in the list, or in the article as a whole, which somewhat deprives him of an important area of investigation. Not only did the discussions between Munis and the Gauche Communiste de France in the late 40s and early 50s play a part in Munis’ break with Trotskyism: we can see throughout the writings of Munis about the economic crisis a continued polemic against the conception of decadence defended by the GCF and later the ICC.

33 *World Revolution*, n° 213.

28. Alarme pamphlet, undated, *Fausse Trajectoire de Révolution Internationale*.

29. “Resolution on the international situation”, *International Review* n° 156.

30. Published on the website www.marxists.org.

ian line of thought in the middle of the triumphant counter-revolution. But in the course of the 1950s, under the impulsion of Castoriadis (who signed his articles Pierre Chaulieu, then Paul Cardan), *SouB* more and more rejected the weak marxist foundations on which it had been built. In particular, Castoriadis developed the idea that the real antagonism in society was no longer between exploiters and exploited but between 'order givers and order takers'. *SouB* finally disappeared at the beginning of 1966, hardly two years before the events of May 68, which marked the historic resurgence of the world-wide class struggle after a counter-revolution of nearly half a century. In fact, Castoriadis had ceased to be a revolutionary long before he died, even if he was able to maintain the illusory appearance of one.

Castoriadis was not the first to betray the revolutionary convictions of his youth. The history of the workers' movement is littered with such examples. What characterised him, however, is that he dressed his treason in the rags of 'political radicalism', in the claim that he was opposed to the whole existing social order. We can see this by looking at an article written in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in response to his final book, *Done and to be done*, 1997.

'Castoriadis gives us the tools to contest, to build the barricades, to envisage the socialism of the future, to think about changing the world, to desire to change life politically... What political heritage can come from the history of the workers' movement, when it is now obvious that the proletariat cannot play the role of motor force that marxism attributed to it? Castoriadis replies with a superb programme that combines the highest demands of human polity with the best of the socialist ideal... Action and thought are in search of a new radicalism, now that the Leninist parenthesis is closed, now that the police-state marxism of history has fallen into dust..'

In reality, this 'radicalism' that makes highbrow journalists drool so much was a fig leaf covering the fact that Castoriadis' message was extremely useful to the ideological campaigns of the bourgeoisie. Thus, his declaration that marxism had been pulverised (*The rise of Insignificance*, 1996) gave its 'radical' backing to the whole campaign about the death of communism which developed after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of the eastern bloc in 1989".

We have seen some of the early signs of a search for recognition in the decision of the Castoriadis group to write for Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, a practice strongly

criticised by the GCF.³⁴ But it is when he finally abandons the idea of a working class revolution and begins to speculate about a kind of autonomous citizens' utopia, when he dives into the more obscure pools of sociology and Lacanian psychoanalysis, that he becomes of interest to bourgeois academia and the more sophisticated branches of the media, who were quite willing to forgive him the follies of his youth and accept him into their very comfortable fold.

But our article accuses Castoriadis of a more serious betrayal than giving up the life of a militant and seeking above all his professional advancement.

"But the real test of Castoriadis' radicalism had already taken place in the early 80s, when under Reagan's leadership the western bourgeoisie launched a deafening campaign against the military threat of the 'Evil Empire' of the USSR in order to justify an armaments drive unprecedented since the second world war. And it was precisely during this period that Castoriadis published his book *Facing War* where he tried to demonstrate that there was a 'massive imbalance' in favour of Russia, 'a situation that was practically impossible for the Americans to amend'. What's more this 'analysis' was frequently cited by Marie-France Garaud, an ideologue of the ultra-militarist right and mouthpiece in France for the Reaganite campaigns.

At the end of the 80s, reality demonstrated that Russian military power was actually vastly inferior to that of the US, but this didn't puncture Castoriadis' self-importance or silence the journalists' praise for him. Neither was this new. From 1953-4, even before he openly abandoned marxism, Castoriadis developed a whole theory that capitalism had now definitively overcome its economic crisis (see 'The dynamic of capitalism' in *SouB* 120). We know what happened after this: capitalism's crisis returned with a vengeance in the late 60s. So when a pocket collection (*Editions 10/18*) of the works of Castoriadis was published in 1973, it missed out certain not very glorious writings, which allowed his friend Edgar Morin to say at the time: 'Who today can publish without shame, indeed with pride, the texts that marked his political road from 1948 to 1973, if not a rare spirit like Castoriadis?' (*Le Nouvel Observateur*)".

Did Castoriadis openly call for mobilising workers in defence of 'western democracy' against what he called the "stratocracy" of the eastern bloc? In a thread on libcom in 2011, a poster who signs himself "Julien Chaulieu" takes issue

34. "Communism is on the agenda of history: Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism", *International Review* n° 161.

with the original post, an account of the life of Castoriadis written by the Anarchist Federation in the UK, which argues that "In his last period, Castoriadis directed himself towards philosophical investigations, to psychoanalysis. In this period, his lack of knowledge of current social events and movements led him towards a tentative defence of the West - because struggle still remained possible within it - against Stalinist imperialism."³⁵

Julien Chaulieu replied:

"As somebody who has studied all of his works, alongside with Guy Debord and many anarchists-libertarian socialists, I can confirm that the above statement is utterly wrong.

Castoriadis never defended the west. This was a misunderstanding, based on a propaganda by the Greek Stalinist social-fascist party (Communist Party of Greece). In this interview-video (which is unfortunately only available in Greek) he claims that indeed USSR was oppressive and tyrannical but that doesn't mean we should defend the western capitalist powers which are similarly brutal towards the 'Third World'. The fact he abandoned typical socialist ideas, moving towards autonomy caused massive reactions to the (CPG).

