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International Review

War in Ukraine

A giant step into barbarism

Report on imperialist tensions (May 2022)

**The significance and impact of the war
in Ukraine**

**Joint statement of groups of the
international communist left about the
war in Ukraine**

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Contents

War in Ukraine

A giant step into barbarism 1

The war in Ukraine, a giant step into generalised barbarism and chaos

The war's impact on the economic crisis

The war in Ukraine is an imperialist war

The proletariat faced with the war in Ukraine

Report on imperialist tensions (May 2022)

The significance and impact of the war in Ukraine 4

The war in Ukraine marks the brutal acceleration of militarism

The basis of the Ukrainian conflict

Russia's invasion profits the United States in the short term

The long term consequences of the war

Characteristics of the current exacerbation of militarism

The present explosion of military confrontations increases unpredictability

What is the impact on the working class?

Joint statement of groups of the international communist left about the war in Ukraine 11

International leaflet

Capitalism is war! War on capitalism! 13

How can the proletariat overthrow capitalism? 15

Update of the orientation text of 1990

Militarism and decomposition 20

100 years after the foundation of the Communist International:

What lessons can we draw for future combats? (part IV) 26

The Bolshevik Party is no longer what it was

"Lenin's last struggle"

The Bolshevisation of the International

Communism is on the agenda of history

Marc Chirik and the state in the period of transition 29

Periods of transition in history

The proletariat's economic policy

The state as a scourge

Origins of the state and all that

The state as incarnation of alienation

The negation of the negation

The workers' councils of the future

The crushing weight of debt

A weakened and unstable world economy

Workers' resistance - a key factor in the evolution of the situation

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A giant step into barbarism

The war in Ukraine continues to unleash its foul torrent of murder, destruction, rape and suffering, including on refugees trying to escape the fury of the belligerents. The daily images of unrestrained barbarity on the doorstep of Western Europe, the historic centre of capitalism, are so unbearable, so apocalyptic and massive; the stakes on a global scale are so colossal, if only because of the nuclear risks that the conflict poses to humanity, that it is clear that this war represents a remarkable worsening of the global chaos that directly involves and affects all the major imperialist powers.

If the war in Ukraine is the most central and caricatural expression of the dynamic of generalised decay into which capitalism is dragging the world, in particular because it is an event consciously unleashed by the bourgeoisie that will durably and seriously affect the whole of society, it is also part of a convergence of disasters and contradictions that the ruling class is increasingly unable to control:

- the Covid-19 pandemic is far from being under control, as evidenced by the massive and extremely brutal lock-downs in Beijing and Shanghai in China, and the explosion of new “waves” due to new variants in Europe;
- the economic crisis is now combining inflation, the disorganisation of production chains and the ineluctable slide of the world economy towards recession, which had been momentarily contained by the record injection of subsidies by the Federal Reserve and the ECB;
- the number of refugees fleeing barbarism and misery in Africa, Syria, Libya, Latin America, Asia and now Europe has continued to rise dramatically;
- the inability of the bourgeoisie to achieve the objective of limiting global temperature increase to 1.5°C is so obvious that even the most optimistic propagandists no longer believe it is possible.

And we could add many more stigmata, such as the explosion of urban violence, individuals falling back on themselves in the face of poverty, the multiplication of delusional “conspiracy theories”, corruption, etc.

The war in Ukraine, however, marks a new and enormous plunge into barbarism. In 1991, shortly after the fall of the USSR, in his speech to the nation on the Gulf War, Bush senior promised the advent of a “new world order”; the bourgeoisie sought to persuade the exploited that capitalism had

definitively triumphed and bright days lay before us. 30 years later, the promises have vanished, confirming, every day a little more, the stakes that were clearly outlined by the 1st Congress of the Communist International in 1919: “*A new epoch is born, the epoch of the breakdown of capital, its internal disintegration, the epoch of the communist revolution of the proletariat... The old capitalist ‘order’ has ceased to function; its further existence is out of the question. The final outcome of the capitalist mode of production is chaos*”.

The war in Ukraine, a giant step into generalised barbarism and chaos

For those who expected a Blitzkrieg-like invasion, starting with the Russian bourgeoisie itself (or at least Putin’s clique), as was the case with the Crimean offensive in 2014, these four months of war have shown, on the contrary, that the conflict is going to be a long one. The initial failure of the Russian invasion led to the systematic destruction of cities, such as Mariupol, Severodonetsk or now Lyssychansk, reminiscent of the annihilation of cities such as Grozny (Chechnya), Fallujah (Iraq) or Aleppo (Syria). During the Second World War, the destruction of cities became more and more massive and systematic even though the outcome of the conflict was certain: Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, working-class cities in Germany. In the current conflict, it took only a few weeks to see images of enormous destruction and razed cities.

Thus, contrary to those who claim that war would open up a new cycle of capitalist accumulation, thus signifying the possibility for capitalism to find a “solution” to the crisis, reality shows that war is only a destruction of productive forces, as the Communist Left of France already said in 1945: “*War was the indispensable means for capitalism to open up possibilities for*

further development, at a time when these possibilities existed and could only be opened up by means of violence. Likewise, the collapse of the capitalist world having historically exhausted all the possibilities of development, finds in modern war, imperialist war, the expression of this collapse which, without opening up any possibility of further development for production, does nothing but to plunge the productive forces into the abyss and to accumulate ruins after ruins at an accelerated rate”.¹

This destruction beginning with the working population itself. Initial estimates of casualties put the death toll in Ukraine at over 50,000, and the number of refugees at around 6 million; Zelensky speaks of 100 Ukrainian soldiers being killed each day and 500 wounded (most of them crippled). On the Russian side, the losses are higher than those of their entire campaign in Afghanistan. Factories, roads and hospitals are burnt to the ground. According to the Kyiv Faculty of Economics, \$4.5 billion worth of civilian infrastructure is destroyed every week.

The bombing and military occupation near Chernobyl led to fears of radioactive contamination, but the scale of the problem of war and its environmental impact goes far beyond that: “*chemical plants were bombed in a particularly vulnerable country. Ukraine occupies 6% of Europe’s territory, but contains 35% of its biodiversity, with some 150 protected species and many wetlands*”.² In general: “*after the 1918 armistice, tens of tons of shells abandoned by the belligerents continue to release their chemical compounds in the subsoil of the Somme and the Meuse. Millions of mines scattered in Afghanistan or Nigeria permanently contaminate agricultural land and condemn the population to fear and misery, not to mention the atomic arsenal which represents an ecological threat unprecedented in the history of humanity*.”³

1. “Report on the international situation” to the conference of July 1945 of the Gauche Communiste de France, cited in “50 years ago: The real causes of the Second World War”, *International Review* n° 59, 1989.

2. ANCRAGE. French ecological website, not accessible at time of production.

3. “The exorbitant environmental cost of war is still a political blind spot”, *Le Monde* 24/06/22.

The war's impact on the economic crisis

As for the impact of the war on the economic crisis, if in the previous crisis of 2008 many workers lost their jobs and some their homes because they could not pay their mortgages, this war directly raises the prospect of famine in many parts of the world, and not only because of the interruption of trade in grain and seeds to the periphery: the threat of hunger directly concerns the most economically fragile populations in the US and other central countries. The bourgeoisie cannot continue to use debt to compensate for the decline in production that has worsened sharply since the pandemic, especially with sustained high inflation and the pressure of militarism brought on by the war in Ukraine. Biden, who had promised \$30 billion in support for the economy, is now saying, like all the governments in Europe, that “the good times are over”.

Yet they have no qualms about increasing military spending exorbitantly (which will also keep inflation up). Macron has just declared that France has entered “a war economy”. In Germany, Scholz’s social democratic government, with the participation of the Greens, has approved an additional budget of 100 billion euros for rearmament, a historic step not seen since the Second World War. Japan plans to increase its defence budget to 2% of GDP, making it the world’s third largest military spender, behind only China, which has increased its spending by 4.7% since 2020 (\$293 billion this year) and the US (\$801 billion).

Another dimension of the war’s impact on the economic crisis is the acceleration of the process of de-globalisation (even if the war itself is not the cause), primarily through the significant damage done to China’s geostrategic military and commercial project, its “New Silk Road”. The pandemic had already greatly accelerated the disorganisation of world production and of the trend towards “relocalisation”, but the war has dealt a major new blow: trade routes across the Black Sea were severely disrupted and many companies were forced to leave Russia. The national bourgeoisies of the most de-industrialised countries are already presenting the trend towards relocation as an “opportunity” for employment and the national economy, but the World Trade Organisation has already warned of the dangers of such a process: the race to accumulate raw materials in each nation, far from reducing the insecurity of the economy, risks further disrupting supply chains and significantly slowing down world production. In sum,

an increase in every man for himself at the economic level. One need only recall the acts of piracy that states engaged in during the “war of masks” to see this. All of this contributes to the logistical crisis of shortages, producing the apparent paradox that a crisis that originates in widespread overproduction creates shortages of goods. The consequences of the deepening crisis for the working class are already taking the form of the most brutal precariousness and redundancies due to company failures.

It is difficult to know what the state of the pandemic is in Russia and Ukraine. As in 1918 with the so-called “Spanish flu”, the war has certainly considerably worsened the ravages of the infection. However, it is not unreasonable to think that if the bourgeoisie was already unable to contain the pandemic before the war, as witnessed by the fiasco of the Sputnik vaccine, the situation has become totally uncontrollable with the deplorable hygienic conditions imposed by the war and the destruction of the health infrastructure. But the pandemic, although ultimately the product of the deterioration of the system and its sinking into decomposition (which heralds new pandemics in the future), is a phenomenon in the life of capitalism that the ruling class did not consciously decide to unleash. By contrast, war is the result of a conscious decision by the bourgeoisie, its only response to the collapse of capitalism!

The war in Ukraine is an imperialist war

As Rosa Luxemburg had already analysed during the First World War, in the decadence of capitalism, all countries are imperialist. Imperialism is the form taken by capitalism at a particular moment of its evolution, that of its decadence. Each national capital defends its interests tooth and nail on the world stage, even if they do not all have equivalent means at their disposal.

Bourgeois propaganda in Ukraine and in the West denounces the offensive and war crimes of the dictator Putin and, on the Russian side, the “Nazi threat” to Ukraine, just as in the First World War the Allied side called for enlistment against the militarism of the Kaiser, while the opposing camp claimed it was countering the expansionism of the Tsar. During the Second World War, each side also put forward its “legitimate” justifications: anti-fascism against Hitler or the defence of Germany against the crushing weight of war “reparations”.

The bourgeoisie also insists that Ukraine is a small country, a victim of the Russian bear. But behind Ukraine are NATO and

the US, and Russia is also trying to seek support from China. As such, the war between Ukraine and Russia is part of a larger conflict between the USA and its declared challenger, China. At the root of the current war is the United States’ desire to reassert its world hegemony, which has been in decline since the collapse of the Stalinist bloc and, more recently, since Bush Jr.’s fiasco in Iraq in 2003 and the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Echoing the way that Bush (Senior) lured Saddam Hussein into a trap in 1991, the US government reported the mobilisation of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border, but made it clear that if the threat of invasion were to occur, the US would not intervene, as in Crimea in 2014. For its part, the Russian government could not tolerate Ukraine joining NATO, after the integration into the alliance of a large part of its historical sphere of influence (i.e. Poland, Hungary and the Baltic States). It therefore had no choice but to take the American bait with the initial idea of swift action to veto Ukraine’s ambitions. However, US support for Zelensky and its pressure on NATO members to move in the same direction embroiled Russia in a longer than expected war of attrition.

The US government is thus trying to expose the weakness of Russian imperialism, which is not up to the standard of a major world power in the 21st century, and to exhaust it as much as possible. At the same time, the United States has succeeded in imposing its discipline on the European powers, especially in the face of the ambitions towards independence of French imperialism (Macron had declared that “*NATO is brain-dead*”) and Germany, which have had to absorb the decrease in Russian gas deliveries and the closure of the Russian market for their own goods following the sanctions, but also the cost of the rearmament decided under American pressure. But above all, behind the Ukrainian conflict, the US strategic objective is to weaken its main challenger, Chinese imperialism. The US has succeeded in making it difficult for China to support Russia, making the main Asian power appear an unreliable partner. In addition to also blocking off a very important region for the New Silk Road project, America has made a show of force and “international diplomatic strategy” that is a very explicit warning to Beijing.

In sum, the US has once again not hesitated to unleash a level of chaos that heralds even greater storms in the future, in order to defend its sordid imperialist interests and global leadership. The weakening of Russian imperialism, in the long run, could lead to the disintegration of Russia into various small nuclear-armed imperialisms. Similarly, the bringing of the European

powers to heel actually leads to their rearmament, especially Germany, something which has not happened since its defeat in the Second World War. Xi Jinping is seeing his new Silk Roads threatened with blockage and its “strategic ally”, Russia, in deep trouble. The real victim of this war, however, is neither Ukraine, nor Russia, nor China, nor Europe, but the working class, which is being asked, in the West but also all over the world, to make immense sacrifices in the name of the war effort and, at the front, to make the supreme sacrifice of life itself.

The proletariat faced with the war in Ukraine

Since the “Orange Revolution” in 2004, the working class in Ukraine has been trained to take sides in the conflicts between factions of the bourgeoisie, and, since 2014, has been largely mobilised on the front against Russia. Today, workers are sent to the battlefield to serve as cannon fodder, while their families desperately flee the war when they are not slaughtered in cities, hospitals or train stations. The Ukrainian working class is today totally defeated and unable to give a class response to the situation, let alone raise the revolutionary perspective as in Russia or Germany in the First World War.

In Russia, contrary to the speculations of the international press, Putin has not succeeded in imposing a general mobilisation of the population for the war. The proletariat had already avoided being drawn directly into the defence of Russia in the nationalist conflicts that followed the break-up of the former USSR. But the fact that it could not play a conscious role in the collapse of Stalinism in 1990 and got carried away by the democratic campaigns about the “death of communism” weighs on the working class in all the Eastern countries, as the democratic illusions that appeared during the social movement in Poland in 1980 illustrated very clearly. In Russia, the weight of democratism weighs even more heavily now because of the propaganda of the bourgeois factions opposed to Putin’s authoritarianism. If isolated minorities like the KRAS heroically defend an internationalist position against the two belligerent camps, the working class in Russia is not in a position to take the initiative of an anti-war struggle in the immediate situation either, although the concrete situation of the struggles, discussions and awareness of the workers in Russia remains to a large extent a mystery.

All this does not mean, however, that the world proletariat is defeated. Its main battalions in Western Europe, where the

historical and recent experience of the main struggles against capitalism has accumulated, where its minorities defend and develop their revolutionary political programme, have not so far been dragged into the war. Here too, the anti-communist campaign has been a key factor in the decline in the combativity and consciousness of the proletariat, a loss of class identity; although since 2003 we have seen various occasional attempts to develop a combativity, and the emergence of politicised minorities (even if they remain very few in number).

However, the bourgeoisie of the central countries is leading a major ideological campaign to support the Ukrainian struggle against the dictator Putin, notably with the slogan: “Arms for Ukraine”. The combined effects of the fragility of the working class since 1990 and this campaign lead to demobilisation and a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the gravity of the situation. That’s why we shouldn’t expect an immediate working class reaction to the war in these countries either.

Even in the First World War, the workers’ response that ended the war was the consequence of struggles in the factories at the rear against the misery and sacrifices imposed by the war. In the present situation too, the bourgeoisie is demanding sacrifices in the name of war, starting with energy savings and continuing with wage cuts and redundancies. The working class, especially in the central countries, will be forced to fight to defend its living conditions. It is in this struggle that the conditions for the proletariat to regain its identity and its revolutionary perspective will be forged. In the present situation, this struggle will have to lead to an understanding of the relationship between the sacrifices at the rear and the supreme sacrifice of life at the front.

The intervention of revolutionary groups (and the minorities around them) in the class is indispensable. In the First World War, the internationalist conference in Zimmerwald, censored and initially barely known to the class as a whole, represented a beacon for the world proletariat in the midst of the darkness of the battlefields. Although today the revolutionary groups are much less recognised in the class than they were then, and the situation is different (no generalised war and no defeat of the proletariat), the Zimmerwald method and the defence by the left fractions of the tradition and historical principles of the proletariat which social democracy had betrayed are still very relevant today. The defence of proletarian internationalism and of the heritage of the communist left is indeed the one called for by the “Joint

Statement of the groups of the Communist Left” which we are publishing on our website and in this *International Review*.

Report on imperialist tensions (May 2022)

The significance and impact of the war in Ukraine

At the beginning of 2020, the global Covid crisis represented the product, but above all constituted a powerful accelerant, of the decomposition of the capitalist system on different levels: important economic destabilisation, loss of credibility in the apparatus of the state, accentuation of imperialist tensions.

Today the war in Ukraine represents a further step in this intensification through a major characteristic of capitalism's descent into its period of decadence and, in particular, into its phase of decomposition: the exacerbation of militarism.

The brutality of this acceleration was not anticipated in previous reports (cf. The Resolution on the International Situation from the 24th ICC Congress) and, even if the Report on Imperialist Tensions of November 2021 in its last point underlined the expansion of militarism and the war economy (point 4.3) and the extension of chaos, instability and bloody warfare (point 4.1), their brutal acceleration in Europe through the massive invasion of Ukraine still caught the ICC by surprise.

The war in Ukraine marks the brutal acceleration of militarism

We should recall, from a general point of view, that the development of militarism does not solely belong to the present stage of decomposition but is intrinsically linked to the decadence of capitalism: *"In fact militarism and imperialist war constitute the central manifestation of the entry of capitalism into its period of decadence (...) to such an extent that for revolutionaries at the time, imperialism and decadent capitalism became synonymous. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out, since imperialism is not a specific manifestation of capitalism but its mode of existence throughout the new historical period, it is not particular states that are imperialist, but all states. In reality, if militarism, imperialism, and war are identified to such an extent with the period of decadence, it is because the latter corresponds to the fact that capitalist relations of production have become a barrier to the development of the productive forces"*.¹ During the 75 years which separates August 1914 from November 1989, capitalism has plunged humanity into more than ten years of world war and then, for nearly 45 years, the Cold War and "armed coexistence" between the American and Russian blocs, which were concretised by bloody confrontations between the two alliances (Vietnam, Middle East, Angola,

Afghanistan) and by the crazy armaments race which turned out to be fatal for the Eastern Bloc.

In a situation where the bourgeoisie, like the proletariat, became incapable of imposing a solution to the historic crisis of capitalism, the collapse of the Russian Bloc opened up the phase of decomposition, a phase characterised by an all-round explosion of chaos and every man for himself, a product of the break-up of the blocs and the disappearance of the discipline imposed by them. Militarism thus expressed itself through a myriad of barbaric conflicts, often under the form of civil wars, through the explosion of imperialist ambitions and the disintegration of state structures: Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Donbass and Crimea, the Islamic State, Libya, Sudan (North and South), Yemen, Mali... These also tended to come closer to Europe (Yugoslavia, Crimea and Donbass) and impact on it strongly through floods of refugees.

However, the present war in Ukraine doesn't only constitute the continuation of the development of militarism in decomposition as described above but, without doubt, represents an extremely important qualitative deepening of its barbaric manifestations, and this for several reasons:

- it's the first military confrontation of this depth between states unfolding on the doorstep of Europe since 1945, and this is engendering an exodus of millions of refugees towards European countries, to the point where Europe today has become the central theatre of imperialist confrontations;
- this war directly involves the two largest countries in Europe, one of them nuclear-armed and holding other massively destructive weaponry, and the other supported financially and militarily by NATO. This opposition between Russia and NATO tends to remind us of the bloc conflicts of the 1950's to

the 1980's and the nuclear terror that it engendered, but it occurs today in a much more unpredictable context given the absence of established blocs and the bloc discipline that comes along with them (we will return to this below);

- the breadth of the fighting: tens of thousands killed, the systematic destruction of entire towns, the murder of civilians, the hare-brained bombardment of nuclear facilities, the considerable economic consequences for the whole of the planet, underlining both the growing barbarity and irrationality of conflicts which can end up in a catastrophe for humanity.

The basis of the Ukrainian conflict

The development of the war in Ukraine can only be understood by seeing it as the direct product of the two dominant tendencies marking imperialist relations in the present period of decomposition, tendencies which the ICC has highlighted in its preceding reports: on the one hand the struggle of the United States against the irreversible decline of its global hegemony, which has resulted in it stimulating chaos across the globe; and on the other hand, the sharpening of imperialist ambitions all over the place, which has particularly re-animated Russian aggression, fuelled by ambitions to again take up an important place on the imperialist scene, and by a persistent spirit of revenge.

The struggle of the United States against the decline of its hegemony

Since Obama's presidency, the American bourgeoisie has been more and more focused, both from the economic and military point of view, on its principal challenger, China. On this point there is absolute continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations. However, on the means and context of "neutralising" Russia, some divergences have appeared: Trump aimed rather to use the services of Russia against China, but this option came up against a resistance and opposition of large parts of the American bourgeoisie and its state structures (secret services, army, diplomatic corps...), given the shady links tying Trump to a leading Russian faction, but above all because of the distrust

1. "Militarism and Decomposition", *International Review* n° 64, 1991, point 3.

towards an alliance with a country that had been the absolute enemy for 50 years. The strategy of the dominant part of the American bourgeoisie represented today by the Biden administration rather aims to deal a decisive blow to Russia, on a scale that would mean it would no longer be a potential threat to the United States: “*We want Russia so weakened that it will not be able to do things like invade Ukraine*” declared US Minister for Defence, Lloyd Austin on a visit to Kyiv on April 25.² The policy of weakening Russia also allows the United States to launch an indirect warning to China (“this is what will happen if you decide to invade Taiwan”) and to impose a strategic reverse on Russia, since the conflict greatly reduces the military potential of Putin and thus transforms his “alliance” with Xi Jinping into a burden for the latter.

The Ukrainian crisis has offered the Biden administration a prime opportunity to implement, in a Machiavellian manner, such a strategy of the progressive weakening of Russia while catching China in a trap.

