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# Presenting the *Review*

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the eastern bloc, the world is sinking at an ever-increasing rate into poverty, chaos, and barbarism. Two recent events in the international situation testify to this: a series of popular revolts in countries most exposed to the aggravation of the world economic crisis, and a recent shift in the balance of imperialist forces in Syria, presaging future advances into global military chaos. These two events are examined in two articles in this *Review*.

The first article, "'Popular revolts' are no answer to world capitalism's dive into crisis and misery" looks at the very often massive mobilisations in Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon and Iran. These movements are often accompanied by blind violence and bloody repression. If the working class is present in these "popular" revolts, which are inter-classist, sterile, heavily dominated by democratic ideology and unable to oppose the logic of capital, it's never as a class antagonistic to capital but always drowned in the general population. It's above all the absence of the proletariat on the world social scene, the consequence of its political difficulty in recognising itself as a specific class within society, which explains the multiplication of these movements. Participating in them only increases this political difficulty for the working class.

The second article, "Turkish invasion of northern Syria - the cynical barbarity of the ruling class" aims to answer the question: what is the significance of the American retreat from Syria, the abandonment of the Kurds who have up till now been part of the US arsenal, the Turkish invasion of Syria and, finally, the establishment of Syria's Russian guardian as the "guarantor" of this precarious balance of power? The US wants to delegate the defence of its interests in the region to its allies on the ground (Israel, Saudi Arabia…) and - why not - is now considering Putin as a possible rampart against the rise of China. Here we are seeing an episode in the war of each against all, which has been a central element in imperialist conflicts since the disappearance of the bloc system, and one which can only illustrate the cynicism of the ruling class. This is shown not only in the huge massacres of the civilian population in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or Gaza, carried out by planes, artillery and terrorist bombs, but also by the way the ruling class uses those forced to flee these killing fields.

The war of each against all is a consequence of the world-wide disorder that resulted from the collapse of the eastern bloc. In future articles on our website, we will come back to the numerous consequences of this collapse and the impact of the lying bourgeois propaganda which accompanied this event. According to the ruling class, this wasn't the downfall of part of the capitalist world, but of "communism" itself, and this would inaugurate an era of peace and prosperity.

More than ever the world situation calls on the international working class to overthrow this system and build a new society which will place in the service of humanity the enormous development of the productive forces achieved under capitalism: a society free from exploitation, poverty and war. But this must be done before this system, which has been decadent for over a century, engenders the destruction of the same productive forces, of nature, and all that makes life on Earth possible, a destruction which would be irreversible and lead to the extinction of humanity.

All the campaigns being orchestrated by the bourgeoisie "against climate change" have the end result of sparing capitalism from responsibility for the ecological catastrophe, blaming the "older generation" for having lived too selfishly and wasting the planet's resources. These campaigns obscure the fact that the only solution to the threat to the planet is the proletarian revolution. We have denounced this new ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie through a number of articles and leaflets.

Despite the objective urgency of the proletarian revolution, the working class is not ready to launch itself into an assault on capitalism. To do this it would have to recover from the terrible blow against its confidence in its historic project inflicted since 1990s by the campaigns on the death of communism, which deeply affected its capacity to see itself as a class, the only class capable of overthrowing capitalism and constructing a new society.

At the same time, as the history of the first revolutionary wave shows, any new revolutionary attempt by the proletariat, if it is to be victorious, will require the presence of the future world party of the revolution. The foundation of such a party can't just be proclaimed but must be prepared through the activity of revolutionary minorities, who since the failure of the first revolutionary wave, have made a balance sheet of this experience and its insufficiencies, including the errors and insufficiencies of the vanguard organisation of the time, the Communist International. In the previous issue of the *Review* we dealt with this theme through an article looking at the lessons which have to be drawn from the foundation of the Communist International in 1919, and another article focusing in particular on the fact that the CI was formed very late, at a time when the German revolution – which was crucial both to the survival of the soviet power in Russia and the extension of the revolution to the main centres of capitalism – was already underway. One of these articles, "One hundred years after the foundation of the Communist International, what lessons can we draw for future combats?", insisted on another important lesson regarding the method employed in the CI's foundation, which placed numbers in a greater order of importance than clear positions and political principles. Not only did this emphasis not arm the new world party, it made it vulnerable to the growing opportunism within the revolutionary movement. In this issue of the *Review* we publish the second part of this article, which aims to throw light on the political struggle that the left fractions were about to wage against the line of the CI, which was tending to go back to the old tactics of the workers' movement, now rendered obsolete by the opening up of the period of capitalism's decadence.

Considerable advances at the theoretical and programmatic level have been made since the first revolutionary wave and the most advanced proletarian groups have understood that it is necessary to take the essential steps towards the formation of the new party before the decisive confrontations with the capitalist system. But despite this, that horizon still seems very distant. Here we are publishing the first part of an article "The difficult evolution of the proletarian political milieu since 1968". It is necessary to understand the obstacles to the necessary clarification and cooperation within the proletarian milieu, essentially the result of the weight of sectarianism. Such

a critical balance sheet is indispensable given that the proletarian political milieu is the essential crucible of clarification and decantation leading to the foundation of the future world party.

History has shown how difficult it is to construct a vanguard political party which is equal to its responsibilities, as was the Bolshevik party during the first revolutionary attempt in 1917. This is a task which demands many and various efforts. Above all, it requires the greatest clarity on programmatic questions and on the principles guiding the functioning of the organisation, a clarity which can only be based on the past experience of the workers' movement and its political organisations. There is a common heritage of the communist left which distinguishes it from other left currents that came out of the Communist International. This is why it is important to clarify the historical contours of the communist left and to see what distinguishes it from other left currents, notably the Trotskyist current, in the face of efforts to spread confusion at this level. This is the aim of the article criticising efforts of this type emanating from the group Nuevo Curso.

Finally, as is the tradition in the workers' movement, revolutionaries have the responsibility to make the experiences of the struggle known to their class. This is what we have done with the publication of a series of articles which seek to contribute to a history of the workers' movement in South Africa. Here we end this series with an article showing how the working class, having confronted the "white power" of apartheid, then had to confront the "black power" of the ANC and Mandela after the latter's election in 1994. The workers of South Africa have had a painful experience of the fact that while heads of state may change, exploitation and repression remain.

20.11.19

# "Popular revolts" are no answer to world capitalism's dive into crisis and misery

Throughout the world attacks against the working class have widened and deepened.[1] And it's always on the backs of the working class that the dominant class tries to minimise the effects of the historic decline of its own mode of production. In the "rich" countries, planned job losses in the near future are piling up, particularly in Germany and Britain. Some so-called "emergent" countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Turkey, are already in recession with all that this implies for the aggravation of the living conditions of the proletariat. As to the countries that are neither "rich" nor "emergent", their situation is even worse. The non-exploiting elements in these places are plunged into an endless misery.

These latter countries particularly have recently been the theatre of popular movements against the endless sacrifices demanded by capitalism and implemented by governments which are often gangrened by corruption, discredited and hated by the population. Such movements have taken place in Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Iraq, Iran, Algeria and Lebanon. These frequently massive mobilisations are, in some countries, accompanied by the unleashing of violence and bloody repression. The widescale movement in Hong Kong, which has developed not in reaction to misery and corruption, but to the hardening of the state's repressive arsenal - particularly regarding extraditions to mainland China - has recently witnessed a new level of repression: the police have started firing live ammunition at the demonstrators.

If the working class is present in these "popular revolts", it's never as an antagonistic class to capital but one drowned within the population. Far from favouring a future riposte from the working class and, with it, the only viable perspective of a struggle against the capitalist system, these popular, inter-classist revolts serve to reinforce the idea of "no future", which can only obscure such a perspective. They strengthen the difficulties experienced by the working class in mounting its own response to the more and more intolerable conditions that are the result of the bankruptcy of capitalism. Nevertheless, the contradictions of this system cannot be eliminated and will become ever deeper, pushing the world working class to confront all the difficulties that it is presently undergoing.

### Exasperation faced with the plunge into yet more misery

After years of repeated attacks, it's often an innocuous price rise that "sparks off the explosion".

In Chile, it was the fare increase on the Metro which was the final straw: *"The problem is not the 30 centimes"* (increase), *"it is the 30 years"* (of attacks), according to a slogan from a demonstrator. Monthly wages are below 400 euros in this country; precarious working is very widespread; costs of basic necessities are disproportionately high and the health and education sectors are failing, while to retire is to be condemned to poverty.

In Ecuador, the movement was provoked by a sudden increase in fares. This follows a list of price increases in basic goods and services, the freezing of wages, massive redundancies, an obligation to give a day's work "free" to the state, the reduction of days off and other measures leading to precarious working and a deterioration of living conditions.

In Haiti, fuel shortages hit the population as a supplementary catastrophe, leading to a general state of paralysis in what has long been one of the poorest countries in the region.

If the economic crisis in general is the main cause of the attacks against living conditions, they overlap in some countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, with the traumatising and dramatic consequences of imperialist tensions and the endless wars ravaging the Middle East.

In Lebanon, it was the imposition of a tax on WhatsApp calls which provoked the revolt in a country with the highest debt per person in the world. Each year the government imposes new taxes, a third of the population are unemployed and the infrastructure of the country is second-rate. In Iraq, where the movement broke out spontaneously following calls on social media, the protesters demanded jobs and functioning public services while expressing their rage against a ruling class that they accuse of being corrupt. In Iran, the hike in fuel prices comes on top of a situation of profound economic crisis, aggravated by US sanctions on the country.

### The impotence of these movements; the repression and manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie

In Chile, attempts to struggle have been diverted onto the barren grounds of a nihilist violence which is characteristic of capitalist decomposition. Favoured by the state, we've also seen eruptions of lumpen elements in minority and irrational acts of violence. This climate of violence has been well-used by the state in order to justify its repression and intimidate the proletariat. The official figures are 19 dead but like official figures everywhere, they greatly underestimate the slaughter. As in the worst times of Pinochet, torture has made its reappearance. But the Chilean bourgeoisie realised that brutal repression wasn't enough to calm the growing discontent. So the Pinera government held its hands up, adopted a "humble" posture and said that it "understood" the "message of the people", that it would "provisionally" withdraw the increases and open the door to a "social consultation". That's to say that the attacks will be imposed by "negotiation" from a table of "dialogue" around which will sit the opposition parties, the unions, the bosses - all "representing the nation" together.[2]

In Ecuador, transport associations have paralysed traffic and the indigenous movement, together with other diverse groups, have joined the demonstrations. The protests of self-employed drivers and small business people take place as expressions of the "citizens" and are dominated by nationalism. It's in this context that the initial mobilisation of workers against the attacks - in the south of Quito, Tulcan and in the Bolivar province - constitute a compass for action and reflection faced with the surge in the mobilisation of the petty bourgeoisie.

The Republic of Haiti is in a situation close to paralysis. Schools are closed, the main roads between the capital and the regions are cut off by roadblocks, and

1. See: *World Revolution* nº 384, "New recession: capitalism demands more sacrifices from the working class".

2. For more information and analysis on Chile, see the article on our website: "The dictatorship/democracy alternative is a dead-end".

numerous businesses have closed. The movement is often accompanied by violence while criminal gangs (among the 76 armed gangs reported in the territory (...) at least 3 are in the pay of the government, the rest are under the control of an old deputy and some opposition senators), engage in abuses, blocking roads and hi-jacking rare cars. On Sunday October 27, a vigilante opened fire on protesters, killing one; he was lynched and burnt alive. Official figures put the number of deaths at twenty over two months.

Algeria. A human tide has again taken to the streets of Algiers on the anniversary of the beginning of the war against French colonisation. The movement is similar to that recorded at the heights of the "Hirak", a protest movement which has been taking place in Algeria since February 22. It is massively opposed to the general election proposed by the government and organised for December 12 in order to elect a successor to Bouteflika, with the aim of "regenerating" the system.

Iraq. In several provinces of the south, protesters have attacked the institutions and buildings of the political parties and armed groups. Public workers, trade unionists, students and schoolchildren, have demonstrated and begun sit-ins. While, according to the latest official figures, the repression has caused the deaths of 239 people, the majority hit by live ammunition, mobilisations have continued in Baghdad and the south of the country. Since the beginnings of the outburst, protesters have maintained that they will refuse any political recuperation of their movement because they want to totally renew the political class. They also say that it's necessary to do away with the complicated system of awarding posts by faith or ethnicity, a process eaten away by clientism - and one steeped in corruption - that leaves out the majority of the population and young people in particular. Just recently, there have been massive jubilant demonstrations and strike pickets have paralysed universities, schools and administration. Elsewhere, nocturnal violence has been directed at the headquarters of the political parties and the militias.

Lebanon. General popular anger has transcended communities, faiths and all the regions of the country. The withdrawal of the new tax on Whatsapp calls has not prevented the revolt from spreading to the whole of the country. The resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri was only a small part of the population's demands. They are demanding the departure of the whole of the political class who they judge as corrupt and incompetent while demanding a radical change of the system.

Iran. As soon as the price increases in fuel were announced, violent confrontations between protesters and the forces of order took place, leading to deaths on both sides but particularly numerous on the side of the former.

## The trilogy of inter-classism, democratic demands and blind violence

In all these inter-classist, popular revolts described above and according to the information that we have to hand, the proletariat has only shown itself as a class in a minority way here and there, including in a situation like Chile where the prime cause of the mobilisations was clearly the necessity for defence against the economic attacks.

Often, even exclusively, the "revolts" are aimed at the privileged, those in power who are judged responsible for all the ills overwhelming the populations. But in this way, they leave out the system of which the privileged are just the servants. To focus the struggle on the fight to replace corrupt politicians is obviously an impasse because, whatever the teams in power, whatever their levels of corruption, all of them can only defend the interests of the bourgeoisie and implement policies in the service of a capitalism in crisis. It is a much more dangerous impasse in that it's somewhat legitimised by democratic demands "for a clean system", whereas democracy is the privileged form of the power of the bourgeoisie for maintaining its class domination over society and the proletariat. It's significant in this regard that in Chile, after the ferocious repression and faced with an explosive situation that the bourgeoisie had underestimated, it then passed onto a new phase of its manoeuvres through a political attack by setting up classic democratic organisms of mystification and isolation, ending up in the plan for a "new constitution" which is presented as a victory for the protest movement.

Democratic demands dilute the proletariat into the whole of the population, blurring the consciousness of its historic combat, submitting it to the logic of capitalist domination and reducing it to political impotence.

Inter-classism and democracy are two methods which marry up and complement each other in a terribly efficient way against the autonomous struggle of the working class. This is much more the case over the last few decades, since with the collapse of the eastern bloc and the lying campaigns on the death of communism,[3] the historic project of the proletariat has temporarily ceased to underlie its struggle. When the latter manages to impose itself, it will be against the current of the general phenomenon of the decomposition of society where each for themselves, the absence of perspectives, etc., acquire an accrued weight.

The rage and violence which often accompanies these popular revolts are far from expressing any sort of radicalism. That's very clear when it's carried out by lumpen elements, whether acting spontaneously or given the nod and wink by the bourgeoisie, and engaging in vandalism, pillages, arson, irrational and minority violence. But, more fundamentally, such violence is intrinsically contained in popular movements where the institutions of the state are not directly called into question. Having no perspective for the radical transformation of society, abolishing war, poverty, growing insecurity and the other calamities of a dying capitalism, movements that end up in this impasse can't avoid spreading all the defects of a decomposing capitalist society.

The degenerating protest movement in Hong Kong constitutes a perfect example of this in the sense that, more and more deprived of any perspective - in fact it can't have any, confined as it is to the "democratic" terrain without calling capitalism into question - it has turned itself into a giant vendetta of the protesters faced with police violence, and then the cops reply, sometimes spontaneously, to the violence they face. This is so clear that some elements of the bourgeois press have commented on it: *"nothing that Beijing has done has worked, not the withdrawal of the extradition law, or police repression, or the ban on wearing face-masks in public. Henceforth, the youth of Hong Kong are no longer moved by hope but by the desire to do battle in the absence of any other possible outcome"*.[4]

Some people imagine, or want us to think, that any violence in this society which is exercised against the forces of state repression should be supported because it's similar to the necessary class violence of the proletariat against capitalist oppression and exploitation.[5] This shows

3. We will return shortly in our press on the considerable impact of these lying campaigns on the class struggle and show what the state of the world really is today, in contrast to all the announcements about a new era of "peace and prosperity" at the beginning of the 1990s.

4. "The Hong-Kong protesters aren't driven by hope". *The Atlantic.*

5. From this point of view, it is illuminating to compare the recent revolts in Chile with the struggles of workers of the Argentinean Cordobazo in 1969 and we recommend this article published in November

a real contempt for the working class and it's a gross lie. In fact the blind violence of these inter-classist movements has nothing to do with the class violence of the proletariat which is a liberating force for the suppression of exploitation of man by man. By contrast, the violence of capitalism is oppressive, and has the primary aim of defending class society. The violence the inter-classist movement carries with it, in the image of the petty-bourgeoisie, has no future of its own. This is a class that can only go nowhere by itself and must end up rallying behind either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

In fact the trilogy of "inter-classism, democratic demands, blind violence" is the trademark of the popular revolts which are hatching out all over the planet in reaction to the accelerated degradation of all the living conditions which affect the working class, other non-exploitative layers and the pauperised petty-bourgeoisie. The movements of the "gilets jaunes" that started in France a year ago squarely falls into this category of popular revolts.[6] Such movements only contribute to obscuring the real nature of class struggle in the eyes of the proletariat, reinforcing its present difficulties in seeing itself as a class of society, distinct from other classes and with its specific combat against exploitation and its historic mission of overthrowing capitalism.

It's the reason why the responsibility of revolutionaries and the most conscious minorities within the working class is to work for the re-appropriation of its own methods, at the heart of which figures the mass struggle; general assemblies as places of discussion and decisions while defending themselves against sabotage by the unions and open to all sectors of the working class; extension to other sectors imposed against the manoeuvres of division and control practised by the unions and the left of capital.[7] Even if today these perspectives seem far away, and that is the case in most parts of the world, particularly where the working class is in the minority with a limited historical experience, these methods nevertheless constitute the only way forward, the only means of allowing the proletariat to recover its class identity and not get lost along the way.

Silvio. 17.11.2019.

2019 on our website: "The Argentinean Cordobazo – May 1969, a moment in the resurgence of the international class struggle."

6. See our account of this movement on our website: "'Yellow Vests' in France: An inter-classist movement – an obstacle to the class struggle".

7. Regarding this read the article published on our website in July 2019: "Resolution on the balance of forces between the classes (2019).

Turkish invasion of northern Syria

# The cynical barbarity of the ruling class

Trump's telephone call to Erdogan on October 6 gave the "green light" for a major Turkish invasion of Northern Syria and a brutal clean-up operation against the Kurdish forces who have up till now controlled the area with US backing. It provoked a storm of outrage both among the USA's NATO "allies" in Europe and large parts of the military and political establishment in Washington, most notably from Trump's own former defence secretary "Mad Dog" Mattis. The principal criticism of Trump's abandonment of the Kurds has been that it will undermine all credibility in the US as an ally you can rely on: in short, that it's a disaster on the diplomatic level. But there is also the concern that the retreat of the Kurds will result in a revival of the Islamic Forces whose containment has been almost solely the work of the Kurdish forces supported by US air power. The Kurds have been holding thousands of IS prisoners, and more than a hundred of them have already broken out of gaol.[1]

Trump's action has set off alarm bells among significant parts of the US bourgeoisie, multiplying worries that his unpredictable and self-serving style of presidency is becoming a real danger for the US, and even that he is losing what little mental stability he possesses under the pressure of the office and above all of the current impeachment campaign against him. Certainly his behaviour is becoming increasingly bizarre, showing himself not only as an ignoramus (the Kurds didn't support us on the Normandy landings…) but as a common mobster (his letter to Erdogan warning him not to be a fool or a tough guy, which the Turkish leader promptly threw in the bin, his threats to destroy Turkey's economy…). He governs by tweet, takes impulsive decisions, disregards advice from his staff and then has to back-track the next minute – as witness the letter and the hasty dispatch of Pence and Pompeo to Ankara to cobble together a cease-fire in Northern Syria.