In this interview he stated the following:

'The western Societies are not just capitalist societies. If somebody is a Marxist will say that the mode of production in the Western world is capitalist, therefore these societies are capitalist because the mode of production determines everything. But these societies are not only capitalist. They are self-called democracies, (I do not call them democratic because I have a different definition on democracy), I call them liberal oligarchies. But in these societies there is a democratic element which has not been created by capitalism. On the contrary, it has been created in contrast to capitalism. It has been created while Europe was exiting from the Middle Ages and a new social class was being created, the so called middle class (which has nothing to do with the capitalists) and they tried to gain some freedom over the feudals, the kings and the church. This movement is continuing after the Renaissance with the English Revolution in the 17th century, the French and the American Revolutions in the 18th century which resulted to the creation of the labour movement.'

In fact, he appears to be very critical against capitalism, he uncovers the myth of 'capitalism is the only system that works,

35. Published on the Libcom website.

the less bad', the dominant western approach. Nothing pro-capitalist here. On the contrary, he speaks out the truth that has been destroyed by stupid liberals"

But what we really find in this passage, with its hint that there remains a real democratic and extra-capitalist substrate in the western forms of capitalism, and even more so with his alarmist analysis of Russian military strength is that the later Castoriadis creates a zone of ambiguity which can easily be exploited by the real hawks of capitalist society, even if Castoriadis himself avoids incriminating himself with any explicitly pro-war pronouncements.

Our article could also have added that there is another side to the "legacy" of Castoriadis: he is, in a sense, one of the founding fathers of what we have called the "modernist" current, which is made up of various groups and individuals who claim that they have gone beyond marxism (which, let's recall, was always to an important extent the version Castoriadis inherited from Trotskyism) but who still consider themselves to be revolutionaries and even communists. Several members of the Situationist International, who tended in this direction, were even members of SouB, but the passing on of this flame is a more general tendency and not dependent on direct physical succession. The Situationists, for example, agreed with Castoriadis about putting forward the slogan of generalised self-management, concurred that the marxist analysis of the economic crisis was old hat, but did not follow him into abandoning the idea of the working class as the motor force of revolution. On the other hand, the main trend of later modernism – which today tends to label itself as the "movement for communisation" – has read its Marx and its Bordiga and is able to show that this notion of self-management is entirely compatible with value relations. But what they do inherit from Castoriadis above all is the abandonment of the working class as the subject of history. And just as Castoriadis' "supercession" of Marx took him back to Proudhon, so the communisers mighty act of "aufhebung" takes them back to Bakunin, where all classes immolate themselves in the coming grand conflagration. But this is a polemic we will have to take up elsewhere.

C D Ward, December 2017

The world bourgeoisie against the October revolution (part II)

Social democracy and Stalinism forever in the bourgeois camp

In the first part of this article¹ we highlighted the response of all the great imperialist powers to stem the revolutionary wave and prevent it from spreading in the major industrialised countries of Western Europe. Having fought each other for four years the bourgeoisies of Europe now made common cause against their historic enemy: the world proletariat. Among the many forces that the ruling class committed to the preservation of its system was social democracy (whose leadership and right wing had voted for war credits in 1914, thus consecrating their long-standing opportunism and leading them to definitively pass into the camp of the bourgeoisie), which was to play a decisive role in the repression and the mystification of the world revolution. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) placed itself in the forefront of this offensive since it was the true executioner of the German revolution in January 1919. As Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg had foreseen,² the impossibility of the extension of the revolution in the great industrial centers of Western Europe led to the isolation and degeneration of the Soviet Republic and the victory of the Stalinist counter-revolution, which still weighs heavily in the ranks of the world working class.

The treason of social democracy

The rejection of solidarity with the Russian proletariat

During the revolutionary wave that reached Germany in November 1918, social democracy played the role of the bridgehead of the bourgeoisie in order to isolate the working class of Russia.

When the revolution broke out in Germany, Soviet diplomats were expelled by Scheidemann (under-secretary of state without portfolio in the cabinet of Max Von Baden). At that time, the working masses had not really perceived the progressive abandonment of marxism by the SPD. On the eve of the First World War, hundreds of thousands of workers in Germany were still members. But its dissociation from the Russian revolution confirmed its betrayal and passage into the bourgeois camp.

After the mutiny of sailors in Kiel, Haase transmitted a teletype message to the People's Commissars of the Soviet government, thanking them for sending grain; but, after a pause, the message continued: "*Knowing that Russia is oppressed by hunger, we ask you to distribute to the starving Russian people the grain that you intend to sacrifice for the German revolution. The President of the American*

Republic Wilson guarantees us the sending of flour and bacon necessary to the German population to get through the winter."

As Karl Radek later said, "*the outstretched hand hung in the void*"! The "socialist" government preferred the aid of a capitalist power rather than that of the Russian workers. Instead, the German government accepted American flour and bacon, huge quantities of luxury items, and other superfluous goods that drained the German Treasury dry. On 14 November, the government sent a telegram to US President Wilson: "*The German Government asks the United States Government to telegraph the Chancellor of the Reich (Ebert) to say if it can count on the supply of foodstuffs on the part of the United States Government, so that the German Government can guarantee domestic order and pay fairly for such supplies.*"

In Germany, the telegram was widely broadcast to convey the following message to the workers: "*renounce the revolution and destroying capitalism, and you will have bread and bacon!*" But no condition of this kind had been imposed by the Americans. So, social democracy not only blackmailed the workers but brazenly lied to them that these conditions had been imposed by Wilson himself.³

Social democracy at the forefront of the counter-revolution

In these conditions, there was no doubt that German social democracy was at the forefront of the counter-revolution. On 10 November 1918, the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, the supreme body recognised by the new government, decided to immediately re-establish diplomatic relations with the Russian government pending the arrival of its representatives in Berlin.

This resolution was an order that the Peoples' Commissars should have respected but they did not do it. Although they had defended themselves from the charge in the publication of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), the betrayal and sale of the revolution to the imperialist powers was accepted by the Independents, as proved by the minutes of the meeting of the Council of the Peoples' Commissars of 19 November 1918: "*Following discussion on relations between Germany and the Republic of the Soviets, Haase advises adopting a delaying policy (...) Kautsky agrees with Haase: the decision must be deferred. The Soviet government cannot survive long: in a few weeks, it will not exist (...)*"⁴ However, while the right wing of this centrist party was gradually moving towards the counter-revolution, the left wing was moving more clearly towards the defence of proletarian interests.