Out and out imperialist demands and Russian ambitions

For its part, the dominant faction of the Russian bourgeoisie has made a major error by mixing-up the tactical debacle of the United States in Kabul with a strategic defeat, whereas it was really a question of a fundamental re-positioning of US forces faced with its central adversary, China. Russian imperialism, in trying to accentuate its return to the foreground since the collapse of the USSR, thought the moment opportune to strike a heavy blow by re-conquering Ukraine (or at least large, strategic regions of it). While for Putin this was part of “Historic Russia”, Ukraine was not only increasingly escaping the Russian zone of influence but risked becoming a spearhead of NATO five hundred kilometres from Moscow.

The decision taken, Putin fell into the trap laid by the United States with the latter demonstrating its capacity for Machiavellian deception very similar to the strategy used against Saddam at the time of the first Gulf war and his invasion of Kuwait: shouting from the rooftops that Russia was about to launch a massive invasion of Ukraine while specifying that they would not intervene, “Ukraine not being part of NATO”. Putin could only interpret this as a retreat from the hard line of Biden and much more so given that initially the American response seemed to be globally limited to

the type of retaliatory measures applied after the occupation of Crimea in 2014.

Russia’s invasion profits the United States in the short term

In succeeding to draw Russia into a major war in Ukraine, the Machiavellian manoeuvre of the United States has undeniably allowed it to make important short-term gains on three crucial fronts:

The restoration of NATO

The war has obliged the countries that were showing a certain independence to return to the ranks (whereas this didn’t happen at the time of the invasion of Iraq in 2003). In fact, NATO has been restored in all its glory under American control whereas Trump even thought of withdrawing from it – against the advice of his military. Contesting European “allies” have been called to order: thus, Germany and France have broken or are breaking their commercial links with Russia and in the rush have made military investments that the United States has been demanding from them for 20 years. New countries, such as Sweden and Finland have posed their candidatures to NATO and the EU has even become partially dependent on the United States for energy. In brief, things have gone quite to the contrary of the illusory hopes of Putin in seeing the European states divided on the question of Ukraine.

The weakening of Russia

The war implies a considerable weakening of Russia at the military level but there’s also an economic weakening which will gradually intensify as the war continues. After three months of the “special operation” the results are already dramatic for Russia:

Russian forces have suffered crushing defeats on the ground, with the failures of the lightning offensive on Kyiv which was also aiming at the elimination of the Zelensky regime, at control of air space over Ukraine, at the taking of Kyiv and Kharkov, at the offensive towards Odessa cutting off Ukraine from its maritime outlets, operating in conjunction with the Transnistria Republic. The retreat of Russian troops from the north of Ukraine and a return to more limited objectives over the Donbass and a less ambitious but just as bloody military strategy of wearing down the enemy, kilometre by kilometre, town by town, with intensive artillery bombardments (Mariupol, like Aleppo in Syria) are admissions that the initial objects were too ambitious for the military capacities of Russian imperialism.

The Russian army is now without thou-

sands of tanks and armoured vehicles which are out of action; dozens of helicopters and planes shot down, the flagship of the Black Sea fleet (the Moskva) sunk, and more and more frequent attacks on fuel and armaments depots and logistic centres in Russia itself. Beyond the figures, it’s above all the modernisation of the Russian army which displays its limits with sophisticated armaments malfunctioning, stocks exhausted and organisational chaos in the army, raising problems of provision of food and fuel, which are moreover growing as a result of widespread corruption, and even through sabotage within the army itself.

Russian troops have suffered very heavy losses (according to military analysts): more than 15,000 deaths and 40,000 out of action (deaths, wounded, taken prisoner and... desertions), or about 20% of the forces initially engaged, which is equivalent to Russian losses suffered in 8 years of the 1980’s in Afghanistan. The morale of the soldiers, who don’t know why they have not been greeted as liberators, is low and the war is not popular. Also the Russian bourgeoisie has avoided calling up conscripts (for this reason they call it a “special operation” and not a war) and have massive recourse to mercenaries (Wagner Organisation, the Chechen Kadirovni) or sending out thousands of offers on specialised sites for *kontracktniki* (short-term contracts for military specialists), generally coming from the poorest regions of Russia. If “war crimes” are by definition “collateral effects” of any war, the massacres of civilians and the destruction of entire towns are particularly salient in this war: on the one hand from the fact of the demoralisation and despair existing within the Russian units and on the other hand, because this type of “urban” war is more suited to the Ukrainians, given the disparity of the military power between the protagonists.

However Putin cannot stop the hostilities at this stage because he desperately needs trophies in order to justify the operation domestically and save what’s left of the military prestige of Russia, which will mean still more military, human and economic losses. On the other hand, the more the war is prolonged, the more Russian economic and military power will crumble. The United States, cynically, also has no interest in favouring an end to hostilities, even if it means sacrificing military, civilian and urban centres in Ukraine, because it wants to bleed Russia dry. In this sense, the present campaigns around the defence of a martyred Ukraine, Russian war crimes (Bucha, Kramatorsk, Mariupol...) and the question of “Ukrainian genocide”, campaigns organised by the United States and Britain in particular,

2. The Biden faction also wants Russia to pay for its interference in domestic American politics as, for example, the attempts to manipulate recent presidential elections.

which takes aim at Putin personally (“Putin as a mad-man”; “Russia is not part of our world”), allows them to counter any possibility of negotiation in the short term (sponsored by France and Germany or by Turkey) and have pushed for the maximum weakening of Russia, even encouraging regime change. In short, the carnage can only continue and the barbarity spread, probably for months, even years, and this under a particularly bloody and dangerous form with, for example, the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons.

China put under pressure

Behind Russia, the United States is basically taking aim at China, putting it under pressure because the fundamental objective of the Machiavellian manoeuvre of the United States is really to weaken the Russo-Chinese duo and deliver a warning to China. The latter has acted in a reserved manner to the Russian invasion deploring “*the return to war on the European continent*” and calling for the “*respect of sovereignty*” and for “*territorial integrity in line with the principles of the UNO*”.³ In fact, China has close links with Ukraine (14.4% of its imports and 15.3% of Ukrainian exports) and it has signed a “Strategic Cooperation Agreement” with President Zelensky “*concerning the pivotal role of his country in the EuroAsiatic project of new Silk Roads*”.⁴ But the Ukrainian conflict precisely blocks various branches of the “Silk Road” which, without doubt, constitutes a non-negligible objective of the American manoeuvre.

Since then, far from gaining from the situation generated by the war in Ukraine China has found itself faced with an insoluble dilemma: an already weakened Russia is obliged to ask for help from China, which has however shown itself circumspect and has up to now has openly avoided supporting the “special operation” of its ally, because to aid a weakened Russia also risks weakening China: that would lead to economic reprisals and the loss of commercial routes and markets to Europe and even the United States which are much more important than business with Russia (3% of its imports and 2% of its exports). On the other hand, the collapse of Russian military power and the immense difficulties of its economy will make Russia an ally which will no longer contribute much on its strong point (military expertise) and which on the contrary risks becoming a burden for China.

Also, Beijing, while disapproving of them, applies sanctions in a symbolic manner rather than handicapping Russia:

3. Xi Jinping, 8/3/22.

4. *Le Monde Diplomatique* (LMD), April 2022, p. 9.

the Asiatic Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has suspended operations with Russia and Belarus; China’s largest state refineries have stopped fuel purchases from Russia for fear of retaliatory measures from the West. Similarly, the largest state banks have refused to finance energy agreements with Russia because they are too risky. In the corridors however these same state enterprises buy back on the international markets, using front companies and long-term contracts for cheap stocks of liquefied gas and Russian petrol that nobody wants.

The long term consequences of the war

If, in the short term, the war has been able to favour an atmosphere of bi-polarisation, particularly propagated by the image of a confrontation between an “autocratic” and a “democratic” bloc, fiercely advocated by the United States, this impression must already be reconsidered when the position of China is analysed (cf. the preceding point). And in the long term, the implications of the present hostilities, far from encouraging a stable imperialist regroupment, will accentuate oppositions and tensions between imperialist vultures everywhere.

Despite American opposition, the intensification of everyman for himself

In pushing the Ukrainian conflict to its limits, the USA is stirring up the development of every man for himself, despite the unity temporarily imposed on Europe. At the vote in the UN on the exclusion of Russia from the Council on Human Rights, 24 countries voted against and 52 abstained: India, Brazil, Mexico, Iran but also Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) developing their own imperialist positions without aligning with the United States or Russia and not participating in the boycott of the latter: “*Contrary to the majority of western nations with the United States at their head, the countries of the south adopted a prudent position regarding the armed conflict opposing Moscow to Kyiv. The attitude of the Gulf monarchies, otherwise allied to Washington, is emblematic of this refusal to take part: they denounce both the invasion of Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. A multi-polar world is thus imposed where other than ideological divergences it’s the interests of states which come first*”.⁵ Japan, which has been gearing up its re-armament programme and which has shown itself more aggressive towards Russia and China, clearly affirmed its own imperialist ambitions in refusing to stop its gas pipeline

5. LMD, May 2022, p. 1.

project with Russia. Turkey, a member of NATO, nevertheless pursues its own imperialist objectives in maintaining good relations with Russia (although there are still contentious issues regarding the war in Libya and over the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict). Even European countries have not cut off all contact with Russia (France and Italy are reluctant to close their subsidiaries to Russian-Europe gas pipelines going through Ukraine that are still functioning, even if with some reductions, and providing revenues for both belligerents; Belgium has excluded the diamond business from its boycott) and Hungary looks greedily towards Ukrainian Transcarpathia with its Hungarian minorities. The brutal tendency of each for themselves will be accentuated even more by dire imperialist and economic spin-offs from the war in Ukraine.

Bleeding Russia dry

For the Russian Federation, the consequences of this “special operation” will be heavy and risk constituting a second profound destabilisation after the fragmentation resulting from the implosion of its bloc (1989-1992): on the military level it will probably lose its rank as the number 2 world army; its economy is already weakened and will fall into more and more trouble (a regression of 12% of the economy according to the Russian Minister of Finances, the most important retreat since 1994). The campaigns around war crimes and the setting-up of structures for investigation and judgement at the international level have the aim of judging Putin and his councillors in an international court for “war crimes”, even for “genocide”. Following this, internal tensions between factions of the Russian bourgeoisie can only intensify, while the Putin faction finds itself cornered and fights desperately in order to survive. Some members of the leading faction (cf. Medvedev) are already warning of the consequences: a possible collapse of the Russian Federation and the rise of diverse mini-Russias with unpredictable leaders holding nuclear arms.

China confronts an accumulation of problems

The consequences of the Ukrainian crisis are dangerously destabilising for the main challenger to the United States, China; first of all, concerning the dilemma of its attitude towards Russia faced with the fear of sanctions on its economy, but also the blocking of important arteries of its Silk Road: “*For now, the great work of the Chinese president – silk roads weaving their web up to Europe via Central Asia – is threatened. As are all hopes of seeing tighter links with the European Union as a*

counter-weight to the United States”.⁶ The Russo-Ukrainian conflict comes at a bad time for Xi Jinping some months before the Congress of CCP, in which he will have to have his third mandate renewed, and all the more so given that the pandemic has begun to hit hard again and economic perspectives are mediocre.⁷

The Chinese economy is still suffering badly from the pandemic. In March and April 27 million inhabitants of its industrial and commercial metropole Shanghai, along with large parts of the capital Beijing, were in lock-down. More and more openly the population is showing panic and discontent faced with weeks of inhuman confinement. However, it's difficult for the government to revise its position of “Zero Covid”: (a) because of the extremely low rate of vaccination among older people and the inferior quality of Chinese vaccines faced with present variants; and (b) above all given the political impact that changing this strategy would have on the eve of the 20th Congress of the CCP on the Xi faction which has been the fierce champion of it. Thus, in Shanghai, Xi has imposed a drastic lock-down against the “sabotage” of local cadres, provoking great discontent among the population. He has sent 50,000 police-army specials from Shandong under the responsibility of the central government in order “to take control of the situation”. For Xi, “It's essential that the ‘Zero Covid’ strategy works and that Shanghai is ‘clean’. To fail would raise serious questions, by default and in part at least, from the opposition forces trying to oppose his re-election”.⁸ And this at any cost: experts from the Japanese investment bank, Nomura, calculated that at the beginning of April that 45 Chinese towns, representing 40% of Chinese GDP, were in total or partial lock-down. These drastic measures bring serious problems

6. LMD, April 2022, p. 9.

7. “Xi has only a 50% chance of being re-elected for a third term of presidency because he has made three great errors”, explained a source quoted by British journalist Mark O'Neill, an expert on China living in Hong Kong. “The first is of having ruined Chinese diplomatic relations since 2012. When he came to power, China had good relations with the majority of countries in the world. Now, because of his doing, relations with many countries have been damaged, particularly in the West as well as its allies in Asia. The second is the policy of ‘Zero Covid’ which has severely hit the Chinese economy, which will not reach the growth rate of 5.5% of GDP expected this year. More than 50 towns are now under lock-down and there's no end in sight. The third is the alignment with (Vladimir) Putin. That's had the effect of damaging still more the already bad relations with Europe and North America. Some Chinese businesses are now not signing new contracts with Russian firms because that could bring sanctions. Where is the benefit for China?” (Quoted in “‘Zero Covid’ in China: Xi Jinping is as deaf as a post to the alarm over the economy”, P.A. Donnet, *Asialyst*, 7/5/22).

8. “Zero Covid in Shanghai: the political fight of Xi Jinping”, A. Payette, *Asialyst*, 14/4/22.

for transportation and the ports (at the end of April more than 300 ships at Shanghai were waiting to be unloaded/loaded, triple that of 2020 when the situation was already critical), as well as interruptions in industrial production and national and international supply chains.

Consequently, the slow-down of the economy, accentuated by repeated lock-downs over two years in the political framework of “Zero Covid” and by the war in Ukraine, becomes more manifest with a presently estimated growth of 4.5% of GDP – the Chinese government expected higher growth of 5.5% but the most pessimistic prognoses talk only of 3.5%⁹ – and this in the same year when the People's Congress must meet in order to elect a new president. What is particularly preoccupying the Chinese bourgeoisie are the abysmal economic figures for March: thus, retail sales lowered by 3.5%, unemployment increased by 5.8% (in underestimated official figures) and imports have almost ground to a halt. The building sector, radically protected by the state in order to insulate certain large companies, continues to plunge: the sale of housing has fallen by 26.7%, the most serious since 2020. “According to a report of the Institute of International Finance published at the end of March, ‘financial flows leaving China are unprecedented. The Russian invasion of Ukraine puts Chinese markets in a new light’. This flight is ‘very unusual’ adds the report. Chinese obligations held by foreign investment have fallen by 80.3 billion yuan for the month of February alone, the steepest fall registered since January 15, when statistics begun to be registered. (...) Some western sanctions against the country are resulting in a fall of foreign investment along with a flight of Chinese capital (...) These economic and financial threats are serious because they show the growing distrust of foreign investment towards China”.¹⁰

Finally, the difficulties of the economy weigh heavily on the maintenance of gigantic financial projects of new routes for the Silk Road, otherwise thwarted by the blockage of several of its branches because of the Ukrainian conflict, but also by the growing chaos of decomposition like the destabilisation of Ethiopia which was to have constituted a central “hub” for its African branch, or again, the difficulties of some countries to repay China because of their debts (Sri Lanka, for example).

The United States won't hesitate to accentuate and exploit these problems in its confrontation with Beijing in a difficult context for the Chinese bourgeoisie, which

9. cf. Ibid.

10. “War in Ukraine: the double language of China could cost it dear”, P. A. Donnet, *Asialyst*, 16/4/22.

is subject to stronger pressures on the economic, social and political fronts.

Affirmations of the imperialist ambitions of the European countries despite American pressure

In Europe, the decision by Germany to massively re-arm by doubling its military budget could constitute a major imperialist “fact on the ground” in the medium term. At the beginning of the period of decomposition, our analysis showed that the only pole capable of facing up to the United States was Germany;¹¹ and, even if today the growth of China, which we neglected at the time, has to be taken into account, the massive re-armament of Germany must represent a major factor for future imperialist confrontations in Europe and in the world.

In fact, this re-armament must be understood in the context of the prolongation of the Ukrainian conflict and the more and more clearly expressed dissent between the countries of Eastern Europe (fanatically anti-Russian Poland faced with a Hungary very close to Moscow), but also between European powers (France, Germany, Italy) and the United States regarding its policy of war to the end against Russia. Faced with the possibility of a return to power of the Trump faction in the United States, and the constitution of the “intransigent” pole of United States-Britain-Poland towards Russia, the military autonomy of the European powers through the development of a pole of the European Union outside of NATO is imposed more and more as an imperious necessity.

Intensification by the US bourgeoisie of an aggressive policy which stimulates chaos despite its internal differences

The domestic situation in the United States, in particular the tensions within the bourgeoisie, are themselves a powerful factor of unpredictability. What will be Biden's margin of manoeuvre after the mid-term elections in November and who will be the next president of the United States - maybe Trump again? In fact, Biden's popularity has fallen this last month as consumer prices have soared to levels not seen for four decades, hitting fuel, food, housing and other expenses. “Joe Biden's approval ratings have oscillated around 42.2% according to the poll aggregate of FiveThirtyEight. With the mid-term elections in seven months, we expect more and more elected Democrats to lose their slender control of one, even perhaps both chambers of Congress”.¹² The Europeans know perfectly well that the engagements

11. See “Militarism and Decomposition”, *International Review* n° 64, 1991.

12. *20 Minutes*, 15/4/22.

of Biden and the “return to grace” of NATO is only valid for two years at most.

But whatever faction of the bourgeoisie is in government, it is clear that since the beginning of the period of decomposition (cf. wars in Iraq of 1993 and 2003) it is the United States, in its will to defend its declining supremacy, which is the main force for the extension of chaos through its interventions and manoeuvres: it has created chaos in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and facilitated the birth of both Al Qaida and ISIS. During the autumn of 2021, it consciously stirred up tensions with China over Taiwan with the aim of regrouping other Asiatic powers behind it, but in this case with more mitigated success than in the case of Ukraine. Its policy is no different today, even if its Machiavellian manoeuvres allow it to appear as a peaceful nation opposing Russian aggression. This fomenting of chaos and war by the United States has become the most efficient barrier against the development of China as a challenger: “*This crisis will certainly not be the last chapter of the long battle engaged in by Washington to ensure a dominant position in an unstable world*”.¹³ At the same time the war in Ukraine is used to issue an unambiguous warning to Beijing over an eventual invasion of Taiwan.

Characteristics of the current exacerbation of militarism

The phase of decomposition strongly accentuates a whole series of characteristics of militarism and demands a closer examination of the forms that are taken in present imperialist confrontations.

The irrationality of war takes on hallucinatory dimensions

The absence of all economic motivations or advantages for war was patent at the outset of the decadence of capitalism:

“*War was the indispensable means by which capitalism opened up areas external to itself for development, at a time when such areas existed and could only be opened up through violence. In the same way, the capitalist world, having historically exhausted all possibility of development, finds in modern imperialist war the expression of its collapse which can only engulf the productive forces in an abyss, and accumulate ruin upon ruin...*”¹⁴

The war in Ukraine strikingly illustrates how war has lost not only all economic function but even its advantages on the

strategic level: Russia has launched a war in the name of the defence of Russophones but it has massacred tens of thousands of civilians in Russophone areas while turning these towns and regions into a field of ruins and submitting them to considerable material and structural losses. If, in the best case at the end of the war, it has taken Donbass and the south-east of Ukraine, it will have conquered this field of ruins, a population that hates it and suffered a consequent strategic setback at the level of its ambitions as a great power. As to the United States with its policy aimed at China, it is led here to undertake a policy of “scorched earth”, without economic or strategic gains other than an immeasurable explosion of chaos on the economic, military and political level. The irrationality of war has never been as clear.

This growing irrationality of military confrontations goes hand-in-hand with increasingly irresponsible factions coming to power, as was shown by the adventure of Bush Junior and the “Neo-Cons” in Iraq in 2003, the Trump presidency from 2016 to 2020 or again the Putin faction in Russia. They are the emanation of the exacerbation of militarism and the loss of control of the bourgeoisie over its political apparatus, giving rise to catastrophic adventurism by these factions which are extremely perilous for humanity.

The economy at the service of war

More than ever, an economy at the service of war and the absurd scale of military spending in the midst of an economic crisis and a pandemic is revealed in the clear light of day:

“*Today, armaments crystallise the nec plus ultra of technological perfection. The fabrication of sophisticated systems of destruction has become the symbol of a modern high-performance economy. However, these technological ‘marvels’, which have just shown their murderous efficiency in the Middle East, are, from the standpoint of production, of the economy, a gigantic waste. Weapons, unlike most other commodities, have the particular feature that once produced they are ejected from the productive cycle of capital. They serve neither to enlarge or replace constant capital (unlike machines, for example) nor to renew the labour power of the workers who set this constant capital in motion. Not only do weapons do nothing but destroy - they are already a destruction of capital in themselves, a sterilisation of wealth.*”¹⁵

Since 1996, military expenses in all countries have doubled, showing the tendency towards the rise of militarism.

According to the Stockholm Institute for Peace Studies (SIPRI) \$2 trillion dollars have been spent on armaments, a new record. Of this total, the United States has spent 34%, China 14% and Russia 3%. The war in Ukraine will result in an explosion of military budgets in Europe, while the Covid pandemic and the ecological and economic crises demand massive investments.

Moreover, the economic arm is massively utilised in the service of militarism: already China has threatened Australia with retaliatory economic measures because the country criticised its policy in Hong Kong and Xinjian (the “Uyghur Autonomous Region”) while Algeria has cut gas deliveries to Morocco because of the conflict between them. However, the war in Ukraine takes this type of policy onto another level: the United States and the European countries have used it to take Russia by the throat and the United States threatens retaliatory measures against China if it supports Russia; they are also used to put pressure on Europe (American gas replacing Russian gas). The cancer of militarism weighs more and more on commercial exchanges and the political economy of states.