But let's not dwell too much on the personality of Trump. In the first place, he is merely an expression of the advancing decomposition of his class, a process which is everywhere giving rise to "strong men" who incite the lowest passions and rejoice in their disregard for truth and the traditional rules of the political game, from Duterte to Oban and from Modi to Boris Johnson. And even if Trump jumped the gun in his dealings with Erdogan, the policy of troop withdrawal from the Middle East was not the invention of Trump, but goes back to the Obama administration which recognised the total failure of US Middle East policy since the early 90s and the necessity to create a "pivot" in the Far East in order to counter the growing threat of Chinese imperialism.

The last time the US gave a green light in the Middle East was in 1990 when the US ambassador April Glaspie let it be known that the US would not interfere if Saddam Hussein marched into Kuwait. It was a well-organised trap, laid with the idea of conducing a massive US operation in the area and compelling its western partners to join a grand crusade. This was a moment when, following the collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989, the western bloc was already beginning to unravel and the US, as the only remaining super-power, needed to assert its authority by a spectacular demonstration of force. Guided by an almost messianic "Neo-Con" ideology, the first Gulf war was followed by further US military adventures, in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. But the waning support to these operations from its former allies, and above all the utter chaos they stirred up in the Middle East, trapping US forces in unwinnable conflicts against local insurgencies, has demonstrated the steep decline of the USA's ability to police the world. In this sense, there is a logic behind Trump's impulsive actions, supported by considerable sectors of the American bourgeoisie, who have recognised that the US cannot rule the Middle East through putting boots on the ground or even through its own air power. It will rely more and more on its most dependable allies in the region – Israel and Saudi Arabia – to defend its interests through military action, directed in particular against the rising power of Iran (and, in the longer term, against the potential presence of China as a serious contender in the region).

### The "betrayal" of the Kurds

The ceasefire negotiated by Pence and Pompeo – which Trump claims will save "millions of lives" – does not seriously alter the policy of abandoning the Kurds, since its aim is merely to give Kurdish forces the opportunity to retreat while the Turkish army asserts its control of northern Syria. And it should be said that this kind of "betrayal" is nothing new. In 1991, in the war against Saddam Hussein, the US under Bush Senior encouraged the Kurds of northern Iraq to rise up against Saddam's regime – and then left Saddam in power, willing and able to crush the Kurdish uprising with the utmost savagery. Iran had also tried to use the Kurds of Iraq against Saddam. But all the powers of the region, and the global powers who stand behind them, have consistently opposed the formation of a unified state of Kurdistan, which would mean the break-up of the existing national arrangements in the Middle East.

The armed Kurdish forces, meanwhile, have never hesitated to sell themselves to the highest bidder. This is happening before our eyes: the Kurdish militia immediately turned to Russia and the Assad regime itself to protect them from the Turkish invasion.

Furthermore, this has been the fate of all "national liberation" struggles since at least the First World War: they have only been able to prosper under the wing of one or another imperialist power. The same grim necessity applies throughout the Middle East in particular: the Palestinian national movement sought the backing of Germany and Italy in the 1930s and 40s, of Russia during the Cold War, of various regional powers in the world disorder unleashed by the collapse of the bloc system. Meanwhile, the dependency of Zionism on imperialist support (mainly, but not only, from the US) needs no demonstration, but is no exception to the general rule. National liberation movements may adopt many ideological

1. It is of course possible that Trump is quite relaxed about Islamic state forces regaining a certain presence in Syria, now that the Russians and the Turks are the ones who will be forced to deal with them. Similarly he seemed quite happy for the Europeans to be saddled with the problem of former IS fighters returning to their European countries of origin. But such ideas will not go unopposed within the US ruling class.

banners – Stalinism, Islamism, even, as in the case of the Kurdish forces in Rojava, a kind of anarchism – but they can only trap the exploited and the oppressed in the endless wars of capitalism in its epoch of imperialist decay.[2]

## A perspective of imperialist chaos and human misery

The most obvious beneficiary from the US retreat from the Middle East has been Russia. During the 1970s and 80s, the USSR had been forced to renounce most of its positions in the Middle East, particularly its influence in Egypt and above all its attempts to control Afghanistan. Its last outpost, and a vital point of access to the Mediterranean, was Syria and the Assad regime, which was threatened with collapse by the war which swept the country after 2011 and the advances made by the "democratic" rebels and above all by Islamic State. Russia's massive intervention in Syria has saved the Assad regime and restored its control to most of the country, but it is doubtful whether this would have been possible if the US, desperate to avoid getting stuck in another quagmire after Afghanistan and Iraq, had not effectively ceded the country to the Russians. This has sown major divisions in the US bourgeoisie, with some of its more established factions in the military apparatus still deeply suspicious of anything the Russians might do, while Trump and those behind him have seen Putin as a man to do business with and above all a possible bulwark against the seemingly inexorable rise of China.

Part of Russia's ascent to such a commanding position in Syria has involved developing a new relationship with Turkey, which has gradually been distancing itself from the US, not least over the latter's support for the Kurds in its operation against IS in the north of Syria. But the Kurdish issue is already creating difficulties for the Russian-Turkish rapprochement: since a part of the Kurdish forces are now turning to Assad and the Russians for protection, and as the Syrian and Russian military move in to occupy the areas previously controlled by the Kurdish fighters, there is a looming risk of confrontation between Turkey on the one hand and Syria and its Russian backers on the other. For the moment this danger seems to have been averted by the deal made between Erdogan and Putin in Sochi on 22 October. The agreement gives Turkey control over a buffer zone in northern Syria at the expense of the Kurds, while confirming Russia's role as the main power-broker in the region. Whether this arrangement will overcome the long-standing antagonisms between Turkey and Assad's Syria remains to be seen. The war of each against all, a central feature of imperialist conflict since the demise of the bloc system, is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in Syria.

For the moment Erdogan's Turkey can also congratulate itself on its rapid military progress in northern Syria and the cleaning out of the Kurdish "terrorist nests". The incursion has also come as a godsend to Erdogan at the domestic level: following some severe set-backs for his AKP party in elections over the last year, the wave of nationalist hysteria stirred up by the military adventure has split the opposition, which is made up of Turkish "democrats" and the Kurdish HDP

Erdogan can, for the moment, go back to selling the dream of a new Ottoman empire, Turkey restored to its former glory as a global player before it became the "sick man of Europe" at the beginning of the 20th century. But marching into what is already a profoundly chaotic situation could easily be a dangerous trap for the Turks in the longer run. And above all, this new escalation of the Syrian conflict will add considerably to its already gigantic human cost. Well over 100,000 civilians have already been displaced, greatly increasing Syria's internal refugee nightmare, while a secondary aim of the invasion is to dump around 3 million Syrian refugees, currently living in dire conditions in Turkish camps, in northern Syria, largely at the expense of the local Kurdish population.

The baseless cynicism of the ruling class is revealed not only in the mass murder its aircraft, artillery and terrorist bombs rain on the civil population of Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Gaza, but also by the way it uses those forced to flee from the killing zones. The EU, that paragon of democratic virtue, has long relied on Erdogan to act as a prison guard to the Syrian refugees under his "protection", preventing them from adding to the waves heading towards Europe. Now Erdogan sees a solution to this burden in the ethnic cleansing of northern Syria, and threatens – if the EU criticises his actions – to channel a new refugee tide towards Europe.

Human beings are only of use to capital if they can be exploited or used as cannon fodder. And the open barbarism of the war in Syria is only a foretaste of what capitalism has in store for the whole of humanity if it is allowed to continue. But the principal victims of this system, all those whom it exploits and oppresses, are not passive objects, and in the past year or so we have glimpsed the possibility of mass reactions against poverty and ruling class corruption in social revolts in Jordan Iran, Iraq and most recently Lebanon. These movements tend to be very confused, infected by nationalist illusions, and cry out for a clear lead from the working class acting on its own class terrain. But this is a task not only for the workers in the Middle East, but for the workers of the world, and above all for the workers of the old centres of capital where the autonomous political tradition of the proletariat was born and has the deepest roots.

Amos

2. For further analysis of the history of Kurdish nationalism, see the article published on our website in December 2017: "Kurdish nationalism – another pawn in imperialist conflicts".

# 100 years after the foundation of the Communist International: What lessons can we draw for future combats? (part II)

In the first part of this article, we recalled the circumstances in which the Third International (Communist International) was founded. The existence of the world party depended above all on the extension of the revolution on a global scale, and its capacity to assume its responsibilities in the class depended on the way in which the regroupment of revolutionaries from which it arose was carried out. But, as we showed, the method adopted in the foundation of the Communist International (CI), favouring the largest number rather than the clarification of positions and political principles, had not armed the new world party. Worse, it made it vulnerable to rampant opportunism within the revolutionary movement. This second part aims to highlight the content of the fight waged by the left fractions against the political line of the CI to retain old tactics made obsolete by the opening of capitalism's decadent phase.

This new phase in the life of capitalism demanded a redefinition of certain programmatic and organisational positions to enable the world party to orient the proletariat on its own class terrain.

### 1918-1919: revolutionary praxis challenges old tactics

As we pointed out in the first part of this article, the First Congress of the Communist International had highlighted that the destruction of bourgeois society was fully on the agenda of history. Indeed, the period 1918-1919 saw a real mobilisation of the whole world proletariat,[1] firstly in Europe:

– March 1919: proclamation of the Republic of Councils in Hungary
– April-May 1919: episode of the Republic of Councils in Bavaria
– June 1919: attempts at insurrection in Switzerland and Austria.

The revolutionary wave then spread to the American continent:

– January 1919: "bloody week" in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where workers are savagely repressed.
– February 1919: strike in the shipyards in Seattle, USA, which eventually extends to the entire city in a few days. The workers manage to take control of supplies and defence against troops sent by the government.
– May 1919: general strike in Winnipeg, Canada.

But also Africa and Asia:

– In South Africa, in March 1919, the tramway strike spreads throughout Johannesburg, with assemblies and rallies in solidarity with the Russian Revolution.
– In Japan, in 1918, the famous "rice meetings" take place against the shipment of rice to Japanese troops sent against the revolution in Russia.

Under these conditions, revolutionaries of the time had real reasons to say, "*The victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale is assured. The founding of an international Soviet republic is underway*".[2]

So far, the extension of the revolutionary wave in Europe and elsewhere confirmed the theses of the First Congress:

"*1) The present epoch is the epoch of the disintegration and collapse of the entire capitalist world system, which will drag the whole of European civilisation down with it if capitalism, with its insoluble contradictions, is not destroyed.*

*2) The task of the proletariat now is to seize state power immediately. The seizure of state power means the destruction of the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie and the organisation of a new apparatus of proletarian power."*[3]

The new period that was opening up, of wars and revolutions, confronted the world proletariat and its world party with new problems. The entry of capitalism into its decadent phase directly posed the necessity of the revolution and modified somewhat the form which the class struggle was to take.

### The formation of left currents within the CI

The revolutionary wave had consecrated the finally found form of the dictatorship of the proletariat: the soviets. But it had also shown that the forms and methods of struggle inherited from the 19th century, such as trade unions or parliamentarism, were now over.

"*In the new period it was the practice of the workers themselves that called into question the old parliamentary and unionist tactics. The Russian proletariat dissolved parliament after it had taken power and in Germany a significant mass of workers pronounced in favour of boycotting the elections in December 1918. In Russia as in Germany, the council form appeared as the only form for the revolutionary struggle, replacing the union structure. But the class struggle in Germany had also revealed an antagonism between the proletariat and the unions.*"[4]

### The rejection of parliamentarism

The left currents in the International organised themselves on a clear political basis: the entry of capitalism into its phase of decadence imposed a single path; that of the proletarian revolution and the destruction of the bourgeois state with a view to abolishing social classes and constructing a communist society. From now on, the struggle for reform and revolutionary propaganda in bourgeois parliaments no longer made sense. In many countries, for the left currents the rejection of elections became the position of a true communist organisation:

– In March 1918, the Polish Communist

1. See: *International Review* n° 80, 1995 , "Lessons of the revolutionary wave 1917-1923".

2. Lenin, closing remarks at the First Congress of the Communist International, in J. Riddell (ed.), *Founding the Communist International*, Anchor, 1987, p. 257.

3. "Invitation to the First Congress of the Communist International", in J. Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919-1943, Documents*, Cass, 1971, p.2.

4. *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, ICC, p.136.

Party boycotts the elections.
– On 22 December 1918 the organ of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), *Il Soviet*, is published in Naples under the leadership of Amedeo Bordiga. The Fraction sets out its goal as being to "*eliminate the reformists from the party in order to ensure for it a more revolutionary attitude*". It also insists that "*all contact must be broken with the democratic system*"; a true communist party is possible only "*if we renounce electoral and parliamentary action*."[5]
– In September 1919, the Workers' Socialist Federation speaks out against "revolutionary parliamentarism".
– The same is true in Belgium for De Internationale in Flanders and the Communist Group of Brussels. Antiparliamentarianism is also defended by a minority of the Bulgarian Communist Party, by part of the group of Hungarian Communists exiled in Vienna, by the Federation of Social Democratic Youth in Sweden and by a minority of the Partido Socialista Internacional of Argentina (the future Communist Party of Argentina).
– The Dutch remain divided on the parliamentary question. A majority of the Tribunists are in favour of the elections; the minority like Gorter is indecisive, while Panekoek defends an antiparliamentary position.
– The KAPD was also opposed to participation in elections.

For all these groups, the rejection of parliamentarism was now a matter of principle. This was actually putting into practice the analyses and conclusions adopted at the First Congress. But the majority of the CI did not see it that way, starting with the Bolsheviks; even if there was no ambiguity about the reactionary nature of trade unions and bourgeois democracy, the fight within them should not be abandoned. The circular of the Executive Committee of the CI of 1 September 1919 endorsed this backward step, returning to the old social democratic conception of making parliament a place of revolutionary conquest: *"[militants] go into parliament in order to appropriate this machinery and to help the masses behind the Parliamentary walls to blow it up*."[6]

## The trade union question crystallises the debates

The first episodes of the revolutionary wave quoted above had clearly shown that the unions were obsolete organs of struggle; worse, they were now against the working class.[7] But more than anywhere else, it was in Germany that this problem was posed in the most crucial way and where revolutionaries managed to establish the clearest understanding of the need to break with trade unions and trade unionism. For Rosa Luxemburg, the unions were no longer "*workers' organisations, but the strongest protectors of the state and of bourgeois society. Therefore, it goes without saying that the struggle for socialisation cannot be carried out without involving the struggle for the liquidation of trade unions*".[8]

The leadership of the CI was not so far-sighted. Although it denounced the unions dominated by social democracy, it still retained the illusion of being able to reorient them on a proletarian path: "*What is now to happen to the trade unions? Along what path will they travel? The old union leaders will again try to push the unions onto the bourgeois road* [...] *Will the unions continue along this old reformist road?* [...] *We are deeply convinced that the answer will be no. A fresh wind is blowing through the musty trade union offices.* [...] *It is our belief that a new trade union movement is being formed*."[9]

It was for this reason that in its earliest days the CI accepted into its ranks national and regional unions of trades or industries. In particular, there were revolutionary syndicalist elements such as the IWW. If the latter rejected both parliamentarism and activity in the old unions, it remained hostile to political activity and therefore to the need for a political party of the proletariat. This could only reinforce the confusion within the CI on the organisational question since it included groups that were already "anti-organisation".

The most lucid group on the trade union question remained without doubt the left-wing majority of the KPD which was to be excluded from the party by the leadership of Levi and Brandler. It was not only against unions in the hands of the social democrats but hostile to any form of trade unionism such as anti-political revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism. This majority was to found the KAPD in April 1920, whose programme clearly stated that: "*Aside from bourgeois parliamentarism, the unions form the principal rampart against the further development of the proletarian revolution in Germany. Their attitude during the world war is well-known* […] *They have maintained their counter-revolutionary attitude up to today, throughout the whole period of the German revolution*."

Faced with the centrist position of Lenin and the leadership of the CI, the KAPD retorted that: "*The revolutionising of the unions is not a question of individuals: the counter-revolutionary character of these organisations is located in their structure and in their specific way of operating. From this it flows logically that only the destruction of the unions can clear the road for social revolution in Germany*."[10]

Admittedly, these two important questions could not be decided overnight. But the resistance to the rejection of parliamentarism and trade unionism demonstrated the difficulties of the CI in drawing all the implications of the decadence of capitalism for the communist program. The exclusion of the majority of the KPD and the rapprochement of the latter with the Independents (USPD) who controlled the opposition in the official unions was a further sign of the rise of programmatic and organisational opportunism within the world party.

## The Second Congress backtracks

At the start of 1920 the CI began to advocate the formation of mass parties: either by the fusion of communist groups with centrist currents, as for example in Germany between the KPD and the USPD; or by the entry of communist groups into parties of the Second International, as for example in Britain where the CI advocated the entry of the Communist Party into the Labour Party. This new orientation completely turned its back on the work of the First Congress that had declared the bankruptcy of social democracy. This opportunist decision was justified by the conviction that the victory of the revolution would result inexorably from the greatest number of organised workers. This position was fought by the Amsterdam Bureau composed of the left of the CI.[11]

The Second Congress, which ran from 19 July to 7 August 1920, foreshadowed a fierce battle between the majority of the CI led by the Bolsheviks, and the left currents, on tactical issues but also on organisational principles. The congress was held during a full "revolutionary war",[12] in which the Red

5. *The Italian Communist Left*, ICC, p.18.
6. *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, p.137.
7. See *International Review* n° 80. "Lessons of the revolutionary wave 1917-1923".
8. Quoted by A. Prudhommeaux, *Spartacus Et La Commune De Berlin 1918-1919* , Ed. Spartacus, p.55 (in French).
9. "Letter from the ECCI to the trade unions of all countries", in Degras, op. cit. p.88.
10. See: *International Review* nº 97, 1999, "1920: the programme of the KAPD".
11. In autumn 1919 the CI set up a temporary secretariat based in Germany, composed of the right wing of the KPD, and a temporary bureau in Holland that brought together left-wing communists hostile to the KPD's rightward turn.
12. This "revolutionary war" constituted a catastrophic political decision which the Polish bourgeoisie used to mobilise a part of the Polish working class against the Soviet Republic.

Army marched on Poland in the belief that it could join with the revolution in Germany. While remaining aware of the danger of opportunism and acknowledging that the party was still threatened by "*the danger of dilution by unstable and irresolute elements which have not yet completely discarded the ideology of the Second International*",[13] this Second Congress began to make concessions regarding the analyses of the first congress by accepting the partial integration of certain social democratic parties still strongly marked by the conceptions of the Second International.[14]

To guard against such a danger, the 21 conditions of admission to the CI had been written against the right and centrist elements, but also against the left. During the discussion of the 21 conditions, Bordiga distinguished himself by his determination to defend the communist programme and warned the entire party against any concession in the terms of membership: "*The foundation of the Communist International in Russia led us back to Marxism. The revolutionary movement that was saved from the ruins of the Second International made itself known with its programme, and the work that now began led to the formation of a new state organism on the basis of the official constitution. I believe that we find ourselves in a situation that is not created by accident but much rather determined by the course of history. I believe that we are threatened by the danger of right-wing and centrist elements penetrating into our midst.*[15] […] *We would therefore be in great danger if we made the mistake of accepting these people in our ranks.* […] *The right-wing elements accept our Theses, but in an unsatisfactory manner and with certain reservations. We communists must demand that this acceptance is complete and without restrictions for the future.* […] *I think that, after the Congress, the Executive Committee must be given time to find out whether all the obligations that have been laid upon the parties by the Communist International have been fulfilled. After this time, after the so-called organisation period, the door must he closed* […] *Opportunism must be fought everywhere. But we will find this task very difficult if, at the very moment that we are taking steps to purge the Communist International, the door is opened to let those who are standing outside come in. I have spoken on behalf of the Italian delegation. We undertake to fight the opportunists in Italy. We do not, however, wish them to go away from us merely to be accepted into the Communist International in some other way. We say to you, after we have worked with you we want to go back to our country and form a united front against all the enemies of the communist revolution.*"[16]

Admittedly, the 21 conditions served as a scarecrow against opportunistic elements likely to knock on the door of the party. But even if Lenin could say that the left current was "*a thousand times less dangerous and less serious than the error represented by right-wing doctrinarism", the many regressive steps on the question of tactics strongly weakened the International, especially in the period to come, which was characterised by retreat and isolation contrary to what the CI leadership thought. Inexorably, these safeguards did not allow the IC to resist the pressure of opportunism. In 1921 the Third Congress finally succumbed to the mirage of numbers by adopting Lenin's "Theses on Tactics*", which advocated work in parliament and the unions as well as the formation of mass parties. With this 180° turn, the party was throwing out of the window the 1918 programme of the KPD, one of the two founding bases of the CI.