But the zeal of the "socialist" government did not stop there. Faced with the irritation of the Entente with the slowness with which the German troops were withdrawing from the Eastern territories, the German government responded with a diplomatic dispatch which, although sent after the expulsion of the Independent Social Democrats from the government, had been developed with them. This is what was stated:

"The Entente's conviction that German troops would support Bolshevism, either on their own initiative or by higher order, directly or by obstructing anti-Bolshevik measures, does not correspond to reality. We Germans, and therefore our troops, remember that Bolshevism represents

1. See *International Review* n° 160.

2. See in particular Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet on the Russian Revolution.

3. See P. Frolich, R. Lindaury, A. Schreiner, J. Walter, *Revolution et Contre-revolution en Allemagne (1918-1920)*, Editions Science Marxiste, 2013.

4. Quoted in P. Frolich et al, *Op. Cit.*, p.25.

an extremely serious threat that must be contained by all means."⁵

If the SPD illustrates in the most extreme way the passage of social democracy into the camp of the bourgeoisie, especially in its open struggle against the revolution in Russia, most of the other major socialist parties in the world were not left out. The tactics of the Italian Socialist Party were, throughout the war, to curb the class struggle under the guise of a falsely neutral position in the world conflict, illustrated by the hypocritical slogan "neither sabotage nor participate", which amounted to trampling on the principle of proletarian internationalism. In France, alongside the fraction that passed bag and baggage into the camp of the bourgeoisie through the vote of the war credits, the socialist movement remained gangrenous with centrism, which only encouraged hostility towards the October revolution and the Bolshevik party.

Nevertheless, a left-wing current began to emerge at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919. Even as the bourgeoisie surfed the wave of victory to strengthen patriotic sentiment, the French proletariat paid mainly for the absence of a true marxist party. This is what Lenin pointed out very lucidly: "*The transformation of the old type of European parliamentary party, reformist in its work and slightly coloured with a revolutionary tinge, into a truly communist party, is an extraordinarily difficult thing, and it is certainly in France that this difficulty appears most clearly.*"⁶

Social democracy sabotages and torpedoes the workers' councils⁷

In Russia, as in all countries in which soviets were hatching, the socialist parties played a double game. On the one hand, they gave the impression that they favoured the development of the emancipatory struggle of the workers through the soviets. On the other, they did everything possible to sterilise these organs of self-organisation of the class. It was in Germany that this enterprise took on the greatest importance. Apparently favourable to the workers' councils, the socialists proved to be fiercely hostile to them. In this way, their destructive action within the soviets shows that they behaved like true guard dogs of the bourgeoisie. The tactic was simple; it was to undermine the movement from within, to empty the councils of their revolutionary content. The intention was to sterilise the soviets by subordinating them to the bourgeois state and ensuring that they con-

ceived themselves merely as transitional organs until the holding of elections to the National Assembly. The councils should also be open to all layers of the population. In Germany for example, the SPD created "Committees of Public Safety" welcoming all social strata with identical rights.

Moreover, the leaders of the SPD/USPD sabotaged the work of the soviets through the Council of People's Commissars⁸ by imposing instructions other than those given by the Executive Council (EC), which was an emanation of the workers' councils, or by ensuring that the EC did not have its own press. Under an SPD majority, the EC even took a position against the strikes of November and December 1918. This demolition job on the self-organisation of the class also took place in Italy between 1919 and 1920 during the great strike wave, since the PSI did everything possible to turn the factory councils into vulgar works committees incorporated into the state and calling for the self-management of production. The left of the party led the fight against this illusion, which could only lock the struggle of the workers inside the narrow perimeters of the factory:

"We want to prevent the absorption by the working class of the idea that it is enough to develop the Councils solely to take hold of the factories and eliminate the capitalists. This would be an extremely dangerous illusion (...) If the conquest of political power has not taken place, the Royal Guard and the carabinieri will be in place to see to the dissipation of all such illusions, with all the mechanisms of oppression, all the forces which the bourgeoisie wields through its apparatus of political power." (Bordiga)⁹

But German social democracy showed its new, true face when it directly assumed the repression of the workers' strikes. The deployment of an intense ideological campaign in favour of the Republic, universal suffrage, the unity of the people, was not enough to destroy the fighting spirit and the consciousness of the proletariat. Thus, now in the service of the bourgeois state, the traitors of the SPD made an alliance with the army to suppress in blood the mass movement which was in continuity with the one born in Russia and which put in danger one of the most developed imperialist powers of the world. The commander-in-chief of the army, General Groener,

8. The Council of People's Commissars was nothing more than the name taken by the new government on November 10 1918, composed of Ebert, Scheidemann and others. This appellation gave the impression that the SPD leaders were in favour of the workers' councils and the development of the class struggle in Germany.

9. Quoted in "Revolution and counter-revolution in Italy (1919-1922), Part 1", *International Review* n° 2.

who had collaborated daily with the SPD and the unions during the war as head of armaments projects, explained:

"We allied ourselves to fight Bolshevism. It was impossible to restore the monarchy (...) I had advised the Feldmarschall not to combat the revolution by force, because given the state of mind of the troops, it was to be feared that such a method would end in failure. I proposed that the military high command should ally with the SPD, since there was no party with enough influence among the people, and the masses, to rebuild a governmental force with the military command. The parties of the right had completely disappeared, and it was out of the question to work with the radical extremists. In the first place, we had to snatch power from the hands of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' councils. An undertaking was planned with this aim in view. Ten divisions were to enter Berlin. Ebert agreed (...) We had worked out a program which planned, after the arrival of the troops, to clean up Berlin and disarm the Spartakists. This was also agreed with Ebert, to whom I was especially grateful for his absolute love for the fatherland (...) This alliance was sealed against the Bolshevik danger and the system of councils." (October-November 1925, Zeugenaussage).¹⁰

The social democratic government also did not hesitate to appeal to the Western European bourgeoisie in the operation to maintain order during the crucial days of January 1919. For all, it was a point of honour to occupy Berlin if the revolution emerged victorious.