Local wars, global consequences

The consequences of the war for the economic situation of numerous countries have been dramatic: Russia is a large producer of fertiliser and energy, Brazil depends on this fertiliser for its crops. Ukraine is a major exporter of agricultural products and the price of commodities such as wheat could well explode; some states such as Egypt, Turkey, Tanzania or Mauritania are one hundred per-cent dependent on Russian or Ukrainian wheat and are on the brink of a food crisis; Sri Lanka and Madagascar, already super-indebted, are bankrupt. According to the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Ukrainian crisis poses serious risks: “*As many as 1.7 billion people – one third of whom are already living in poverty – are now highly exposed to disruptions in food, energy and finance systems that risk triggering increases in poverty and hunger*”;¹⁶ the economic and social consequences will be global and incalculable: pauperisation, misery, hunger, revolts...

The present expansion of military confrontations increases unpredictability

The serious acceleration of militarism demands that revolutionaries closely examine the dynamic of current military confrontations and are precise about the challenges

13. LMD, March 2022, page 7.

14. Report of the July 1945 Conference of the Communist Left of France, taken up in the “Report on the Historic Course” adopted at the 3rd ICC Congress, *International Review* n° 18, 3rd quarter, 1979.

15. “Where are we in the crisis: economic crisis and militarism”, *International Review* n° 65, 1991.

16. Transcript of press conference held by the UN Secretary General on April 13, 2022 to launch the report “Global impact of war in Ukraine on food, energy and finance systems”. UN website.

and dangers of the present period. This is not a dissertation on the “sex of angels”, but of understanding all the consequences of this dynamic in order to determine the relations of force, the links between war and class struggle and the dynamic of workers’ struggles today as well as our intervention towards them.

What is the significance of polarisation at the level of imperialist confrontations?

For a dozen years now, a polarisation has effectively developed between the United States and China. Above all, this polarisation is the result of a change of policy of the United States affirmed during the term of the Obama administration:

*“In 2011, the American leadership came to the conclusion that their obsessional war against terrorism – although still popular in Congress and general opinion – had weakened America’s status as a superpower. During a secret meeting in the summer, the administration of Barak Obama decided to take a step back and accord a higher strategic importance to competition with China rather than the war on terror. This new approach dubbed the Asiatic ‘Pivot’ was announced by the American president during the course of a speech given to the Australian parliament in Canberra on November 17 2011.”*¹⁷ This growing understanding of the dangerous challenge to the maintenance of the declining leadership of the United States drove it to re-position its economic and military means in order to confront the main danger, China. The resistance of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the emergence of the Islamic State held back and slowed down the implementation of this policy by the Obama administration, so that it would only be fully deployed with the Trump administration and would be formulated in the “National Defence Strategy” elaborated by the then Defence Minister, James Mattis.

Thus, this tendency towards polarisation essentially comes from the United States and constitutes the present strategy of the declining superpower that has the aim of maintaining its hegemony. After the failure of its position as the “world’s gendarme” it is now concentrating on a policy aiming to counter its most dangerous challenger. For China on the contrary, such a polarisation is highly unsettling for the moment:¹⁸ despite its massive investment in its army, it is well behind in the development of its military equipment and its technological and economic development (the Silk

Road) which requires the maintenance of globalisation and multi-polarity at the moment. As is the case since 1989 with American imperialist policy, the present policy of polarisation can only exacerbate chaos and every man for himself. That is clearly concretised today through the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the massive re-armament of Germany, the growing aggression of Japanese imperialism, the specific position of India, manoeuvres by Turkey, etc.

Does this polarisation bring about a dynamic of stable alliances, even the reconstitution of blocs?

Let’s remind ourselves first of all of the position of the ICC concerning the formation of blocs after 1989: *“Although the formation of blocs appears historically as the consequence of the development of militarism and imperialism, the exacerbation of the latter in the present phase of capitalism’s life paradoxically constitutes a major barrier to the re-formation of a new system of blocs taking the place of the one which has just disappeared”*.¹⁹ To what extent do the current conflicts favour the factors leading to a dynamic towards the constitution of blocs?

(a) The force of arms having become a preponderant factor in order to limit world chaos and to impose itself as the head of the bloc, and with the United States having a military power equivalent to all the other major powers put together, no country today has at its disposal: *“the military potential of the USA to a point where it could set itself up as a rival bloc leader”*,²⁰ which is again illustrated by the war in Ukraine. As *“the scale of conflicts between the blocs, and what is at stake in them takes on an increasingly world-wide and general character (the more gangsters there are to control, the more powerful must be the ‘godfather’ (...)) the more the bourgeoisie’s different fractions tend to tear each other apart, as the crisis sharpens their mutual competition, so the state must be reinforced in order to exercise its authority over them. In the same way, the more the open historic crisis ravages the world economy, so the stronger must be a bloc leader in order to contain and control the tendencies towards the dislocation of its different national components.”*²¹

(b) Given that *“the formation of imperialist blocs corresponds to the need to impose a similar discipline amongst different national bourgeoisies, in order to limit their mutual antagonisms and to draw them together for the supreme con-*

frontation between two military camps”,²² are we seeing a tendency to strengthen this discipline today? The imposition of discipline by the United States on the European states within NATO in the framework of the war in Ukraine is temporary and is already resulting in fissures: Turkey plays “The Lone Ranger”, Hungary has maintained bridges with Russia, Germany drags its feet and France pushes for the constitution of a European pole. For its part, China’s alliance with Russia is of limited scale and the former is very careful not to engage too much alongside Russia, while other countries in the world have demonstrated their reservations about taking a side between the conflicting powers.

In sum, even if there is a push towards polarisation, particularly on the part of the American superpower; even if, in this framework, temporary alliances can be made (United States, Japan, Korea; Turkey-Russia in Syria; China-Russia) or through old alliances being temporarily reactivated (NATO), the tendency in present imperialist confrontations does not indicate a dynamic towards the constitution of two antagonistic blocs, such as we saw before the first and second world wars or at the time of the “Cold War”: *“...in the time after the Cold War, states have had neither friends nor permanent Godfathers but fluctuating, vacillating allies of limited duration.”*²³

The constitution of blocs was a dominant tendency up to the phase of decomposition. In this latter period, the tendency rather, given the aggravated characteristics of this stage, is to the intensification of the dynamic towards war without the constitution of blocs: *“In the new historical period we have entered, and which the Gulf events have confirmed, the world appears as a vast free-for-all, where the tendency of ‘every man for himself’ will operate to the full, and where the alliances between states will be far from having the stability that characterised the imperialist blocs, but will be dominated by the immediate needs of the moment. A world of bloody chaos, where the American policeman will try to maintain a minimum of order by the increasingly massive and brutal use of military force.”*²⁴

Is the present dynamic oriented towards a world war, that’s to say a generalised confrontation between all of the countries regrouped around their respective leaders?

The world wars that we have known in capitalist decadence were all linked to a coalition behind a “boss”, whose architecture was determined well before the

17. LMD, March 22, p. 7.

18. Leaks coming from the Pentagon have revealed that at the end of Trump’s mandate the Chinese military high command secretly contacted the Pentagon in order to find out if there was a danger of a nuclear attack on China by Trump.

19. “Militarism and Decomposition”, 1991, *International Review* n° 64, point 9.

20. Ibid, point 10.

21. Ibid, point 11.

22. Ibid, point 4.

23. LMD, May 2022, p. 8.

24. “Militarism and Decomposition”, point 11.

explosion of conflict which, in the logic of blocs, unfolded into global confrontations: two great alliances confronted each other in 1914: the Entente (the Triple Alliance between Britain, France and Russia, from 1907 and later the Quadruple Alliance after Italy rallied in 1915) faced with the Triple Alliance (between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy founded in 1882, going into 1887 and confirmed in 1891/1896); two axes of alliances confronting each other in 1939: Rome-Berlin-Tokyo (concluded in 1936 and completed by the German-Soviet Pact in August '39) and the alliance between France and Britain combined with two tripartite alliances (France-Britain-Poland and France-Britain-Turkey) as well as a "political entente" between Britain and the United States; finally, the two blocs of the West and the East (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) facing each other between 1945-1989). Moreover, such wars imply a massive mobilisation of enormous armies which the bourgeoisie is avoiding today, the massive mobilisations of populations (partially happening in Ukraine) whereas that the armies of the major imperialisms have been reconfigured since the 1990's (reduction of size, priority to specialised, professional forces and development of technologies linked to military robotics and cybernautics in the case of the American, Chinese, Russian and European armies) and the widespread use of mercenaries and private "contractors".

Doesn't such an analysis underestimate the dangers of wars today?

The analysis laid out above must in no way be of re-assurance regarding war in the period of decomposition despite the absence of a bloc dynamic. In fact, it is vital to be conscious that such a context doesn't at all exclude an important military conflict, and that the danger of a direct military confrontation between the major powers is negligible; quite the contrary: *"The constitution of imperialist blocs is not the origin of militarism and imperialism. The opposite is true: the formation of these blocs is only the extreme consequence (which at certain moments can aggravate the causes), an expression (and not the only one), of decadent capitalism's plunge into militarism and war."*²⁵

Paradoxically, the absence of blocs makes the situation more dangerous inasmuch as conflicts are characterised by a greater unpredictability: *"In announcing that he was placing his forces of dissuasion on alert, the Russian leader, President Vladimir Putin has constrained the major states to update their doctrines, most often inherited from the Cold War. The certainty of mutual annihilation – the acronym*

'MAD' (Mutually Assured Destruction) meaning crazy – is not enough to exclude the hypothesis of so-called 'limited' nuclear strikes with the risk of an uncontrolled free-for-all".²⁶ And again paradoxically, the regroupment around blocs limited the possibilities of them sliding out of control:

- because of the bloc discipline;
- also because of the necessity to inflict a decisive defeat beforehand on the proletariat in the centres of capitalism (cf. the analysis of the historic course in the 1980's).

Thus, even if there is presently no perspective of the constitution of blocs or of a third world war, at the same time, the situation is characterised by greater underlying peril linked to the intensification of each for themselves and the growth of irrationality: the unpredictability of the development of confrontations, the possibility of them getting out of control, which is stronger than in the decades from the '50's to the 1980's, marks the stage of decomposition and constitutes one of the particularly pre-occupying dimensions of this qualitative acceleration of militarism.

What is the impact on the working class?

In conclusion, we must understand that the conditions for war between on the one hand the first and second world wars, and on the other hand those of today, are fundamentally different and, consequently, so are the perspectives for the proletariat. If the slide into barbarity in Ukraine is destructive and brutal, the significance of such conflicts is also more difficult for the working class to understand. Whereas fraternisations were technically and politically possible during the First World War – workers were still capable of communicating through the trenches – that potential doesn't exist today. There are no longer hundreds of thousands of people massed together on the military fronts with possibilities of discussion, massive reactions against their officers and revolt.

For now, we can thus not expect any class reaction on the war front, even if Russian soldiers could desert or refuse to be enlisted for the war in Ukraine. Today the working class hasn't the capacity to offer a class resistance against imperialist war – neither in Ukraine, nor Russia – nor at this time in the West. As to the more general perspectives for the development of class struggle today, they are examined in the Report on the Situation of the Class Struggle.

ICC, 9/5/22

25. Ibid, point 5.

26. LMD, April 2022, page 1.

Joint statement of groups of the international communist left about the war in Ukraine

The organisations of the communist left must mount a united defence of their common heritage of adherence to the principles of proletarian internationalism, especially at a time of great danger for the world's working class. The return of imperialist carnage to Europe in the war in Ukraine is such a time. That's why we publish below, with other signatories from the communist left tradition (and a group with a different trajectory fully supporting the statement), a common statement on the fundamental perspectives for the working class in the face of imperialist war.

Workers have no country! Down with all the imperialist powers! In place of capitalist barbarism: socialism!

The war in Ukraine is being fought according to the conflicting interests of all the different imperialist powers, large and small – not in the interests of the working class, which is a class of international unity. It's a war over strategic territories, for military and economic domination fought overtly and covertly by the warmongers in charge of the US, Russia, the Western European state machines, with the Ukrainian ruling class acting as a by no means innocent pawn on the world imperialist chess board.

The working class, not the Ukrainian state, is the real victim of this war, whether as slaughtered defenceless women and children, starving refugees or conscripted cannon fodder in either army, or in the increasing destitution the effects of the war will bring to workers in all countries.

The capitalist class and their bourgeois mode of production cannot overcome its competitive national divisions that lead to imperialist war. The capitalist system cannot avoid sinking into greater barbarism.

For its part the world's working class cannot avoid developing its struggle against deteriorating wages and living standards. The latest war, the biggest in Europe since 1945, warns of capitalism's future for the world if the working class struggle doesn't lead to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its replacement by the political power of the working class, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The war aims and lies of the different imperialist powers

Russian imperialism wants to reverse the enormous setback it received in 1989 and become a world power again. The US wants to preserve its super power status

and world leadership. The European powers fear Russian expansion but also the crushing domination of the US. Ukraine is looking to ally itself to the most powerful imperialist strong man.

Let's face it, the US and the Western powers have the most convincing lies, and the biggest media lie machine, to justify their real aims in this war - they are supposedly reacting to Russian aggression against small sovereign states, defending democracy against the Kremlin autocracy, upholding human rights in the face of the brutality of Putin.

The stronger imperialist gangsters usually have the better war propaganda, the bigger lie, because they can provoke and manoeuvre their enemies into firing first. But remember the oh-so peaceful performance of these powers recently in the Middle East, in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, how US air power recently flattened the city of Mosul, how the Coalition forces put the Iraqi population to the sword with the false excuse that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Remember further back the countless crimes of these democracies against civilians over the past century whether it be during the 1960s in Vietnam, during the 1950s in Korea, during the Second World War in Hiroshima, Dresden or Hamburg. The Russian outrages against the Ukrainian population are essentially drawn from the same imperialist playbook.

Capitalism has catapulted humanity into the era of permanent imperialist war. It is an illusion to ask it to "stop" war. "Peace" can only be an interlude in war-like capitalism.

The more it sinks into irresolvable crisis the greater the military destruction

capitalism will bring, alongside its growing catastrophes of pollution and plagues. Capitalism is rotten ripe for revolutionary change.

The working class is a sleeping giant

The capitalist system, more and more a system of war and all its horrors, does not currently find any significant class opposition to its rule, so much so that the proletariat suffers the worsening exploitation of its labour power, and the ultimate sacrifices imperialism calls on it to make on the battlefield.

The development of the defence of its class interests, as well as its class consciousness stimulated by the indispensable role of the revolutionary vanguard, conceals an even bigger potential of the working class, the ability to unite as a class to overthrow the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie entirely as it did in Russia in 1917 and threatened to do in Germany and elsewhere at the time. That is, overthrow the system that leads to war. Indeed, the October Revolution, and the insurrections it gave rise to in the other imperialist powers, are a shining example not only of opposition to the war but also of an attack on the power of the bourgeoisie.

Today we are still far from such a revolutionary period. Similarly, the conditions of the proletariat's struggle are different from those that existed at the time of the first imperialist slaughter. On the other hand, what remains the same, in the face of imperialist war, are the fundamental principles of proletarian internationalism and the duty of revolutionary organisations to defend these principles tooth and nail, against the stream when necessary, within the proletariat.

The political tradition that has fought for, and continues to fight for, internationalism against imperialist war

The villages of Zimmerwald and Kienthal in Switzerland became famous as the meeting places of the socialists from both sides in the First World War to begin an international struggle to bring the butchery to an end and denounce the patriotic leaders of the Social Democratic Parties. It was at

these meetings that the Bolsheviks, supported by the Bremen Left and the Dutch Left, brought forward the essential principles of internationalism against imperialist war that are still valid today:

No support of either imperialist camp; the rejection of all pacifist illusions; and the recognition that only the working class and its revolutionary struggle could put an end to the system that is based on the exploitation of labour power and permanently generates imperialist war.

In the 1930s and 1940s it was only the political current now called the Communist Left which held fast to the internationalist principles developed by the Bolsheviks in the First World War. The Italian Left and the Dutch Left actively opposed both sides in the second imperialist world war, rejecting both the fascist and anti-fascist justifications for the slaughter - unlike the other currents which claimed the proletar-

ian revolution, including Trotskyism. In so doing these Communist Lefts refused any support to the imperialism of Stalinist Russia in the conflict.

Today, in the face of the acceleration of imperialist conflict in Europe, the political organisations based on the heritage of the Communist Left continue to hold up the banner of consistent proletarian internationalism, and provide a reference point for those defending working class principles.

That's why organisations and groups of the Communist Left today, small in number and not well known, have decided to issue this common statement, and broadcast as widely as possible the internationalist principles that were forged against the barbarism of two world wars.

No support for any side in the imperialist carnage in Ukraine.

No illusions in pacifism: capitalism can only live through endless wars.

Only the working class can put an end to imperialist war through its class struggle against exploitation leading to the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Workers of the World, Unite!

International Communist Current

Istituto Onorato Damen

Internationalist Voice

Internationalist Communist Perspective (Korea)

06/04/22

Capitalism is war! War on capitalism!

We publish here the leaflet that the ICC began to distribute from 28 February 2022, four days after the Russian offensive began. Its prime responsibility was to reaffirm the principles of proletarian internationalism in the face of the war (no camp to defend); to denounce the lies of the war propaganda and the imperialist nature of all states; and to defend real workers' solidarity through the development of the class struggle all over the world.

We made an effort to render it accessible in the languages spoken where the ICC does not have any militants, and a certain number of contacts have helped us in this work. So it's in no small measure thanks to the translations done by these contacts that the leaflet can be read in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Spanish, Turkish, Dutch, Portuguese, Greek, Russian, Hindi, Farsi, Korean, Japanese, Tagalog, Chinese, Hungarian, Finnish and Arabic. For a certain number of these languages, the leaflet can be downloaded as a PDF from our site to assist those who want to print it and distribute it at meetings or demonstrations.

Europe has entered into war. It is not the first time since the second world butchery of 1939-45. At the beginning of the 1990s, war ravaged the former Yugoslavia, causing 140,000 deaths, with huge mass massacres of civilians, in the name of "ethnic cleansing" as in Srebrenica, in July 1995, where 8,000 men and teenagers were murdered in cold blood. The war that has just broken out with the offensive of the Russian armies against Ukraine is not as deadly for the moment, but no one knows yet how many victims it will ultimately claim. As of now, it is much larger in scale than the war in ex-Yugoslavia. Today, it is not militias or small states that are fighting each other. The current war is between the two largest states in Europe, with populations of 150 million and 45 million respectively, and with huge armies being deployed: 700,000 troops in Russia and over 250,000 in Ukraine.

Moreover, if the great powers had already been involved in the confrontations in the former Yugoslavia, it was in an indirect way, or by participating in "intervention forces", under the aegis of the United Nations. Today, it is not only Ukraine that Russia is confronting, but all the Western countries grouped in NATO which, although they are not directly involved in the fighting, have taken significant economic sanctions against this country at the same time as they have begun to send arms to Ukraine.

Thus, the war that has just begun is a dramatic event of the utmost importance, first and foremost for Europe, but also for the whole world. It has already claimed thousands of lives among soldiers on both sides and among civilians. It has thrown

hundreds of thousands of refugees onto the roads. It will cause further increases in the price of energy and cereals, which will lead to increased cold and hunger, while in most countries of the world, the exploited, the poorest, have already seen their living conditions collapse in the face of inflation. As always, it is the class that produces most of the social wealth, the working class, that will pay the highest price for the warlike actions of the masters of the world.

This war, this tragedy, cannot be separated from the whole world situation of the last two years: the pandemic, the worsening of the economic crisis, the multiplication of ecological catastrophes. It is a clear manifestation of a world sinking into barbarism.

The lies of war propaganda

Every war is accompanied by massive campaigns of lies. In order to make the population, and particularly the exploited class, accept the terrible sacrifices that are asked of them, the sacrifice of their lives for those who are sent to the front, the mourning of their mothers, their partners, their children, the terror of the civilian population, the deprivations and the worsening of exploitation, it is necessary to fill their heads with the ideology of the ruling class.

Putin's lies are crude, and mirror those of the Soviet regime in which he began his career as an officer in the KGB, the political police and spy organisation. He claims to be conducting a "special military operation" to help the people of Donbass who are victims of "genocide" and he

forbids the media, on pain of sanctions, to use the word "war". According to him, he wants to free Ukraine from the "Nazi regime" that rules it. It is true that the Russian-speaking populations of the East are being persecuted by Ukrainian nationalist militias, often nostalgic for the Nazi regime, but there is no genocide.

The lies of Western governments and media are usually more subtle. Not always: the United States and its allies, including the very "democratic" United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and... Ukraine (!) sold us the 2003 intervention in Iraq in the name of the - totally invented - threat of "weapons of mass destruction" in the hands of Saddam Hussein. An intervention that resulted in several hundred thousand deaths and two million refugees among the Iraqi population, and several tens of thousands killed among the coalition soldiers.

Today, the "democratic" leaders and the Western media are feeding us the fable of the fight between the "evil ogre" Putin and the "good little boy" Zelensky. We have known for a long time that Putin is a cynical criminal. Besides, he has the looks to match. Zelensky benefits from not having such a criminal record as Putin and from having been, before entering politics, a popular comic actor (with a large fortune in tax havens as a result). But his comedic talents have now allowed him to enter his new role of warlord with brio, a role which includes forbidding men between 18 and 60 from accompanying their families trying to take refuge abroad, and calling on Ukrainians to be killed for 'the Fatherland', i.e. for the interests of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and oligarchs. Because whatever the colour of the governing parties, whatever the tone of their speeches, all the national states are above all defenders of the interests of the exploiting class, of the national bourgeoisie, both against the exploited and against competition from other national bourgeoisies.

In all war propaganda, each state presents itself as the "victim of aggression" that must defend itself against the "aggressor". But since all states are in reality brigands, it is pointless to ask which brigand fired first in a settlement of accounts. Today, Putin and Russia have fired first, but in the past, NATO, under US tutelage, has integrated into its ranks many countries which, before

the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union, were dominated by Russia. By initiating the war, the brigand Putin aims to recover some of his country's past power, notably by preventing Ukraine from joining NATO.

In reality, since the beginning of the 20th century, permanent war, with all the terrible suffering it engenders, has become inseparable from the capitalist system, a system based on competition between companies and between states, where commercial warfare leads to armed warfare, where the worsening of its economic contradictions, of its crisis, stirs up ever more warlike conflicts. A system based on profit and the fierce exploitation of the producers, in which the workers are forced to pay in blood as well as in sweat.