## The CI - sickness of leftism[17] or opportunism?

It was in opposition to the KPD's opportunist policy that the KAPD was born in April 1920. Although its program was inspired more by the theses of the left in Holland than those of the CI, it requested to be attached immediately to the Third International.

When Jan Appel and Franz Jung[18] arrived in Moscow, Lenin handed them the manuscript of what would become *Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, written for the Second Congress to expose what he saw as the inconsistencies of the left currents.

The Dutch delegation had the opportunity to take note of Lenin's pamphlet during the Second Congress. Herman Gorter was commissioned to write a reply to Lenin, which appeared in July 1920 (*Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*). Gorter relied heavily on the text published by Pannekoek a few months earlier entitled *World Revolution and Communist Tactics*. It is not necessary to go back over the details of this polemic here.[19] However, it must be pointed out that the different issues raised echo perfectly the fundamental question: how did the entry into the era of wars and revolutions impose new principles in the revolutionary movement? Were "compromises" still possible?

For Lenin, left-wing "doctrinairism" was a "childish sickness". The "*young communists*", still "*inexperienced*", had given way to impatience and indulged in "*intellectual childishness*" instead of defending "*the serious tactics of a revolutionary class*" according to the "*particularity of each country*", taking into account the general movement of the working class.

For Lenin, to reject work in the unions and parliaments, to oppose alliances between the communist parties and the social democratic parties, was a pure nonsense. The adherence of the masses to communism did not depend only on revolutionary propaganda; he considered that these masses had to go through "*their own political experience*". For this, it was essential to enrol the greatest numbers in revolutionary organisations, whatever their level of political clarity. The objective conditions were ripe, the path of the revolution was all mapped out...

However, as Gorter pointed out in his reply, the victory of the world revolution depended above all on the subjective conditions, in other words on the ability of the world working class to extend and deepen its class consciousness. The weakness of this general class consciousness was illustrated by the virtual absence of a real vanguard of the proletariat in Western Europe, as Gorter pointed out. Therefore, the error of the Bolsheviks in the CI was "*to try to make up for this delay through tactical recipes which expressed an opportunist approach where clarity and an organic process of development were*

13. Preamble to the "Conditions of Admission to the CI". In Degras, Op. Cit., p.168.

14. This is what Point 14 of the "Basic Tasks of the Communist International" stated: "*The degree to which the proletariat in the countries most important from the standpoint of world economy and world politics is prepared for the realisation of its dictatorship is indicated with the greatest objectivity and precision by the breakaway of the most influential parties in the Second International – the French Socialist Party, the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, the Independent Labour Party in England , the American Socialist Party of America – from the yellow International, and by their decision to adhere conditionally to the Communist International. […] The chief thing now is to know how to make this change complete and to consolidate what has been attained in lasting organisational form, so that progress can be made along the whole line without any hesitation.*" (in Degras, Op. Cit., p. 124).

15. Respectively the social patriots and the social democrats: "*these supporters of the Second International who think it is possible to achieve the liberation of the proletariat without armed class struggle, without the necessity of introducing the dictatorship of the proletariat after the victory, at the time of the insurrection*" (see note 16).

16. Speech of Bordiga on the conditions of admission to the CI, *Second Congress of the Communist International*, Volume One, 1977, pp.221-224.

17. This term corresponds here to the left communist current which appeared in the CI in opposition to the centrism and opportunism that grew within the party. It has nothing to do with the term for the organisations that belong to the left of capital.

18. These were the two delegates mandated by the KAPD at the 2nd CI Congress to outline the party's programme.

19. For more details see *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, "Chapter 4: The Dutch Left in the Third International".

*sacrificed in favour of artificial numerical growth at any cost*."[20]

This tactic, based on the quest for instant success, was animated by the observation that the revolution was not developing fast enough, that the class was taking too long to extend its struggle and that, faced with this slowness, it was necessary to make "concessions" by accepting work in trade unions and parliaments.

While the CI saw the revolution as a somehow inevitable phenomenon, the left currents considered that *"the revolution in Western Europe [would be] a long drawn out process*" (Pannekoek), which would be strewn with setbacks and defeats, to use the words of Rosa Luxemburg. History has confirmed the positions developed by the left currents within the CI. Leftism was therefore not a "childish sickness" of the communist movement but, on the contrary, the treatment against the infection of opportunism that spread in the ranks of the world party.

## Conclusion

What lessons can we draw from the creation of the Communist International? If the First Congress had shown the capacity of the revolutionary movement to break with the Second International, the following congresses marked a real setback. Indeed, while the founding congress recognised the passage of social democracy into the camp of the bourgeoisie, the Third Congress rehabilitated it by advocating the tactic of allying with it in a "united front". This change of course confirmed that the CI was unable to respond to the new questions posed by the period of decadence. The years following its founding were marked by the retreat and defeat of the international revolutionary wave and thus by the growing isolation of the proletariat in Russia. This isolation is the decisive reason for the degeneration of the revolution. Under these conditions, badly armed, the CI was unable to resist the development of opportunism. It too had to empty itself of its revolutionary content and become an organ of the counter-revolution solely defending the interests of the Soviet state.

It was in the very heart of the CI that left fractions appeared to fight against its degeneration. Excluded one after the other during the 1920s, they continued the political struggle to ensure the continuity between the degenerating CI and the party of tomorrow, by learning the lessons from the failure of the revolutionary wave. The positions defended and elaborated by these groups responded to the problems raised in the CI by the period of decadence. In addition to programmatic issues, the lefts agreed that the party must "*remain as hard as steel, as clear as glass*" (Gorter). This implied a rigorous selection of militants instead of grouping huge masses at the expense of diluting principles. This is exactly what the Bolsheviks had abandoned in 1919 when the Communist International was created. These compromises on the method of building the organisation would also be an active factor in the degeneration of the CI. As Internationalisme pointed out in 1946: "*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*".[21] By favouring quantity at the expense of quality, the Bolsheviks threw into question the struggle they had fought in 1903 at the Second Congress of the RSDLP. For the lefts who were fighting for programmatic and organisational clarity as a prerequisite for CI membership, small numbers were not an eternal virtue but an indispensable step: "*If ... we have the duty to confine ourselves for a time with small numbers, it is not because we feel for this situation a particular predilection, but because we have to go through it to become strong*" (Gorter).

Alas, the CI had been born in the storms of revolutionary combat. In these conditions, it was impossible to clarify overnight all the questions it had to confront. Tomorrow's party must not fall into the same trap. It must be founded before the revolutionary wave breaks, relying on good programmatic bases but equally on principles of functioning reflected on and clarified beforehand. This was not the case for the CI at the time.

Narek. July 8, 2019.

20. Ibid.p.150.

21. Internationalisme, "On the First Congress of the Internationalist Communist Party of Italy", in *International Review* nº 162, 2019.

Fifty years since May 68

# The difficult evolution of the proletarian political milieu (part I)

The 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Communist International reminds us that the October revolution in Russia had placed the world proletarian revolution on the immediate agenda. The German revolution in particular was already underway and was crucial both to the survival of soviet power in Russia and to the extension of the revolution to the main centres of capitalism. At this moment, all the different groups and tendencies which had remained loyal to revolutionary marxism were convinced that the formation and action of the class party were indispensable to the victory of the revolution. But with hindsight we can say that the late formation of the CI – almost two years after the seizure of power in Russia, and several months after the outbreak of the revolution in Germany- as well as its ambiguities and errors on vital programmatic and organisational questions, was also an element in the defeat of the international revolutionary upsurge.

We need to bear this in mind when we look back at another anniversary: May 68 in France and the ensuing wave of class movements. In the two previous articles in this series, we have looked at the historic significance of these movements, expressions of the reawakening of the class struggle after decades of counter-revolution - the counter-revolution ushered in by the dashing of the revolutionary hopes of 1917-23. We have tried to understand both the origins of the events of May 68 and the course of the class struggle over the next five decades, focusing in particular on the difficulties facing the class in re-appropriating the perspective of the communist revolution.

In this article we want to look specifically at the evolution of the proletarian political milieu since 1968, and to understand why, despite considerable advances at the theoretical and programmatic level since the first revolutionary wave, and despite the fact that the most advanced proletarian groups have understood that it is necessary to take the essential steps towards the formation of a new world party in advance of decisive confrontations with the capitalist system, this horizon still seems to be very far away and sometimes seems to have disappeared from sight altogether.

### 1968-80: The development of a new revolutionary milieu meets the problems of sectarianism and opportunism

The global revival of the class struggle at the end of the 1960s brought with it a global revival of the proletarian political movement, a blossoming of new groups seeking to re-learn what had been obliterated by the Stalinist counter-revolution, as well as a certain reanimation of the rare organisations which had survived this dark period.

We can get an idea of the components of this milieu if we look at the very diverse list of groups contacted by the comrades of Internationalism in the US with the aim of setting up an International Correspondence Network:[1]

- USA: Internationalism and Philadelphia Solidarity.
- Britain: Workers Voice, Solidarity.
- France: Révolution Internationale, Groupe de Liaison Pour l'Action des Travailleurs, Le Mouvement Communiste.
- Spain: Fomento Obrero Revolucionario.
- Italy Partito Comunista Internazionalista (Battaglia Comunista)
- Germany Gruppe Soziale Revolution; Arbeiterpolitik; Revolutionärer Kampf
- Denmark: Proletarisk Socialistisk Arbejdsgruppe, Kominstisk Program
- Sweden: Komunismen
- Netherlands: Spartacus; Daad en Gedachte
- Belgium: Lutte de Classe, groupe "Bilan"
- Venzuela; Internacionalismo

In their introduction Internationalism added that a number of other groups had contacted them asking to take part: World Revolution, which had meanwhile split from the Solidarity group in the UK; Pour le Pouvoir Internationale des Conseils Ouvrières and Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs (France); Internationell Arbetarkamp, (Sweden), and Rivoluzione Comunista and Iniziativa Comunista (Italy).

Not all of these currents were a direct product of the open struggles of the late 60s and early 70s: many of them had preceded them, as in the case of Battaglia Comunista in Italy and the Internacialismo group in Venezuela. Some other groups which had developed in advance of the struggles reached their pinnacle in 68 or thereabouts and afterwards declined rapidly – the most obvious example being the Situationists. Nevertheless the emergence of this new milieu of elements searching for communist positions was the expression of a deep process of "underground" growth, of a mounting disaffection with capitalist society which affected both the proletariat (and this also took the form of open struggles like the strike movements in Spain and France prior to 68) and wide layers of a petty bourgeoisie which was itself already in the process of being proletarianised. Indeed the rebellion of the latter strata in particular had already taken on an open form prior to 68 – notably the revolt in the universities and the closely linked protests against war and racism which reached the most spectacular levels in the USA and Germany, and of course in France where the student revolt played an evident role in the outbreak of the explicitly working class movement in May 68. The massive re-emergence of the working class after 68, however, gave a clear answer to those, like Marcuse, who had begun theorising about the integration of the working class into capitalist society and its replacement as a revolutionary vanguard by other layers such as the students. It reaffirmed that the keys to the future of humanity lay in the hands of the exploited class just as it had in 1919, and convinced many young rebels and seekers, whatever their sociological background, that their own political future lay in the workers' struggle and in the organised political movement of the working class.

The profound connection between the resurgence of the class struggle and this

1. Published in *Internationalism* nº 4, undated, but circa 1973

newly politicised layer was a confirmation of the materialist analysis developed in the 30s by the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left. The class party does not exist outside the life of the class. It is certainly a vital, active factor in the development of class consciousness, but it is also a product of that development, and it cannot exist in periods when the class has experienced a world-historic defeat as it had in the 20s and 30s. The comrades of the Italian left had experienced this truth in their own flesh and blood since they had lived through a period which had seen the degeneration of the Communist parties and their recuperation by the bourgeoisie, and the shrinking of genuine communist forces to small, beleaguered groups such as their own. They drew the conclusion that the party could only re-appear when the class as a whole had recovered from its defeat on an international scale and was once again posing the question of revolution: the principal task of the fraction was thus to defend the principles of communism, draw the lessons of past defeats, and to act as a bridge to the new party that would be formed when the course of the class struggle had profoundly altered. And when a number of comrades of the Italian left forgot this essential lesson and rushed back to Italy to form a new party in 1943 when, despite certain important expressions of proletarian revolt against the war, above all in Italy, the counter-revolution still reigned supreme, the comrades of the French communist left took up the torch abandoned by an Italian Fraction which precipitously dissolved itself into the Italian party.

But since, at the end of 60s and the early 70s, the class was finally throwing off the shackles of the counter-revolution, since new proletarian groups were appearing around the world, and since there was a dynamic towards debate, confrontation, and regroupment among these new currents, the perspective of the formation of the party – not in the immediate, to be sure – was once again being posed on a serious basis.

The dynamic towards the unification of proletarian forces took various forms, from the initial travels of Mark Chirik and others from the Internacialismo group in Venezuela to revive discussion with the groups of the Italian left, the conferences organised by the French group Information et Correspondence Ouvrières, or the international correspondence network initiated by Internationalism. The latter was concretised by the Liverpool and London meetings of different groups in the UK (Workers Voice, World Revolution, Revolutionary Perspectives, which had also split from Solidarity and was the precursor of today's Communist Workers Organisation), along with RI and the GLAT from France.

This process of confrontation and debate was not always smooth by any means: the existence of two groups of the communist left in Britain today – a situation which many searching for class politics find extremely confusing - can be traced to the immature and failed process of regroupment following the conferences in the UK. Some of the divisions that took place at the time had little justification in that they were provoked by secondary differences – for example, the group that formed Pour une Intervention Communiste in France split from RI over exactly when to produce a leaflet about the military coup in Chile. Nevertheless, a real process of decantation and regroupment was taking place. The comrades of RI in France intervened energetically in the ICO conferences to insist on the necessity for a political organisation based on a clear platform in contrast to the workerist, councilist and "anti-Leninist" notions that were extremely influential at the time, and this activity accelerated their unification with groups in Marseille and Clermont Ferrand. The RI group was also extremely active at the international level and its growing convergence with WR, Internationalism, Internacialismo and new groups in Italy and Spain led to the formation of the ICC in 1975, showing the possibility of organising on a centralised international scale. The ICC saw itself, like the GCF in 40s, as one expression of a wider movement and didn't see its formation as the end-point of the more general process of regroupment. The name "Current" expresses this approach: we were not a fraction of an old organisation, though carrying on much of the work of the old fractions, and were part of a broader stream heading towards the party of the future.

The prospects for the ICC seemed very optimistic: there was a successful unification of three groups in Belgium which drew lessons from the recent failure in the UK, and some ICC sections (especially France and UK) grew considerably in numbers. WR for example quadrupled in numbers from its original nucleus and RI at one point had sufficient members to set up separate local sections in the north and south of Paris. Of course we are still talking about very small numbers but nevertheless this was a significant expression of a real development in class consciousness. Meanwhile the Bordigist International Communist Party established sections in a number of new countries and quickly became the largest organisation of the communist left.

And of particular importance in this process was the development of the international conferences of the communist left, initially called by Battaglia and supported enthusiastically by the ICC even though we were critical of the original basis for the appeal for the conferences (to discuss the phenomenon of "Eurocommunism", what Battaglia called the "social democratisation" of the Communist parties).

For three years or so, the conferences offered a pole of reference, an organised framework for debate which drew towards it a number of groups from diverse backgrounds.[2] The texts and proceedings of the meetings were published in a series of pamphlets; the criteria for participation in the conferences were more clearly defined than in the original invitation and the subjects under debate became more focused on crucial questions such as the capitalist crisis, the role of revolutionaries, the question of national struggles, and so on. The debates also allowed groups who shared common perspectives to move closer together (as in the case of the CWO and Battaglia and the ICC and För Kommunismen in Sweden).

Despite these positive developments, however, the renascent revolutionary movement was burdened with many weaknesses inherited from the long period of counter-revolution.

For one thing, large numbers of those who could have been won to revolutionary politics were absorbed by the apparatus of leftism, which had also grown considerably in the wake of the class movements after 68. The Maoist and particularly the Trotskyist organisations were already formed and offered an apparently radical alternative to the 'official' Stalinist parties whose strike-breaking role in the Events of 68 and afterwards had been plain. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, "Danny the Red", the feted student leader of 68, had written a book attacking the Communist Party's function and proposing a "left wing alternative" which referred approvingly to the communist left of the 1920s and to councilist groups like ICO in the present.[3] But like so many others Cohn-Bendit lost patience with remaining in the small world of genuine revolutionaries and went off in search of more immediate solutions that also conveniently offered the possibility of a career, and today is a member of the German Greens who has served his party at the heart of the bourgeois state. His trajectory – from potentially revolutionary ideas to the dead-end of leftism – was followed by many thousands.

But some of the biggest problems faced by the emerging milieu were "internal",

2. For a list of the groups who attended or supported conferences, see the annex

3. *Obsolete Communism, the Left wing Alternative*, Penguin 1969

even if they ultimately reflected the pressure of bourgeois ideology on the proletarian political vanguard.

The groups which had maintained an organised existence during the period of counter-revolution – largely the groups of the Italian left – had become more or less sclerotic. The Bordigists of the various International Communist Parties[4] in particular had protected themselves against the perpetual rain of new theories that "transcended marxism" by turning marxism itself into an dogma, incapable of responding to new developments, as shown in their reaction to the class movements after 68 - essentially the one which Marx already derided in his letter to Ruge in 1843: here is the truth (the party), down on your knees! Inseparable from the Bordigist notion of the "invariance" of marxism was an extreme sectarianism[5] which rejected any notion of debate with other proletarian groups, an attitude concretised in the flat refusal of any of the Bordigist groups to engage with the international conferences of the communist left. But while the appeal by Battaglia was a small step away from the attitude of seeing your own small group as the sole guardian of revolutionary politics, it was by no means free of sectarianism itself: its invitation initially excluded the Bordigist groups and it was not sent to the ICC as a whole but to its section in France, betraying an unspoken idea that the revolutionary movement is made up of separate "franchises" in different countries (with Battaglia holding the Italian franchise of course).

Moreover sectarianism was not limited to the heirs of the Italian left. The discussions around regroupment in the UK were torpedoed by it. In particular, Workers Voice, frightened of losing its identity as a locally based group in Liverpool, broke off relations with the international tendency around RI and WR around the question of the state in the period of transition, which could only be an open question for revolutionaries who agreed on the essential class parameters of the debate. The same search for an excuse to break off discussions was subsequently adopted by RP and the CWO (product of a short-lived fusion of RP and WV) who declared the ICC to be counter-revolutionary because it did not accept that the Bolshevik party and the CI had lost all proletarian life from 1921 and not a moment later. The ICC was better armed against sectarianism because it traced its origins in the Italian Fraction and the GCF, who had always seen themselves as part of a wider proletarian political movement and not as the sole repository of truth. But the calling of the conferences had also exposed elements of sectarianism in its own ranks; some comrades initially responded to the appeal by declaring that the Bordigists and even Battaglia were not proletarian groups because of their ambiguities on the national question. Significantly, the subsequent debate about proletarian groups which led to a great deal of clarification in the ICC[6] was launched by a text by Marc Chirik who had been "trained" in the Italian and French left to understand that proletarian class consciousness is by no means homogeneous, even among the more politically advanced minorities, and that you could not determine the class nature of an organisation in isolation from its history and its response to major historical events, in particular world war and revolution.

With the new groups, these sect-like attitudes were less the product of a long process of sclerosis than of immaturity and the break in continuity with the traditions and organisations of the past. These groups were faced with the need to define themselves against the prevailing atmosphere of leftism, so that a kind of rigidity of thought often appeared to be a means of defence against the danger of being sucked under by the much larger organisations of the bourgeois left. And yet, at the same time, the rejection of Stalinism and Trotskyism often took the form of a flight into anarchist and councilist attitudes – manifested not only in the tendency to reject the whole Bolshevik experience but also in a widespread suspicion of any talk about forming a proletarian party. More concretely, such approaches favoured federalist conceptions of organising, the equation of centralised forms of organisation with bureaucracy and even Stalinism. The fact that many adherents of the new groups had come out of a student movement much more marked by the petty bourgeoisie than the student milieu of today reinforced these democratist and individualist ideas, most clearly expressed in the neo-Situationist slogan "militantism: the highest stage of alienation".[7] The result of all this is that the revolutionary movement has spent decades struggling to understand the organisation question, and this lack of understanding has been at the heart of many conflicts and splits in the movement. Of course, the organisation question has of necessity been a constant battleground within the workers' movement (witness the split between Marxists and Bakuninists in the First International, or between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks in Russia). But the problem in the re-emerging revolutionary movement at the end of the 60s was exacerbated by the long break in continuity with the organisations of the past, so that many of the lessons bequeathed by previous organisational struggles had to be re-learned almost from scratch.