On March 26 1919, the English Prime Minister Lloyd George wrote in a memorandum addressed to Clemenceau and Wilson: "*The greatest danger in the current situation lies, in my opinion, in the fact that Germany could turn to Bolshevism. If we are wise, we will offer peace to Germany, which, because it is fair, will be better for all reasonable people to the alternative of Bolshevism.*" Faced with the danger of the "Bolshevisation of Germany",¹¹ the main political leaders of the bourgeoisie did not show themselves so eager to disarm the enemy of yesterday. During a debate in the Senate on the issue in October 1919, Clemenceau did not hide the reasons: "*Because Germany needs to defend itself and we have no interest in having a second Bolshevik Russia in the centre of Europe; one is enough*".¹²

While the armistice had just been signed,

5. Quoted in P. Frolich et al, Op. Cit., p.26.

6. Cited in Anne Kriegel, *Aux origines du Communisme français*, Flammarion, 1978.

7. For a more complete approach see the article "Revolution in Germany: The beginnings of the revolution (II)", *International Review* n° 82

10. Quoted in "The German Revolution part II: The start of the revolution", *International Review* n° 82.

11. Cited in Gilbert Badia, *Les Spartakistes. 1918: l'Allemagne en revolution*, Editions Aden, 2008, p.296.

12. Ibid, p.298.

the Ebert-Noske-Scheidemann-Erzberger government sealed the peace with Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson by a military pact directed against the German proletariat. Subsequently, the violence with which the bloodhound Noske and his freikorps unleashed during the “bloody week” from January 6 to 13, 1919, was matched only by the terrible repression the Versailles waged against the Communards during the bloody week of May 21 to 28, 1871. Like 38 years earlier, the proletariat was subjected to the “unmasked savagery and lawless revenge” (Karl Marx) of the bourgeoisie. But the bloodshed of January 1919 was only the prologue to a much more terrible punishment, which subsequently fell on the workers of the Ruhr, Central Germany, Bavaria ...

The democratic mystification in the “victor” countries

In the main allied countries, the victory over the forces of the Triple Alliance did not prevent the reaction of the working class to the barbarism experienced by Europe between 1914 and 1918. But despite the resounding echo of October 1917 in the proletariat of Western Europe, the Entente bourgeoisie used the outcome of the war to channel the development of the proletarian struggles between 1917 and 1927. While the imperialist war was the expression of the general crisis of capitalism, the bourgeoisie managed to push the lie that it was just an anomaly of history; that it was “the war to end wars”, that society would recover stability and that the revolution had no place in it. In the most modern countries of capitalism, the bourgeoisie hammered home the argument that from now on all classes should participate in the construction of democracy. The time was for so-called reconciliation and not social confrontations. With this in mind, in February 1918 the British parliament adopted the *Representation of the People Act*, which enlarged the electoral population and granted the right to vote to women over thirty. In a context where social struggles were raging in Great Britain, the most experienced bourgeoisie in the world, with great skill, was trying to divert the working class from its class terrain. As Sylvia Pankhurst said at the time, this clever manoeuvre was motivated by the threat of the spread of the October Revolution to the western countries:

“Those events in Russia evoked a response throughout the world not only amongst the minority who welcomed the idea of Soviet Communism, but also amongst the upholders of reaction. The latter were by no means oblivious to the growth of Sovietism when they decided to popularise the old Parliamentary machine

by giving to some women both votes and the right to be elected.” (Workers’ Dreadnought, 15th December 1923)¹³

Moreover, the bourgeoisie was very good at using the outcome of the war by playing on the division between the ‘victorious’ and ‘vanquished’ nations in order to break the dynamic of generalisation of the struggles. For example, following the dislocation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the proletariat of the various territorial entities was subjected to the propaganda of national liberation struggles. In the same way, while in the vanquished countries the proletariat was steered towards gaining “revenge”, in the conquering countries, where the proletariat aspired most for peace after four years of war, the news from Russia provoked a new wave of class militancy, particularly in France and Great Britain. This momentum was channelled into chauvinism and the hype of the victory of civilisation against the “dirty boches”.

Faced with the deterioration of living conditions, following the worsening of the crisis from the 1920s, workers’ struggles erupted in England, France, Germany and Poland. But these movements, in many cases violently repressed, were in fact the last gasps of the revolutionary wave which reached its final convulsions during the terrible repression of workers in Shanghai and Canton in 1927.¹⁴ The bourgeoisie had thus succeeded in coordinating its forces in order to finish stifling and repressing the last bastions of the revolutionary wave. Thus, as we have already shown, it must be recognised that war does not create the most favourable conditions for the generalisation of the revolution. In fact the global economic crisis as it has unfolded since the 1960s appears as a much more valid material base for the world revolution, since it affects all countries without exception and cannot be stopped unlike the imperialist war. The socialist parties had a central role in promoting democracy, and the republican and parliamentary system was presented as a step forward on the road to revolution. In Italy, as early as 1919, the PSI unambiguously advocated the recognition of the democratic system by pushing the masses to vote in the 1919 elections. An aggravating circumstance was that the electoral success that followed was approved by the Communist International. However, once in command, the socialists ran the state just like any bourgeois faction. In the following years, the antifascist theses propagated by Gramsci and the Ordiovists led the Italian working class no more and no less towards inter-classism.