Since 2015, global military spending has been rising sharply. This war has just brutally accelerated this process. As a symbol of this deadly spiral: Germany has started to deliver arms to Ukraine, a historic first since the Second World War; for the first time, the European Union is also financing the purchase and delivery of arms to Ukraine; and Russian President Vladimir Putin has openly threatened to use nuclear weapons to prove his determination and destructive capabilities.

How can we end war?

No one can predict exactly how the current war will develop, even though Russia has a much stronger army than Ukraine. Today, there are many demonstrations around

the world, and in Russia itself, against Russia's intervention. But it is not these demonstrations that will put an end to the hostilities. History has shown that the only force that can put an end to capitalist war is the exploited class, the proletariat, the direct enemy of the bourgeois class. This was the case when the workers of Russia overthrew the bourgeois state in October 1917 and the workers and soldiers of Germany revolted in November 1918, forcing their government to sign the armistice. If Putin was able to send hundreds of thousands of soldiers to be killed against Ukraine, if many Ukrainians today are ready to give their lives for the "defence of the Fatherland", it is largely because in this part of the world the working class is particularly weak. The collapse in 1989 of the regimes that claimed to be "socialist" or "working class" dealt a very brutal blow to the world working class. This blow affected the workers who had fought hard from 1968 onwards and during the 1970s in countries like France, Italy and the United Kingdom, but even more so those in the so-called "socialist" countries, like those in Poland who fought massively and with great determination in August 1980, forcing the government to renounce repression and meet their demands.

It is not by demonstrating "for peace", it is not by choosing to support one country against another that we can bring real solidarity to the victims of war, the civilian populations and the soldiers of both sides, proletarians in uniform transformed into cannon fodder. The only solidarity consists in denouncing ALL the capitalist states, ALL the parties that call for rallying

behind this or that national flag, ALL those who lure us with the illusion of peace and "good relations" between peoples. And the only solidarity that can have a real impact is the development of massive and conscious workers' struggles everywhere in the world. And in particular, these struggles must become conscious of the fact that they constitute a preparation for the overthrow of the system responsible for the wars and all the barbarity that increasingly threatens humanity: the capitalist system.

Today, the old slogans of the workers' movement, which appeared in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, are more than ever on the agenda: Workers have no fatherland! Workers of all countries, unite!

For the development of the class struggle of the international proletariat!

International Communist Current,
28/2/22

Confronted with war, economic attacks and global chaos

How can the proletariat overthrow capitalism?

The outbreak of war in Ukraine, at the gates of Europe, is a dangerous part of the explosive accumulation of the contradictions of capitalism: ecological disaster, resurgence of pandemics, devastating inflation, wars that are more and more irrational even from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, more and more circumstantial alliances dominated by “every man for himself”, destabilisation of growing parts of the globe, social dislocation and fragmentation, migratory exoduses, etc. In the present situation, as in the First World War, the goal of the working class struggle can only be the overthrow of capitalism on a world scale. The very survival of humanity depends on it.

In the face of the First World War, in the face of bloodletting and enormous economic sacrifices, the working class was able to recover from the betrayal of the Social Democratic parties which had embroiled it in the world conflict. This was not possible in the Second World War, the main detachments of the proletariat having been crushed by the Stalinist counter-revolution, crushed in the defeat of the revolution in Germany and subjected to the rule of fascism, enlisted in the defence of democracy and anti-fascism.

Since the historic resumption of the class struggle in 1968, the proletariat has not suffered such a defeat that the bourgeoisie would be able to make its most concentrated and experienced battalions in the heart of capitalism accept today the attacks resulting from the worsening of the world economic crisis, the economic cost of the wars - in particular in Ukraine - and the reinforcement of militarism all over the world; but also the economic consequences of climatic disruption, the world disorganisation of production, etc.

Not all the fractions of the world proletariat are in the same relation of force against the bourgeoisie. The proletariat in Ukraine, by being mobilised behind the flag of national defence, has suffered a major political defeat, amplified and aggravated by the massacres of the war. The proletariat in Russia, whose situation is not so critical, nevertheless has no means to oppose the war in Ukraine on its class terrain, far from it.

The decisive importance of the Western European proletariat for the future revolution

Capitalism has developed unevenly in the different regions of the world. The same was true for the proletariat which

is the product of this system. Therefore, at the beginning of the 20th century, with the constitution of the world market and the entry of capitalism into its historical crisis, there are considerable disparities between the different fractions of the world proletariat. In the historical heart of capitalism, in Western Europe, where the concentrations of the working class are the oldest, the working class has lived through irreplaceable historical experiences which give its class struggle a potential strength which does not exist in any other country in the world. Not even in the United States, which surpassed the other powers during the 20th century, and even less in China, despite its meteoric rise to rank 2nd in the world in the 21st century.¹ Western Europe, which will be the battleground of the most experienced fractions of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the world, will be decisive for the process of global generalisation of the class struggle.

The very history of the class struggle attests to the decisive role that the Western European proletariat will be called upon to play

What distinguishes the Western European proletariat from the other fractions of the world proletariat relates to historical experience, concentration, historical consciousness, resistance to the mystifications of the bourgeoisie and in particular the democratic mystification.

A reminder of the most “famous” experiences is instructive:

- The Paris Commune, which took place from 18 March to 28 May 1871, was the first time in history that the necessity and possibility of the working class seizing political power was made concrete.²

1. Read our article, “The Western European proletariat at the centre of the generalisation of the class struggle”; *International Review* n° 31, 1982

2. Read our article “On the 140th anniversary of

- The revolutionary wave of 1917-23: it started in Europe but had repercussions throughout the world. Its peak was in Russia with the seizure of power by the proletariat in 1917, but its centre of gravity then shifted to Europe, in particular Germany. In fact, the Russian revolution is the exception that proves the rule, as illustrated by the fact that Lenin stressed a thousand times: it was by a “historical accident” that it fell to the Russians to carry the banner of the revolution for a short period, the stakes of the seizure of power in Germany being decisive for the fate of the world revolution.

- The historical resumption of class struggle in 1968, which marked the end of the counter-revolution, was initiated by the emergence of the French proletariat in May of that year, followed in 1969 by the proletariat in Italy, with this wave of class struggle gradually spreading to different parts of the world, at different levels. It is necessary here to point out the scale and importance of the class struggles waged by the proletariat in Poland in 1971, '76 and '80, which constituted a striking confirmation of the return of the class struggle on a world scale. “*There is absolutely no doubt that the workers of Poland have drawn the lessons of their previous experiences of 1956, 1970 and 1976. Their praxis has revealed the collective reflection of the revolutionary class. Unlike previous struggles, particularly Gdansk, Gdynia and Szczecin in 1970 when street fighting was the most marked although not the only characteristic of the movement, in the 1980 struggle the workers consciously avoided premature confrontations and left no dead. They realised that their force resided above all in the generalisation of the struggle, in organisation and solidarity*”.³

In fact, the struggles in Poland were the culmination of the international resurgence of class struggles opened in 1968 in France. They witnessed a level of self-organisation of struggle not seen since the revolutionary wave of 1917-23, which at first sight seems to invalidate our analysis, which puts at

the Paris Commune”, *International Review* n° 146, 2011.

3. “Mass strikes in Poland 1980: The proletariat opens a new breach”, *International Review* n° 23, 1980.

the heart of the revolutionary perspective the decisive importance of the Western European proletariat. In reality, our analysis was confirmed by the way they were defeated by the world bourgeoisie, with, at the centre of its plan of action against the working class in Poland, the confinement of the Polish proletariat behind the mystification of “free” trade unionism and democratic demands, by means of *“the left and the unions in the west giving political and material aid to the setting up of the Solidarity apparatus (sending funds, printing materials, delegations to teach the new-born union the techniques of sabotaging struggles ...)”*.⁴

The way in which the bourgeoisie overcame this fraction of the world proletariat illustrates the existence of deep weaknesses of the working class, common to all the countries of the former Eastern bloc, expressed by the weight of democratic illusions, and even of religion. These weaknesses remained very much alive after the collapse of the Eastern bloc insofar as, very often, right-wing “authoritarian” regimes replaced the Stalinist totalitarian regimes.

So, the episode of the class struggles in Poland, far from constituting a counter-example to the importance of the Western European proletariat, on the contrary, illustrates it. This is the reason why we think more globally that, for the historical reasons advanced previously, *“... the epicentre of the coming revolutionary earthquake will be in the industrial heart of western Europe, where the best conditions exist for the development of revolutionary consciousness and a revolutionary struggle. The proletariat of this zone will be in the vanguard of the world proletariat.”*⁵

It is also for these reasons that areas like **Japan and North America**, although they meet most of the material conditions necessary for revolution, are not the most favourable for the triggering of the revolutionary process, because of the lack of experience and the ideological backwardness of the proletariat in these countries. This is particularly clear in Japan, but it is also valid, to a certain extent, in North America where the workers’ movement developed as an appendix of the European workers’ movement and with specificities such as the myth of “the frontier”⁶ or, dur-

ing a whole period, the highest standard of living of the working class in the world, ... allowing the bourgeoisie to ensure an ideological hold on the workers much more solid than in Europe.

As for the proletariat in **China**, the most numerous in the world (China being the workshop of the planet), its numbers do not compensate in any way for its inexperience⁷ and its extreme vulnerability (even more so than in the Eastern countries) to all the manoeuvres that the bourgeoisie will use against it, in particular the setting up of “free” trade unions, when the need arises.

The recognition of such differences does not mean that the class struggle, or the activity of revolutionaries, has no meaning in other parts of the world than Western Europe. Indeed, the working class is global, its class struggle exists wherever proletarians and capital face each other. The lessons of the different manifestations of this struggle are valid for the whole working class wherever they take place.⁸

More than ever, and despite the very important difficulties it is currently experiencing and which affect the whole world proletariat, the Western European proletariat holds the key for a world renewal of the class struggle that can take the road to world revolution. For all these reasons, and contrary to what Lenin hastily generalised from the example of the Russian revolution, it is not in the countries where the bourgeoisie is the weakest (the “weakest link in the capitalist chain”) that such a movement is first unleashed, which will then spread to the most developed countries.⁹ In these countries, the proletariat would not only face its own bourgeoisie, but in one form or another the world bourgeoisie would combine to muzzle it.

in the settlement of these regions by populations composed mainly of people of European or African descent - at the expense, of course, of the native Indian tribes. The hope of the Frontier has left a strong mark on ideology in America.

7. The communes of Shanghai and Canton, crushed in blood in 1927 by the Kuomintang with the complicity of the Stalinist Communist International, could only leave minute traces in the memory of the working class. It will take considerable social upheaval for these experiences to become active factors in the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat in China.

8. Like the struggles in Argentina in 1969 (the Cordobazo), in Egypt, in South Africa under both Apartheid and Nelson Mandela...

9. Read our article “The Western European proletariat at the centre of the generalisation of the class struggle”, *International Review* ° 31, 1982.

“Local” wars since the end of the 1960s: a negative confirmation of the particular role of the Western European proletariat

In the late 1960s in the United States, the protests against the Vietnam War and the refusal of many young workers to go and fight for the flag were an indirect harbinger of the opening of a new global course of class struggle marking the end of half a century of counter-revolution.

Since the historic resumption of class struggles in 1968, and throughout the period when the world was divided into two rival imperialist blocs, the reason why the third world war did not happen was because the working class in the main industrialised countries of Europe and in the United States - unbeaten, not ideologically subjugated to the bourgeoisie - was not ready to accept the sacrifices of war, either in the centres of production or at the front.¹⁰

Nevertheless, if the new world dynamic towards decisive class confrontations forbade the bourgeoisie to march towards world war, “local” wars broke out everywhere where the proletariat did not represent a social force capable of obstructing it. These wars pitted professional or mercenary troops in the service of the great powers against each other in countries where the local proletariat not only lacked the strength to oppose them through its own class struggle, but where it found itself enrolled by force or by consent in one or other of the opposing camps. But it is by no means a coincidence that none of these conflicts involved the proletariat under the uniform of the countries of Western Europe.

Since the collapse of the blocs, even more than in the previous period, local wars have been omnipresent, murderous and devastating. But in none of these could the proletariat of the countries of Western Europe be mobilised by the bourgeoisie.

And when these countries directly fought wars, as in ex-Yugoslavia in 1991, it was always professional soldiers who were mobilised, some of whom, it is true, were the sons of proletarians who could not find a way to sell their labour power. But more often than not, and precisely because of this, these troops were confined to the role of so-called “peacekeeping” forces.

It is significant in this respect that in the United States, where the proletariat does not represent the same political force as in Western Europe, the bourgeoisie was able

10. Read our articles “Resolution on the balance of forces between classes”, *International Review* n° 164, 2019 and “Fifty years since May 68: The advances and retreats in the class struggle since 1968”, *International Review* n° 161, 2018.

4. “After the repression in Poland: Perspectives for the world class struggles”, *International Review* n° 29, 1982.

5. “The Western European proletariat at the centre of the generalisation of the class struggle”, *International Review* n° 31, 1982.

6. In American society, “the Frontier” has a specific meaning that refers to its history. Throughout the 19th century, one of the most important aspects of the development of the United States was the westward expansion of industrial capitalism, which resulted

to call on conscript troops (proletarians in uniform) for its war expeditions, albeit with caution and circumspection. Nevertheless, in this country, the trauma of the Vietnam war has not been erased and the population (especially the working class within it) remains sensitive to the sending of troops made up of proletarians in uniform to theatres of operation. The Second Iraq War (2003) was a new warning for the bourgeoisie, which tended to think that the Vietnam syndrome had vanished. After a year of occupation of Iraq by American troops, “*The climate of permanent insecurity among the troops and the ‘body bags’ returning home have significantly cooled the population’s patriotic ardour - which was anyway very relative - even in the heart of ‘Middle America’*”.¹¹

Since then, for Obama (with regard to Syria) and even more so for Trump (everywhere), it is the “no boots on the ground” doctrine that set the limits to American military interventions.

For all the above reasons, it is unimaginable that, in the current situation, a Western European country or countries would go on the offensive as Russia has done in Ukraine.

The proletariat of the East dragooned or impotent in the face of the war in Ukraine

In the same way that we explained the reasons for the non-involvement of the Western European proletariat in military conflicts since the end of the 1960s, it is necessary to understand why the proletariat of certain countries was directly involved in the war, as in Ukraine, or did not oppose it, as in Russia.

The context of the Eastern bloc

In the 1980s, the industrial proletariat of the USSR was one of the largest in the world. The workers of the Donbas in Ukraine led struggles at that time (mid-1980s) that could make one think that the proletariat of the East was taking the initiative. The peak was reached with the struggles in Poland in 1970, 1976 and 1980 which saw the massive mobilisations we mentioned above. In this part of the world, on the other hand, the weight of the counter-revolution embodied by the existence of totalitarian political regimes - albeit rigid and fragile - made the proletariat much more vulnerable to democratic, trade union, nationalist and even religious mystifications.

In the summer of 1989, 500,000 miners from Donbas (Ukraine) and southern Siberia (the USSR still existed and Ukraine was

part of it) fought for their demands on their class terrain in the biggest movement since 1917. But the movement was then marked (as it had been in the case of the struggle in Poland in 1980) by democratic illusions which eventually led to the dead ends of the struggle against totalitarianism, of the demand for “autonomy” of the enterprises so that they could sell the part of the coal not handed over to the state.¹²

Faced with the collapse of the Stalinist bloc, instead of mass class struggles of the proletariat, we saw movements marked by the weight of separatist nationalism towards the USSR and by democratic illusions. The same weaknesses marked the chaos that reigned in the Russian Federation in the 1990s.

One of the most significant elements of the weakness of the proletariat in the East was the incapacity, in the face of the strongest moments of the class struggle as in Poland in 1980, to provoke reflection on the part of minorities allowing them to orient themselves towards the positions of the communist left.

After the collapse of the Eastern bloc

The case of Ukraine

The Ukrainian proletariat is very weakly developed. Indeed, outside the mining basin and the few industrial centres in Kyiv, Kharkov or Dnipropetrovsk, small-scale agriculture predominates. This situation became even more pronounced during the 1990s, as we pointed out in an article published in 2006:

*“According to the census of 1989, when the Ukraine’s level of urbanisation peaked, 33.1% of the republic’s population lived in the countryside. Out of 16 areas of future Orange support (not counting Kiev) only in three was this proportion below 41%. In five oblasts it was between 43-47%, but in eight it exceeded 50%, and in some cases noticeably so (Ternopol oblast 59.2%, Zakarpate 58.9% etc.) In the 1990s the position only worsened: industry was destroyed, the population began to regress on the cultural level, workers had to rely on their vegetable gardens to survive and began to go back to the land, to restore their own social relationships with the villages, where they also have a mass of kinsfolk. So the influence of the rural petty bourgeois atmosphere on them increased immensely.”*¹³

In 1993, after the independence of

12. “Editorial: China, Poland, the Middle East, struggles in Russia and America: Capitalist convulsions and workers’ struggles”, *International Review* n° 59, 1989.

13. “On the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine: The prison of authoritarianism and the trap of democracy”, *International Review* n° 126, 2006.

Ukraine, the workers of the industrial region of Pridneprovie, however, managed to mobilise on their class terrain, forcing the resignation of president Kuchma and the holding of general elections. But, already in 2004, the proletariat was dragged into the employers’ strikes and the struggle between factions of the bourgeoisie in the so-called “Orange Revolution” where the confrontation between the pro-Russian and pro-US option was imposed. Since the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014, this situation has already led to armed clashes which proletarians have been drawn into.

Faced with the current war in Ukraine, there is a mobilisation of the population, including the proletariat. The “defence of the fatherland” has taken precedence over all other considerations.

The case of Russia

The importance of the proletariat in Russia for the world proletariat is greater than that of the proletariat in Ukraine. And if everything we said about the weaknesses of the proletariat in the Eastern countries can be applied to it, it has not however been directly mobilised in the confrontations between factions of the bourgeoisie; even if there is certainly an important weight of democratic illusions, which the arrival of Putin and the imposition of a new totalitarianism have considerably reinforced.

Despite such weaknesses, this proletariat was nevertheless not ready to be mobilised. This is both the cause and the consequence of the disintegration of the Red Army in Afghanistan: “*Moreover, the authorities cannot even count on the loyalty of the ‘Red’ Army. Soldiers from the various national minorities that today are clamouring for independence are less and less inclined to go and get killed to defend continued Russian domination over these same minorities. The Russians themselves are increasingly reluctant to take on this kind of job. This can be seen in demonstrations such as those of 19th January in Krasnodar (southern Russia), whose slogans have shown clearly that the population is not ready to accept a new Afghanistan; as a result of these demonstrations, the authorities were obliged to demobilise the reservists who had been called up only a few days previously.*”¹⁴

In Russia, war does not yet involve the mobilisation of the entire population, and if “replacement” soldiers are recruited from within Russia, it is under the guise of participation in “military manoeuvres”. The very mention of war is censored in the Russian media, which only talks about a

14. “After the collapse of the Eastern bloc, destabilisation and chaos”, *International Review* n° 61, 1990.

11. “No peace for the Middle East”, *International Review* n° 116, 2004.

“special operation” in Ukraine. And contrary to the atmosphere of patriotism in Ukraine, there are no known manifestations of public support for the war in Russia (apart, of course, from official ceremonies orchestrated by the Putin clique).

Nevertheless, for the reasons outlined above, there is currently no possibility of the proletariat in Russia having the strength to end the war on its own, and its future response to the situation remains as yet difficult to predict precisely.

The situation of the Western proletariat facing the economic attacks of the bourgeoisie before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine

During the period from 1968/80 until the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the dislocation of its Western counterpart, the development of the combativity and the reflection of the world proletariat, in the central countries in particular, took place within a dynamic arising from the succession of three waves of struggles, the first two momentarily stopped by the manoeuvres and strategies of the bourgeoisie to face them. The third, for its part, came up against the consequences of the collapse of the Eastern bloc, provoking a deep retreat of the class struggle because of the bourgeoisie’s campaigns on “the death of communism” and also because of the more difficult conditions of the class struggle in the phase of the decomposition¹⁵ of capitalism which had now opened up. Indeed, as we have already highlighted, the decomposition of capitalism profoundly affects the essential dimensions of the class struggle: collective action, solidarity; the need for organisation; the relationships which underpin all life in society which are breaking down more and more; confidence in the future and in one’s own strength; consciousness, lucidity, coherence and unity of thought, the taste for theory.¹⁶

Despite these difficulties, the working class had not disappeared, as illustrated by a number of attempts of the class struggle to break through: 2003 (public sector in

Europe, in France in particular); 2006 (fight against the CPE in France: mobilisation of the young generations of the working class against precariousness); 2011 (mobilisation of the “Indignados” which testifies to the beginnings of a global reflection on the bankruptcy of capitalism); 2019 (France, mobilisation against the pension reform);¹⁷ end of 2021/beginning of 2022 (rise of anger and development of combativity in the United States, in Iran, in Italy, in Korea in spite of the stifling effects of the pandemic).¹⁸

Whatever the difficulties faced by the proletariat throughout this period, especially since 1990, it has not suffered a defeat in the main industrialised countries, which implies that it will be able to take its class struggle to a higher level in the face of the unprecedented wave of attacks that will affect all its fractions more and more severely in all countries of the world, in all sectors.

What path and perspective for the development of the class struggle?

The eruption of war at the gates of Europe once again alerts the world proletariat to what revolutionaries had already pointed out in the face of the First World War: as long as capitalism is not overthrown, humanity is threatened with the worst catastrophes and, ultimately, with extinction. *“Friedrich Engels once said: ‘Capitalist society faces a dilemma, either an advance to socialism or reversion to barbarism.’ What does ‘reversion to barbarism’ mean at the present stage of European civilisation? (...) At this moment one glance about us will show us what a reversion to barbarism in capitalist society means. This world war means a reversion to barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture, sporadically during a modern war and forever, if the period of world wars that has just begun is allowed to take its damnable course to the last ultimate consequence.”*¹⁹ In the present period, the dilemma facing society is more precisely “socialism or the disappearance of humanity”.