It was essentially the inability of the milieu as a whole to overcome sectarianism that led to the blockage and eventual sabotage of the conferences.[8] From the beginning, the ICC had insisted that the conferences should not remain dumb but should, where possible, issue a minimum of joint statements, to make clear to the rest of the movement what points of agreement and disagreement had been reached, but also – faced with major international events like the class movement in Poland or the Russian invasion of Afghanistan – to make a common public statements around questions which were already essential criteria for the conferences, such as opposition to imperialist war. These proposals, supported by some, were rejected by Battaglia and the CWO on the grounds that it was "opportunist" to make joint statements when other differences remained. Similarly, when Munis and the FOR walked out of the second conference because they refused to discuss the question of the capitalist crisis, and in response to the ICC's proposal to issue a joint criticism of

4. These groups all had their origin in the 1952 split within the Internationalist Communist Party in Italy. The group around Damen retained the name Internationalist Communist Party; the "Bordigists" took the name International Communist Party, which after further splits now has several incarnations under the same name.

5. Sectarianism was a problem already identified by Marx when he wrote: "*The sect sees the justification for its existence and its point of honour not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from the movement*." Of course, such formulae can be misused if taken out of context. For the left wing of capital, the entire communist left is sectarian because it does not consider itself to be part of what they call the "labour movement" – organisations like the unions and social democratic parties whose class nature has changed since Marx's day. From our point of view, sectarianism today is a problem between proletarian organisations. It is not sectarian to reject premature fusions or adherence that cover over real disagreements. But is certainly sectarian to reject all discussion between proletarian groups or to dismiss the need for basic solidarity between them.

6. This debate gave rise to a resolution on proletarian political groups at the Second ICC Congress. *See International Review* nº 11, "Resolution on proletarian political groups".

7. See the article on the Libcom website: " Militancy: highest stage of alienation – Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Revolutionnaires". The early 70s also saw the rise of "modernist" groups who began to cast doubt on the revolutionary potential of the working class and who tended to see political organisations, even when they clearly stood for the communist revolution, as no more than rackets. Cf the writings of Jacques Camatte. These were the forebears of today's "communisation" tendency. A number of the groups contacted by Internationalism in 1973 went off in this direction and were irretrievably lost: Mouvement Communiste in France (not the existing autonomist group, but the group around Barrot/ Dauvé which had initially made a written contribution to the Liverpool meeting), Komunisimen in Sweden, and in a certain sense Solidarity UK, which shared with these other groups the enormous conceit of having gone beyond marxism.

8. See *International Review* nº 22, "3rd international conference of groups of the communist left".

the FOR's sectarianism, BC simply rejected the idea that sectarianism was a problem: the FOR had left because it had different positions, so what's the problem?

Clearly, underneath these divisions there were quite profound disagreements about what a proletarian culture of debate should be like, and matters reached a head when BC and the CWO suddenly introduced a new criterion for participation in the conferences – a formulation about the role of the party which contained ambiguities about its relationship to political power which they knew would not be acceptable to the ICC and which effectively excluded it. This exclusion was itself a concentrated expression of sectarianism, but it also showed that the other side of the coin of sectarianism is opportunism: on the one hand, because the new "hard" definition of the party did not prevent BC and the CWO holding a farcical 4th conference attended only by themselves and the Iranian leftists of the Unity of Communist Militants;[9] and on the other hand because, with the rapprochement between BC and the CWO, BC probably calculated that it had gained all it could from the conferences, a classic case of sacrificing the future of the movement for immediate gain. And the consequences of the break-up of the conferences have indeed been heavy – the loss of any organised framework for debate, for mutual solidarity, and an eventual common practice between the organisations of the communist left, which has never been restored despite occasional efforts towards joint work in subsequent years

## The 1980s: crises in the milieu

The collapse of the conferences was soon revealed to be one aspect of a wider crisis in the proletarian milieu, expressed most clearly by the implosion of the Bordigist ICP and the "Chenier affair" in the ICC, which led to a number of members leaving the organisation, particularly in the UK.

The evolution of the main Bordigist organisation, which published *Programma Comunista* in Italy and *Le Proletaire* in France (among others) confirmed the dangers of opportunism in the proletarian camp. The ICP had been growing steadily throughout the 70s and had probably become the largest left communist group in the world. And yet its growth had to a great extent been assured through the integration of a number of elements who had never really broken with leftism and nationalism. Certainly, the profound confusions of the ICP on the national question were not new: it claimed to defend the theses of the Second Congress of the Communist International on solidarity with revolts and bourgeois revolutions in the colonial regions. The CI theses would soon reveal themselves to be fatally flawed in themselves, but they did contain certain stipulations aimed at preserving the independence of communists in the face of rebellions led by national bourgeoisies in the colonies. The ICP had already taken some dangerous steps away from such safeguards, for example when it hailed the Stalinist terror in Cambodia as an example of the necessary vigour of a bourgeois revolution.[10] But the sections in North Africa organised around the paper *El Oumami* went even further than this, since in the face of the military conflicts in the Middle East it openly called for defence of the Syrian state against Israel. This was the first time that any Bordigist group had brazenly called for participation in a war between capitalist states. It is significant that there were strong reactions within the ICP against these positions, testifying to the fact that the organisation retained its proletarian character, but the end result was further splits, the departure of whole sections and of many individual militants, reducing the survivors of the shipwreck to small nuclei who have never been able to draw all the lessons from these events.

But an opportunist tendency also appeared in the ICC at the time – a grouping which, in response to the class struggles of the late 70s and early 80s, began to make serious concessions to rank and file trade unionism. But the problem posed by this grouping was situated above all at the organisational level, since it began to question the centralised nature of the ICC and to argue that central organs should function mainly as letter boxes rather than as bodies elected to provide political orientation in between general meetings and congresses. This did not imply that the grouping was held together by a deep programmatic unity. In reality it was held together by affiliations based on personal relationships and common resentments against the organisation – in other words, it was a secretive "clan" rather than a real tendency, and in an immature organisation it gave rise to a "counter-clan" in the UK section, with disastrous results. And stirring up these resentments and conflicts was the dubious element Chenier, who had a past history of travelling through revolutionary organisations and fomenting crises, and who engaged in the most shameful manipulation of those around him. The crisis came to a head in the summer of 1981 when members of the "tendency" entered a comrade's house when he was away and stole equipment from the organisation on the spurious grounds that they were only cashing in the investment they had made in the organisation. The tendency formed a new group which folded after a single issue, and Chenier "returned" to the Socialist Party and the CFDT, for whom he had probably been working all along, most likely in the "Secteur des Associations" which monitors the development of currents to the left of the PS.

This split was met with a very uneven response from the ICC as a whole, especially after the organisation made a determined attempt to get its stolen equipment back by visiting the houses of those suspected of being involved in the thefts and demanding the equipment be returned. A number of comrades in the UK simply left the organisation, unable to cope with the realisation that a revolutionary organisation has to defend itself in this society, and that this can include physical action as well as political propaganda. The Aberdeen/Edinburgh sections not only quickly departed, but publicly denounced the ICC's actions and threatened to call the police if they were subject to any visits themselves (since they also retained a certain amount of material belonging to the organisation, even though to our knowledge they had not been directly involved in the initial thefts). And when the ICC issued a very necessary public warning about the activities of Chenier, they rushed to defend his honour. This was the inglorious beginning of the Communist Bulletin group, whose publications were largely dedicated to attacks on the Stalinism and even the insanity of the ICC. In short, this was an early example of political parasitism which was to become a significant phenomenon in the subsequent decades.[11] Within the wider proletarian milieu, there were few if any expressions of solidarity with the ICC. On the contrary, the CBG's version of the events is still circulating on the internet and has a strong influence, on the anarchist milieu in particular.

We can point to further expressions of crisis in the years that followed. The balance sheet of the groups who took part in the international conferences is mainly negative: disappearance of groups that had only recently broken with leftism (L'Eveil Internationaliste, the OCRIA, Marxist Workers Group in the USA)) Others were pulled in the opposite direction: the NCI, a split with the Bordigists which had shown

9. An early expression of the "Hekmatist" tendency which today exists in the shape of the Worker Communist Parties of Iran and Iraq – a tendency which is still often described as left communist but is in fact a radical form of Stalinism. See *World Revolution* nº 293, "The Worker Communist Parties of Iran and Iraq: the dangers of radical Stalinism".

10. *International Review* nº 28, "The present convulsions in the revolutionary milieu" and *International Review* nº 32, "Present problems in the revolutionary milieu".

11. See the article on our web site from 2010: "Political parasitism: The CBG does the bourgeoisie's work". We will return to the problem of political parasitism in the second part of the article.

a certain level of maturity on organisational questions during the conferences, fused with the Il "Leninsta" group and followed it to abandon internationalism and adopt a more or less open form of leftism (the OCI).[12] The Groupe Communiste Internationaliste, which had come to the third conference merely to denounce it, already expressing its destructive and parasitic character, began to adopt openly reactionary positions (support for Peruvian Maoists and El Salvador guerrillas, culminating in a grotesque justification for the actions of the "centrist" al Qaida and physical threats against the ICC in Mexico[13]). The GCI, whatever its motivations, is a group which essentially does the work of the police, not only by threatening violence against proletarian organisations, but also by giving the impression that there is a link between authentic communist groups and the shady milieu of terrorism.

In 1984 we also saw the formation of International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party, a coming together of the CWO and Battaglia. The IBRP (now the ICT) has maintained itself on an internationalist terrain, but the regroupment was in our view achieved on an opportunist basis – a federalist conception of national groups, a lack of open debate about the differences between them, and aseries of hasty attempts to integrate new sections which would in most cases end in failure.[14]

1984-5 saw the split in the ICC which gave rise to the "External Fraction of the ICC". The EFICC initially claimed to be the true defenders of the ICC's platform against alleged deviations on class consciousness, the existence of opportunism in the workers' movement, the alleged monolithism and even "Stalinism" of our central organs etc. In reality, the whole approach of the ICC was jettisoned very rapidly, showing that the EFICC was not what it thought it was: a real fraction fighting the degeneration of the original organisation. In our view, this was another clan formation which put personal links above the needs of the organisation, and whose activity once leaving the ICC provided another example of political parasitism.[15]

The proletariat, according to Marx, is a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society – part of capitalism and yet in a sense alien to it.[16] And the proletarian organisation, which above all embodies the communist future of the working class, is no less a foreign body for being part of the proletariat. Like the proletariat as a whole, it is subject to the constant pressure of bourgeois ideology, and it is this pressure, or rather the temptation to adapt to it, to conciliate with it, which is the source of opportunism. It is also the reason why revolutionary organisations cannot live a "peaceful" life within capitalist society and are inevitably doomed to go through crises and splits, as conflicts break out between the proletarian "soul" of the organisation and those who have succumbed to the ideologies of other social classes. The history of Bolshevism, for example, is also a history of organisational struggles. Revolutionaries do not seek or advocate crises, but when they do break out, it is essential to mobilise its forces to defend its central principles if they are being undermined, and to fight for clarification of the divergences and their roots instead of running away from these obligations. And of course it is vital to learn the lessons that these crises inevitably bring with them, in order to make the organisation more resistant in the future.

For the ICC, crises have been frequent and sometimes very damaging, but they have not always been entirely negative. Thus the 1981 crisis, following an extraordinary conference in 1982, led to the elaboration of fundamental texts on both the function and the mode of functioning of revolutionary organisations in this epoch,[17] and brought vital lessons on the permanent necessity for a revolutionary organisation to defend itself, not only against the direct repression of the bourgeois state, but also against dubious or hostile elements who pose as part of the revolutionary movement and may even infiltrate its organisations.

Similarly the crisis that led to the departure of the EFICC saw a maturation of the ICC on a range of key issues: the real existence of opportunism and centrism as diseases of the workers' movement; the rejection of councilist visions of class consciousness as being purely a product of the immediate struggle (and hence the necessity for the revolutionary organisation as the main expression of the historic, depth dimension of class consciousness); and, linked to this, the understanding of the revolutionary organisation as an organisation of combat, capable of intervening in the class at several levels: not only theoretical and propagandistic, but also agitational, providing orientations for the extension and self-organisation of the struggle, participating actively in general assemblies and struggle groups.

Despite the clarifications that the ICC made by responding to its internal crises, they did not guarantee that the organisation problem, in particular, was now solved and that there would be no more cases of falling back into error. But at the very least, the ICC recognised that the question of organisation was a political question in its own right. On the other hand, the milieu in general didn't see the importance of the organisational issue. "Anti-Leninists" of various stripes (anarchists, councilists, modernists, etc) saw the very attempt to maintain a centralised organisation as inherently Stalinist, while the Bordigists made the fatal mistake of thinking that the last word had been said on the question and that there was nothing further to discuss. The IBRP was less dogmatic but tended to treat the organisation question as secondary. For example, in their response to the crisis which hit the ICC in the mid-90s, they did not deal with the organisational issues at all but argued that they were essentially a by-product of the ICC's mistaken evaluation of the balance of class forces.

There is no doubt that an incorrect appreciation of the world situation can be an important factor in organisational crises: in the history of the communist left, for example, we can point to the adoption, by a majority of the Italian Fraction, of Vercesi's theory of the war economy, which considered that the accelerating march towards war in the late 30s was proof that the revolution was imminent. The outbreak of the imperialist war thus saw a total disarray in the Fraction.

Similarly, the tendency of the groups coming out of the 68 upsurge to overestimate the class struggle, to see the revolution as "just around the corner", meant that the growth of revolutionary forces in the 70s was extremely fragile: many of those who joined the ICC at that time did not have the patience and conviction to last the course when it became clear that the struggle for revolution was one posed in the long term and that the revolutionary organisation would be engaged in a permanent struggle for survival, even when the class struggle was globally following an upward course. But the difficulties resulting from this immediatist vision of world events also had a major organisational element: not only in the fact that during that period members were often integrated in a hasty, superficial manner, but above all in the fact that they were integrated into an organisation which did not yet have a clear vision of its function, which was not to act as if it

12. Organizzazione Comunista Internazionalista.

13. See the article on our website from 2006: "How the Groupe Communiste Internationaliste spits on proletarian internationalism".

14. See *International Review* nº 121: "Polemic with the IBRP: An opportunist policy of regroupment that leads to nothing but 'abortions'".

15. See *International Review* nº 45 "The 'External Fraction' of the ICC".

16. In the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.*

17. See the two reports on the organisation question from the 1982 Extraordinary Conference: *International Review* nº 29, "Report on the function of the revolutionary organisation" and *International Review* nº 33, "Report on the structure and functioning of the revolutionary organisation".

was already a kind of mini-party but was above all to see itself as a bridge to the future communist party. The revolutionary organisation in the period that began in 1968 thus retained many features of a communist fraction even if it had no direct organic continuity with the parties or fractions of the past. This does not at all mean that we should have renounced the task of direct intervention in the class struggle. On the contrary, we have already argued that one of the key components in the debate with the tendency that formed the "External Fraction" was precisely the insistence on the need for a communist intervention in the struggles of the class – a task which may vary in scope and intensity, but which never disappears, in different phases of the class struggle. But it does mean that the largest part of our energies have necessarily been focused on the defence and construction of the organisation, to analysing a rapidly evolving world situation and both preserving and elaborating our theoretical acquisitions. This focus would become even more important in the conditions of the phase of social decomposition from the 1990s onwards, which have powerfully increased the pressures and dangers confronting revolutionary organisations, We will examine the impact of this phase in the second part this article.

Amos

## Annex

Introductory note to the pamphlets containing the texts and proceedings of the Second International Conference of Groups of the Communist Left, 1978, written by the international technical committee:

"With this first pamphlet we are beginning the publication of the texts of the Second International Conference of the groups of the Communist left, held in Paris on 11 and 12 November 1978 on the initiative of the Internationalist Communist Party, *Battaglia Comunista*. The texts of the First International Conference, held in Milan on 30 April and I May 1977, were published in Italian under the responsibility of the ICP/BC and in French and English under the responsibility of the ICC.

On 30 June, 1977, the ICP/BC, in accordance with what had been decided at the Milan Conference and subsequent contacts with the ICC and CWO, sent out a circular letter inviting the following groups to a new conference to be held in Paris:

- International Communist Current (France, Belgium, Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany. Holland, USA, Venezuela).
- Communist Workers Organisation (Britain).
- International Communist Party (*Communist Programme:* Italy, France, etc)
- Il Leninista (Italy).
- Nucleo Comunista Internazionalista (Italy).
- Iniziativa Comunista (Italy).
- Fomento Obrero Revolucionario (France, Spain).
- Pour Une Intervention Communiste (France).
- Forbundet Arbetarmakt (Sweden).
- För Komunismen (Sweden).
- Organisation Communiste Revolutionaire Internationalise d'Algerie.
- Kakamaru Ha (Japan).
- Partito Comunista Internazionale/*Il Partito Comunista (Italy).*
- Spartakusbond (Holland).

In volume II we will publish this letter.

Of the groups invited, Spartakusbond and Kakamaru Ha didn't reply.

Communist Programme and *Il Partito Comunista* refused to participate in articles appearing in their respective publications. Both rejected the spirit of the initiative as well as the political content of the work itself (particularly on the party and national liberation wars)

The PIC refused with a letter-document to participate in a meeting based on a recognition of the first two congresses of the Third International, which they see as being essentially social democratic from the beginning (see Vol II).

Forbundet Arbetarmakt rejected the invitation since it doubted that it could recognise the criteria for participation (see Vol II).

Iniziativa Comunista gave no written response, and at the last minute – after having agreed to come to a joint meeting of Battaglia and Il Leninista – refused to participate in the conference, justifying its attitude in the issue of its bulletin which appeared after the Paris conference.

Il Leninista. Although it confirmed its agreement to participate, was unable to attend due to technical problems at the time they set off for the meeting.

The OCRIA of the Algerian immigrants in France was unable to participate physically in the meeting for security reasons, but asked to be considered as a participating group

The FOR, although it had participated at the beginning of the conference – to which it presented itself as an observer at the sidelines – quickly dissociated itself from the conference, saying that its presence was incompatible with groups who recognise that there is now a structural crisis of capital (see vol. II)…"

In between the second and third conferences, the Swedish group För Komunismen had become the ICC section in Sweden and Il Nucleo and Il Leninista had fused to become a single organisation, Il Nuclei Leninisti

The list of participating groups was: ICC, Battaglia, CWO, Groupe Communiste Internationaliste, L'Éveil Internationaliste, Il Nuclei Leninisti OCRIA, which sent written contributions. The American Marxist Workers' Group associated itself to the conference and would have sent a delegate, but was prevented from doing so at the last minute."

Nuevo Curso and the "Spanish Communist Left"

# What are the origins of the Communist Left?

## Introduction

The communist revolution can only be victorious if the proletariat arms itself with a political party of the vanguard able to take up its responsibilities, as the Bolshevik party was able to do in the first revolutionary attempt in 1917. History has shown how difficult it is to construct such a party. It is a task which demands numerous and diverse efforts. It demands, above all, considerable clarity around programmatic questions and the principles of organisational functioning, a clarity which is necessarily based on the entirety of the past experience of the workers' movement and its political organisations.