13. See the article in ICC Online: “Suffragism or communism”, February 2018.

14. See the article: “The first revolutionary wave of the world proletariat” in *International Review* n° 80.

Arguing that fascism expressed a peculiarity of Italian history, Gramsci advocated the establishment of the Constituent Assembly as an intermediate step between Italian capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. According to him, “*a class of an international character must, in a certain sense, become nationalised*”. It was therefore necessary that the proletariat make an alliance with the bourgeoisie in a constituent national assembly where the deputies of “all the democratic classes of the country”, elected by universal vote, would elaborate the future Italian constitution. At the 5th world congress, Bordiga responded to these mistakes that led the proletariat to leave its class terrain in the name of democratic illusions:

“We must reject the illusion that a transitional government would be naive enough to allow a situation to occur in which, through legal means, parliamentary manoeuvres and more or less skilful expediency, we could lay siege to the bourgeoisie, ie legally deprive them of their whole technical and military apparatus, and quietly distribute arms to the workers. This is a truly infantile conception! Making a revolution is not that simple!”¹⁵

Campaigns of slander accompany the bloody repression

Propaganda organised at the highest levels of the state

“Parallel to the military preparation of the civil war against the working class, they proceeded with the ideological preparation” (Paul Frölich). Indeed, very early on, in the weeks and months following the revolution in Russia, the bourgeoisie worked to reduce this event to the seizure of power by a minority who had hijacked the will of the masses and led society into disorder and chaos. But this intense anti-Bolshevik and anti-Spartacist propaganda campaign was not the product of a few zealous individuals determined to act as the guard dogs of the ruling class but a policy of all the main bourgeois factions directed from the highest levels of the state apparatus. As we developed in an article of *International Review* n° 155, the First World War was a defining moment in the state’s massive takeover of control of information through propaganda and censorship. The goal was clear; to put ideological pressure on the population to ensure victory in this total war. With the opening of the revolutionary period, the goal of state propaganda was equally clear: to pressure the masses to ensure that they moved away from the organisations of the proletariat and ensure

15. “Revolution and counter-revolution in Italy part II: Facing fascism”, *International Review* n° 3.

the victory of the counter-revolution. The great German industrialists were the most determined and broke their piggy banks for the “good cause” of the bourgeois order. Thanks to the donation of a few thousand marks from the banker Helfferich and the politician Friedrich Naumann, a “General Secretariat on the study of and fight against Bolshevism” was founded on 1 December 1918 in Berlin. On 10 January its founder, a certain Stadler, brought together nearly 50 German industrialists to hear their views. Immediately after, Hugo Stinnes, one of the biggest magnates of German industry, rallied the top-hatted troops:

“I am of the opinion that after this presentation all discussion is superfluous, I fully share the speaker’s point of view. If the world of industry, commerce and banking does not have the will and is not able to pay an insurance premium of 500 million marks to guard against the danger just revealed to us, we do not deserve to be considered as representatives of the German economy. I ask that we close this meeting and ask Messrs. Mankiewitz, Borsig, Siemens, Deutsch, etc., etc. (he quoted about eight names) to go with me to the next room for us to agree immediately on a method of apportioning this contribution.”¹⁶

With these hundreds of millions of marks of subsidies, several offices could be created to carry out the anti-revolutionary campaign. The Anti-Bolshevik League (formerly the Reich Association against Social Democracy) was certainly the most active in spitting venom on the revolutionaries of Russia and Germany by distributing millions of leaflets, posters, leaflets and posters or organisation of meetings. This first office was part of one of the two counter-revolutionary centres with the *Bürgerrat* and the Hotel Eden, where the headquarters of the Guards Cavalry Rifle Division were located.

The propaganda organisation “Building and becoming, society for the education of the people and the improvement of national labour forces”, founded by Karl Erdmann, was directly financed by Ernst Von Borsig and Hugo Stinnes. The latter also subsidised the nationalist press and far-right parties to carry out propaganda against the Spartacists and Bolsheviks.

But in most cases, social democracy was the mastermind in manipulating opinion within the working class. As Paul Frölich relates:

“It began with the dissemination of insipid speeches celebrating the victory of the November Revolution. Promises, lies, reprimands and threats followed. The *Heimatdienst*, an institution created during

the war to manipulate public opinion, disseminated hundreds of millions of leaflets, pamphlets and posters, most often written by the Social Democrats, in support of the reaction. Shamelessly distorting the meaning of previous revolutions and the teachings of Marx, Kautsky proclaimed his indignation at the ‘prolongation of the revolution’. They made ‘Bolshevism’ a scarecrow for children. This concert was also led by the Social Democrats, the same gentlemen who during the war had acclaimed the Bolsheviks (described as faithful followers of Marx’s thought) in the columns of their newspapers because they thought that the struggles of Russian revolutionaries would help Ludendorff and company to definitively defeat the Western powers. Now, on the contrary, they spread terrible stories about the Bolsheviks, going so far as to circulate fake ‘official documents’ according to which the Russian revolutionaries had made women common property.”¹⁷

Revolutionaries reduced to the level of bloody savages

From then on, the revolutionary forces defending proletarian internationalism were the main targets, especially after the Russian workers seized power in October 1917. Aware of the danger that the extension of the revolution posed to world capital, the most developed states carried out a veritable campaign of slander against the Bolsheviks in order to prevent any feeling of sympathy or attempt at fraternisation. During the 1919 elections, the French bourgeoisie took the opportunity to focus the campaign on the “red peril” by fuelling the demonisation of the revolution and the Bolsheviks. Georges Clemenceau, one of the great actors of the counter-revolution, was particularly active since he campaigned on the theme of “national unity” and the “threat of Bolshevism”. A booklet and a famous poster titled “How to fight against Bolshevism?” even painted a portrait of the Bolshevik like a beast, with shaggy hair and a knife between his teeth. All this helped to portray the proletarian revolution as a barbaric and bloodthirsty enterprise. At the founding congress of the Communist International, George Sadoul reported on the extent of the slanders poured out by the French bourgeoisie:

“When I left Paris in September of 1917, just a few weeks before the October revolution, public perception of Bolshevism in France was that of a hideous caricature of socialism. Bolshevik leaders were viewed as criminals or madmen; their army was depicted as a horde of several thousand fanatics or outlaws (...) I am ashamed to confess that nine-tenths of both the majority

and the minority Socialists held the same view. In our defence we can only point to mitigating circumstances: we were not the least bit informed about the situation in Russia and, further, newspapers of every stripe printed fabrications and falsified documents to prove the corruption, cruelty, and unscrupulousness of the Bolsheviks. The theme of a seizure of power by this ‘gang of bandits’ had a major impact in France. The slanders hiding the true face of Russian communism became even more vicious with the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace. Anti-Bolshevik agitation reached a fever pitch.”¹⁸