This is why the attitude of the revolu-

17. See the articles: “Fifty years since May 68, The advances and retreats of the class struggle since 1968”, *International Review* n° 161, 2018; “Resolution on the balance of forces between classes”, *International Review* n° 164, 2019; “24th ICC Congress: Resolution on the International Situation”, *International Review* n° 167, 2022.

18. International ICC leaflet, “Against the attacks of the ruling class, we need a massive, united struggle!”

19. “The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy”, Rosa Luxemburg, 1915. From *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder Press 1970, p.269.

tionary vanguard towards the First World War must absolutely be a source of inspiration today for the defence of consistent internationalism, which only makes sense in putting forward the need to overthrow capitalism.

Proletarian internationalism is not, as the experience of the collapse of the IInd International in the face of world war has shown, a declaration of intent or a pacifist slogan. Proletarian internationalism is the defence of class war against imperialist war and the defence of the historical tradition of the principles of the workers’ movement, embodied by the Communist Left. The Zimmerwald conference²⁰ - particularly the debates and confrontations of the different positions during this conference and the political clarification that resulted from it - must constitute today a source of inspiration for consistent revolutionaries to assume their responsibilities as much in the regroupment of the authentically proletarian forces as in the open, fraternal and uncompromising confrontation of the divergences that exist between them.

In this sense it is necessary to clarify that the conditions confronted by the proletariat today are different from those of the first world conflict, in order to draw the consequences for the intervention of revolutionaries:

- If the proletariat in Ukraine has suffered a deep defeat and that of Russia is in great difficulty, it is not the case for the proletariat of other countries and in particular the proletariat of Western Europe.
- Nevertheless, all the fractions of the world proletariat were affected by this event, inducing a deep feeling of powerlessness in its ranks. No sooner had the proletariat begun to recover from the staggering effect of the pandemic, than it took a second blow, harder than the first, which inevitably has had and will have consequences for its ability to mobilise in the face of the considerable economic attacks that are coming down on it. Even if strikes are already multiplying, we don’t know how much longer it will take the proletariat to set itself in motion in the face of the deluge of attacks.
- The proletariat will have no choice but to take up the historical path of its class struggle against the consequences of exploitation. It is through these struggles that it will be able to recover the consciousness (lost with the campaigns on the death of communism) of being a distinct class antagonistic to capitalism,

15. Read our article: “Theses: Decomposition, the final phase of capitalist decadence”, *International Review* n° 107, 2001.

16. “Solidarity and collective action are faced with the atomisation of ‘look out for number one’; the need for organisation confronts social decomposition, the disintegration of the relationships which form the basis for all social life; the proletariat’s confidence in the future and in its own strength is constantly sapped by the all-pervasive despair and nihilism within society; consciousness, lucidity, coherent and unified thought, the taste for theory, have a hard time making headway in the midst of the flight into illusions, drugs, sects, mysticism, the rejection or destruction of thought which are characteristic of our epoch.” “Theses: Decomposition, the final phase of capitalist decadence”, *International Review* n° 107, 2001.

20. “Zimmerwald (1915-1917): From war to revolution”, *International Review* n° 44, 1986.

being able to count only on the solidarity of its different parts, on its unity ... that it will find the path of coming to consciousness - opened with May 68 in France and the mobilisations which followed in the world - of the means, the goals and the stakes of its struggle.

The First World War was a factor in raising awareness of the need to overthrow capitalism, and at the same time it was also a factor in mobilisation. Nevertheless, such a mobilisation was only really expressed (in particular the fraternisations, the mobilisations of working women, etc.) when it could be backed up by a powerful movement of the proletariat from the rear, from the workplaces, in defence of its living conditions.

It would be seriously misleading for the proletariat to believe that its fractions in Ukraine or in Russia can today mobilise against the war. This could only lead to an irresponsible overestimation of the possibilities open to the proletariat in these two countries. Moreover, such a slogan in the present world situation would contribute to diverting the world proletariat from its task of overthrowing capitalism by developing its class struggle against the attacks of capitalism in crisis. The latter represents much more favourable conditions for revolution than war, since the bourgeoisie cannot stop the development of its economic crisis while it can put an end to war by concluding a peace deal, and thus disarm the revolutionary dynamic, dividing the proletariat of the victorious and defeated countries, as was the case in the world revolutionary wave of the first post-war period.²¹

- The slogan of “revolutionary defeatism” has the same defect of diverting the world proletariat from the world revolution against capitalism in crisis. Added to this is the defect of advocating different tactics for different national fractions of the proletariat in the face of war. If some of them must wish for the defeat of their own bourgeoisie, in order to hasten the revolutionary process, it cannot be the same for the proletarians of the opposite camp. It is therefore no coincidence that this slogan is so popular with leftists and other imperialist warmongers who exploit an error of Lenin’s which was then quite secondary in the context of his unflinching internationalism.²²

In 1981, the ability of the world bourgeoisie to inflict a defeat on the Polish proletariat by exploiting the democratic and trade union illusions of this fraction of the world proletariat led the ICC to critique Lenin’s theory of the weakest link in the imperialist chain, in which a country with a less developed bourgeoisie has the best possibilities for a victorious revolution. The opposite is true. It will be up to the proletariat of Western Europe to confront the most experienced world fractions of the bourgeoisie. It is on the result of this confrontation that the world revolutionary conflagration will depend.

Silvio, 02-07-2022

*the ‘enemy’ countries were ready to enter into struggle against the war before calling on workers in ‘your’ country to do the same. In support of this position, they put forward the argument that if the workers of one country rose up before those in the opposing countries, they would facilitate the imperialist victory of the latter. Against this conditional ‘internationalism’, Lenin replied very correctly that the working class of any given country had no common interest with ‘its’ bourgeoisie. In particular, he pointed out that the latter’s defeat could only facilitate the workers’ struggle, as had been the case with the Paris Commune (following France’s defeat by Prussia) and the 1905 revolution in Russia (which was beaten in the war with Japan). From this observation he concluded that each proletariat should ‘wish for’ the defeat of ‘its’ bourgeoisie. This last position was already wrong at the time, since it led the revolutionaries of each country to demand for ‘their’ proletariat the most favourable conditions for the proletarian revolution, whereas the revolution had to take place on a world-wide level, and above all in the big advanced countries, which were all involved in the war. However, with Lenin, the weakness of this position never put his intransigent internationalism in question”. “Polemical: the proletarian political milieu faced with the Gulf War”, *International Review* n° 64, 1991.*

21 . See: “Militarism and decomposition (May 2022)”, in this issue PAGE?

22 . “This slogan was put forward by Lenin during the First World War. It was designed to respond to the sophistries of the ‘centrists’, who while being ‘in principle’ against any participation in imperialist war, advised that you should wait until the workers in

Update of the orientation text of 1990

Militarism and decomposition

The ICC adopted the theses on “Decomposition, final phase of the decadence of capitalism” (*International Reviews* n°s 62 and 107) in May 1990, some months after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc which had preceded the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The trap set by the United States for Saddam Hussein, which led him to invade Kuwait at the beginning of August 1990, and the subsequent concentration of American forces in Saudi Arabia, were a first consequence of the disappearance of the Eastern bloc, with the attempt by the American power to close the ranks of the Atlantic Alliance threatened with disintegration because of the disappearance of its Eastern adversary. It was in the aftermath of these events, which prepared the military offensive against Iraq by the main western countries under the leadership of the United States, that the ICC discussed and adopted an orientation text on “Militarism and Decomposition” in October 1990 (*International Review* n° 64) which complements the Theses on Decomposition.

At its 22nd International Congress in 2017, the ICC adopted an update of the theses on decomposition “Report on decomposition today”, *International Review* n° 164, which basically confirmed the text adopted 27 years earlier. Today the war in Ukraine requires us to produce a complementary document on the question of militarism, similar to that of October 1990 of which it constitutes an update. Such a step is all the more necessary given the error that we made in not foreseeing the outbreak of this war which resulted from forgetting the framework of analysis that the ICC had given itself for several decades on the question of war in the period of decadence.

1) Point 1 of the text “Militarism and Decomposition” of 1990 reminds us of the living character of the marxist method and the necessity to constantly confront the analyses that we have been able to make in the past with the new realities that present themselves to us; either by criticising them, confirming them, or modifying them to make them more precise. It’s not necessary to return to this in the present text. On the other hand, faced with erroneous interpretations of the present war in Ukraine made by certain bourgeois “experts”, but also by most of the groups of the proletarian political milieu, it is useful to return

to the foundations of the marxist method regarding the question of war and, more generally, historical materialism.

At the base of this there is the following idea: *“In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness”* (Marx, “Preface to a contribution to the critique of political economy”, 1859). This pre-eminence of the material economic base over other aspects of the life of society has often been the object of a mechanical and reductionist interpretation. It’s a fact that Engels notes and criticises in a letter to Joseph Bloch in September 1890 (and in many other texts) that: *“According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle and its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas - also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their form in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (...) the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself”*.

Clearly, we cannot ask the “experts” of the bourgeoisie to adopt the marxist method. On the other hand, it is sad to note that many organisations that explicitly claim to be marxist and effectively defend this method with regard to the fundamental principles of the workers’ movement, in particular proletarian internationalism, do not follow Engel’s vision of the causes of war, but rather the one he criticises. Thus, regarding the Gulf War of 1990-91, we were able to read the following: *“The United States has brazenly defined ‘American national interest’ that led it to act as that of: guaranteeing the stable supply of oil produced in the Gulf at a reasonable price: the same interest which made it support Iraq against Iran, now leads it to support Saudi Arabia and the petro-monarchs against Iraq”* (leaflet by the Parti Communiste Internationale – *Le Proletaire*). Or again: *“In fact, the crisis in the Gulf is really a crisis of oil and its control. Without cheap petrol, profits will fall. The profits of western capital are threatened and it’s for this reason, and no other, that the United States is preparing a blood-bath in the Middle East...”* (leaflet of the Communist Workers Organisation, section in Britain of the International Communist Tendency). An analysis made by Battaglia Comunista, the section of the ICT in Italy, states: *“Oil, present directly or indirectly in almost all of the productive cycles, has a decisive weight in the process of the formation of monopoly rents and, consequently, the control of its price is of vital importance (...). With an economy clearly showing signs of a recession, a public debt of staggering dimensions, a productive apparatus mired in low productivity faced with European and Japanese competition, the United States cannot in the least allow itself to lose control of these fundamental variables of the whole world economy: the price of oil”*. What has happened in the 30 years since in the Middle East contradicts such an analysis. The different adventures of the United States in this region (like the 2003 war initiated by the Bush Junior Administration) have had an incomparably higher economic cost for the American bourgeoisie than anything relating to the control of oil prices (if indeed it was able to exercise any control due to these wars).

Today, the war in Ukraine has no direct economic objectives; neither for Russia which unleashed hostilities on February

24, 2022, nor for the United States which, for more than two decades, has taken advantage of Russia's weakening following the collapse of its empire in 1989 in order to push the expansion of NATO right up to the borders of that country. If Russia succeeds in establishing control over new areas of Ukraine, it will be faced with huge expenditures in rebuilding the areas that it is currently destroying. Moreover, in time, the economic sanctions put into place by the West will further weaken an already weak economy. On the Western side, these same actions will come at a considerable cost as well, not to mention the military aid to Ukraine which is already in tens of billions of dollars. In fact, the current war is a further illustration of the ICC's analysis of the question of war in the period of capitalism's decadence and especially in the phase of decomposition, which constitutes the culminating point of decadence.

2) From the beginning of the 20th century, the workers' movement has highlighted imperialism and imperialist war as the most significant manifestation of the entry of the capitalist mode of production into its phase of historic decline, its decadence. This transformation of historical period brought about a fundamental change to the causes of the wars. The Communist Left of France has shed light on the specific features of this change:

"In the epoch of ascendant capitalism, wars (whether national, colonial, or of imperial conquest) represented the upward movement of ripening, strengthening and enlarging the capitalist economic system. Capitalist production used war as a continuation by other means of its political economy. Each war was justified and paid its way, by the opening up of a new field for greater expansion, assuring further capitalist development.

"In the epoch of decadent capitalism, war, like peace, expresses this decadence and greatly accelerates it.

"It would be wrong to see war as negative by definition, a destroyer and shackle on the development of society, as opposed to peace, which would appear as the normal and positive course of continued development of production and society. This would be to introduce a moral concept into an objective, economically determined course.

"War was the indispensable means by which capital opened up areas external to itself for development, at a time when such areas existed and could only be opened up through violence. In the same way, the capitalist world, having historically exhausted all possibility of development,

finds in modern imperialist war the expression of its collapse, which can only engulf the productive forces in an abyss, and accumulate ruin upon ruin in an ever-accelerating rhythm, without opening up any possibility of the outward development of production.

"Under capitalism there exists no fundamental opposition between war and peace, but there is a difference between the ascendant and decadent phases of capitalist society, and thus a difference in the function of war (and in the relation of war to peace) in the respective phases.

"While in the first phase, war has the function of assuring an expansion of the market, and so of the production of the means of consumption, in the second phase production is essentially geared to the production of means of destruction, ie to war. The decadence of capitalist society is strikingly expressed by the fact that, whereas in the ascendant period wars served the process of economic development, in the decadent period economic activity is geared essentially to war.

"This does not mean that war has become the aim of capitalist production, since this is always the production of surplus value, but that war becomes the permanent way of life in decadent capitalism." ("Report on the International Situation", July 1945 Conference of the Gauche Communiste de France taken up in "The Report on the Historic course" adopted at the 3rd Congress of the ICC and published in *International Review* n° 18.)

This analysis, formulated in 1945, has been fundamentally valid since, even in the absence of a new world war. Since that time the world has known more than a hundred wars which have caused at least as many deaths as the Second World War; a situation which has continued and even intensified after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the end of the "Cold War", which constituted the first great manifestation of the entry of capitalism into its phase of decomposition. Our 1990 text already announced this: *"Society's general decomposition is the final phase of capitalism's decadence. In this sense, this phase does not call into question the specific characteristics of the decadent period: the historic crisis of the capitalist economy, state capitalism, and the fundamental phenomena of militarism and imperialism. Moreover, in as far as decomposition appears as the culmination of the contradictions into which capitalism has plunged throughout its decadence, the specific characteristics of this period are still further exacerbated in its ultimate phase. (...) Just as the end of Stalinism does not mean the end of the historical tendency towards state capital-*

ism, of which it was one manifestation, so the present disappearance of imperialist blocs does not imply the slightest calling into question of imperialism's grip on social life. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that whereas the end of Stalinism corresponds to the elimination of a particularly aberrant form of state capitalism, the end of the blocs only opens the door to a still more barbaric, aberrant, and chaotic form of imperialism". The war in the Gulf in 1990-91, the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia through the 1990's, the war in Iraq from 2003 which lasted 11 years, in Afghanistan which spread over 20 years and many others even if of lesser importance, notably in Africa, have further confirmed this prediction.

Today the war in Ukraine, at the heart of Europe, is a new illustration of this reality and on a much larger scale. It is an eloquent confirmation of the theses of the ICC on the complete irrationality of war in the decadence of capitalism from the point of view of the global interests of the system (see the text, "The significance and impact of the war in Ukraine", adopted in May, 2022 and published in this issue on page 4).

3) In fact, even if the distinction between the wars of the 19th century and those of the 20th, such as that made in the 1945 text of the GCF, is perfectly valid, even when it says that *"The decadence of capitalist society is strikingly expressed by the fact that, whereas in the ascendant period wars served the process of economic development, in the decadent period economic activity is geared essentially to war"*, one cannot attribute a directly economic cause to each of the wars of the 19th century. For example the Napoleonic Wars had a catastrophic cost for the French bourgeoisie which, in the end, weakened it considerably against the British bourgeoisie, opening the way for the latter towards its position of dominance in the middle of the nineteenth century. The same is true for the war of 1870 between Prussia and France. In the latter case, Marx (in the "First address of the General Council on the Franco-German war") took up the term "dynastic war" used by the French and German workers in order to characterise it. On the German side, the King of Prussia aimed to set up an empire by regrouping around the crown a multitude of small Germanic states which, up to then, had only managed a customs union (Zollverein). The annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was the gift to this marriage. For Napoleon III, the war was fundamentally aimed at strengthening the political structure of the Second Empire, threatened by the industrial development of France. On the Prussian side, beyond the ambitions of the monarch, this war

made it possible to create a political unity of Germany which laid the basis for the full industrial development of the country whereas, on the French side, it was totally reactionary. In fact the example of this war perfectly illustrates the presentation made by Engels of historical materialism. We see the superstructures of society, notably politics and ideology (the form of government and the creation of a national sentiment) playing a very important role in the course of events. At the same time, the economic basis of society is seen to be the ultimate determinant in the realisation of the industrial development of Germany and thus of capitalism as a whole.

In fact, analyses which try to be “materialist” by looking for an economic cause for each war, forget that marxist materialism is also dialectical. And this “forgetfulness” becomes a considerable hindrance to understanding the imperialist conflicts of the current period, which is clearly defined by a considerable reinforcement of militarism in the life of society.

4) The text “Militarism and Decomposition” of 1990 devotes an important part to the place that American power was going to take in the imperialist conflicts in the period opening up: “In the new historical period we have entered, and which the Gulf events have confirmed, the world appears as a vast free-for-all, where the tendency of ‘every man for himself’ will operate to the full, and where the alliances between states will be far from having the stability that characterised the imperialist blocs, but will be dominated by the immediate needs of the moment. A world of bloody chaos, where the American policeman will try to maintain a minimum of order by the increasingly massive and brutal use of military force”. The United States continued to play the role of “World Cop”, in a way, after the collapse of its Cold War rival, as we saw in the former Yugoslavia in particular at the end of the 1990s and above all in the Middle East from the beginning of the 21st century (notably in Afghanistan and Iraq). It has also assumed this role in Europe by integrating new countries into NATO, the military organisation under its control, countries that were previously part of the Warsaw Pact or even of the USSR (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia). The question that was already posed in 1990, with the sharing out of the world between the western and eastern blocs, was that of the establishment of a new division of the world like that at the end of World War 2: “Up to now, during the period of decadence, such a situation where the various imperialist antagonisms are dispersed, where the world (or at least its decisive zones) is not divided up between

two blocs, has never lasted long. The disappearance of the two major imperialist constellations which emerged from World War 2 brings with it the tendency towards the recomposition of two new blocs” (“After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, destabilisation and chaos”, *International Review* n° 61). At the same time, the text pointed out all the obstacles to such a process and particularly the obstacles posed by the decomposition of capitalism: “the tendency to a new share-out of the planet between two military blocs is countered, and may even be definitively compromised, by the increasingly deep and generalised phenomenon of the decomposition of capitalist society as we have already highlighted” (“The decomposition of capitalist society”, *International Review* n° 57). This analysis was developed in the orientation text “Militarism and Decomposition” and, three decades later, the absence of such a carve-up of the world into two military blocs confirms it. The text “The significance and impact of the war in Ukraine”, in this issue (page 4), develops on this subject, largely basing itself on the 1990 text in order to show that the reconstitution of two imperialist blocs sharing the planet between them is still not on the agenda. It may be worthwhile to recall what we wrote in the 1990 text on militarism:

“At the beginning of the decadent period, and even until the first years of World War 2, there could still exist a certain ‘parity’ between the different partners of an imperialist coalition, although it remained necessary for there to be a bloc leader. For example, in World War 1 there did not exist any fundamental disparity at the level of operational military capacity between the three ‘victors’: Great Britain, France and the USA. This situation had already changed considerably by World War 2, when the ‘victors’ were closely dependent on the US, which was already vastly more powerful than its ‘allies’. It was accentuated during the ‘Cold War’ (which has just ended) where each bloc leader, both USA and USSR, held an absolutely crushing superiority over the other countries in the bloc, in particular thanks to their possession of nuclear weapons. This tendency can be explained by the fact that as capitalism plunges further into decadence:

- *“the scale of conflicts between the blocs, and what is at stake in them, takes on an increasingly world-wide and general character (the more gangsters there are to control, the more powerful must be the ‘godfather’);*
- *“weapons systems demand ever more fantastic levels of investment (in particular, only the major powers could devote the necessary resources to the*

development of a complete nuclear arsenal, and to the research into ever more sophisticated armaments);

- *“and above all, the centrifugal tendencies amongst all the states as a result of the exacerbation of national antagonisms, cannot but be accentuated.*

“The same is true of this last factor as of state capitalism: the more the bourgeoisie’s different factions tend to tear each other apart, as the crisis sharpens their mutual competition, so the more the state must be reinforced in order to exercise its authority over them. In the same way, the more the open historic crisis ravages the world economy, so the stronger must be a bloc leader in order to contain and control the tendencies towards the dislocation of its different national components. And it is clear that in the final phase of decadence, the phase of decomposition, this phenomenon cannot but be seriously aggravated. For all these reasons, especially the last, the reconstitution of a new pair of imperialist blocs is not only impossible for a number of years to come, but may very well never take place again: either the revolution, or the destruction of humanity will come first”.

Today this analysis remains entirely valid, but we should note that in the 1990 text we completely missed seeing that China could one day become a new head of a bloc since today it is clear that it is about to become the main rival to the United States. Behind this omission there is a major error of analysis in that we didn’t foresee the possibility that China could become a leading economic power, the condition for a country to assume the role of a leader of an imperialist bloc. Moreover, the Chinese bourgeoisie had understood very well that it would be able to compete with the American bourgeoisie on the military level only if it could provide itself with an economic and technological power capable of supporting its military power, otherwise it could suffer the same fate as the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980’s. It’s for this reason, among others, that while China is increasingly asserting its growing military ambitions (especially in relation to Taiwan), it cannot as yet, or for a long time to come, have any pretensions to forming new imperialist bloc around it.