At each step in the history of this movement, certain currents have stood out as the best expressions of this clarity, as the ones which have been able to make a decisive contribution to the future of the struggle. This has been the case with the marxist current ever since 1848, a time when large sectors of the proletariat were still heavily influenced by the petty bourgeois conceptions that were vigorously combated in chapter three of the *Communist Manifesto*, "Socialist and Communist Literature". It was even more the case within the International Workingmen's Association founded in 1864:

"*But this association, formed with the express aim of welding into one body the whole militant proletariat of Europe and America, could not at once proclaim the principles laid down in the* Manifesto*. The International was bound to have a programme broad enough to be acceptable to the English trade unions, to the followers of Proudhon in France, Belgium, Italy, and Spain, and to the Lassalleans in Germany.*

"*Marx, who drew up this programme to the satisfaction of all parties, entirely trusted to the intellectual development of the working class, which was sure to result from combined action and mutual discussion… And Marx was right. The International, on its breaking in 1874, left the workers quite different men from what it found them in 1864... In fact, the principles of the* Manifesto *had made considerable headway among the working men of all countries.*"[1]

It was finally within the Second International, founded in 1889, that the marxist current became hegemonic thanks in particular to the influence of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. And it was in the name of marxism that Rosa Luxemburg in particular engaged in the fight against the opportunism which, from the end of the 19th century, was gaining ground in this party and the whole of the International. It was equally in the name of marxism that the internationalists during the First World War waged the struggle against the betrayal of the majority of the Socialist parties, and that, under the impulsion of the Bolsheviks, they founded the Third, Communist International in 1919. And when the latter, following the failure of the world revolution and the isolation of the revolution in Russia, in turn followed a path of opportunist degeneration, it was once again the marxist current of the communist left – represented notably by the Italian and Dutch-German lefts – which led the battle against this degeneration. Like the majority of the parties of the Second International those of the Third ended up, with the triumph of Stalinism, going over to the camp of the capitalist enemy. This treason, this submission of the Communist parties to the imperialist diplomacy of the USSR, provoked many reactions alongside those of the communist left. Some of them were led to a "critical" return into the fold of social democracy. Others tried to remain in the camp of the proletariat and the communist revolution, as was the case, after 1926, with the Left Opposition animated by Trotsky, one of the great names of the October 1917 revolution and the foundation of the Communist International.

The world communist party which will be at the head of the proletarian revolution of the future will have to base itself on the experience and reflection of the left currents which detached themselves from the degenerating Communist International. Each of these different currents drew their own lessons from this historic experience. And these lessons are not all equivalent. Thus there are profound differences between the analyses and politics of the left communist currents which were formed right at the beginning of the 1920s and the "Trotskyist" current which appeared much later and which, while situating itself on a proletarian terrain, was from the start strongly marked by opportunism. It is obviously not by chance that the Trotskyist current joined the bourgeois camp faced with the test of the Second World War whereas the currents of the communist left remained loyal to internationalism.

Thus the future world party, if it is to make a real contribution to the communist revolution, can't take up the heritage of the Left Opposition. It will have to base its programme and its methods of action on the experience of the communist left. There are disagreements among the existing groups who have come out of this tradition, and it is their responsibility to continue confronting these political disagreements so that the new generations can better understand their origins and significance. This is the sense of the polemics which we have already published with the Internationalist Communist Tendency and the Bordigist groups. That said, beyond these divergences, there exists a common heritage of the communist left which distinguishes it from other left currents which came out of the Communist International. Because of this, anyone who claims to belong to the communist left has the responsibility to know and to make known the history of this component of the workers' movement, its origins in reaction to the degeneration of the parties of the Communist International, and the different branches which compose it (the Italian left, the German-Dutch left etc). It is above all important to draw out very precisely the historic contours of the communist left and the differences which separate it from other left currents of the past, notably the Trotskyist current. This is the object of the present article.

1. Engels, Preface to the 1888 English edition of the *Manifesto*.

On the blog Nuevo Curso (New Course) we can read an article that tries to explain the origins of the Communist Left:[2] "*We call the Communist Left the internationalist movement that began fighting against the degeneration of the Third International, seeking to correct the errors inherited from the past reflected in its programme, starting from 1928 faced with the triumph of Thermidor*[3] *in Russia and the counter-revolutionary role of the International and the Stalinist parties*".[4]

What does this mean, exactly? That the Communist Left began its struggle in 1928? If that is what Nuevo Curso thinks, it is wrong since the Communist Left arose in response to the degeneration of the Communist International as early as 1920-21, at the Second and Third Congresses of the International. In that agitated period where the last possibilities of the world proletarian revolution were being played out, groups, nuclei, of the Communist Left in Italy, Holland, Germany, Russia itself and later in France and other countries, carried out a fight against the opportunism that was corroding the revolutionary body of the Third International to its very roots. Two of the expressions of this Communist Left expressed themselves very clearly at the Third Congress of the CI (1921), carrying out a severe but fraternal criticism of the positions adopted by the International:

"*It was in the 3rd Congress of the CI those that Lenin called 'leftists', regrouped in the KAPD, stood up against the return to parliamentarism, to trade unionism, and showed how these positions went again those adopted in the First Congress, which had tried to draw out the implications for the struggle of the proletariat of the new period opened by the First World War.*

"*It was also in this Congress that the Italian Left, which led the Communist Party of Italy, reacted vigorously -although in deep disagreement with the KAPD - against the unprincipled policy of alliance with the 'centrists' and the disfiguring of the CPs by the mass entry of fractions exiting social democracy*".[5]

In the Bolshevik Party itself *"from 1918, the 'Left Communists' Bukharin and Ossinsky, had begun to warn the party against the danger of carrying out a policy of state capitalism. Three years later, after having been excluded from the Bolshevik party, Miasnikov's 'Workers' Group' continued the struggle underground in close relationship with the KAPD and the Bulgarian Communist Workers' Party until 1924 when it disappeared under the repeated blows of state repression. This group criticised the Bolshevik party for sacrificing the interests of the world revolution for the sake of defending the Russian state, reaffirming that only the world revolution could allow the revolution to survive in Russia*".[6]

Thus, since 1919-20 the different currents of what became the Communist Left had been seeking a profound programmatic alternative – even though still in the process of elaboration – to the degeneration of the International. They made mistakes, as they were often groping in the dark in the face of major historical problems. However, for Nuevo Curso "*it can be said that the historical time of the Communist Left ended in the decade between 1943 and 1953 when the main currents that had maintained an internationalist praxis within the Fourth International denounced the betrayal of internationalism and elaborated a new platform that started with the denunciation of Stalinist Russia as a capitalist, imperialist state*".

This passage tells us, on the one hand, that the Fourth International was the home of groups with "an internationalist praxis", and, on the other hand, that after 1953 "*the historical time of the Communist Left ended in the decade between 1943 and 1953*". Let us examine these assertions.

## What was the IVth International and what was the contribution of its nucleus, the Left Opposition?

The Fourth International was constituted in 1938 on the basis of the Left Opposition whose initial origins lie in Russia with the *Manifesto of the 46* in October 1923, to which Trotsky adhered and, at an international level, in the appearance of groups, individuals and tendencies that from 1925-26 tried to oppose the increasingly overwhelming triumph of Stalinism in the Communist Parties.

These oppositions expressed an undoubted proletarian reaction. However, this reaction was confused, weak and contradictory. It expressed a superficial rejection of the rise of Stalinism. The Opposition in the USSR, despite its heroic battles, "*showed itself incapable of understanding the real nature of the phenomena of Stalinism and bureaucratisation, a prisoner of its illusions about the nature of the Russian state. It also became the champion of state capitalism, which it wanted to promote through an accelerated industrialisation. When it fought against the theory of socialism in one country, it did not manage to break with the ambiguities of the Bolshevik party on the defence of the 'Soviet fatherland'. And its members, Trotsky at the head, presented themselves as the best supporters of the 'revolutionary' defence of the 'Soviet fatherland'. It conceived itself not as a revolutionary fraction seeking to safeguard theoretically and organisationally the great lessons of the October Revolution, but only as a loyal opposition to the Russian Communist Party*". This led it towards all kinds of "*unprincipled alliances (thus Trotsky sought the support of Zinoviev and Kamenev who hadn't stopped slandering him since 1923)*"[7]

As for the International Left Opposition, "*it laid claim to the first four congresses of the CI. At the same time, it perpetuated the practice of manoeuvres that already characterised the Left Opposition in Russia. To a large extent this opposition was an unprincipled regroupment that was limited to making a 'left' critique of Stalinism. All true political clarification was forbidden in its ranks and it was left to Trotsky, re-*

2. See the article in Spanish, "La izquierda comunista no fue comunista de izquierda" on the Nuevo Curzo website.

3. In an article on the series on communism (*International Review* nº 102, "1924-28: the Thermidor of Stalinist State capitalism") we criticised the use of the term "Thermidor", very typical of Trotskyism, to characterise the rise and development of Stalinism. The Thermidor of the French Revolution (July 28, 1794) was not properly speaking a "counter-revolution" but a necessary step in the consolidation of bourgeois power that, beyond a series of concessions, would never return to the feudal order. On the other hand, the rise of Stalinism since 1924 meant the definitive restoration of capitalist order, and Stalin's USSR did not represent, as Trotsky always erroneously thought, a "socialist terrain" where "some conquests of October" would remain. This is a fundamental difference that Marx already noted in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "*Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm more swiftly from success to success, their dramatic effects outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds, ecstasy is the order of the day – but they are short-lived, soon they have reached their zenith, and a long Katzenjammer takes hold of society before it learns to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period soberly*". Thermidor was precisely one of those moments of "assimilation" of the political conquests of the bourgeoisie, giving room to the more moderate factions of this class and more inclined to make a pact with the feudal forces, who remained powerful.

4. Readers can find a great deal of material on the historical communist left on our website.

5. From our pamphlet in French *Le Trotskysme contre la classe ouvriere*. Much of this is available in English translation in *World Revolution* nºs 11 and 12 ("Trotskyism: Child of the counter-revolution") and nº 21 ("Trotskyism and WW2: In defence of imperialist war"). In 1926 the United Opposition was formed, bringing together the previous groups from the *Manifesto of the 46* with Zinoviev and Kamenev – the latter two being experts in manoeuvring and bureaucracy.

6 Ibid.

7. Ibid.

*garded as the very symbol of the October Revolution, to act as the spokesman and 'theoretician'*"[8]

With these fragile foundations, the Left Opposition founded in 1938 was a "Fourth International" born dead to the working class. Already in the 1930s, the Opposition had been unable to "*resist the effects of the counterrevolution that was developing on a world scale on the basis of the defeat of the international proletariat*"[9] because throughout the different localised wars that were preparing the holocaust of the Second World War, the Opposition developed a "tactical perspective" "*of supporting one imperialist camp against another (without openly admitting it)*". This tactic "*was put into practice by Trotskyism under multiple guises in the 1930s: support for 'colonial resistance' in Ethiopia, China and Mexico, support for republican Spain, etc. Trotskyism's support for Russian imperialism's war preparations was equally clear throughout this period (Poland, Finland 1939), concealed behind the slogan 'defence of the Soviet fatherland'.*"[10] This, together with the tactic of entryism in the Socialist parties (decided in 1934), ensured that "*the political programme adopted in the founding congress of the IVth International, written by Trotsky himself, took up and aggravated the orientations that preceded that congress (defence of the USSR, workers' united front, erroneous analysis of the period ...) but also had as its axis a repetition of the minimum program of a social democratic type ('transitional' demands), a programme rendered obsolete by the impossibility of reforms since the entry of capitalism in its phase of decadence, of historical decline*".[11] The IVth International defended "*participation in the trade unions, critical support for the so-called 'workers" parties, 'united fronts' and 'anti-fascist fronts', 'workers' and peasants' governments' and, prisoner of the experience in the USSR, state capitalist measures: the expropriation of private banks, the nationalisation of the credit system, the expropriation of certain branches of industry* (...) *and the defence of the degenerated Russian workers' state. And at the political level, it envisaged the democratic and bourgeois revolution in the oppressed nations taking place through the struggle for national liberation*".[12] This nakedly opportunist programme prepared the way for the betrayal of the Trotskyist parties through the defence of their respective nation states in 1939-40. Only a few individuals, and in no way "*currents with an internationalist praxis*" as Nuevo Curso claims, tried to resist this reactionary course! Among them Natalia Sedova, Trotsky's widow, who broke in 1951, and especially Munis, whom we will talk about below.[13]

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12 Ibid.

## The continuity of the Communist Left, a programmatic and organisational continuity

It is therefore necessary to understand that the struggle to elaborate a programmatic framework that serves the development of proletarian consciousness and prepares the premises for the formation of the world party is not the task of unconnected personalities and circles, but the fruit of an organised, collective struggle that forms part of the critical historical continuity of communist organisations. That continuity passes, as we affirm in our Basic Positions, through "*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*".[14]

We have already seen that this continuity could not pass down either from the Left Opposition or from the Fourth International.[15] Only the Communist Left could do it. But according to Nuevo Curso, the " *the historical time of the Communist Left ended in the decade between 1943 and 1953*". They give no explanation for this, but in their article they add another sentence: "*The Communist Left who were left out of the international regroupment – the Italians and their French derivatives – would arrive, although not all of them, not completely and not always on coherent positions, at a similar picture in the same period*".

This passage contains numerous "enigmas". To begin with, which are the groups of the Communist Left that were left out of the "international regroupment"? What international regroupment is meant here? Of course, *Bilan* and the other currents of the Communist Left rejected the illusion of "going towards a Fourth International".[16] However, from 1929 they did everything possible to argue with the Left Opposition, recognising that it was a proletarian current, albeit gangrened by opportunism. However, Trotsky obstinately rejected any debate;[17] only some currents such as the League of Internationalist Communists of Belgium or the Marxist Group of Mexico accepted the debate and this brought an evolution that led them to break with Trotskyism.[18]

Nuevo Curso tells us that those groups that remained "*on the margin of the international regroupment", "would arrive, although not all of them, not completely and not always on coherent positions, at a similar picture in the same period*". What did they "lack"? Where were they "incoherent"? Nuevo Curso does not clarify anything. We are going to demonstrate, using a table that we put together in an article entitled "What are the differences between the Communist Left and the Fourth International?"[19] In the same way, these groups had positions consistent with the programme of the proletariat and were in no way "similar" to the opportunist mire of the Opposition and the groups who had a so-called "internationalist praxis" in the Fourth International (see next page).

We add to the above table a point that seems to us to be very important in order to really contribute to the proletarian struggle and to advance towards the world party of revolution: While the Communist Left

13. Among the individuals and small groups that opposed the betrayal of the organizations of the Fourth International, we should also add the RKD of Austria (see below) and the Greek revolutionary Stinas who remained faithful to the proletariat and denounced nationalism and the barbarism of war. See *International Review* nº 72 "Memoirs of a revolutionary (A. Stinas, Greece): Nationalism and antifascism".

14. See for example the article from 2005 published on our website: "The communist left and the continuity of marxism", and *International Review* nº 9, "Notes towards a history of the Communist Left (Italian Fraction 1926-1939)".

15. As the Gauche Communiste de France wrote in its journal *Internationalisme*: "*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*".

16. See for example *Bilan* nº 1, 1933, organ of the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left, the article "Towards a Two and Three Quarters international?", which criticises Trotsky's perspective of moving towards the formation of a Fourth International.

17. See for example, the text in Spanish on our website: "Trotsky y la Izquierda italiana (Textos de la Izquierda comunista de los años 30 sobre el trotskismo).

18. See for example *International Review* nº 10, "Texts of the Mexican Left (1937-38)" and *International Review* nº 20, "Mexican left: On the national question (1938)".

19. See the article in Spanish from 2005 published on our website: "¿Cuales son las diferencias entre la Izquierda Comunista y la IV Internacional?"

| Communist Left | Left Opposition |
|---|---|
| Based on the First Congress of the CI and critically considers the contributions of the Second. Rejects most of the positions of the Third and Fourth Congresses. | Based on the first 4 Congresses without critical analysis. |
| Looks critically at what is happening in Russia and comes to the conclusion that the USSR should not be supported as it has fallen into the hands of world capitalism. | Views Russia as a degenerated workers' state that must be supported in spite of everything. |
| Refuses to work in the trade unions (German-Dutch Communist Left) and will end up coming to the conclusion that they have become organs of the state. | Recommends trade unions as workers' bodies and considers it necessary to work within them. |
| Denounces national liberation. | Supports national liberation. |
| Denounces parliamentarism and participation in elections. | Supports participation in elections and "revolutionary parliamentarism". |
| Undertakes the work of a Fraction to draw lessons from the defeat and lay the foundations for a future reconstitution of the World Party of the proletariat. | Undertakes "opposition" work that could even lead to entryism in the social democratic parties. |
| During the 1930s, and especially through *Bilan*, considers that the world was on course for the Second World War; that the party could not be formed under such conditions, but that lessons had to be learnt and the future prepared. That is why Bilan proclaims: "*The watchword of the hour is not to betray*". | In the midst of the counterrevolution, Trotsky believes that the conditions for forming the party have been met and in 1938 the Fourth International is constituted. |
| Denounces World War II; condemns both sides in the conflict and advocates world proletarian revolution | Calls on workers to choose sides among the World War II contenders, thus abandoning internationalism |

carried out an organised, collective and centralised work, based on loyalty to the organisational principles of the proletariat and on the historical continuity of its class positions, the Left Opposition was an agglomeration of heterogeneous personalities, circles and groups, united only by the charisma of Trotsky who was entrusted with the work of "political elaboration".

To top it all off, Nuevo Curso puts the Communist Left and the communisers (a modernist movement radically alien to marxism) in the same bag: "*So-called 'left communism' is a concept that encompasses the Communist Left –especially the Italian and German-Dutch currents – the groups and tendencies that give it continuity, from 'Councilism' to 'Bordigism' and the thinkers of 'communisation'*". And because an image is worth a thousand words, they place a photo of Amadeo Bordiga[20] in the middle of the denunciation of the "communisers," which implies that the Communist Left is linked to them or shares positions with them.

20. Born in 1889 and died in 1970, he was a founder of the Communist Party of Italy and made an important contribution to the positions of the Communist Left, especially up until 1926.

## Munis and a so-called "Spanish Communist Left"

Thus, according to Nuevo Curso, revolutionaries today don't have to look for the bases of their activity in the groups of the Communist Left (the ICT, the ICC, etc.) but in what might have come out of the programme of capitulation to capitalism elaborated by the Fourth International and concretely, as we will see below, of the work of the revolutionary Munis. However, in a confusing and convoluted way, Nuevo Curso implies, without stating it clearly, that Munis is the most important link in a supposed "Spanish Communist Left", a current that according to Nuevo Curso "*founded the Spanish Communist Party in 1920 and created the Spanish group of the Left Opposition to Stalinism in 1930, then the Communist Left of Spain, participating in the foundation of the International Opposition and also serving as a seed and reference point for the communist lefts in Argentina (1933-43) and Uruguay (1937-43). It took up a revolutionary position on the workers' insurrection of July 19, 1936 and was the only marxist tendency to take part in the revolutionary insurrection of 1937 in Barcelona. It denounced the betrayal of internationalism and the consequent departure from the class terrain in the Second Congress of the Fourth International (1948), leading a split by the remaining internationalist elements and the formation of the 'International Workers Union'.*"

Before going on to analyse Munis' contribution, let's analyse the supposed "continuity" between 1920 and 1948.

We cannot now enter into an analysis of the origins of the Communist Party in Spain (PCE). In 1918 there were some small nuclei interested in the positions of Gorter and Pannekoek, who took up the arguments of the Amsterdam Bureau of the Third International which grouped together the Left groups within the Third International. From these nuclei the first Communist Party of Spain was born, but they were forced by the CI to merge with the centrist wing of the PSOE, which was in favour of adhering to the Third International. As soon as possible we will make a study of the origins of the PCE, but what is clear is that, beyond some ideas and an unquestionable combativity, these nuclei did not constitute a real organ of the Communist Left and did not have any continuity. Later, Left Opposition groups emerged and indeed took the name "Communist Left of Spain," led by Nin. This group was divided between supporters of merging with the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (a Catalan nationalist Stalinist group) and those who advocated entryism in the PSOE, seduced by the radicalisation of Largo Caballero (former state adviser to the dictator Primo de Rivera) who had begun posing as the "Spanish Lenin". Munis was among the latter, while the majority, led by Nin, would merge with the Bloc to form the POUM in 1935. Thus of the "Communist Left" they had nothing more than the name they gave themselves to be "original", but the content of their positions and of their actions was indistinguishable from the prevailing opportunist tendency in the Left Opposition.