Although the governments of the Triple Entente were able to play on the momentum of victory to calm discontent within the working class, they still had to divert all its revolutionary inclinations towards the ballot box. Here the bourgeoisie showed its true face; vile, manipulative, lying! The anti-Bolshevism spread by the press, the media and the academic world for several decades therefore took root very early, during the revolutionary wave, in the highest circles of the state apparatus. The military offensive on the Russian frontiers and the bloody repression of the German working class in January 1919 had to be accompanied by an intense propaganda campaign in order to deflect the growing sympathy for the proletarian revolution among exploited strata around the world. Among the many counterrevolutionary propaganda posters produced in France, England and Germany, the main targets remained the political organisations of the proletariat, who were made out to be responsible for unemployment, war and hunger, and regularly accused of sowing disorder and crime.¹⁹ As Paul Frölich sums it up, “the posters in the street represented Bolshevism as a wild beast with a jaws wide open, ready to bite”.

The call to kill the vanguard of the proletariat

By November 1918, the German bourgeoisie had made Spartacus the main target. To neutralise the influence of the organisation with the masses it tried to accuse it of all evils; Spartacus became the scapegoat, a real plague for social order and German capital, to be done away with. The picture portrayed by Frölich, ten years after the events, is edifying:

“Every crime committed in the big cities had only one culprit: Spartacus! The Spartacists were accused of all robberies. Delinquents in uniform, protected by official documents, true or false, rushed

18. John Riddell (Ed.), *Founding the Communist International*, Pathfinder, 1987, p.101.

19. See our article: “The birth of totalitarian democracy”, *International Review* n°155.

16. Cited in G. Badia, Op. Cit., p.286.

17. Quoted in P. Frölich et al, Op. Cit., p.45.

into houses, smashing and pillaging everything: it was Spartacus who sent them! All suffering, all menacing danger had only one origin: Spartacus! Spartacus, it's anarchy, Spartacus, it's famine, Spartacus, it's terror!"²⁰

The ignominy of social democracy and the entire German bourgeoisie went even further, as *Vorwärts*²¹ organised a campaign of denigration and hatred against Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and other influential activists of the Spartacus League: "Karl Liebknecht, a certain Paul Levi and the impetuous Rosa Luxemburg, who have never worked at a vice or lathe, are ruining our dreams and those of our fathers (...) If the Spartacist clique wants to ban us, we and our future, then Karl Liebknecht and company are also banned!"

Hate speech succeeded in organising a real witch hunt for revolutionaries. The League for the Fight against Bolshevism promised to offer 10,000 marks for the capture of Karl Radek or for information that could lead to his arrest. But the main targets remained Liebknecht and Luxemburg. In December 1918, a manifesto placed on the walls of Berlin called for nothing less than their murder. Its contents set the tone of the degree of violence which social democracy unleashed on Spartacus: "Worker, citizen! The homeland is on the brink of ruin. Save it! The threat does not come from outside, but from within: the Spartacus group. Strike their leader! Kill Liebknecht! And you will have peace, work and bread! The soldiers of the front." A month before, the soldiers' council of Steglitz (a small town in Brandenburg) had threatened that soldiers would shoot Liebknecht and Luxemburg on sight if they went to a barracks to give "incendiary speeches". The bourgeois press was in reality spreading a real pogrom atmosphere, "it sang of walls splattered with the brains of those shot, transforming the entire bourgeoisie into a bloodthirsty horde, drunk with denunciations, dragging the suspects (revolutionaries and others, perfectly harmless) before the rifles of the firing squads, and all these howls culminated in a single murderous cry: Liebknecht, Luxemburg!"²² The prize for ignominy can be awarded to *Vorwärts* which, on 13 January, published a poem that made the main members of Spartacus out to be deserters and cowards who had betrayed the German proletariat and deserved only death:

"Many hundred corpses in a row—
Proletarians!
Karl, Radek, Rosa and Co —

Not one of them is there, not one of them is there!
Proletarians!"

We all know that these calumnies had tragic results since on 15 January 1919, Karl and Rosa, these two great militants of the revolutionary cause were murdered by the freikorps. The completely false account that *Vorwärts* gave of these crimes alone illustrated the mentality of the bourgeoisie, this "pitiful and cowardly" class as already emphasised by Karl Marx in the *18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. According to the newspapers on the evening of 16 January, Liebknecht was killed during an escape attempt and Rosa Luxemburg lynched by the crowd. As reported by Paul Frölich, the commander of the Guard Cavalry Rifle Division, whose members carried out the two murders, issued a statement completely falsifying the events which was repeated by the entire press, all this "giving vent to a web of lies, cover-ups and law-breaking that provided the backdrop for a shameful series of comedies as interpreted by the judiciary."²³

After considerable labours, all these fabrications were exposed by Leo Jogiches who, in collaboration with a commission of inquiry created by the central council and the executive council of Berlin, restored the truth by bringing to light the unfolding of these crimes and publishing the photograph of the murderers' feast after their crimes. He thus signed his own death warrant! On March 10, 1919, he was arrested and murdered in the prison of the Berlin Police Headquarters. As for the culprits, they escaped with acquittals or short prison sentences.

Yesterday, Rosa Luxemburg was this red witch devouring "good little Germans", today she is the "good democrat", "the anti-Lenin" — who is still generally presented as a "dangerous revolutionary" and "inventor of totalitarianism". The ruling class is full of contradictions, but it must be said, the two sides of this treatment of Rosa Luxemburg are not strictly speaking in contradiction. They are a new illustration of what the bourgeoisie does with the memory of great people who dared to challenge their world "without heart and without spirit":

"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them,

so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarising it. Today, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the workers' movement concur in this doctoring of Marxism." (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*).