5) The war in Ukraine has rekindled concerns about a third world war, especially from Putin’s posturing about nuclear weapons. It is important to point out that world war is similar to imperialist blocs. In fact a world war is the ultimate phase in the constitution of imperialist blocs. More precisely, it is because of the existence of constituted imperialist blocs that a war which, at the outset, concerns only a limited number of

countries, degenerates, through the playing out of alliances, into a generalised conflagration. Thus, the outbreak of World War I, whose deep historical causes stemmed from the sharpening of imperialist rivalries between European powers, took the form of a chain of situations in which the various allies gradually entered the conflict: Austria-Hungary, with the support of its ally Germany, wanted to take advantage of the assassination of the heir to the throne in Sarajevo on the 28th June 1914 to bring the Kingdom of Serbia to heel, accusing it of stirring up the nationalism of the Serbian minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Serbia immediately received the support of its Russian ally, which had also formed the “Triple Entente” with Great Britain and France. At the beginning of August 1914, all these countries went to war against each other, followed by other countries such as Japan and Italy in 1915 and the United States in 1917. Similarly, in September 1939, when Germany attacked Poland, it was the existence of a treaty dating from 1920 between Poland, the United Kingdom and France that led these two countries to declare war on Germany, even though their bourgeoisies had no particular desire for such a conflict, as demonstrated a year earlier by their signing of the Munich Agreement. The conflict between the three main European powers quickly spread to the whole world. Today, Article 5 of NATO’s Charter states that an attack on one of its members is considered an attack on all its allies. This is why countries that belonged to the Warsaw Pact before 1989 (and even to the Soviet Union, such as the Baltic States) enthusiastically joined NATO; it was a guarantee that neighbouring Russia would not attack them. Now, for the same reason, Finland and Sweden are joining after decades of “neutrality”. This is also why Putin could not accept a situation where the Ukrainian state was threatening to join NATO, as it was written into its constitution.

Thus, the absence of a division of the world into two blocs means that a third world war is not on the agenda at present and may never be again. However, it would be irresponsible to underestimate the gravity of the global situation. As we wrote in January 1990:

“This is why in our analyses, we must clearly highlight the fact that while the proletarian solution - the communist revolution - is alone able to oppose the destruction of humanity (the only ‘answer’ that the bourgeoisie is capable of giving to the crisis), this destruction need not necessarily be the result of a third world war. It could also come about as a logical and extreme conclusion of the process of decomposition.

“For most of the 20th century, the historic alternative of ‘socialism or barbarism’ highlighted by marxism has taken the form of ‘socialism or imperialist world war’, and in recent decades, thanks to the development of nuclear weapons, the still more terrifying ‘socialism or the destruction of humanity’. This perspective remains absolutely valid following the Eastern bloc’s collapse. But we must be clear that this destruction may be the result either of imperialist world war, OR of society’s decomposition”.

In the three decades since the adoption of this document by the ICC, events have clearly shown that even outside of a third world war, the four horsemen of the apocalypse that threaten the survival of humanity today are “ecological disasters, epidemics, famines, and local wars”.

6) The orientation text “Militarism and Decomposition” concluded with a section on “The proletariat and imperialist war”. Given the importance of this question, it’s worth quoting large extracts from this part rather than paraphrasing them:

“More than ever then, the question of war remains central to the life of capitalism. Consequently, it is more than ever fundamental for the working class. Obviously, this question’s importance is not new. It was already central before World War I (as the international congresses of Stuttgart (1907) and Basel (1912) highlighted). It became still more decisive during the first imperialist butchery (with the combat of Lenin, Luxemburg, and Liebknecht, and the revolutions in Germany and Russia). Its importance remained unchanged throughout the inter-war period, in particular during the Spanish Civil war; not to mention of course its importance during the greatest holocaust of the century between 1939-45. (...) In fact, since the beginning of the (20th) century, war has been the most decisive question that the proletariat and its revolutionary minorities have had to confront, much more so than the trade union or parliamentary questions for example. It could not be otherwise, in that war is the most concentrated form of decadent capitalism’s barbarity, which expresses its death-agony and the threat that hangs over humanity’s survival as a result.

“In the present period, where the barbarity of war will, far more than in previous decades, become a permanent and omnipresent element of the world situation (whether Bush and Mitterrand with their prophecies of a ‘new order of peace’ like it or not), involving more and more the developed countries (limited only by the proletariat in these countries), the question of war is still more essential for the working class. The ICC has long

insisted that, contrary to the past, the development of a new revolutionary wave will come not from a war but from the aggravation of the economic crisis. This analysis remains entirely valid: working class mobilisation, the starting point for large-scale class combats, will come from economic attacks. In the same way, at the level of consciousness, the aggravation of the crisis will be a fundamental factor in revealing the historical dead-end of the capitalist mode of production. But on this same level of consciousness, the question of war is once again destined to play a part of the first order:

- *“by highlighting the fundamental consequences of this historical dead-end: the destruction of humanity,*
- *“by constituting the only objective consequence of the crisis, decadence and decomposition that the proletariat can today set a limit to (unlike any of the other manifestations of decomposition), to the extent that in the central countries it is not at present enrolled under the flags of nationalism (Point 13).*

“It is true that the war can be used against the working class much more easily than the crisis itself, and economic attacks:

- *“it can encourage the development of pacifism;*
- *“it can give the proletariat the feeling of impotence, allowing the bourgeoisie to carry out its economic attacks” (Point 14).*

Today, the war in Ukraine effectively arouses feelings of impotence inside the proletariat, when it is not, as in Ukraine and also, partly, in Russia, leading to a popular mobilisation and the triumph of chauvinism. In Western countries, it even promotes a certain strengthening of democratic ideology thanks to the torrents of propaganda broadcast by the mainstream media in which we are seeing a confrontation between “evil”, the “dictator” (Putin) on the one hand and “good”, the “democrat” (Zelensky and his Western supporters) on the other. Such propaganda was obviously less effective in 2003 when the “boss” of the “Great American Democracy”, Bush Junior, did the same thing as Putin in launching war against Iraq (the use of the “big lie”, violation of UN “international law”, the use of “forbidden” weapons, bombing of civilian populations, “war crimes”, etc).

That being said, it is important to bear in mind the analysis that the ICC has developed around the question of the “weakest link” putting forward the differences between the proletariat of the central

countries, and particularly those of Western Europe, and those of the countries of the periphery and of the former “socialist” bloc (see in particular our articles “The proletariat of Western Europe at the centre of the generalisation of the class struggle; critique of the theory of the ‘Weakest Link’” in *International Review* n° 31, and “Debate: On the critique of the theory of the ‘Weakest Link’” in *International Review* n° 37). The war between Russia and Ukraine underlines the great political weakness of the proletariat in these countries. The current war will also have a negative political impact on the proletariat of the central countries but it does not mean that the resurgence of democratic ideology from which it suffers, will paralyse it definitively. In particular, it is already feeling the consequences of this war through the economic attacks accompanying the dramatic rise in inflation (which had begun before the outbreak of the war but which the latter is accentuating). It will necessarily have to take up the path of class struggle against these attacks.

“In the present historical situation, our intervention within the class is determined, apart of course from the serious aggravation of the economic crisis and the resulting attacks against the whole class, by:

- *“the fundamental importance of the question of war;*
- *“the decisive role of revolutionaries in the class coming to consciousness of the gravity of what is at stake today.*

“It is therefore necessary that this question figure constantly at the forefront of our press. And in periods like today, where this question is at the forefront of international events, we must profit from the workers’ particular sensitivity to it by giving it special emphasis and priority.

“In particular, the revolutionary organisations will have to ensure that they:

- *“denounce with the utmost virulence the repugnant hypocrisy of the leftists who, in the name of ‘internationalism’ and the ‘struggle against imperialism’, actually call for support to one of the imperialist camps;*
- *“denounce the pacifist campaigns which constitute a privileged means to demobilise the working class in its struggle against capitalism by dragging it on the rotten ground of interclassism;*
- *“emphasise the full seriousness of what is at stake in the present period, including a full understanding of all the implications of the considerable upheavals that the world has just undergone, and particularly the period of chaos into which it has entered.” (Ibid. point 15)*

7) These orientations put forward more than 30 years ago remain entirely valid today. But, in our propaganda in the face of imperialist war, it is also necessary to recall our analysis of the conditions for the generalisation of revolutionary struggles, an analysis developed in particular in our 1981 text “The historical conditions for the generalisation of the working class struggle” in *International Review* n° 26. For decades, revolutionaries, by basing themselves on the examples of the Paris Commune (which followed the Franco-Prussian war), the 1905 revolution in Russia (during the Russo-Japanese war), and of 1917 in this same country and 1918 in Germany, considered that imperialist war created the best conditions for the proletarian revolution, or even that this could only arise from a world war. This is an analysis that is still widespread among the groups of the Communist Left, which partly explains their inability to understand the question of the historical course. Only the ICC has clearly questioned this analysis and returned to the “classical” analysis that Marx and Engels developed in their lifetime (and in part by Rosa Luxemburg), which held that the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat would arise from the economic collapse of capitalism and not from the war between capitalist states.

We can summarise the arguments put forward in support of our analysis as follows:

a) If within a country the war provokes a massive response from the proletariat, the bourgeoisie of that country can find a way to undermine such a response by putting an end to its hostile actions and exiting from the war. This is what happened in November 1918 in Germany where the bourgeoisie, conscious of the revolutionary events in Russia, was quick to sign the armistice with the Entente countries a few days after the sailors’ insurrection in the Baltic. By contrast, no bourgeoisie would be able to overcome and end the economic convulsions that would be the cause of massive and generalised struggles of the proletariat.

b) *“...the war produced victors as well as vanquished. In the defeated countries, as well as revolutionary anger against the bourgeoisie, there was a desire for revenge produced in the general population. This backward tendency penetrated even into the ranks of revolutionaries, as is witnessed by the tendency in the KAPD which advocated national-communism, and the struggle against the Treaty of Versailles which was to become the axis of the KPD’s propaganda. Worse still was the effect produced amongst the workers in the victorious countries. As the aftermath of the First World War*

had already shown, and still more so the Second, what prevailed was a spirit of lassitude if not of chauvinistic delirium pure and simple...” (Ibid)

c) The bourgeoisie has learnt the lessons of World War I and the revolutionary wave it provoked. On the one hand, it learnt that it was necessary to ensure a profound political defeat of the proletariat in the central countries before engaging in World War 2. It achieved this with the establishment of Nazi terror on the German side and anti-fascist mobilisations on the Allied side. On the other hand, the ruling class took multiple measures to prevent or nip in the bud any proletarian upsurge during or at the end of the war, particularly in the defeated countries. *“In Italy where the danger was greatest the bourgeoisie (...) lost no time changing its regime and after that its alliance. In autumn ’43 Italy was divided in two; the south was in the hands of the Allies, the rest was occupied by the Nazis. On the advice of Churchill (‘Italy must be left to stew in its own juice’) the Allies delayed their advance towards the north and so achieved two things: on the one hand they left the job of repressing the proletarian movement to the German army; on the other they gave the ‘anti-fascist’ forces the task of diverting the movement from the terrain of the anti-capitalist struggle to that of the anti-fascist struggle. (...) In Germany... the international bourgeoisie acted systematically to avoid a repetition of events similar to those of 1918-19. In the first place shortly before the end of the war the Allies carried out the mass extermination of the population of the workers’ quarters by means of the unprecedented bombardment of large cities such as Hamburg or Dresden. On 13th February 1945, 135,000 people (twice as many as at Hiroshima) perished in the bombing. As military objectives they were worthless (moreover the German army was already thoroughly routed): in reality their aim was to terrorise the working class and prevent it from organising itself in any way. Secondly the Allies rejected outright the possibility of an armistice on the grounds that they had not occupied the whole of German territory. They were anxious to administer this territory directly as they were aware of the danger that the defeated German bourgeoisie would be unable to control the situation on its own. Lastly once the latter had capitulated, and in close collaboration with them, the Allies hung onto their war prisoners for many months in order to avoid the explosive mix that might have resulted if they had encountered the civilian population. In Poland during the second half of 1944 the Red Army too left it to the Nazi forces to carry out the dirty work of massacring the*

insurgent workers in Warsaw: for months the Red Army waited a few kilometres away from the city while the German troops crushed the revolt. The same thing happened in Budapest at the beginning of 1945" ("1943: The Italian proletariat opposes the sacrifices demanded for the war", *International Review* n° 75).

d) The revolutionary emergence of the proletariat during World War 1 was favoured by the characteristics of this war: the predominance of confrontations between foot-soldiers and trench warfare that facilitated fraternisation between soldiers of the two camps who were for long periods only a few metres apart from each other. The Second World War did not take the form of trench warfare; it was marked by the massive use of mechanical and technological means, particularly armour and aviation, a trend that has only become more pronounced since then as states increasingly call on professional armies capable of using increasingly sophisticated weapons, which greatly limits the possibilities of direct fraternisation between combatants on both sides. And last but not least, a third world war would at some stage call on nuclear weapons, which obviously radically settles the question of the possibility of a proletarian upsurge within it.

8) In the past we have criticised the slogan of "revolutionary defeatism". This slogan was put forward during the First World War, notably by Lenin, and was based on a fundamentally internationalist concern: the denunciation of the lies spread by the social-chauvinists who claimed that it was necessary for their country to gain a victory before allowing the proletarians of that country to engage in the struggle for socialism. In the face of these lies, the internationalists pointed out that it was not the victory of a country that favoured the struggle of the proletariat of that country against their bourgeoisie but, on the contrary, its defeat (as illustrated by the examples of the Paris Commune after the defeat by Prussia and of the 1905 Revolution following the failure of Russia's war against Japan). Subsequently, this slogan of "revolutionary defeatism" was interpreted as the wish of the proletariat of each country to see its own bourgeoisie defeated in order to favour the fight for its overthrow, which obviously turns its back on a true internationalism. In reality, Lenin himself (who in 1905 had hailed Russia's defeat by Japan) first of all put forward the slogan "turn the imperialist war into a civil war" which constituted a concretisation of the amendment which, together with Rosa Luxemburg and Martov, he had presented and adopted at the Stuttgart Congress of the Socialist International in 1907: "*In case war breaks out nevertheless* [the socialist

parties] *have the duty to intercede to bring it to a prompt end and to use with all their strength the economic and political crisis created by the war to stir up the deepest popular strata and precipitate the fall of capitalist domination*".

The revolution in Russia in 1917 was a striking concretisation of the slogan "transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war": the proletarians turned against their exploiters the weapons the latter had given them in order to massacre their class brothers in other countries. This being said, as we have seen above, even if it is not excluded that soldiers could still turn their weapons against their officers (during the Vietnam War, there were cases where American soldiers "accidentally" shot their superiors or lobbed fragmentation bombs into the officer's tents), such facts could only be of very limited scale and could not constitute in any way the basis of a revolutionary offensive. For this reason, in our propaganda, we should not only not put forward the slogan of "revolutionary defeatism" but also that of "turning the imperialist war into a civil war".

More generally, it is the responsibility of the groups of the Communist Left to take stock of the position of revolutionaries in the face of war in the past by highlighting what remains valid (the defence of internationalist principles) and what is no longer valid (the "tactical" slogans). In this sense, if the slogan of "turning the imperialist war into a civil war" cannot henceforth constitute a realistic perspective, it is necessary on the other hand to underline the validity of the amendment adopted at the Stuttgart Congress in 1907 and particularly the idea that revolutionaries "*have the duty to use with all their strength the economic and political crisis created by the war to agitate the deepest popular strata and to precipitate the fall of capitalist domination*". This slogan is obviously not immediately feasible given the present weak situation of the proletariat, but it remains a beacon for communist intervention in the class.

ICC, May 2022

Continued from page 35

trations of workers in sectors like health, transport, communication, administration and education (and in the manufacturing sector as well...). And we have seen some examples of how workers can overcome the disadvantages of being dispersed into small enterprises, for example in the struggle of the steel workers in Vigo in Spain in 2006, where assemblies of strikers in the town centre grouped together workers from a number of small steel factories. We will return to these questions in a future article, but what is certain is that, in any future revolutionary upheaval, the class autonomy of the proletariat will involve a real assimilation of the experience of previous revolutions, and above all, of the experience of the post-revolutionary state. We can say with some confidence that the critique of the state elaborated by a line of revolutionaries that links Marx, Engels and Lenin to *Bilan* and Marc Chirik both in the GCF and the ICC, will be indispensable to the reacquisition, by the working class, of its own history, and thus to the implementation of its communist future.

C D Ward, August 2019

100 years after the foundation of the communist international: What lessons can we draw for future combats? (part IV)

In the preceding parts of this series we have highlighted the opportunist weaknesses which were at the base of the constitution of the Communist International (CI), both on the programmatic and on the organisational levels. This part will tackle the final period of the CI as an organisation of the working class.

In the years which followed the Founding Congress (1919) and its Second Congress (1920), despite episodes of great combativity, the reflux of the revolutionary wave continued. The working class in Russia was more and more isolated, the Soviets were slowly dying, the Bolshevik Party was merging with the state, becoming more bureaucratic and losing its proletarian content. Insurrectional uprisings in Western Europe (Bulgaria, Poland and Germany)¹ were supported by the CI although conditions were becoming more and more unfavourable, ending in the disorientation and demoralisation of the proletariat.

The CI suffered from the effects of the isolation of the revolution in the sole Russian bastion and followed the same trajectory as the Bolshevik Party where the logic of the apparatus gradually worked against an authentic class policy. Its political vitality was dying, as in the Russian party which in the end led it to become a useful tool serving the imperialist interests of the Russian state. In other words, after having epitomised the highest expression of global proletarian unity in its revolutionary struggle, the CI entered a process of degeneration.

This fourth part will therefore try to show the way in which this tragic political evolution happened.

The Bolshevik Party is no longer what it was

The three years of civil war between 1918 and 1920, during the course of which the White armies and foreign battalions gave the revolution a hard test, led to the Soviet Republic adopting the policy of "War Communism". But what was only to be a number of urgent measures in order to face up to a desperate situation gave rise to a

1. See notably: "The German Revolution, XII: 1. The bourgeoisie inflicts a decisive defeat on the working class", *International Review* n° 98 and "The German Revolution XIII: 1923 (II). A defeat which marked the end of the world revolutionary wave", *International Review* n° 99.

militarisation of society under the authority of the Bolshevik Party and the state. During this period that necessitated very heavy sacrifices for the workers and other social layers, we saw "*a progressive weakening of the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat (the workers' councils) and consequently the development of tendencies towards bureaucratic institutions.*"²

If during the whole of the civil war privations were on the whole put up with by the workers and poor peasants, it didn't last in the new conditions. The civil war left the social situation in Russia totally drained. The people lacked everything, from food to fuel, needed to stave off the rigours of winter. From summer 1920, the first signs of discontent were emerging, notably in campaigns around the uprisings of peasants in Tambov. But agitation spread rapidly through towns where, aside from economic demands, the workers also demanded the end of War Communism. As such these strikes didn't only express a reaction faced with the degradation of living conditions; they also marked a desire for the soviets to return to the heart of political decision-making. It is in this context that the sailors' insurrection at Kronstadt broke out on February 28, 1921. In reaction to the brutal methods of the requisition of wheat undertaken by armed detachments, and the privations suffered by workers and peasants alike, the sailors of the warship Petropavlovsk mutinied and adopted a ten-point resolution with the principal claim being the rapid regeneration of soviet power. The revolt of the Kronstadt sailors happened "*during the course of a movement of the class struggle against the growing bureaucracy of the regime, it identified with this struggle and saw itself as a moment in its generalisation.*"³

The terrible repression that the Bolshevik Party unleashed on the revolt marked a real turning-point of the revolution. Through the execution of close to 3000

2. "The lessons of Kronstadt", *International Review* n°3, October 1975.

3. *Ibid.*

sailors, the Bolshevik Party crossed the red line by exercising violence within the working class. This dramatic policy undertaken by the only organisation, up to then, defending the revolutionary line and the communist programme marked, to a certain extent, a point of no return and a slow, irredeemable rupture between the interests of the Bolshevik Party which was assimilating itself more and more with the state, and those of the working class.

If the working class had in one sense emerged victorious from the war against the counter-revolutionary forces, the concentration of authority in the hands of the party-state duo was the other side of the coin. The dissensions within the proletarian camp on this issue, notably incarnated in the workers' strikes in Moscow and Petrograd and the revolt of the Kronstadt sailors, were expressed even within the party from the beginning of the civil war. They were to reach their paroxysm during the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (RCP)⁴ notably through controversy over the union question and the critiques of the Workers' Opposition group notably animated by A. Kollontai and Shliapnikov. Since autumn 1920, this group within the RCP was established during the course of the debate on the role of the unions in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Although the framework for the debate remained profoundly inadequate, the position of the Workers' Opposition was that the industrial unions would have to manage production while being independent from the soviet state⁵ thus expressing "*in a confused and hesitant manner, the antipathy of the proletariat for the bureaucratic and military methods which were more and more marking the regime and the hopes of the working class that things were going to change now that the rigours of the war had ended.*"⁶ This debate gave rise to lively polemics throughout the winter of 1920-1921 while, according to Lenin in his opening speech to

4. This congress took place from the March 8 to 16 at the same time as the repression of the sailors at Kronstadt was taking place.

5. Two other positions were expressed in the debate: that of Trotsky for the total integration of the unions into the "Workers' State" and that of Lenin for whom the unions should always act for the defence of the class, even against the "Workers' State".

6. "The Communist Left in Russia: 1918-1930 (part one)", *International Review* n° 8, December 1976.

the congress, the party had need for unity in its ranks more than ever: “*Comrades, we have passed through an exceptional year, we have allowed ourselves the luxury of discussions and disputes within the party. This was an amazing luxury for a Party shouldering unprecedented responsibilities and surrounded by mighty and powerful enemies uniting the whole capitalist world (...) whatever form the discussion has taken up to now, however much we have argued among ourselves – and we are confronted with so many enemies – the task of the dictatorship of the proletariat in a peasant country is so vast and difficult that formal cohesion is far from enough. (Your presence here at the Congress is a sign that we have that much). Our efforts should be more united and harmonious than ever before; there should not be the slightest trace of factionalism – whatever its manifestations in the past. That we must not have on any account.*”⁷ Following that, the congress had to endorse the objective fixed by this opening speech through the adoption of the resolution on “party unity” ordering “*the immediate dissolution of groups without exception formed on such-and-such a platform, and give instruction to all the organisations to strictly insist on the inadmissible character on all types of fractional activity. The non-execution of this decision of the congress will result in the immediate and unconditional exclusion from the party.*” This decision, also defended by a majority of the CI, reflected the profound change in the way in which the party treated disagreements expressed on subjects as fundamental as the role of the trade unions for example. The forbidding of factions within the party showed in reality a deformation of the discipline within the latter since henceforth it demanded the strict submission to the decisions of the party once they had been taken. Critiques from militants or groups were tolerated but it was formally prohibited to put up an opposition to the official party decision on the basis of an organised defence of their positions.⁸ With this decision, the Communist Party of Russia abandoned a whole part of its history since it itself had led such work in fighting against the opportunism which gangrened the IInd International, leading that organisation to its own bankruptcy at the outbreak of the First World War.