As for the existence of a Communist Left in Uruguay and Argentina, we have studied the articles published by Nuevo Curso to prove its existence. As far as Uruguay is concerned, it was the Bolshevik Leninists that was one of the rare groups that, within Trotskyism, took an internationalist position against World War II. This has much merit and we salute it warmly as the expression of a proletarian effort, but reading the Nuevo Curso article shows that this group could barely carry out an organised activity and moved in a political environment dominated by the Peruvian APRA, a bourgeois party from

head to toe that flirted with the already degenerated Communist International: "*We know that the League met with the 'antidefensistas' in Lima in 1942 at the home of the founder of the APRA, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, only to verify the profound differences that separated them.* (…) *After the failure of their 'anti-defence' contact they were subjected to the witch-hunt organised against the 'Trotskyists' by the government and the Communist Party. Without international references - the IVth International only gave them the option of giving up their criticism of the 'unconditional defence of the USSR' - the group was disbanded*".[21]

What Nuevo Curso calls the Argentine Communist Left are two groups that merged to form the Internationalist Communist League and remained active until 1937 to be finally destroyed by the action of Trotsky's supporters in Argentina. It is true that the League rejected socialism in one country and called for socialist revolution in the face of "national liberation," but while we recognise the merit of its struggle, its arguments are very flimsy. In Nuevo Curso we find quotes from one of the most important members of the group, Gallo, affirming:

"*What does the struggle for national liberation mean? Doesn't the proletariat as such represent the historical interests of the Nation in the sense that it tends to liberate all social classes by its action and to overcome them by its disappearance? But in order to do so, it needs precisely not to be confused with national interests (which are those of the bourgeoisie, since this is the ruling class), which on the internal and external terrain contradict each other sharply. So that slogan is categorically false (...) affirming our criterion that only socialist revolution can be the stage that corresponds to colonial and semi-colonial countries".* Prisoner of the dogmas of the Opposition on national liberation and incapable of breaking from them, the group affirms *'The IV International does not admit any slogan of 'national liberation' that tends to subordinate the proletariat to the ruling classes and, on the contrary, assures that the first step of proletarian national liberation is the struggle against them*".[22] The confusion is terrible: the proletariat should undertake a proletarian "national liberation", that is, the proletariat should carry out a task that really belongs to the bourgeoisie.

21. See the text on the Nuevo Curso website: "¿Hubo izquierda comunista en Uraguay y Chile?"

22. See the text on the Nuevo Curso website: "La 'Izquierda comunista argentina' y el internacionalismo."

## Critical review of Munis' Contribution

Very late on (in 1948!), there emerged from the rotten trunk of the IVth International some promising tendencies (the last in the Trotskyist movement[23]): Those around Munis and Castoriadis. In the article "Castoriadis, Munis, and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism"[24] we make a very clear distinction between Castoriadis who ended up as a staunch propagandist for Western capitalism and Munis who always remained loyal to the proletariat.[25]

This loyalty is admirable and is part of the many efforts to advance toward a communist consciousness. However, this is one thing; quite another is that the work of Munis was more an example of individual activity than something linked to an authentic, organised proletarian current, something that could provide the theoretical, programmatic and organisational basis for continuing the work of a communist organisation today. We have shown in a number of articles that Munis, because of his origins in Trotskyism, was not able to carry out this task.[26]

## Ambiguities about Trotskyism

In an article written in 1958, Munis makes a very clear analysis denouncing the American and English leaders of the Fourth International who shamefully reneged on internationalism, correctly concluding that "*the Fourth International has no historical reason for existence; it is superfluous, its very foundation must be considered an error, and its only task is to trail after Stalinism, more or less critically*". However, he believes that it can be of some use to the proletariat, as it would appear that "*it has a possible role left to play in countries dominated by Stalinism, mainly in Russia. There the prestige of Trotskyism still feels enormous. The Moscow trials, the gigantic propaganda carried out for almost fifteen years in the name of the struggle against Trotskyism, the incessant slander to which it was subjected under Stalin and which his successors maintain, all contribute to making Trotskyism a latent tendency of millions of men. If tomorrow – and this is a very possible event – the counter-revolution were to yield to a frontal attack by the proletariat, the Fourth International could quickly emerge in Russia as a very powerful organisation*".

Munís repeats, with respect to Trotskyism, the same argument that he uses against Stalinism and Social Democracy: that EVERYTHING CAN SERVE THE PROLETARIAT. Why? Because Stalinism has designated it "public enemy number one," just as right-wing parties present social democrats and Stalinists as dangerous revolutionaries. He adds another argument, equally typical of Trotskyism regarding social democrats and Stalinists: "There are many workers who are followers of these parties".

That the parties of the left are rivals of the right and are vilified by it does not make them "favourable to the proletariat", and in the same way their influence among the workers does not justify supporting them. On the contrary, they must be denounced for the role they play in the service of capitalism. To say that Trotskyism abandoned internationalism and to immediately add that "it might still have a possible role to play in favour of the proletariat" is a very dangerous incoherence that hinders the necessary work of distinguishing between genuine revolutionaries and capitalist wolves who wear the skin of a "communist" or "socialist" lamb. In the *Communist Manifesto*, the third chapter entitled "Socialist and Communist Literature" clearly establishes the border between "reactionary socialism" and "bourgeois socialism" that it sees as enemies and the currents of "critical utopian socialism" that it recognises as part of the proletarian camp.

## The "transitional demands"

The Trotskyist imprint is also found in Munís when he proposes "transitional demands" along the lines of the famous Transitional Programme that Trotsky put forward in 1938. This is something we criticised in our article "Where is the FOR going?":

"*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*

23. A third tendency should be added: the Austrian RKD, which detached itself from Trotskyism in 1945. Internationalisme discussed seriously with them, although they eventually drifted into anarchism.

24. "Castoriadis, Munis, and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism" in *International Review* nºs 161 and 162.

25. In 1948-49, Munis discussed a great deal with comrade MC, a member of the GCF; and in this period his definitive break with Trotskyism came to fruition.

26. See *International Review* nº 58, "Farewell to Munis, a revolutionary militant"; *International Review* nº 52, "Polemic: Where is the FOR going?", *International Review* nº 25, "The confusions of Fomento Obrera Revolucionario (FOR): Russia 1917 and Spain 1936" and the article from 2006 in Spanish on our website: "Critica del libro: jalones de derrota promesas de victoria".

*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'*".

We see here a gradualist vision where "the leading party" administers its miraculous potions to lead the masses to "final victory," which is done at the price of sowing dangerous reformist illusions in the workers and embellishing the capitalist state by hiding the truth that its "democratic liberties" are a means of dividing, deceiving and diverting workers' struggles. Communists are not a force outside the proletariat, armed with the skills of revolutionary leadership and thus able to point the workers in the right direction. As early as 1843, Marx criticised this idea of prophets bringing redemption: "*we do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles. We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it has to acquire, even if it does not want to*".[27]

## Voluntarism

The work as a fraction that the Left Opposition was incapable of conceiving allows revolutionaries to understand at what moment we are in the relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, to know if we are in a dynamic that allows us to advance towards the formation of the world party or, on the contrary, if we are in a situation where the bourgeoisie can impose its trajectory on society, leading it to war and barbarism.

Deprived of that compass, Trotsky believed that everything was reduced to the ability to gather a large mass of affiliates that could serve as a "revolutionary leadership". Thus, as world society moved toward the massacres of World War II punctuated by the massacres of Abyssinia, the Spanish war, the Russian-Japanese war, etc., Trotsky believed he saw the beginning of the revolution in the July 1936 French strikes and the Spanish workers' brave initial response to Franco's coup.

Unable to break with this voluntarism, Munís repeats the same mistake. As we wrote in part two of our article on Munis and Castoriadis,

"*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*".

"*Thus Munis wrote: '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'*".[28]

Thus, a "real revolutionary leadership" would suffice to sweep away all the obstacles, all the adversaries. The proletariat would not have to rely on its unity, solidarity and class consciousness but entrust itself to the goodness of a "revolutionary leadership". This messianism leads Munis to a delirious conclusion: "***The last war offered more revolutionary opportunities than that of 1914-18***. *For months, all European states, including Russia, appeared battered and discredited, liable to be defeated by a proletarian offensive. Millions of armed men confusedly aspired to a revolutionary solution* (...) *the proletariat, organised on a revolutionary basis, could have launched an insurrection across several countries and spread it throughout the continent.. The Bolsheviks in 1917 did not, by a long shot, enjoy such vast possibilities*."[29]

Unlike World War I, the bourgeoisie had conscientiously prepared for the defeat of the proletariat before World War II: massacred in Germany and Russia, enlisted under the banner of "anti-fascism" in the democratic powers, the proletariat could only put up a weak resistance to the massacre. There was the great proletarian shock in northern Italy in 1943 that the democratic allies let the Nazis bloodily crush,[30] some strikes and desertions in Germany (1943-44) that the allies nipped in the bud with the terrible bombings of Hamburg, Dresden etc., bombings without any military objective but aimed only at terrorising the civilian population. Also the Commune of Warsaw (1944) that the Russian army let the Nazis suppress.

Only by abandoning oneself to the most suicidal illusions could one think that at the end of the Second World War "*the proletariat, organised on a revolutionary basis, could have launched an insurrection across several countries*". With these fantasies little can be contributed to the formation of a proletarian organisation.

## Sectarianism

A fundamental pillar of the revolutionary organisation is its openness and willingness to discuss with the other proletarian currents. We have already seen how the *Communist Manifesto* regarded with respect and a spirit of debate the contributions of Babeuf, Blanqui and utopian socialism. Therefore, in the Resolution on proletarian political groups adopted by our 2nd International Congress, we pointed out that "*the characterisation of the various organisations who claim to defend socialism and the working class is extremely important for the ICC. This is by no means a purely theoretical or abstract question; on the contrary, it is directly relevant to the attitude the Current has towards these organisations, and thus to its intervention towards them: on whether it denounces them as organs and products of capital; or whether it polemicizes and discusses*

27. Letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, Marx *Collected Works* Volume 3, p.141, published by Lawrence and Wishart, 1975. Also available on marxists.org website.

28. "Lettre ouverte au Parti Communiste Internationaliste", June 1947. Published on the marxists.org website. We should add, as an example of this blind voluntarism and against a background of defeat, the tragic experience of Munis himself. In 1951 a boycott of trams exploded in Barcelona. It was a very combative reaction by the workers in the black night of the Franco dictatorship. Munis moved there in the hope of "promoting the revolution", without understanding the relationship of forces between the classes. Internationalisme and MC advised him against this adventure. However, he insisted on it and was arrested, spending 7 years in Franco's prisons. We appreciate the militant's combativity and we are in solidarity with him; however, the revolutionary struggle requires a conscious analysis and not a simple voluntarism or, even worse, a messianism, believing that by being "present" among them, the masses will be able to reach the "New Jerusalem".

29. From an article by Munis "La IV Internacional".

30. See *International Review* nº 75, "1943, The Italian proletariat opposes the sacrifices demanded for the war".

*with them in order to help them evolve towards greater clarity and programmatic rigour; or to assist in the appearance of tendencies within them who are looking for such clarity*."[31]

Contrary to this position, Trotsky, as we saw before, rejected debate with *Bilan* and, instead, opened the door wide to a so-called "left wing of social democracy".

Munis was also affected by sectarianism. Our article in homage to Munis[32] acknowledges with appreciation that "*in 1967, along with comrades from the Venezuelan group Internacialismo, 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*". This effort had no continuity and as we say in the abovementioned article ("Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism, second part") "*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*".

However important, a disagreement over the analysis of the economic crisis cannot lead to the abandonment of debate among revolutionaries. This must be done with the utmost tenacity, with the attitude of "convincing or being convinced", but never slamming the door on the first few exchanges without having exhausted all possibilities of discussion. Our article rightly points out that such an attitude affects something vital: the construction of a solid organisation capable of maintaining continuity. The FOR did not survive the death of Munís and disappeared definitively in 1993, as indicated in the article:

"*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*".

Just as the negative weight of the Trotskyist heritage prevented Munís from contributing to the construction of the organisation, so the activity of the revolutionaries is not that of a sum of individuals, even less that of charismatic leaders: it is based on an organised collective effort. As we say in our "Report on the function of the revolutionary organisation" from 1982, "*The period of illustrious leaders and great theoreticians is over. Theoretical elaboration has become a truly collective task. In the image of millions of 'anonymous' proletarian fighters, the consciousness of the organisation develops through the integration and surpassing of individual consciousness in a single, collective consciousness"*.[33] More profoundly, "*The working class doesn't give rise to revolutionary militants but to revolutionary organisations: there is no direct relationship between the militants and the class. The militants participate in the class struggle in so far as they become members and carry out the tasks of the organisation*".[34]

## Conclusion

As we stated in the article we published at his death in 1989: "*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.*"

Lenin said that, for revolutionaries, "*after their death they are turned into harmless icons, canonised, their names consecrated for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes, in order to deceive them*". Why does Nuevo Curso fill its blog with photos of Munis, publish some of his texts without the slightest critical eye? Why do they elevate him to the icon of a "new school"?

Perhaps we are looking at a sentimental cult of a former proletarian combatant. If that is the case, we must say that it is an enterprise destined to create more confusion because its theses, turned into dogmas, will only distil the worst of its errors. Let us remember the accurate analysis of the *Communist Manifesto* with respect to the utopian socialists and those who later tried to vindicate them

"*Therefore, although the originators of these systems were, in many respects, revolutionary, their disciples have, in every case, formed mere reactionary sects. They hold fast by the original views of their masters, in opposition to the progressive historical development of the proletariat*".

Another possible explanation is that the authentic Communist Left is being attacked with a spam "doctrine" built overnight using the materials of that great revolutionary. If such is the case, it is the obligation of revolutionaries to fight such an imposture with the maximum energy.

C.Mir 4-7-19

31. *International Review* nº 11, "Resolution on proletarian political groups".

32. "Farewell to Munis…"

33. *International Review* nº 29 "Report on the function of the revolutionary organisation"

34. *International Review* nº33, "Report on the structure and functioning of the revolutionary organisation",

Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa IV

# From the election of President Nelson Mandela (1994) to 2019

In the introduction to the previous article,[1] we immediately drew the reader's attention to the importance of the issues dealt with in these terms:"*Although, in the face of new social movements, the South African bourgeoisie relied on its most barbaric traditional weapons, the police and military forces, the dynamic of class confrontation was unprecedented: the working class had never before shown such combativity and development of consciousness, faced with a bourgeoisie that had never had to develop such sophisticated manoeuvres, including extensive use of the weapon of rank and file unionism animated by the extreme left of capital. In this clash between the two real historic classes, the determination of the proletariat would go so far as to provoke the dismantling of the system of apartheid, resulting in the unification of all fractions of the bourgeoisie with the aim of confronting the surge in the struggle of the working class*."

And we then showed in detail the extent of the combativity and the development of class consciousness within the South African proletariat, expressed, for example, by placing its struggles in the hands of hundreds of struggle committees called "civics" (Community Based Organisations). We also showed how the bourgeoisie was finally able to overcome the magnificent combativity of the South African working class by relying on its main pillars, namely "white power" (under apartheid), the ANC and radical unionism. Indeed, the overall balance sheet of this battle between the working class and the bourgeoisie shows the leading role played by rank and file unionism in diverting genuine proletarian struggles onto a bourgeois terrain.

Speaking of radical unionism, we said:

"*… its main contribution was undoubtedly the fact of having succeeded in knowingly constructing the 'democratic/national unity' trap in which the bourgeoisie was able to imprison the working class. Moreover, taking advantage of this climate of 'democratic euphoria', largely as a result of the liberation of Mandela and company in 1990, the central power could rely on its 'new union wall' consisting of COSATU and its 'left wing' to systematically divert the struggle movements into demands for 'democracy', 'civil rights', 'racial equality', etc.* (…) *Indeed, between 1990 and 1993, when a transitional government of 'national unity' was formed, strikes and demonstrations became scarce or had no effect on the new government.* (…) *Besides, this was the central objective of the bourgeoisie's project when it decided the process which led to the dismantling of apartheid and to the 'national reconciliation' of all the bourgeois factions that had been killing each other under apartheid.*

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

In this article, we aim to show how the ANC's project was implemented methodically by its successive leaders, in the first place by Nelson Mandela. We will show to what extent, having fought the old "white power", the South African working class was able to deal with the new "black power". Indeed, the South African proletariat did not lose its combativity, as we will see later, but it faced many serious difficulties. In addition to its daily struggle for the improvement of its living conditions, it also had to confront diseases like AIDS with its terrible ravages, the corruption of the regime in power, and the many forms of social violence related to the decomposition of the capitalist system; murders, pogroms, etc. At the same time, as usual, it continued to face a repressive, bloodthirsty power, one that caused the deaths of many miners at Marikana in 2012. But the fact remains that the South African proletariat has already shown its capacity to play an important role as part of the world proletariat for the communist revolution.

1. See *International Review* nº 158, "From the Soweto Movement of 1976 to the coming to power of the ANC in 1993".

## The ANC in the exercise of power

In 1994, at the end of the period of the "transitional government", general elections were held and won triumphantly by the ANC which took all the levers of power to govern the country according to the orientations of South African national capital, with the support, or goodwill, of the principal white South African leaders who had fought against it for so long.

Now for Mandela the serious business could begin, namely the recovery of a national economy severely battered not only by the economic crisis in this period but also the consequences of the workers' resistance to exploitation. So in its first year of office in 1995, the Mandela government decided on a series of austerity measures, including a 6% cut in civil servants' salaries and 10% in spending on health. From that moment on, the question posed was how the working class would react to the attacks of the new regime.

## First strike movement of the era of President Mandela

Against all odds, the working class, though stunned by all the propaganda about the "national union" or "new democratic era", could not let such an aggressive attack go by without reacting. We saw the outbreak of the first strike movements under the Mandela government, particularly in transport and public services. For its part, as expected, the new bourgeoisie in power soon showed its true face as the dominant class by violently repressing the strikers, a thousand of whom were arrested, without counting the number of wounded by police dogs. Parallel to the government and police repression, the South African Communist Party and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), both members of the government, being unable to prevent the outbreak of strikes, began to violently denounce the strikers, accusing them of sabotaging the policy of national "recovery" and "reconciliation". An important fact should be noted here: while COSATU trade union leaders along with the government denounced and repressed the strikers, the base unionists remained "bonded"

with the workers, claiming to defend them against the repression descending on them. We must see here a certain power of the new regime because while associating COSATU with the management of the affairs of capital it did not forget the importance of relying on the sound instrument of recuperation of the workers' struggles constituted by base unionism, of which many of those in government had had practical experience.[2]

## The ANC deploys a new ideological device to deflect workers' combativity

Pursuing the implementation of its austerity measures, the new governmental team launched ideological manoeuvres to get them accepted by creating structures claiming to give legitimacy to its economic and political orientation. So, under the guise of the *"Truth and Reconciliation Commission"* (TRC), in 1996 the Mandela government introduced a programme called *"Reconstruction, Negotiation and Reconciliation"*, then in the following year "G*rowth, Employment and Redistribution"* (GEAR). In fact these gadgets hid the same initial economic orientation whose application could only aggravate the living conditions of the working class. From then on, for the new regime, the question was how to get the "pill" accepted by the masses of workers, some of whom had just violently demonstrated their refusal of such austerity measures. And in this context, with the fear of a workers' response in opposition to the government plan, we saw the first open expression of (tactical) divergences within the ANC:

"*Is the ANC's political line still really at the service of its former supporters, serving the greatest number of people, especially the most deprived, as it claims? COSATU and the SACP (South African Communist Party) question it more and more often, even if it is not frontally. They criticize the ANC for not representing the interests of the poorest, especially the workers, for losing interest in job creation and not paying enough attention to the access of all citizens to proper conditions of life. (...) This criticism has been abundantly relayed by intellectuals of the left and often virulently. (...) These divergent points of view nevertheless give rise to questions and debates. Is there a workers' party to represent workers' interests in their own right? The SACP (South African Communist Party) has for a while evoked the prospect of an autonomous candidacy for elections and some within COSATU have even drafted a project for a workers' party*."[3]

As can be seen from this quote, the governmental team publicly displayed its divisions. But this was above all a manoeuvre or more classically a division of labour between the right and the left at the summit of power, whose main purpose was to deal with the eventual workers' reaction.[4] In other words, the threat of a split to create a "workers' party to represent workers' interests" was above all a cynical political trick aimed at diverting the combativeness of the working class.

The fact remains that the Mandela government decided to continue its austerity policy by taking all the necessary measures for the recovery of the South African economy. In other words, it was no longer a question of the "national liberation" struggle or "defending the interests of the poorest" preached hypocritically by the left of the ANC. And, at first, this policy of economic austerity, repression and intimidation on the part of the "new power of the people" had an impact on the working class, causing great disappointment and bitterness in its ranks. There then followed a period of relative paralysis of the working class in the face of persistent economic attacks by the ANC government. On the one hand, a good number of African workers, who had hoped for faster access to the same rights and benefits as their white comrades, were tired of waiting. On the other hand, the latter, with their racist unions (albeit very small) threatened to take up arms in defence of their "gains" (the various privileges accorded under apartheid).