Stalinism: true executioner of the revolution

The failure of the revolutionary wave makes a bed for Stalin

The bloody crushing of the revolution in Germany was a terrible blow to the world proletariat. As Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg affirmed, the salvation of the revolution on a world scale depended on the ability of the workers of the great capitalist powers to seize power in their own countries. In other words, the future of humanity depended on the extension of the revolutionary wave that began in Russia. But this did not take place. The failure of the proletariat in Germany, Hungary and Italy sounded the death knell of the revolution in Russia, a death by asphyxiation because it no longer had sufficient breath within it to give impetus to the workers of the whole world. It was in this agony "precisely that Stalinism intervened, in total rupture with the revolution when after the death of Lenin, Stalin seized the reins of power and, from 1925, put forward his thesis of 'the construction of socialism in one country', through which the counter-revolution was installed in all its horror".²⁴

And now, for decades, historians, journalists and other commentators of all kinds falsify history by trying to find a continuity between Lenin and Stalin, and feed the lie that communism is equal to Stalinism. In fact, there is an abyss between Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the one side and Stalinism on the other.

The state that emerged after the revolution more and more escaped from the working class and gradually absorbed the Bolshevik Party, where the weight of the bureaucrats had become preponderant. Stalin was the representative of this new layer of rulers whose interests were in total opposition to the salvation of the world revolution. The thesis of "socialism in one country" served precisely to justify the policy of this new bourgeois class in Russia to fall back on the national economy and the state as guarantor of the *status quo* and the capitalist mode of production. Lenin never defended such positions. On the contrary, he always

24. ICC pamphlet, *The collapse of Stalinism* (in French).

20. P. Frolich et al, Op. Cit., p.45.

21. The main press organ of the SPD

22. P. Frolich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, L'Harmattan, 1991, p. 137.

23. P. Frolich, R. Lindauy, A. Schreiner, J. Walter, *Revolution et Contre-révolution en Allemagne (1918-1920)*, Editions Science Marxiste, 2013.

defended proletarian internationalism, considering this principle as a compass preventing the proletariat from straying onto the bourgeoisie's terrain. Although he could not anticipate what Stalinism would do, in the last years of his life Lenin was aware of some of the dangers threatening the revolution and in particular struggled against the conservative attraction of the state for the revolutionary forces. Although he was unable to prevent this, he warned against the bureaucratic gangrene without finding a solution to the problem. Similarly, Lenin was very suspicious of Stalin and was opposed to him receiving any significant responsibilities. In his "testament" of 4 January 1923, he even tried to remove him from the post of secretary general of the party where Stalin was "*concentrating a huge power which he abuses brutally*". A vain attempt since Stalin already controlled the situation.²⁵

As we highlighted in our pamphlet, *The Collapse of Stalinism*:

*"It was on the ruins of the 1917 revolution that Stalinism was able to establish its domination, thanks to the most radical negation of communism constituted by the monstrous doctrine of 'socialism in one country', totally alien to the proletariat and to Lenin; that the USSR became again not only a capitalist state in its own right but also a state where the proletariat has been subjected more brutally and more ferociously than elsewhere to the interests of national capital renamed 'the interests of the socialist fatherland'."*²⁶

The USSR: an imperialist bourgeois state against the working class

Once in power, Stalin wanted to stay there. By the end of the 1920s he had in his hands all the control levers of the soviet state apparatus. We have shown, in one of the first texts we produced on the revolution in Russia, the process that led to the degeneration of the revolution and the emergence of a new ruling class making this country a capitalist state in its own right.²⁷

Thus, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was "Soviet" only in name!

"Not only was the slogan of the entire revolutionary period – 'All power to the soviets' – abandoned and banned, but the dictatorship of the proletariat, through which the power of the workers' councils had been the driving force and soul of the revolution and which so revolts and upsets our dear "democrats" today, (...) was totally destroyed and became an empty shell devoid of meaning, leaving room in its

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. "The degeneration of the Russian Revolution", *International Review* n° 3.

*place for an implacable dictatorship of the party-state over the proletariat."*²⁸

Since Stalinism was the product of the degeneration of the revolution, it never belonged to any other camp than that of the counter-revolution. Moreover, it found its full and complete place in the great concert of bourgeois nations precisely for this reason. It was a masterful force for mystifying the working class and making it believe that communism did indeed exist in Eastern Europe, that its progress was momentarily slowed down, and that its total victory rested on the support of the workers of the whole world for the political line decided by Moscow. This great illusion was of course maintained by all the communist parties around the world. In order to spread the lie on a large scale, Moscow and the national CPs organised, among other things, the famous trips to the Soviet Union of workers' delegations, a stay during which all the "pomp" of the regime were shown to "political tourists" who were then mandated to preach the good word in their factories and cells on their return. Here is how Henri Guilbeaux described this masquerade:

*"When the worker goes to Russia he is carefully selected, he can only go there in groups chosen from Party members but also elements known to be 'sympathizers' from the trade unions and the socialist party, who are very suggestible and easy to brainwash. Delegates thus 'elected' form a workers' delegation. Once arrived in Russia, these delegates are officially received, escorted, pampered, celebrated. Everywhere they are accompanied by guides and translators. They are given presents. (...) Wherever they go, they are told: 'This belongs to the workers, and here it is the workers who direct'. On their return, the workers' delegates who have been identified as being the most able to say good things about the USSR are put on a pedestal. They are then invited to come and give their impressions in public meetings."*²⁹

These political brainwashing trips had as their sole objective to maintain the myth of "socialism in one country", a true falsification of the programme defended by the revolutionary movement which, since its origins, has been an international movement precisely because, as Engels wrote in 1847, the political offensive of the working class against the ruling class takes place from the outset at a world level: "*The communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilised countries (...) It will have a powerful impact on*

28. *The collapse of Stalinism*.