A good number of dishonest and in-

7. V. Lenin, “Tenth congress of the RCP (B). Speech at the opening of the congress March 8th” *Collected Works*, vol.32 p168-9.

8. We should note however that this decision was considered to be temporary: “*The forbidding of factions was, let me repeat it, conceived as an exceptional measure called to fall into disuse with the first amelioration of the situation*” (Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*”, 1963).

consequential academics and journalists saw in this affair the definite proof of the “natural authoritarianism” of Lenin and a so-called Bolshevik tyranny. In reality, this process was above everything a product of the isolation and state of siege imposed on the revolution in Russia, expressing not a “natural authoritarianism” but a real deviation of the Bolsheviks from their own history. Furthermore, as Lenin indicated, the existence of opposition groups organised in a “fraction” could be used by counter-revolutionary forces with the aim of discrediting the party. But what Lenin was no longer seeing was that while the open enemies of the revolution could point to these disagreements within the party in order to discredit it, it was all the more true that the “hidden enemy” of the revolution, the counter-revolution from the inside, was served by the forbidding of fractions as a means of entirely Stalinising the party.

It was thus the isolation of the revolution to the Russian bastion which led the RCP to turn in on itself and prioritise the interests of the party and of the state through an “iron discipline” rather than guarantee the expression of disagreements so as to participate in the clarification of fundamental political questions for the whole of the revolutionary milieu and the world working class.⁹ Floating the threat of exclusion of groups defending divergent positions, the Russian party deprived itself of vitality and opened itself up to the bureaucratic spiral.

“Lenin’s last struggle”

If, as we’ve indicated, Lenin defended the ban on factions and, consequently, tried to dissuade some militants from publicly criticising the “necessary discipline”, he wasn’t slow however in taking stock of the proliferation of bureaucrats and of the danger thus weighing on the activities of the party. The tendencies to bureaucracy were a constant preoccupation of Lenin since the taking of power in October 1917. The consciousness of this scourge continued to be affirmed with the accumulation of dysfunctions and the proliferation of arrivistes and the grip of functionaries

The different oppositions appearing during the years 1920-1921 never ceased, although in a confused manner, to warn

9. The loss of political vitality and the tendency to bureaucratisation was continued through other means:

- The congress lost part of its prerogatives for nominations to the central committee since two-thirds of its members now had the possibility of excluding one of its members in the case of disagreements with decisions.

- The secretariat was given a growing importance in the party apparatus through the increase of the number of its members.

the party against the growing weight of the “Workers’ State”¹⁰ and of the absorption of the party into it. A mortal danger for the revolution and the party that Lenin himself exposed at the time of the XIth congress of the RCP, affirming that “*erroneous relations between the party and the Soviet administrations*” were being established.

The “Georgian Affair”, which broke out during 1922, allowed Lenin to take stock of the breadth of the bureaucratic gangrene. The use of violence, repression and manipulation by Grigol Ordzhonikidze (Secretary of the Transcaucasian Regional Bureau) under the orders of Stalin (Secretary-General of the RCP) against members of the Georgian party who refused to go along with the planned Constitution of the USSR¹¹ very much scandalised Lenin.

These brutal methods, totally foreign to proletarian and communist morals, were never before seen in the ranks of the party. They demonstrated the all-powerful nature of the party machine over its members and the disastrous evolution of the party and the state, engendering practices coming from “*an apparatus which is fundamentally foreign and represent a hodgepodge of bourgeois and tsarist vestiges (...) covered only with a soviet veneer.*”¹²

During the last two years of his life, Lenin tried to arrest the bureaucratic drift incarnated by Stalin and his minions. After the Georgian episode, he undertook a frontal combat, openly accusing the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate led by Stalin of being “at the forefront” of the development of bureaucracy.

It was thus, guided by the flame of internationalism, that Lenin put his meagre forces to work in order to try and repel the

10. The ICC rejects the conception of the “Workers’ State” which appears to us as a contradiction in terms. As we indicate in our pamphlet “The period of transition from capitalism to socialism”: “*The working class does not build states because it is not an exploiting class. The state in the period of transition is inevitable but it is not an emanation of the working class. This state can represent a danger for the proletariat, trying to bind the hands of the proletariat in order to make it ‘work for others’. The working class must be free to pursue its politics including the right to strike against the dictates of the state. Wanting to confuse proletariat and state leads to the aberration of a ‘workers’ state’ which forbids the workers to rise against it. For Lenin, the Soviet state wasn’t a workers’ state proper, but ‘a worker and peasant state with bureaucratic deformations’. It was rather Trotsky, who wanted to subordinate all the workers’ organisations to the state, who talked of a ‘workers’ state’.*”

11. This plan submitted by Stalin, which Lenin opposed, envisaged the autonomy of the sister republics within the federation, putting them under overall control of the Russian Republic.

12. Quoted from P Broué, *Le parti bolchevique. Histoire du PC de l’URSS*, Editions de minuit, 1971, page 174. Lenin referred here more to the party than the state, but in reality the two were inter-linked.

Stalin's first offensives and his doctrine of "socialism in one country". But the totally erroneous responses that he advocated, consisting more or less of restructuring of the state, in the (illusory) expectation of a revolutionary jump-start from the European proletariat, only confirmed the irredeemable impasse in which the Russian revolution and the entire world revolution found itself.

For decades, the dominant ideology has used every means in order to establish a link between the revolutionary combat of Lenin and the totalitarian power of Stalin. But facts are stubborn! "Lenin's Testament" contains enough to warn against the future tyrant, dismissing any legitimising of gangster methods and the chauvinistic aims of Stalin and his clique. Moreover, the "Testament" was kept under wraps for a long time and it was only after guaranteeing his total power within the party and the state that Stalin indulged in a kind of confession regarding what the document said about him.

The Bolshevisation of the International

Because of the victory of the revolution in Russia and the weakness of other communist parties, the RCP played a preponderant role in the formation of the Communist International, whose executive seat was based in Moscow. But this preponderance itself took a disproportionate character in the life and the functioning of the CI.

Consequently, bureaucracy and rampant authoritarianism within the RCP soon ate into the ranks of the International. Lenin was one of the few concerned about the "Russification" of the CI. He first expressed this at the time of the Second Congress by proposing the installation of the executive seat to Berlin, then at the Fourth Congress where he criticised the "too-Russian" character of the "Theses on the Structures, Methods and Action of the Communist Parties", although he fully supported their content. Concerned about the too-strong "dependence" of the CI on the RCP, he exhorted the other sections of the CI to appropriate without delay all the experiences and lessons of the revolution in Russia so as to affirm its cohesion through a greater association of the different sections in the life of the party. This was also a question of guaranteeing the vitality of the International by placing reflection and the study of revolutionary experience at the centre of the activity of the sections.¹³

13. "I am persuaded that in this regard we must say, not only to Russians but also to comrades from abroad, that the most important thing in the period to come is study. We ourselves are studying in the general sense of the term. They must study

But these working perspectives were extinguished with the death of Lenin in 1924. From that moment we see a turnaround in the CI which more progressively became a weapon in the hands of the (Zinoviev-Kamenev-Stalin) Troika first of all, then of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The "Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties" announced at the Fifth World Congress in July 1924 aimed to suppress all opposition; Trotsky and his partisans as much as the groups of the left: "*The key word of Bolshevisation is born in the struggle against the right. Naturally it will be led against it, but also, of course, against the ultra-leftist deviations and against the pessimism which, here or there, weighs heavily on us*".¹⁴

This new watchword thus formed a clear expression of the tighter grip in which the Russian revolution found itself after the setback of the German proletariat in 1923 at the time of its desperate attempt at insurrection. This only accelerated the grip of the bureaucracy henceforth using its authoritarian discipline against all those who opposed or criticised the policy of the party led by the Troika first of all and subsequently by the Stalinist clique. It was thus a matter of "breaking the back" of all forms of resistance against the degeneration of the International. Alfred Rosmer, a member of the Executive Bureau of the CI between 1920 and 1921, having participated in its Second, Third and Fourth congresses, gives an informed account of the appalling policy manoeuvred by Zinoviev, then the president of the International: "*Through the means of emissaries that he sent to the sections before the congress, he suppressed all opposition. Where resistance was expressed, a great variety of methods were used in order to minimise them; it was a war of attrition where the workers were beaten in advance by functionaries who, having everything to lose, imposed interminable debates; war-weary and overwhelmed by the weight of the International, all those who had made criticisms temporarily gave up or simply left*".¹⁵

The "Declaration of the Committee of Entente",¹⁶ addressed to the Executive Committee of the CI in July 1925 after the Fifth Congress denounced the same aberrations: "*The serious problems of fractions and tendencies within the Party, which is posed historically, both as a consequence*

in a particular sense in order to really understand the organisation, the structure, the method and the content of revolutionary action" (speech of Lenin to the Fourth World Congress).

14. Speech of Zinoviev at the Fifth Plenum of the CI, quoted from P. Broué, *Histoire de l'internationale communiste. 1919-1943*, Fayard.

15. Albert Rosmer, *Moscow under Lenin*.

16. This is from the left within the Communist Party of Italy which became the left fraction of the Italian Communist Party.

of the policy followed and as a repudiation of this type of tactic, as a symptom of its insufficiencies that it's necessary to study with the greatest attention, they pretend they've solved through orders and by threats, submitting comrades to crude disciplinary pressures, thus leaving one to think that on their personal conduct depends the entire favourable development of the Party".

Consequently, all the militants or tendencies which subsequently expressed disagreements with the orientations defended by the party confronted the following alternative: submit or be excluded! If excluded, they were replaced in the executive organs of the CP by docile, young or inexperienced militants, very quickly becoming apparatchiks with limitless fidelity to Moscow as in the KPD or in the image of Maurice Thorez within the French Communist Party. Henceforth, the CP's incarnated the implacable defence of the foreign policy of the Russian state instead of playing an active role in the elevation of revolutionary consciousness among the masses. The new mode of organisation of the CP's through "factory cells" constituted a clear expression of this unfortunate evolution since it kept the workers focussed on local and corporatist problems to the detriment, evidently, of a general vision and perspective for the proletarian combat.

Stalinist propaganda largely contributed to presenting "Bolshevisation" as being in continuity with the policy undertaken by the Bolsheviks since October 1917. It was part of a long series of falsifications set up by this bourgeois clique throughout the period of counter-revolution. In reality, this watchword was a total rupture with the history and spirit of the Bolshevik Party. But much more than that, it marked a significant stage in the degeneration of the Communist International which stayed on this trajectory and became a counter-revolutionary tool in the hands of the Russian state for the preservation of its imperialist interests. Only the left fractions tried to lead a determined combat to counter this involution and keep alive the flame of internationalism and the communist programme. It is this aspect that we will tackle in the last part of this series.

(To be continued)

Najek, April 16, 2021

Communism is on the agenda of history

Marc Chirik and the state in the period of transition

The last time this series looked specifically at the problem of the state in the period of transition was in our introduction to the theses on the state produced by the Gauche Communiste de France in 1946.¹ We presented this text as an important continuation of the work of the Italian left which, during the 1930s, had produced a number of articles examining the lessons of the defeat of the Russian revolution, in which the problem of the state was seen as central. Building on the warnings by Marx and Engels against the tendency of the state to alienate itself from society, the characterisation of the state as a temporary scourge which the proletariat will have to use while limiting to the maximum its most harmful aspects, the articles of Vercesi and in particular Mitchell (a member of the Belgian Fraction) had already drawn a distinction between the necessary function of the “proletarian state” and the real, effective power of the proletariat.² The GCF text took a further step by arguing that the state, by its very nature, is foreign to the proletariat as the bearer of communism and thus of a stateless society.

In our introduction to the theses we noted certain weaknesses or ambiguities in the 1946 text (on the unions, the role of the party, the economic programme of the revolution), most of which would be substantially overcome through the process of discussion and clarification which was at the heart of the GCF’s activities. But these advances – particularly on the unions and the party – were corrected in other texts³ since to our knowledge the group didn’t produce any further documents on the question of the transition period itself.

The 1946 theses were a product of the collective work of the GCF and drafted by Marc Chirik, who had played a key role in the formation and theoretical development of the group. When the group broke up after 1952 (despite Marc’s efforts to maintain it), Marc was “exiled” to Venezuela where he was not engaged in any organised political activity for over a decade. However, this was not a period of disengagement from political reflection on his part and as soon as the times began a-changing, in the early to mid-60s, Marc had formed a discussion circle with some young elements, the result of which was the formation of the *Internacionalismo* group in 1964. This group

in turn eventually became the section in Venezuela of the ICC.

Marc himself returned to Europe in order to take part in the historic events of May-June 1968 and stayed to help form the group *Révolution Internationale* (RI), which would become the French section of the ICC.

To the generation of revolutionaries who emerged from the international wave of struggles sparked off by May 68, revolution didn’t seem such a distant prospect. A number of new groups and militants, having rediscovered the tradition of the communist left, not only set about demarcating themselves from the left wing of capital by re-appropriating the fundamental class positions elaborated during the period of the counter-revolution, but also plunged into debating the character of the anticipated revolution and the road towards a communist society. The approach towards the transitional period and its semi-state which had been put forward by the GCF and further elaborated by Marc soon became a focal point for many passionate discussions among the new groups. A majority of RI and the groups aligned to it were convinced by Marc’s arguments but it was made clear from the start that this particular analysis could not be considered as a class line because history had not yet definitively established its veracity. The discussion thus continued within the newly-formed ICC and with other groups involved in the discussions about the international regroupment of the newly emerging revolutionary forces which marked this phase. The first issue of the

International Review contained contributions on the transition period from Marc (on behalf of *Révolution Internationale*) and a long article developing ideas along the same lines written a young CD Ward on behalf of *World Revolution* (WR) in the UK, as well as a text from *Rivoluzione Internazionale* in Italy arguing in favour of the proletarian character of the transitional state, and a further contribution by *Revolutionary Perspectives*, which was the nucleus of the future *Communist Workers’ Organisation*. These texts were written for the 1975 conference which saw the formal constitution of the ICC; although there was no time to hold the discussion during the meeting they were published as a contribution to an ongoing debate.

It is no exaggeration to say that these debates were heated. The *Workers Voice* (WV) group in Liverpool soon broke off from the regroupment discussions, citing the future ICC’s majority position on the transitional period as proof of its counter-revolutionary character, since it allegedly meant, in a future revolutionary process, advocating a state that would dominate the workers’ councils. As we argued at the time,⁴ this was not only a false accusation but also to a large extent a pretext aimed at preserving WV’s local autonomy from the threat of being swallowed up in a larger international organisation; but other reactions of the time revealed the extent to which the acquisitions of the Italian communist left had been lost in the fog of the counter-revolution. At the Second ICC Congress in 1977, for example, where a resolution (and counter-resolution) on the state in the period of transition were on the agenda, a delegate from *Battaglia Comunista*, which then and still today claims to be the most consistent continuator of the tradition of the Italian left, seemed dumbfounded by the very notion of questioning the proletarian character of the transitional state, even if this view was merely a logical conclusion drawn from *Bilan*’s contributions in the 1930s.

As it happened, although the resolution expressing the majority position was eventually adopted at the ICC’s Third Congress in 1979, at the 1977 congress it

1. “In the aftermath of World War Two: debates on how the workers will hold power after the revolution”. Published by ICC Online, January 2014.

2. See in particular: “Communism: the real history of humanity, IV. The 1930s: debate on the period of transition”, *International Review* n° 127, 2006 and : “Communism: the real history of humanity, V. The problems of the period of transition”, *International Review* n° 128, 2007.

3. For example: “On the nature and function of the political party of the proletariat” *Internacionalisme* n° 38, October 1948, republished in *International Review* n° 153, 2014.

4. “Sectarianism unlimited” in *World Revolution* n°3.

was judged that the debate had not matured sufficiently and should continue. A number of the contributions to this debate were later published as a pamphlet which shows the richness of the debate.⁵ Within the ICC, the minority was not homogeneous but tended towards the idea that the position of *Bilan* on the state in the transition period had been the correct one, whereas the GCF had departed from the marxist conception. Some of the comrades of the minority later rallied to the majority position whereas others began putting in question other key developments made by the GCF and taken forward by the ICC, notably on the question of the party. Most of these dispersed in different directions – one towards a more orthodox Bordigist position, another embarking on a brief attempt to form a new version of *Bilan* (Fraction Communiste Internationaliste), while others imbibed the dangerous concoction of anarchism, Bordigism and the defence of so-called “workers’ terrorism” which marked the trajectory of the Internationalist Communist Group.⁶

In this article, we are going to focus on three contributions to the discussion within the ICC from that period written by Marc Chirik. This approach continues and concludes the three preceding articles in this series which have considered the contribution to communist theory made by particular individuals within the proletarian political movement during the period of counter-revolution (i.e. Damen, Bordiga, Munis and Castoriadis). This is not because we approach these individual communists in the manner of academic journals where theory is always seen as the intellectual property of this or that specialist; on the contrary, as class militants, these comrades could only make their contributions with the aim of developing something which, far from being the copyright of individuals, only exists to become the universal property of the proletariat – the communist programme. But for us the communist programme is a work of association where individual comrades are able to make their particular contribution within a wider collectivity. And precisely the outstanding quality of Marc Chirik was his capacity to “universalise” what he had acquired, through living experience, on the organisational and programmatic level and then to transmit it to other comrades. Thus, within the history of the ICC, there have been a number of important contributions

5. “The period of transition from capitalism to socialism”, 1981. The original pamphlet is out of print but photocopies can be made on application.

6. The evolution of this group, in particular its apology for terrorism and its violent threats against comrades of the ICC, took it outside the boundaries of the proletarian camp. See: “What use is the Internationalist Communist Group?”, *International Review* n° 124, 2006.

to this general effort to illuminate the road towards communism by other comrades of the organisation – some of which we will refer to in this article. But there is no doubt that the texts written by Marc are examples of his profound grasp of the marxist method and deserve to be re-examined in some detail. We apologise in advance for the length of some of the quotations from these articles, but we think it’s best to let Marc’s words speak for themselves as much as possible.

Periods of transition in history

The article published in *International Review* n°1 is notable for posing the question of “transition periods” in a broad historical framework.

“Human history is made up of different stable societies linked to a given mode of production and therefore to stable social relations. These societies are based on the dominant economic laws inherent in them. They are made up of fixed social classes and are based on appropriate superstructures. The basic stable societies in written history have been: slave society, Asiatic society, feudal society and capitalist society.

“What distinguishes periods of transition from periods when society is stable is the decomposition of the old social structures and the formation of new structures. Both are linked to a development of the productive forces and are accompanied by the appearance and development of new classes as well as the development of ideas and institutions corresponding to these classes.

“The period of transition is not a distinct mode of production, but a link between two modes of production - the old and the new. It is the period during which the germs of the new mode of production slowly develop to the detriment of the old, until they supplant the old mode of production and constitute a new, dominant mode of production.

“Between two stable societies (and this will be true for the period between capitalism and communism as it has been in the past), the period of transition is an absolute necessity. This is due to the fact that the sapping of the basis of the existence of the old society does not automatically imply the maturation and ripening of the conditions of the new. In other words, the decline of the old society does not automatically mean the maturation of the new, but is only the condition for it to take place.

“Decadence and the period of transition are two very distinct phenomena. Every period of transition presupposes the decomposition of the old society whose mode and

relations of production have attained the extreme limit of their possible development. However, every period of decadence does not necessarily signify a period of transition, in as much as the period of transition represents a step towards a new mode of production. Similarly ancient Greece did not enjoy the historical conditions necessary for a transcendence of slavery; neither did ancient Egypt.

*“Decadence means the exhaustion of the old social mode of production; transition means the surging up of the new forces and conditions which will permit a resolution and transcendence of the old contradictions”.*⁷

At the time this text was written, the emerging revolutionary movement was already faced with the influence of the precursors of today’s “communisation” current, particularly in the writing of Jacques Camatte and Jean Barrot (Dauvé). Indeed the ICC had already been through a split by a group of members who had come from the Trotskyist organisation *Lutte Ouvrière* but had quickly fallen for the pseudo-radical notions which marked what we at the time called “modernism”: that the working class had become, in essence, a class for capital, that its struggle for immediate demands were a dead-end, and that the communist revolution meant the immediate self-negation of the working class rather than its political affirmation through the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this vision, the idea of a transition period directed by the proletariat was denounced as no more than the perpetuation of capital: the process of communisation obviated any need for a phase of transition between capitalism and communism.⁸ That such ideas were gaining currency in the revolutionary movement was also shown by the evolution of one of the groups that attended the conference – the Revolutionary Workers’ Group, based in Chicago, which had also come out of Trotskyism but which was now discovering the uselessness of the fight for economic demands (see the Preface to *International Review* n° 1). Meanwhile the Revolutionary Perspectives group insisted that an isolated proletarian bastion should consciously seal itself off from the world market while implementing all kinds of communist measures inside its borders: this was less a modernist aberration than a belated apology for the “War Communism” of the 1918-21 period in Russia, but it shares with the communisers the idea

7. “Problems of the period of transition”, *International Review* n°1, 1975.

8. One of the most recent converts to this idea is the group Internationalist Perspective. An interesting response to those who reject the need for the transition period was published in 2014 by the CWO: “The period of transition and its dissenters”, *Revolutionary Perspectives*, series 4, n°4.

that it is possible to introduce authentic communist measures in a single country or region.⁹

Marc's text provides us with a solid starting point for criticising all these approaches. On the one hand it insists that every new mode of production has been the product of a more or less long period of transition, which is "*not a distinct mode of production, but a link between two modes of production - the old and the new*". This certainly applies to the period of transition to communism, which is anything but a stable mode of production (sometimes misleadingly described as "socialism"). On the contrary, it will be the theatre of a sustained combat to push forward the communist transformation of social relations against the immense economic and ideological weight of the old society and indeed of the thousands of years of class society which preceded capitalism. This will be true even after the point at which the proletariat has conquered power on a world scale and is even more applicable to situations where the first proletarian outposts confront a hostile capitalist environment.