This was a situation that could not objectively favour the struggle, let alone the unity of the working class. Fortunately, this period was only short-lived, because three years after its first reaction against the austerity measures of the ANC government under Mandela, the working class again reacted by resuming the fight, but much more massively than before.

## 1998: First massive struggles against the Mandela government

Encouraged no doubt by the way in which it had mastered the situation in the face of the first strike of its reign against its first austerity measures, the ANC government now made them even harder. But without realising, it created the conditions for a broader workers' response:

"*In 1998, it was estimated that 2,825,709 days of work were lost from the beginning of January to the end of October. The strikes were essentially for economic demands, but they also reflected the strikers' political discontent with the government. Indeed, far from living better, many South African workers have seen their economic situation deteriorate, contrary to the commitments of the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Program). As for the unemployed, more and more numerous in the absence of new jobs and with many industries (especially in the textile and mining industries) closing or relocating, their situation was becoming more and more critical. It may be thought that, in addition to the financial demands made by the unions, the strikes also showed the first signs of the erosion of national enthusiasm for government policy.*

"*The movement was widespread since strikes affected sectors as varied as textiles, chemicals, the automobile industry and even universities or security companies and commerce, often long, two to five weeks on average, and sometimes marked by police violence (**a dozen strikers killed**[5]) and serious incidents, almost all for demands for salary increases. (...) Faced with strikes, the employers initially adopted a hard line and threatened to reduce their workforce or replace the strikers with other workers, but in most cases they were forced to honour the strikers' demands."*[6]

As we can see, the South African working class did not wait long to resume its struggles against the ANC regime, just as it had opposed the attacks of the old apartheid regime. It is all the more remarkable that Mandela's government proceeded in the

2. These were in particular members of COSATU, which came out of the Federation of South African Trade Unions, as we can see in *International Review* nº 158: *"FOSATU made use of its 'genius' for organising, to the point of being simultaneously heard by both the exploited and the exploiter in order to astutely 'manage' the conflicts between the two antagonists – which meant, in the final analysis, serving the bourgeoisie…At the beginning of the 80s, the union current developed an original union project, with the idea of being explicitly independent from the main political forces; it was formed around networks of intellectuals and students…presenting itself as a 'union left' and 'political left', and a number of its leaders were influenced by the ideology of Trotskyism and critical Stalinism"*

3. Judith Hayem, *La figure ouvrière en Afrique du Sud*, Editions Karthala, 2008, Paris. According to her editor, Judith Hayem *"is an anthropologist, lecturer at the University of Lille 1 and a member of CLERSE-CNRS. Specializing in labor issues, she carried out factory surveys in South Africa, but also in England, the United States and France. Since 2001, she has continued her research in South Africa around mobilisations for access to HIV/ IDS care in the mines*".

4. Moreover, 10 years after this episode the various components of the ANC are still together at the head of the South African government, at least at the time these lines were originally writen in autumn 2017.

5. Our emphasis. In a footnote Hayem specifies the number of victims in these terms: "*it is estimated that 11 to 12 people lost their lives, and that many others, strikers or non-strikers, and replacement workers were wounded*". And all without any comment, as if the author sought to downplay the importance of the massacre or to preserve the image of Chief Officer Mandela, "*the icon of the Democrats*".

6. Ibid.

same way as its predecessor by firing on a great number of strikers, killing some, with the sole purpose (of course unacknowledged) of defending the interests of South African national capital. And without causing any public protest from the "humanist democrats". Indeed, it is significant to note that few media outlets (or field investigators) commented, or even described, the crimes committed by the Mandela government in the ranks of the striking demonstrators. Clearly, for the media and the bourgeois world in general, Mandela was still both an "icon" and an "untouchable prophet", even when his government massacred workers.

For its part, the South African proletariat demonstrated in this way its reality as the exploited class by struggling courageously against its exploiter whatever the colour of their skin. And by its pugnacity it managed quite often to push back its enemy, as the bosses were forced to honour its claims. In short, there was here an expression of an internationalist class whose struggle constituted a clear unmasking of the lie that the interests of black workers merged with those of their own black bourgeoisie, namely the ANC clique.

Precisely, by uniting the ANC, the CP and the COSATU trade union in the same government, the South African bourgeoisie wanted, on the one hand, to convince the (black) workers that they had their own "representatives" in power to serve them, while also planning to leave the rank and file of COSATU in opposition in case it would be necessary to recuperate their struggles. Clearly, the ANC government thought it had done everything to guard against any consequent reactions from the working class. But in the end Mandela and his companions found the opposite.

## In 1999 Mandela is replaced by his heir Mbeki but the struggles continue

In that year, following the presidential elections won by the ANC, Mandela gave way to his "foal" Thabo Mbeki who decided to continue and amplify the same austerity policy initiated by his predecessor. To begin with, he formed his government with the same factions as before, namely: the ANC, the CP and the COSATU central union. And immediately his government was formed, it imposed a wave of austerity measures hitting with full force the key economic sectors of the country, resulting in pay cuts and the deterioration of living conditions of the working class. But, also like Mandela, the next day, hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike and descended *en masse* into the streets and, as in the apartheid era, the ANC government sent its police to violently repress the strikers, causing a large number of casualties.

But above all it was remarkable to see how quickly the South African workers realised the capitalist and anti-working class nature of these attacks that the ANC team in power had made it suffer. The most significant thing in the workers' response was that in several industrial sectors workers decided to take charge of their own struggles without waiting for, or even acting against, the unions: *"(...) the Autofirst strike, which began outside of the union and despite it, is a good example; especially since far from being an isolated case this type of strike tended to become widespread after 1999, including in large factories where the workers went on strike in spite of the unfavourable advice of the union, and even its formal opposition to the conflict"*.[7]

This was a striking demonstration of the return of combativity accompanied by an attempt to take charge of the struggles that the working class had already experimented with under the apartheid regime. Consequently, the ANC had to react by readjusting its message and its method.

## The ANC resorts to "racialist" ideology in the face of the new workers' combativity

To counteract the militancy of the workers which tended to outflank the unions, the Mbeki government and the ANC decided to resort to the ideological legacy of the " national liberation struggle", including (among other things) the "anti-white" rhetoric of this period:

"*The return in a renewed form in the governmental political discourse of the question of colour, especially in a number of statements castigating Whites - a notion that must be examined if (and in this case how) it acts as a, racial, social, historical or other marker, and if it also operates in people's ways of thinking.*

"*As a corollary of this new presidential policy, the tensions within the triple alliance (ANC, COSATU, SACP South African Communist Party), still in place after many threats of a split especially on the eve of the 2004 elections, were more and more obvious and more and more vivid. They show the difficulty of the ANC, the former national liberation party, to retain its popular legitimacy once in power and in charge of governing for the benefit, no longer only of the oppressed of yesteryear but for all the inhabitants of the country*."[8]

But why was the "rainbow" government, the "guarantor of national unity", which held all the levers of power, suddenly forced to resort to one of the old facets of the ANC of yesteryear, namely denouncing the "white power" (which it presented as preventing the power of the blacks)? The author of the quotation seems to us very indulgent with the leaders of the ANC, when she seeks to know about this "*notion that must be examined*" to know "*if it acts as a, racial, social, historical or other marker*". In reality this "notion", behind which lurks the idea that "the whites still hold power at the expense of blacks", was used here by the ANC in yet another attempt to divide the working class. In other words, by doing so, the government hoped to deflect demands for improvements in living conditions into racial issues.

Part of the working class, notably the militant base of the ANC, could not help being "sensitised" by this devious anti-white or even "anti-foreigner" rhetoric. We also know that the previous President Zuma, with his populist accents, frequently exploited the "racial question" especially when he found himself in difficulty faced with social discontent.

## Anti-globalisation ideology to the rescue of the ANC

To deal with social unrest and the erosion of its credibility, the ANC decided in 2002 to hold a World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (the *"Durban Social Forum"*). The whole galaxy of anti-globalisation organisations participated, including several South African ones characterised as "radical" like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the Landless People's Movement, very active in the strikes of the 2000s. In other words, in a context of radicalisation of workers' struggles the ANC apparatus sought the ideological contribution of the anti-globalisation movement:

"*Furthermore, workers' strikes outside the trade unions broke out as in Volkswagen Port Elizabeth in 2002 or in Engen in Durban, in 2001. Some of these actions, like those of the TAC, regularly won victories over government policy. However, on the one hand, no opposition party really relayed these points of view in the parliamentary arena; on the other hand, the capacity of these organisations to* ***influence sustainably, and on their own strengths*** *(without becoming institutionalised or entering the government), the decisions of the state, remained fragile*"[9]

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

Here we see a double problem for the ANC government: on the one hand, to prevent or divert strikes tending to escape the control of the unions close to it, and on the other hand, how to find a "credible" parliamentary opposition with an apparent capacity to "durably influence" the decisions of the state. Regarding this last point we will see later that the problem has not been resolved at the time of writing this article. On the other hand, regarding the first, the ANC, was able to expertly rely on the anti-globalisation ideology well embodied by some of the groups pushing for the radicalisation of struggles, in particular the TAC and the Landless People's Movement.

Indeed, "anti-globalisation" ideology came at the right time for an ANC government in search of new "ideological breath", all the more so as this movement was on the rise at the global media level. We should note also that in this same context (in 2002) the ANC was campaigning for the re-election of its leaders, for whom it was then timely to show their closeness to the anti-globalisation movement. But this was not enough to restore the credibility of the ANC leaders with the South African masses. And for good reason…

## A deeply corrupted ruling class coming from the "national liberation struggle"

Corruption, that other "supreme disease" of capitalism, is a characteristic widely shared among the ANC leaders. Certainly, the capitalist world is very rich in examples of corruption, so it may be useless to add this one. In fact, it is the opposite in that many are still "believers" in "exemplary symbolic capital" and the "probity" of the old heroes of the national liberation struggle who are the leaders of the ANC.

By way of introduction we reproduce here a quote from an organ of the bourgeois press, namely *Le Monde Diplomatique*, one of the ANC's greatest "old supporters":

"*The system of 'legalised corruption': Since the presidency of Mr. Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008), the collusion between the business world and the black ruling class is obvious. This mix of people finds its embodiment in the person of Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, 60 years old, designated successor of Mr. Zuma, elected vice-president of the African National Congress in December 2012. On the eve of the massacre of Marikana (...), Mr. Ramaphosa sent an email message to Lonmin's management, advising it to resist the pressure of the strikers, who he called 'criminals'.*

"*A McDonald's South Africa owner and president of the MTN telecommunications company, among others, Mr. Ramaphosa is also the former secretary general of the ANC (1991-1997) and the National Union of Mineworkers (1982-1991). A central player in the negotiations for the democratic transition between 1991 and 1993, he was ousted by Mr Mbeki from Nelson Mandela's succession race. In 1994, he returned to business, boss of New African Investment (NAIL), the first black company listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and the first black billionaire of the 'new' South Africa. He now runs his own company, Shanduka, active in mining, agribusiness, insurance and real estate.*

"*Among his brothers-in-law are Jeffrey Radebe, Minister of Justice, and Patrice Motsepe, mining tycoon, boss of African Rainbow Minerals (ARM). This had profited from Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) implemented by the ANC: supposed to profit the 'historically disadvantaged' masses, according to the ANC's phraseology, this process of 'the economic rise of the black people' in fact favoured the consolidation of a bourgeoisie close to power. Mr. Moeletsi Mbeki, the youngest brother of the former head of state, academic and patron of the audiovisual production company Endemoi in South Africa, denounced a system of 'widespread corruption'. It highlights the perverse effects of BEE: 'cosmetic' promotion of black directors fronting large white firms, huge salaries for limited competences, a sense of injustice among white professionals, some of whom prefer to emigrate.*

"*If the adoption of a BEE charter in the mining sector, in 2002, put 26% in black hands, it also promoted a number of ANC barons to important leadership positions. Mr. Mann Dipico, former governor of North Cape Province, is vice-president of the De Beers diamond group's South African operations. BEE has also favoured the anti-apartheid elders, who have strengthened their position of influence in power. In 2009 Mr. Mosima ('Tokyo')) Sexwale, head of the Mvelaphanda mining group, took the leadership of the ministry of human settlements (slums).*

"*As for Patrice Motsepe, he stands out in the 2012 Forbes List as the fourth richest man in South Africa ($2.7 billion). He did a great service to the ANC by announcing on January 30 the gift of half of his family assets (100 million euros) to a foundation that bears his name, to help the poor. Even if they do not emulate this, we cannot blame the black elite for not sharing its money.*"[10]

This is a ruthless description of the system of corruption instituted by the ANC leaders on their arrival at the South African post-apartheid summit of power. Clearly, like gangsters, it is a question of sharing the spoils that their former white rivals held exclusively under the old regime, distributing posts according to the balance of power and alliances within the ANC. As a result, the struggle for the "power of the black people" was very quickly forgotten in the race for posts that led to the "capitalist paradise", getting richer faster to become (symbolically) multimillionaires in a few short years. Like this former great trade union leader and prominent member of the ANC, Mister Ramaphosa:

"*The black bourgeoisie lives far from townships, where it does not distribute its wealth, or very little. Its tastes for luxury and opulence came to the fore under the presidency of Mr. Mbeki (1999-2008), thanks to the growth of the 2000s. But since Mr. Zuma came to power in 2009, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the South African Council of Churches have not ceased to denounce a 'moral decline' much more serious than the exorbitant price of the sunglasses of those nicknamed the Gucci revolutionaries. 'Relationships can be openly venal', smiles a black business lawyer who prefers to remain anonymous. 'We talk about sex at the table, and not just about our polygamous president! Corruption spreads ...'So much so that when a former De Beer executive is accused of corruption by the press, he says: 'You get nothing for mahala ... (You get nothing for nothing)*".[11]

It is amazing what this quote shows, notably the involvement of the successors to president Mandela, in the construction of the system of corruption under their respective reigns. But we also know that corruption in the ANC exists at all levels and in all places, giving rise to insidious and violent struggles, as in mafia gangs. Thus, Mbeki took advantage of his presidency of the state apparatus and the ANC to, by means of "low blows", oust his ex-rival Cyril Ramaphosa in 1990 and then sacked Zuma, his vice-president, sued for rape and corruption. Evidently these last two (while fighting each other) were able to reply by means as violent as they were obscure against their common rival. Zuma, who had the wit to pretend to be the victim of the umpteenth plot hatched by his predecessor Mbeki "*known for his intrigues*" according to *Le Monde Diplomatique*. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning the characteristic act of violence that took place in December 2012 in Parliament, where, in the midst of preparations for their congress, ANC members came to blows to get their respective candidates passed by throwing

10. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2013.

11. Ibid.

chairs and exchanging punches.

And during all this time the "liberated people" of apartheid are immersed in misery and disease (for example one in four South Africans does not have enough to eat): "*Meanwhile the level of despair is visible to the naked eye. In Khayelitsha, they drown their grief in gospel, a popular music that sounds everywhere, but also in dagga (cannabis), Mandrax or tik (methamphetamine), a drug that ravages the township.*"[12]

What a sad dive into the horror of a moribund economic system which plunges its people into the abyss with no way out!

## AIDS comes in the midst of the misery and corruption of the ANC's power

Between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s the working class was not only battling against economic misery but also struggling against the AIDS epidemic. All the more so since the then head of government, Thabo Mbeki, had for a long time refused to recognize the reality of this disease, going so far as to cynically refuse to properly invest against its development.

"*Another major element of the situation in South Africa since 2000 is precisely the proven and devastating spread, finally publicly recognized, of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. South Africa boasts the sad record as the most affected country in the world. In December 2006, the UNAIDS and WHO report indicated there were an estimated nearly 5.5 million HIV-positive people in South Africa, a rate of 18.8% among adults aged between 15 and 49 years and 35% among women - who are the most affected - seen in antenatal clinics. The total mortality in the country, from all causes, increased by 79% between 1997 and 2004, mainly because of the impact of the epidemic*.

"(...)*Beyond this calamitous health check, AIDS has become one of the country's major problems. It decimates the population, leaves entire generations of children orphaned, but its impact is such that it also threatens the productivity and social equilibrium of the country. Indeed, the active population is the section most affected by the disease and the lack of income generated by the inability of an adult to work, even informally, sometimes plunges whole families into misery when survival depends sometimes only on these revenues. Social benefits are now granted by the state to families affected by the disease, but they remain insufficient* (...) *AIDS has indeed invaded all spheres of social life and the daily lives of everyone who is infected with the disease and/or affected by the death of a family member, a neighbour, a colleague...*

"(...) *It seems to me that the closing of the negotiation sequence that was already taking shape in 1999, with the publication of the GEAR, was confirmed by Thabo Mbeki's denial of the link between HIV and AIDS in April 2000. Not so much because of the immense controversy that this statement has aroused in the country and around the world but for tackling the epidemic, which represented a major challenge for the construction of the country and its unity, marking that it was not, in his view, to be one of the main concerns of the state*".[13]

As this quotation shows, on the one hand, the AIDS epidemic was wreaking havoc (and continues to do so) in the ranks of the South African proletariat and in the (mostly poor) populations in general, and on the other, government officials did not care, or only partially, about the plight of the victims even though official reports (from the UN) amply illustrated the massive presence of the virus in the country. In fact, the Mbeki government was in denial in not even seeing that AIDS has now invaded all spheres of social life, including the daily life of the productive forces of the country, in this case the working class. But the most cynical in this case was the then health minister:

"*Faithful to then President Thabo Mbeki, Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang* (...) *has no intention of organizing the distribution of ARVs* [antiretroviral drugs] *in the public health sector. She argues that they are toxic, or that one can be healed by adopting a nutritious diet based on olive oil, garlic and lemon. The conflict ended in 2002 before the Constitutional Court: is the public hospital authorised to administer to HIV-positive mothers a nevirapine tablet that drastically reduces the risk of the child being infected during childbirth. The government is doomed. Other trials will follow, imposing in 2004 the start of a national treatment strategy*."[14]

This is the abject attitude of an irresponsible government faced with the millions of AIDS victims left to their own devices, where it had to wait until the intervention of the Supreme Court to stop the criminal madness of the ANC and Mbeki government faced with the rapid development of AIDS, which has largely contributed to the fall in life expectancy from 48 in 2000 to 44 in 2008 (when infected patients died by the hundreds every day).

## The decomposition of capitalism aggravates social violence

Readers of the ICC's press know that our organization regularly deals with the effects of decomposition (the final phase of the decadence of capitalism) on all aspects of social life. These are manifested more bluntly in certain areas, especially the former "Third World" in which South Africa is located.

Despite its status as the continent's leading industrial power with relative economic development, South Africa is one of the countries in the world where you are more likely to die by homicide and where violent aggressions of all kinds are the daily lot of the population and, of course, within the working class. For example, in 2008 South Africa experienced 18,148 murders, or a rate of 36.8 per 100,000 inhabitants, which puts the country in second place behind Honduras (with a rate of 61 per 100,000 inhabitants). In 2009, a study by the South African Council of Medical Research found that the rate of female homicides committed by male partners was five times higher than the global average.

The killings happen day and night in all places, at home, in the street, on transport, café terraces, sports grounds. Alongside the killings there is the explosion of other violence: incidents of sexual violence against women and children amounted to 50,265 in 2008.

The most sordid thing in this situation is undoubtedly the fact that the South African government turns out to be at best powerless and at worst indifferent or complicit when we know that members of its own police participate in this violence; in South Africa the police are as corrupt as the other institutions of the country and, as a result, many cops are implicated in the vicious killings. Indeed, when the police do not participate directly in the killings, they behave like gangs that racketeer and beat up people, so much so that those who suffer violence daily have little confidence in the police to protect them. As for the bourgeoisie meanwhile, many of its members prefer to be protected (in their well-barricaded houses) by heavily armed guards and other "security agents", whose numbers sources indicate today far exceed those of the national police.

## The pogrom, epitome of violence

The pogrom, another barbaric aspect of social violence, has raised its head episodically in South Africa since 2008, and again very recently in 2019.

"*A wave of xenophobic violence has*

12 Ibid.

13. Judith Hayem, Op. Cit.

14. *Manière de voir*, supplement to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2015.