29. H. Guilbeaux, *La fin des soviets*, Societe francaise d'editions litteraires et techniques, 1937, p. 86.

*the other countries of the world, and will radically alter the course of development which they have followed up to now, while greatly stepping up its pace. It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range."*³⁰

Socialism in one country meant the defence of national capital and participation in the imperialist game. It also meant the dissipation of the revolutionary wave. Under these conditions, Stalin became a respectable man in the eyes of the Western democracies, now anxious to facilitate the insertion of the USSR into the capitalist world. While the world bourgeoisie had not hesitated to establish a military cordon around Russia at the time of the revolution, this policy changed radically once the danger had dissipated. Moreover, following the crisis of 1929, the USSR became a central issue and the whole Western bourgeoisie tried to attract the good graces of Stalin. Thus, the USSR joined the League of Nations in 1934 and a mutual security pact was signed between Stalin and Laval, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose communiqué the following day illustrated the anti-working class policy of the USSR: "*Mr. Stalin understands and fully endorses the national defence policy made by France to maintain its armed force in terms of its security*". As we showed in our pamphlet *The collapse of Stalinism*:

"It was this policy of alliance with the USSR that would allow, in the aftermath of the Laval-Stalin pact, the constitution of the 'Popular Front' in France, signalling the reconciliation of the PCF with social democracy for the needs of French capital in the imperialist arena: after Stalin decided in favour of the arming of France, suddenly the PCF in turn voted for military credits and signed an agreement with the radicals and the SFIO."

The Stalinist terror, or the liquidation of the old guard of the Bolshevik Party

The whole bourgeoisie understood that Stalin was the man of the situation, the one who was going to eradicate the last vestiges of the revolution of October 1917. Besides, the democracies were more benevolent towards him when he began to break up and exterminate the generation of proletarians and revolutionaries who had participated in the revolution of October 1917. The liquidation of the old guard of the Bolshevik Party expressed Stalin's determination to avoid any form of conspiracy around him in order to consolidate his power; but it also struck a blow to the consciousness of the proletariat of the whole world by pushing it to defend the USSR against so-called traitors to the revolutionary cause.

30. *The principles of communism*, 1847.

In these conditions, the European democracies did not hesitate to support and participate in this macabre enterprise. If they were very enthusiastic when it came to bleating beautiful hymns to Human Rights, they were much less willing to welcome and protect the main members of the workers' opposition, starting with Trotsky, its principal representative. After being expelled from Russia in 1928, the latter was greeted by a Turkey hostile to Bolshevism, who, in cahoots with Stalin, let him enter the territory without a passport at the mercy of the residue of white Russians determined to kill him. The former chief of the Red Army escaped several murder attempts. His Calvary continued after leaving Turkey when all the democracies of Western Europe, in agreement with Stalin, refused to grant him the right of asylum; "*Chased by murderers in the pay of Stalin or the remains of white armies, Trotsky would be sentenced to wander from one country to another until by the mid-30s, the whole world became for the former head of the Red Army a 'planet without a visa'*".³¹ Social democracy proved the most zealous to serve Stalin. Between 1928 and 1936, all Western governments collaborated with him and closed their borders to Trotsky or, as in Norway, put him under house arrest by prohibiting any political activity and any criticism of Stalin. In another example, in 1927 Christian Rakovsky, USSR ambassador in Paris, was recalled to Moscow following the request of the French government who considered him "persona non grata" after he signed the platform of the Left Opposition. The "homeland of the rights of man and of the citizen" delivered him ignobly to his executioners and added its stone to the building of the great Stalinist purges. And yet today these same democracies and their shoddy intellectuals denounce them loudly in order to make people forget that they themselves participated in these killings.

For all the oppositionists, the "great democracies" were nothing more than antechambers of the Stalinist death camps or the playgrounds of the GPU agents, authorised to penetrate their territories to silence the oppositionists. Similarly, the Western press relayed the smear campaign, designating the accused as Hitler's agents, justifying the purges and convictions by relying, without questioning them, on the minutes of the court sittings. Of course, the Communist parties, oozing with zeal, went the furthest in the slander and justification of such a mockery of justice. After the conviction of the sixteen defendants of the first Moscow Trial, the central committee of the PCF and the cells of several

factories passed resolutions approving the execution of these "Trotskyist terrorists". The newspaper *L'Humanité* also distinguished itself by calling for the murder of the "Hitler-Trotskyists". But perhaps the most foul celebration of Stalinist terror is *Hymn to the GPU*, a so-called poem by Louis Aragon³² in 1931, who, after being a poet in his youth, became a Stalinist preacher and never, till his last breath, stopped singing the praises of Stalin and the USSR!

Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Smirnov, Evdokimov, Sokolnikov, Piatakov, Bukharin, Radek ... to name only the best-known of the condemned. Although some were more or less compromised in the process of Stalinisation, all these fighters of the proletariat embodied the legacy of October 1917. By liquidating them, Stalin murdered the revolution a little more; for behind the farce of these trials was hidden the tragedy of the counter-revolution. These great purges, far from expressing the purification of society for the "construction of socialism", marked a new assault on the memory and transmission of the legacies of the revolutionary movement.

Cultivated or discredited, the myth of communism in the Soviet Union has always been utilised by the bourgeoisie against the consciousness of the proletariat. If it had been thought that the break-up of the Eastern bloc between 1989 and 1991 would bring about the fall of this great deception, it was not so. On the contrary, the equation of Stalinism with communism has only been reinforced during the last thirty years, although among the revolutionary minorities Stalinism is recognised as the worst product of the counter-revolution.

Conclusion

One hundred years after the events, the spectre of the October 1917 Revolution still haunts the bourgeoisie. And to try to guard against a new revolutionary episode that would shake its world, it is bent on burying the historical memory of the proletariat. For this, its intelligentsia tirelessly strives to rewrite history until the lie takes the appearance of a truth.

Therefore, faced with the propaganda of the ruling class, the proletariat must plunge back into its history and strive to learn from past episodes. It must also question, and we hope that this article will give food for thought, the reasons that push the bourgeoisie to denigrate in an ever more infamous way one of the most glorious events in the

history of humanity, this moment where the working class demonstrated that it is possible to envisage a society where the exploitation of man by man will end.

Narek , January 27, 2019.

31. ICC pamphlet, *The collapse of Stalinism* (in French).

32. Poet, novelist and journalist. He joined the PCF in 1927 and would not leave until his death. He remained faithful to Stalin and Stalinism all his life and approved of the Moscow trials.

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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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