*caused the deaths of ten immigrant workers in South Africa since September. A continental economic giant, the country is ravaged by inequality. Unemployment affects 40% of the working population and especially black people.*"[15]

We know that the decomposition of the capitalist system encourages nihilism, undermines the spirit of human and class solidarity; and in these cases, we can consider that some victims of poverty can become the killers of their class brothers, thus becoming accomplices of their class enemy at the head of bourgeois power. The real responsibility for all this lies with the leaders of the ANC and their boss Cyril Ramaphosa, ex-president Zuma's successor who was elected in February 2018 on the basis of untenable promises like "the fight against unemployment", "a better life for all", or "free schooling for poor families". In fact, faced with the abominable murders of immigrants he first turned a blind eye and said nothing, before reacting hypocritically without accepting any responsibility for the massacres: "*On Tuesday, the South African president, after an inexplicable silence, finally admitted that the attacks were an expression of what in current language in South Africa is termed 'xenophobia'…but that according to him, South Africa 'is not xenophobic'. Since the big upsurge in violence in 2008 (which accounted for 60 to 100 victims), an anti-foreign discourse, which seems to be a disturbing reflection of what comes out of the extreme right in Europe, with occasional borrowings from Donald Trump, has been circulating in the elite, and can't fail to impregnate the poorest layers who are exposed to very difficult living conditions.*"[16]

And another press organ described more clearly the abject attitude of the "elites", behind which lies the ANC: "*The most widespread stereotypes about the migrants derive from official speeches which present them as criminals, as people who carry diseases and try to marry South Africans to get hold of immigration papers.*"[17]

So we see very clearly that the ANC leaders in power describe black African immigrants in words very similar to those of the extreme right. The behaviour of the South African regime is all the more absurd when we know that the entire working class is the target here, because it has been drawn from many sources, including under apartheid. As in 2008, the pogromists are described by the media, randomly, as the "left-behind", "delinquents/traffickers", the "precarious/unemployed ..." In short, a mixture of the "declassed", "nihilists" and the simply frustrated, without hope and without proletarian consciousness. The pogroms of September 2019 inevitably draw comparisons with 2008. In June that year nearly one hundred immigrant workers died, victims of pogroms perpetrated by armed gangs in the slums of Johannesburg. Groups equipped with knives and firearms appeared at nightfall in dilapidated neighbourhoods looking for "foreigners" and began to beat, to kill, even burn alive the inhabitants and chase thousands more.

The first massacres took place in Alexandra, in a huge township (slum) located next to the business district of Johannesburg, the financial capital of South Africa. The xenophobic attacks spread gradually to the other localities of this region with the total indifference of the country's authorities. Indeed, it took 15 days of killings for President Mbeki's government to decide to react weakly (cynically in fact) by sending the police to intervene in certain areas while letting the massacres continue in others. Most of the victims were from neighbouring countries (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Congo, etc.). There are nearly 8 million immigrants of whom 5 million are Zimbabweans who work (or search for work) in South Africa, particularly in arduous jobs such as mining. Meanwhile others live precariously by starting businesses to survive. But what is more inhumanely terrible in this pogrom is the fact that many victims were there because they were starving in their countries of origin, as in the case of the Zimbabwean survivor quoted by the weekly *Courrier international*:

"*We are starving and our neighbours are our only hope*. (...) *There is no point in working in Zimbabwe. You do not even earn enough to stay in the worst suburbs of Harare (the capital).* (...) *We are willing to take risks in South Africa; this is our life now* (...) *But if we don't do it, we will still die. Bread today costs 400 million Zimbabwean dollars (0.44 euros) and one kilo of meat 2 billion (2.21 euros). There is nothing more than porridge in the shops, and the people who work cannot live on their wages*".[18]

Faced with the horrible murders in 2008 and 2019, the ANC leaders use the same criminal methods against the working class

## The importance of the imperialist factor in the situation

The other factor weighing on the budgets of these two states is their leaders' search for imperialist influence. Moreover, if we talk about the "imperialist question" here, it is above all its effects on the relations between the classes, where the bourgeoisie subjects the working class to an economic war effort at home and to killings abroad. To be clear, the South African and Zimbabwean governments compete with the imperialist powers (large and small) who seek to control the regions of Southern Africa and the Great Lakes, by proclaiming themselves "local gendarmes". Thus, these two were massively involved in the wars that ravaged this area in 1990-2000 which caused more than 8 million deaths. It is with this in mind that Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe embarked on a decade-long war in the DRC (ex- Zaire), where he dispatched some 15,000 men at an exorbitant economic cost estimated at 1 million dollars a day (representing over 5.5% of annual GDP). This disastrous military adventure was undoubtedly an accelerator of the total ruin of the economy of Zimbabwe, a country that until the 1990s was considered the "breadbasket" of Southern Africa. Moreover, among the causes of the deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe we must also emphasize the total embargo imposed by the western imperialist powers against the "dictatorial regime" of Robert Mugabe (who died in 2019). Indeed, he refused to comply with the Western "democratic governance model" by doing everything to cling to the power he had held between 1984 and 2017, when he was "deposed" and replaced by his former right-hand man Emmerson Mnangagwa. And the latter proved himself a worthy heir of Mugabe, wasting no time in carrying out the repressive role of his predecessor against recent movements of struggle against endemic poverty.

Regarding the specific role of South Africa in the imperialist wars in Africa we refer readers to *International Review* nºs 155 and 157. But let us point out that before they came to power, Mandela and his companions were already fully involved in imperialist struggles for influence and then continued, for example, going as far as to dispute with France, in 1990-2000, its influence in Central Africa in the Great Lakes region.

## The return of strikes and other social movements

One of the major characteristics of South Africa since the apartheid era is that, when there are no strikes, social tensions give rise to protests, sometimes to other types of violent clashes. For example, according to police data, the country experienced three riots per day on average between 2009 and 2012. And according to a South African researcher quoted by *Le Monde Diplomatique* this is an increase of 40% compared to the period 2004-2009.This

15. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2019.
16. *Le Monde*, 5 September 2019.
17. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2018.
18. *Courrier International*, May 29, 2008.

situation is probably related to the violent relations that already existed between the colonial empires and the population of this country, well before the official establishment of apartheid, when successive leaders at the head of the South African state always resorted to violence to impose their order – bourgeois order of course.[19] This is amply proven throughout the history of the class struggle in South Africa, in the era of industrial capitalism. Indeed, the working class saw its first deaths (4 miners of British origin) when it launched its first strike at Kimberley, the "diamond capital", in 1884.

For its part, the population, in this case the black majority of the working class, has always been forced to use violence, especially during apartheid, where its human dignity was simply denied on the historical pretext that it belonged to an "inferior race". Thus, in the light of all these factors, we can speak of a "culture of violence" as a component of the relations between the bourgeoisie and the working class in South Africa. And the phenomenon persists and grows today, that is to say under the rule of the ANC.

## Bloody repression of the strike at Marikana in 2012

This movement was preceded by more or less significant strikes, such as that of 2010, by the workers responsible for building the stadiums to host the World Cup that year. A strike was launched by the unions in that sector threatening not to complete the work before the official start of the competition. With this "union blackmail", the striking workers were able to obtain substantial salary increases of 13% to 16%. There was strong discontent throughout the country over the deteriorating living conditions of the population and it is in this context, two years after the final whistle of the World Cup, that the strike erupted in Marikana. From August 10, 2012, the employees of the Marikana pits went on strike to support the lowest paid workers by demanding that the minimum wage be raised to 1250 euros, a demand rejected by the mining employers and the NUM (the largest of the unions affiliated to COSATU).

"*The social tension was palpable since, on August 16, 2012, police killed thirty-four miners (and wounded seventy-eight) on strike in Marikana, a platinum mine near Johannesburg. For the population, what a symbol! The forces of a democratic and multiracial state, led since 1994 by the African National Congress (ANC), fired on demonstrators, as in the days of apartheid; on these workers who constitute its electoral base, the overwhelming black and poor majority of South Africa. In this industrialised country, the only emerging market south of the Sahara, poor households, 62% black and 33% Métis, represent more than twenty-five million people, or half of the country's population, according to figures published at the end of November by the national institutions*.

"*The shock wave is comparable to that of the Sharpeville Massacre, whose memory events in Marikana have awakened. On 21 March 1960, the apartheid regime's police (1948-1991) killed sixty-nine protesters demonstrating in a township against the pass imposed on 'non-whites' to go to the city. When the news of the tragedy arrived in Cape Town, the people of Langa, a black township, reduced the public buildings to ashes.*

"*The same chain reactions occur today. In the wake of Marikana, employees in the mining, transport and agriculture sectors are multiplying wildcat strikes.* (...) *Result: vineyards burned, shops looted and showdowns with the police. All against a background of the strikers' dismissal.* (...) *At Lonmin, the miners won, after six weeks of action, an increase of 22% and a premium of 190 euros.*

"(...) *Today, the black unions, with more than two million members, demand from the government a real social policy and better working conditions for all. But – a South African peculiarity here - they are ... in power. With the South African Communist Party and the ANC, since 1990 they have constituted a 'revolutionary' tripartite alliance that is supposed to work for the transformation of society. Communists and trade unionists represent the left wing of the ANC, which the party is trying to restrain by distributing power. Communist leaders regularly hold ministerial positions, while those of Cosatu sit on the National Executive Committee of the ANC. Their challenge to the ANC's liberal management of the economy ANC loses credibility.*

"(...) *For the first time, in Marikana, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), affiliated to Cosatu and among the largest in the country, has been overwhelmed by social conflict*.[20] *(For a contractor), 'The politicization of social conflicts, which involve the questioning of the ANC or its leaders, scares the big mining groups*.'"[21]

In the tragic events of Marikana we once again witnessed a real class confrontation between the new bourgeoisie in power and the South African working class. Already, without causing much noise, during a strike in 1998-99 the government of Mandela himself had massacred a dozen workers. But the tragedy of Marikana is unprecedented and rich in lessons that we will probably not be able to draw within the framework of this article. But we can say from the outset that the miners who died or were wounded in rising up against the misery imposed by their class enemy deserve a great tribute and salute from their class brothers and sisters everywhere. Especially since at the end of the day none of the perpetrators of this slaughter were sentenced and the ANC president, Jacob Zuma, simply appointed a commission of inquiry that waited two years to make its report that (cynically) simply advocated: "*A criminal investigation under the direction of the prosecution against the police*" which "*points out the responsibilities of Lonmin. On the other hand, it exempts the political leaders of the time*".[22]

This conflict shows us the profound and definitive anchoring of the ANC in the camp of the South African national capital, not only at the level of the state apparatus, but also its individual members. Thus, it has previously been shown (see above) that many ANC leaders are at the head of large fortunes or successful businesses. In the course of the Marikana movement, the miners had to face the interests of big bosses including Doduzane Zuma (son of the former South African head of state), the head of "JLC Mining Services", which is very active in this sector. From then on we can understand better why this boss and company categorically rejected accepting the merits of the strikers' demands by counting first on the police repression and the sabotaging work of unions close to the ANC to overcome the strike. In this conflict we could see the abject and totally hypocritical behaviour of COSATU and the Communist Party, pretending to "support" the strike movement, even as the government of which they are decisive members launched its bloodthirsty dogs on the strikers. In reality, the government's left

19. See the article "Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa: From the birth of capitalism to the eve of the Second World War" in *International Review*, nº 154, which shows (among other examples) that in order to overcome a miners' strike in 1922 the South African government decreed martial law and brought together some 60,000 men equipped with machine guns, cannons, tanks and even aircraft. In the end, 200 workers were killed and thousands more wounded or imprisoned.

20. In fact, the NUM was outflanked by a new independent organisation, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), created on the initiative of Julius Malema. This was a base union which took the lead in the strike in open opposition to the NUM and ANC government. It was very militant, even engaging in armed confrontations with the forces of order. It began life as a group of workers who could no longer tolerate their working conditions but also and above all the complicity between the NUM and the mine bosses; and in this they were massively followed by their mining comrades, even winning over members of the official union.

21. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2018.

22. *Manière de voir*.

was preoccupied above all by the eruption into the movement of a radicalised minority of its union base tending to escape its control:

"*President Jacob Zuma did not move until a few days after the events. And he did not meet the miners, but the leadership of Lonmin. His political foe, 31-year-old Julius Malema, former president of the ANC Youth League, who was expelled from the party in April for 'indiscipline', took the opportunity to occupy the field. Becoming the spokesman of the disappointed base, he sided with the strikers. He accompanied them to court, where they were initially themselves charged with murder under a former apartheid riot law. This law allowed it to return a charge of murder against simple protesters, accusing them of having provoked the security forces. In the face of the outcry, the charge against two hundred and seventy miners was finally lifted and a commission of inquiry appointed. Mr Malema took this opportunity to call yet again for the nationalisation of mines and to denounce collusion between the regime, the black bourgeoisie, unions and 'big capital'*".[23]

Clearly, on one side, we see President Zuma acting without mercy against the strikers, even avoiding meeting them; on the other side, we see this young Malema take advantage of his exclusion from the ANC to present an ultra-radical image with the sole purpose of recuperating the workers outraged and revolted by the attitude of the government forces in this conflict. To do this he pushed for the creation of a new miners' union in radical opposition to the NUM (which is linked to the regime). This explains the highly manoeuvrable and acrobatic attitude of the left wing of the ANC, which simultaneously wanted to assume its governmental responsibilities and preserve its credibility with unionised strikers, particularly its militant base. Fundamentally, this was a division of labour between the leaders of the ANC in order to break the movement in case the deaths would not be enough.

What about the symbolic aspect of this slaughter? Indeed, as noted in the quote above, what a symbol for the population! The forces of a democratic and multiracial state fired on protesters just as in the time of apartheid! As this witness (obviously a survivor of the carnage) describes:

"*I remember one of our guys told us: 'Let's go' by raising his arms in the air, says a witness. A bullet hit him in two fingers. He was hurt. Then he got up and said, 'Men, let's go'. A second time, the cops hit him in the chest, and he fell to his knees. He tried to get up again, and a third bullet hit him in the side. Then, he collapsed, but he was still trying to move ... The man just behind him, who wanted to surrender too, then took a bullet in the head, and collapsed next to the other guy*."[24]

Here it is, the ANC police, facing the working class in struggle, adopting the same method, the same cruelty, as the apartheid regime. Of course, the gangster Zuma has now been replaced by his rival Ramaphosa, but the same anti-working class policies of the ANC continue.

For us, marxist revolutionaries, what the behaviour of the present-day South African leaders in this butchery ultimately shows is that before being black-white-yellow ... the oppressors of the strikers are above all capitalist barbarians defending the interests of the dominant class, and this is why Mandela and his companions were put at the head of the South African state by all the representatives of big capital in the country. One can equally see in this tragic event for the working class another far more symbolic aspect in the former apartheid country: the fact that the police chief who led the bloody operations against the strikers was a black woman. This shows us, once again, that the real divide is not race or gender but class, between the working class (of all colours) and the bourgeois class. And this is true despite all those who claimed (or still believe!) that the leaders of the ANC (Mandela included) would defend the same interests as the (black) South African working class.

As for the latter, it must know that before and after the tragedy of Marikana, it always faces the same enemy, namely the bourgeois class which exploits, beats it and does not hesitate to assassinate it. That's what the current leaders of the ANC do, and that's what Nelson Mandela did when he governed the country himself. Although the latter died in 2014, his legacy is assured and assumed by his successors. Until his death, Mandela was the reference point and the political and "moral" authority of the ANC leaders; likewise he was the icon of all the capitalist regimes on the planet who, moreover, honoured him by awarding him the "Nobel Peace Prize", in addition to other titles like "hero of the anti-apartheid struggle and man of peace and reconciliation of the peoples of South Africa". Consequently, it was this capitalist world (from the representative of North Korea to the President of the United States through the representative of the Vatican) which was present at his funeral to pay him a final tribute for "services rendered".

We now come to the end not only of this article, but also of the series of four articles. It is now necessary to conclude what we wanted to be a "contribution to a history of the workers' movement".

## What balance sheet to draw?

Given the breadth of the questions posed, at least one additional article would be needed to draw all the necessary lessons. We will limit ourselves here to succinctly expounding only a few elements of a balance sheet by trying to highlight the most important.

The starting question was: is there a history of class struggles in South Africa? We think we have highlighted this by delving into the history of capitalism in general and that of South African capitalism in particular. To do this, we immediately sought enlightenment from the revolutionary marxist Rosa Luxemburg on the conditions of the birth of South African capitalism (see *The Accumulation of Capital*), and for the rest we relied for sources on various researchers whose work seems consistent and credible. Capitalism did indeed exist in South Africa as early as the 19th century, and it engendered two historical classes, namely the bourgeoisie and the working class, which have never ceased to clash for more than a century. The problem is that since then we never heard of class struggles, especially because of the monstrous system of apartheid against which Nelson Mandela and his companions fought in the name of the "struggle for national liberation". As we wrote in the first article in the series: "*Mandela's media image veils everything else to the point where the history and struggles of the South African working class before and during apartheid are either completely ignored or distorted by being systematically categorised under the rubric of 'anti-apartheid struggles' or 'national liberation struggles'*".[25]

Readers who have read this entire contribution can see the glaring reality of real class struggles and of many victorious or glorious struggles of the working class in South Africa. In this sense we want to focus more particularly on two highlights of the class struggle led by the South African proletariat: on the one hand, during and against the First World War and, on the other, its decisive struggles at the time of the international recovery of the class struggle in the 1960s-70s, after the long period of counter-revolution.

In the first case, as soon as the 1914-18 war broke out, a minority of the working

23 *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2018.

24. *Manière de voir*.

25. See *International Review*, nº 154 "Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa: From the birth of capitalism to the eve of the Second World War"

class showed its internationalist spirit by agitating and calling for opposition to this slaughter:

"(...) *In 1917, a poster appears on the walls of Johannesburg, convening a meeting for July 19: 'Come and discuss issues of common interest between white and indigenous workers.' This text is published by the International Socialist League (ISL), a revolutionary syndicalist organization influenced by the American IWW* (...) *and formed in 1915 in opposition to the First World War and the racist and conservative policies of the South African Labour Party and craft unions*."[26]

This was an exemplary act of class solidarity in the face of the world's first butchery. This proletarian and internationalist gesture is all the stronger when we also know that this same minority was at the origin of the creation of the truly internationalist Communist Party of South Africa before it was definitively "Stalinised" at the end of the 1920s.

In the second case, the massive struggles in the 1970s and 80s undermined the apartheid system, culminating in the Soweto movement of 1976: "*The events of Soweto in June 1976 were to confirm the political change underway in the country. The youth revolt in the Transvaal combined with the rebirth of the black workers' movement to unleash the major social and political movements of the 1980s. After the strikes of 1973, the clashes of 1976 ended the period of defeat.*"[27]

At a given moment, the level of combativeness and working class consciousness had "tipped the scales" of the balance of forces between the two historical classes. And the bourgeoisie took note of this when it decided to dismantle the system of apartheid, resulting in the reunification of all factions of capital in order to cope with the resurgence of working class struggle. Very concretely, to reach this stage of development of its combativity and class consciousness, the working class had to take control of its struggles by, for example, setting up hundreds of struggle committees (the "civics") to express its unity and its class solidarity during the struggle, to a large extent going beyond the "racial question". These civics, a high-level expression of the Soweto movement, were the culmination of a process of maturation begun in the wake of the massive struggles of the years 1973-74.

To cope with this magnificent workers' struggle, the bourgeoisie was able to rely in particular on the formidable weapon of "base unionism", without ever forgetting for a moment its repressive arsenal.

Although geographically removed from the most experienced and concentrated battalions of the world proletariat in the old capitalist countries, the South African proletariat has demonstrated, in practice, its ability to assume a very important role in the path to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of communism. Certainly, we know that the path will be long and chaotic, and with enormous difficulties. But there is no other.

Lassou (October 2019)

26. Ibid.

27. See *International Review* nº 158, "Contribution to a history of the working class in South Africa: From the Soweto movement of 1976 to the coming to power of the ANCin 1993".

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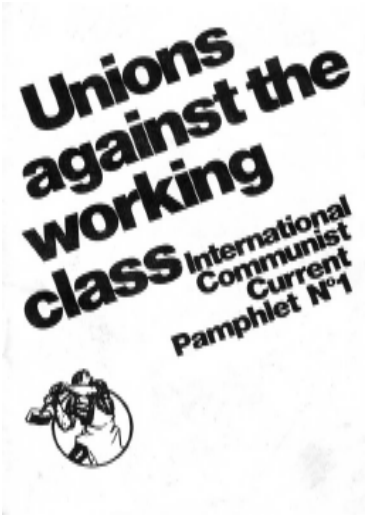


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**The world bourgeoisie against the October revolution (part II)**

# BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

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

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

## OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

## OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1889-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts.*

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