At the same time, the text goes on to explain that the period of transition to communism differs profoundly from all previous such transitions:

- its aim is not the institution of a new form of class exploitation, but the abolition of all forms of exploitation;
- whereas previous transitions had been the product of blind economic laws, communism is a society in which all production and distribution are subject to conscious human activity;
- unlike previous modes of production, communism cannot exist in one part of the globe but must be planetary in scale;
- unlike previous transitions, where the old ruling classes and their state forms could to a considerable extent adapt to the rising mode of production, communism demands the complete destruction of the economic and political structures of capitalism.

The consequence of all this is that the period of transition to communism cannot begin inside capitalism, through an accretion of economic changes which serve as the basis of the power of the new ruling class, but only after an essentially political act – the violent dismantling of the existing state machine. This is the starting point for the rejection of any idea that a real process

9. See our criticism of Dauvé on the events of Spain in 1936: "Review of 'When Insurrections Die': modernist ideas hinder a break from anarchism", *World Revolution* n° 230, 2004.

of communisation¹⁰ can begin before the destruction of the world-wide power of the bourgeoisie. Any economic and social changes undertaken before that point has been reached are essentially stop-gaps, contingent and emergency measures that should not be painted as a kind of "really existing communism", and their main aim would be to reinforce the political domination of the working class in a given area.

The proletariat's economic policy

Indeed, even after the beginning of the period of transition proper, the text warns against the idealisation of the immediate measures taken by the working class:

"On the economic plane, the period of transition consists of an economic policy (and no longer a political economy) of the proletariat with a view to accelerating the process of universal socialisation of production and distribution. But the realisation of this programme of integral communism at all levels, while being the goal affirmed and followed by the working class, will still be subject to immediate, conjunctural and contingent conditions in the period of transition which only pure utopian voluntarism would ignore. The proletariat will immediately attempt to advance as far as possible towards its goal while recognising the inevitable concessions it will be obliged to tolerate. Two dangers threaten such a policy:

- *"the idealisation of this policy, presenting it as communist when it is nothing of the sort;*
- *"the denial of the necessity of such a policy in the name of idealistic voluntarism"*.

The whole spirit running through the text is one of revolutionary realism. We are talking about the most radical social transformation since the advent of the human species and it is absurd to think that this process – which for the vast majority of humanity today is seen as impossible, contrary to human nature, at best "a nice idea that would never work" – could in fact take place all in one go: in historical terms, overnight.

The text goes on to outline some more specific aspects of this "economic policy", which in fact remain quite general:

- Immediate socialisation of the great capitalist concentrations and of the prin-

cipal centres of productive activity.

- Planning of production and distribution - the criteria of production must be the maximum satisfaction of needs and no longer of accumulation.
- Massive reduction of the working day.
- Substantial rise in the standard of living.
- The attempt to abolish remuneration based on wages and on its money form.
- Socialisation of consumption and of the satisfaction of needs (transportation, leisure, meals, etc).
- The relationship between the collectivised sectors and sectors of production which are still individual - particularly in the countryside - must tend towards an organised collective exchange through co-operatives, thus suppressing the market and individual exchange.

Marc's text begins by the following warning - "*It is always with the greatest caution that revolutionaries have raised the question of the period of transition. The number, the complexity, and above all, the newness of the problems the proletariat must solve prevent any elaboration of detailed plans of the future society; any attempt to do so risks being turned into a straitjacket which will stifle the revolutionary activity of the class*". It is quite understandable that Marc only provides us with a very general outline of a possible "economic policy" of the proletariat. One of the points is rather too general - "substantial rise in the standard of living" - to do much with, but the others do indeed indicate the general direction; and one clearly marks an advance over the 1946 text, i.e. when it says that "*the criteria of production must be the maximum satisfaction of needs and no longer of accumulation*", since the 1946 text still tended to see the proletariat's "*development of the productive forces*" as a process of accumulation which can only mean the expansion of value. In fact, we are only too aware today that both the economic and ecological crises of the system are the result of an "over-accumulation" and that real development will necessarily have to take the form of a profound *transformation and reorganisation* of the productive forces accumulated under capitalism (involving, for example, the conversion from highly polluting forms of production, energy and transport, the reduction of capitalist megacities to a far more human scale, massive reforestation, etc).

Regarding the distribution of the social product in the transitional period, the text does not pronounce on the debate on

10. In itself the term communisation is valid, since it is perfectly true that communist social relations are not the product of state decrees but of "*the real movement that abolishes the present state of affairs*" as Marx put it. But we reject the idea that this process can take place without the taking of power by the working class.

“labour time vouchers” based on Marx’s proposals in the “Critique of the Gotha Programme” and strongly advocated, for example by the Dutch council communists of the GIC in the *Grundprinzipien*¹¹ and by the CWO in their most recent article on the transition period,¹² but Marc’s text sets the tone by insisting both on the attempt to get rid of wage and monetary forms and on the widespread socialisation of consumption: free provision of transport, communal meals etc. In the WR text in *International Review* n° 1 the position is more explicit in its rejection of the labour time vouchers. Although Marx did not consider these vouchers to be a form of money since they could not be accumulated, the WR article argues that the labour time system “does not really go beyond the capitalist notion of labour as an ‘exchange’ between the individual, atomised worker and ‘society’”. The system of labour-time vouchers would tend to divide those proletarians who are able to work from those who are not (a situation which may well be intensified in a period of international revolutionary crisis), and would furthermore drive a wedge between proletarians and other strata, inhibiting the process of social integration. Such a system would demand an immense bureaucratic supervision of each workers’ labour, and would most easily degenerate into a form of money-wages at a downturn of the revolution (these drawbacks apply both to the period of the civil war and to the transition period itself).

“A system of rationing under the control of the workers’ councils would more easily lend itself to democratic regulation of the total resources of a proletarian bastion and to the encouragement of feelings of solidarity among all members of the class. But we have no illusions that this or any other system will represent a ‘guarantee’ against the return of wage slavery in its most naked form.”¹³

However, we don’t think that we can say any more definitely than in 1975 that this debate on the immediate economic measures of the proletariat in power has been settled once and for all. On the contrary, while it can and should continue today (we aim to return to the question in a future article in this series), it can only be settled by a future revolutionary praxis.

The state as a scourge

Having defined the general character of the transition period, the text goes on to

11. See: “Communism is not a ‘nice idea’, Vol. 3 Part 10, Bilan, the Dutch left, and the transition to communism”, *International Review* n° 151, 2013.

12. See footnote 8.

13. “The proletarian revolution”, *International Review* n° 1, 1975.

reaffirm the position on the state which had already been outlined by the text of the GCF in 1946:

“*The transitional society is still a society divided into classes and so there will necessarily arise within it that institution peculiar to all societies divided into classes: the STATE. With all the limitations and precautionary measures with which we will surround this institution (functionaries will be elected and revocable, their consumption will be equal to that of a worker, a unification will exist between the legislative and executive functions, etc.), and which make this state into a ‘semi-state’, we must never lose sight of the state’s historic anti-socialist, and therefore anti-proletarian and essentially conservative, nature. The state remains the guardian of the status quo.*

“We recognise the inevitability of this institution which the proletariat will have to utilise as a necessary evil in order to:

– “break the resistance of the waning capitalist class and preserve a united administrative, and political framework in this period when society is still rent by antagonistic interests.

“But we categorically reject the idea of making this state the standard-bearer of communism. By its own nature (‘bourgeois nature in its essence’ - Marx), it is essentially an organ for the conservation of the status quo and a restraint on communism. Thus, the state can neither be identified with communism nor with the proletariat which is the bearer of communism. The proletariat is by definition the most dynamic class in history since it carries out the suppression of all classes including itself. This is why, while utilising the state, the proletariat expresses its dictatorship not through the state, but over the state. This is also why the proletariat can under no circumstances allow this institution (the state) to intervene by violence within the class, nor to be the arbiter of the discussions and activities of the class organs - the councils and the revolutionary party”.¹⁴

It was this position in particular – the conservative and non-proletarian nature of the state – which was the subject of divergent arguments within the ICC, not only with regard to the transitional state, but the state in general.

Origins of the state and all that

The 1981 pamphlet included a text by Marc called “The origins of the state and all that”, which was a response to a text¹⁵ written

14. “Problems of the period of transition”, *International Review* n° 1, 1975.

15. “The state in the period of transition”, S and M,

by two comrades of the minority, M and S, defending the notion of the proletarian state on the basis of an examination of the historical origins of the state. M and S argued that, since the state is in essence the creation and instrument of a ruling class, it can play a revolutionary role in periods when that class is itself a revolutionary or at least actively progressive force, while it is only doomed to play a reactionary role when that class itself becomes decadent or obsolete. Their text thus rejects the definition of the state as being “conservative” in its essential nature. As for its essential function, it is as an instrument of repression of one class by another. Accordingly, during the transition period the state can and indeed must have a proletarian character, since it is nothing but the creation of the working class with the aim of exercising its dictatorship.

In his response, Marc provides a short but insightful history of the way that the proletarian movement has, through its own debates and above all its own experiences in the class struggle, developed its understanding of the question of the state: from the first ideas of Babeuf and the Equals about the conquest of the state by armed revolution to the intuitions of the utopians about communism being a society without the state; from the critique of Hegel’s state-worship by the young Marx to the lessons drawn by the Communist League from the revolutions of 1848 and above all by Marx and Engels from the Paris Commune of 1871, when it first became clear that the existing state was to be dismantled not conquered. The survey goes on to mention the studies of primitive communism by Morgan which made it possible for Engels to analyse the historical origins of the state, passing by the strengths, weaknesses, and incomplete insights of Lenin in relation to the experience of the Russian revolution, and finally to the efforts of the communist left to synthesise and develop all the advances made by the preceding expressions of the movement. The aim here is to show that our understanding of the problem of the state and the period of transition is not the product of an invariant marxist orthodoxy but has evolved and will indeed continue to evolve in the light of real experience and reflection on that experience.

The central core of the text is the reference to Engels’ famous passage about how the state first appears in the long transitional period when primitive communist society is giving way to the emergence of definite class divisions – not as the conscious creation ex nihilo of a ruling class but as an emanation of society at a certain stage of its development: “*The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from*”¹⁶

May 1977, also published in the 1981 pamphlet.

without; just as little is it 'the reality of the moral idea', 'the image and the reality of reason,' as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a particular stage of development; it is the admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, a power, apparently standing above society, has become necessary to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state".¹⁶

Marc explains that this does not mean that the state has a neutral or mediating role in society, but it does show that simply defining the state as "bodies of armed men" whose function is to exert repression against the exploited or oppressed classes is inadequate, because the state's primary role is to hold society together and for this repression alone can never be sufficient. Hence the need to use ideological institutions, forms of political representation, etc. As Marx put it in "The King of Prussia and Social Reform" (1844), "from a political point of view, the state and the organisation of society are not two different things. The state is the organisation of society" – with the qualification of course that we are still talking about a society divided into classes.

Marc then returns to Engels to emphasise that this function of organising society, holding it together, means preserving the existing relations of production and thus "As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, which by its means becomes also the politically ruling class, and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class".¹⁷

16. *Origins of the Family, private property and the state*, chapter IX.

17. Engels uses the term "normally" because he goes on to say "exceptional periods, however, occur when the warring classes are so nearly equal in forces that the state power, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence in relation to both. This applies to the absolute monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which balances the nobility and the bourgeoisie against one another; and to the Bonapartism of the First and particularly of the Second French Empire, which played off the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat". Marc comments on such exceptions in "Origins of the state and all that...", giving examples in which, in the framework of class society, the state form that generally corresponds to the dominant mode of production can also serve to protect relations of production which have reappeared

However, this necessary identification with the state by exploiting classes of the past doesn't apply to the proletariat because, as an exploited class, it doesn't have its own economy. And we can add: faced with a situation where the old state has been dismantled and the old bourgeois society is in a condition of dissolution, the proletariat will still need an instrument for preventing the conflicts between itself and the other non-exploiting classes from tearing society apart. And since this situation is, in a sense, a return to the original conditions which led to the formation of the state, state forms will appear, emerge, manifest themselves whether the working class likes it or not. And precisely because of this, the transitional state, however much the proletariat is able to dominate it, will not be a purely proletarian organ but will – as the Workers Opposition was already able to discern in relation to the Soviet state in 1921 – have a "heterogeneous" nature,¹⁸ based on territorial communes or soviet type bodies in which the entire non-exploiting population is necessarily represented.

Regarding the "conservative" role of the state, a clarification of the original 1946 text is in order, where the text says that "in the course of history, the state has appeared as a conservative and reactionary factor". But conservative and reactionary are not exactly the same. The function of the state is always conservative in the sense of protecting, codifying, and stabilising developments that take place in economy and society. Depending on the epoch, this role can globally serve the progressive development of the productive forces; in periods of decadence, the same role becomes overtly reactionary in the sense of backward looking, preserving all that is past and obsolete. The key difference with the minority was not here, but with their idea that the dynamic movement - the movement towards the future - came from the state and not from society. An article published in *International Review* n° 11¹⁹ and signed RV argues forcefully that, even in the bourgeois revolution, which comrades of the minority were most keen to reference as an example of the state being a revolutionary instrument, the really radical movement pushing for the overthrow of the old regime came from "below", from the "plebeian" movement in the streets, the general meetings in the "sections", or the first Paris Commune of 1793 - which were constantly coming up against the economic and political boundaries imposed by the bourgeoisie's central state power in its after a long absence – the example of slavery in the 17th-19th centuries being a case in point.

18. See: "The proletariat and the transitional state", *International Review* n° 100, 2000.

19. "State and dictatorship of the proletariat".

quest for order and stability. This is even more the case for the proletarian revolution where the communist transformation led by the working class will constantly have to go beyond the legally defined limits laid down by the official organisation of the transitional society, the state.

The state as incarnation of alienation

In the third text, published in 1978 in *International Review* n° 15,²⁰ Marc elaborates on a number of the issues posed in the previous two articles, but in particular it picks up and develops on a key insight in the quote from Engels used in the previous article: "this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state".²¹

As Marc notes, recognising the state as one of the most primordial manifestations of man's alienation from himself, or from what he can be, is one of Marx's earliest political insights and was key to his critique of the Hegelian philosophy:

"In his Critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state, with which he began his life as a revolutionary thinker and militant, Marx not only fought against Hegel's idealism which held that the idea was the point of departure for all movement (making the 'idea the subject, the real subject, or properly speaking, the predicate' in all cases, as he wrote in Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State), he also vehemently denounced the conclusions of this philosophy, which made the state the mediator between social man and universal political man, the reconciliator of the split between private man and universal man. Hegel, noting the growing conflict between civil society and the state, wanted the solution to this contradiction to be found in the self-limitation of civil society and its voluntary integration into the state, for as he said, 'it is only in the state that man has an existence which conforms with reason' and 'everything that man is, he owes to the state and it is there that his being resides. All his value and spiritual reality, man only has them through the state' (Hegel, Reason in History). Against this delirious apology for the state Marx said 'human emancipation is only completed when man has recognised and organised his own forces as social forces, so that social force is no longer separated from himself in the form of political force', i.e. the state (from On the Jewish Question)."

Right from the start, therefore, Marx's

20. "The state in the period of transition", *International Review* n° 15, 1978.

21. *Origins of the Family, private property and the state*, chapter IX.

theoretical work took up a position against the state as such, which was a product, an expression of, and an active factor in, the alienation of humanity. Against Hegel's demand for the strengthening of the state, and its absorption of civil society, Marx resolutely insisted that the withering away of the state was synonymous with the emancipation of humanity, and this fundamental notion would be enriched and developed throughout his life and work.

This is argued most explicitly in the section of the Critique dealing with the question of the vote, which for Hegel strictly maintained the separation between the legislative assembly and civil society, since the electors did not in any sense exercise a mandate over the elected. Marx saw a different potential, if the vote was to become universal and if "the electors had the choice either to deliberate and decide on public affairs for themselves or to delegate specific individuals to perform these tasks on their behalf." The result of such a "direct democracy" would be this:

"In unrestricted suffrage, both active and passive, civil society has actually raised itself for the first time to an abstraction of itself, to political existence as its true universal and essential existence. But the full achievement of this abstraction is at once also the transcendence [Aufhebung] of the abstraction. In actually establishing its political existence as its true existence civil society has simultaneously established its civil existence, in distinction from its political existence, as inessential. And with the one separated, the other, its opposite, falls. Within the abstract political state the reform of voting advances the dissolution [Auflösung] of this political state, but also the dissolution of civil society"

These words might still be couched in the language of democracy but they also tend to transcend it, since they anticipate not only the dissolution of the state but also of civil – i.e. bourgeois – society. And in the year that followed Marx was to write the "Introduction" to the Critique, which unlike the latter was actually published (in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* of 1844) and to compose the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In the first, Marx identifies the proletariat as the agent for revolutionary change, and in the second, he definitively declares for communism as the only possible future for human society.

The Negation of the Negation

Returning to Marc's text, it is significant that he again frames his whole line of inquiry in a very broad historical arc. As in the previous text on the origins of the

state, where he talks at some length about "gentile" society and its demise, he begins with the dissolution of primitive communist society and the first emergence of the state. This he defines as the initial Antithesis or Negation which ensures that all subsequent class societies, despite all the changes that have taken place from one mode of production to another, maintain an essential unity and continuity – all the way to the future abolition of classes and thus the withering away of the state, which is the synthesis, the "Negation of the Negation, the restoration of the human community on a higher level".

In the whole long epoch of the first Negation, of class society, the state increasingly tends to perpetuate itself and its own private interests, to alienate itself more and more from society. Thus the increasingly totalitarian power of the state reaches its high point in the phenomenon of state capitalism that belongs to the epoch of capitalism's decline. *"With capitalism, exploitation and oppression have reached a paroxysm, because capitalism is the condensed product of all previous societies of exploitation of man by man. The state in capitalism has achieved its destiny, becoming the hideous and bloody monster we know today. With state capitalism it has realised the absorption of civil society, it has become the manager of the economy, the boss of production, the absolute and undisputed master of all members of society, of their lives and activities; it has unleashed terror and death and presided over a generalised barbarism"*.

This whole process is thus a key to measuring the distance between humanity as it could be and humanity as it now stands: in short the spiralling alienation of humanity, which has reached its most extreme point in bourgeois society. In opposition to this runs the "real movement", the unfolding of communism, which as a precondition to its future flowering, must ensure the withering away of the state, fulfilling Marx's promise of a time *"when man has recognised and organised his own forces as social forces"*.

This panoramic view of history allows us to better understand the essentially conservative nature of the state, its necessary antagonism to the dynamic that emerges from the social, the human sphere:

"We must be extremely careful not to fall into the confusion and eclecticism which holds that the state is both conservative and revolutionary. This would turn reality on its head and open the door to Hegel's error which makes the state the subject of the movement of society."

"The thesis of the conservative nature

of the state, which is above all concerned with its own conservation, is closely and dialectically linked to the notion that the emancipation of humanity can be identified with the withering away of the state".

In Marc's article, in the paragraph that opens this section, it is pointed out that Hegel's cardinal error about history, in which he sees the true, forward-moving force as the state, is also committed at the logical level, in his confusion between subject and predicate, idea and reality, which Marx also criticises at length in the Critique: *"Family and civil society are the presuppositions of the state; they are the really active things; but in speculative philosophy it is reversed. But if the Idea is made subject, then the real subjects - civil society, family, circumstances, caprice, etc. - become unreal, and take on the different meaning of objective moments of the Idea"*.²²

The form of the transitional state

The *International Review* n° 15 article also goes into greater detail about the form of the transitional state:

"We can put forward the following principles for the structure of the transitional society:

"1. The whole non-exploiting population is organised on the basis of territorial soviets or communes, centralised from the bottom up, and giving rise to the Commune-state.

"2. The workers participate in this soviet organisation, individually like all members of society, and collectively through their autonomous class organs, at all levels of the soviet organisation.

"3. The proletariat ensures that it has a preponderant representation at all levels, but especially the higher levels.

"4. The proletariat retains and maintains complete freedom in relation to the state. On no pretext will the proletariat subordinate the decision-making power of its own organs, the workers' councils, to that of the state; it must see that the opposite is the case.

"5. In particular it won't tolerate the interference of the state in the life and activity of the organised class; it will deprive the state of any right or possibility of repressing the working class.

"6. The proletariat retains its arms outside of any control by the state".

These perspectives are not recipes for the cookbooks of the future; they *"are in*

22. Transcription of Cambridge University Press edition, 1970, published on Marxists.Org website.

no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.”²³ On the contrary, they are the conclusions that need to be drawn from the real experience of the Russian revolution. Here, in its first heroic period, the specific organs of the working class – factory committees, Red Guards, soviets elected by workplace assemblies – were part of a broader network of soviets embracing the whole non-exploiting population. But Marc’s outline of the structure of the transitional state does make more explicit the necessity for the working class to exert its control over this general state apparatus, an idea that was as yet only implicit in the Russian revolution, for example in the notion that votes from workers’ assemblies and delegates should count higher than the votes of the delegates of the peasants and other non-exploiting classes. At the same time, the outline overcomes certain key errors made in the Russia of 1917, notably the fact that, once the Civil War began in 1918, the factory-based militias, the Red Guards, were dissolved into the territorial Red Army. This meant that the workers were deprived of a crucial instrument for defending their specific interests, even against the transitional state and its army, if need be. The paragraph that follows in Marc’s text also insists on another essential lesson of the Russian experience:

“It only remains for us to affirm that the political party of the class is not a state organ. For a long time revolutionaries did not hold this view, but this was a sign of the immaturity of the objective situation and their own lack of experience. The experience of the Russian Revolution has shown that this view is obsolete. The structure of a state based on political parties is typical of bourgeois democracy, of the bourgeois state. Society in the transition period cannot delegate its power to political parties, i.e. specialised bodies. The semi-state will be based on the soviet system, on the direct and constant participation of the masses in the life and functioning of society. This implies that the masses can at any time recall their representatives, replace them, exert a constant and direct control over them. The delegation of power to parties, of whatever kind, reintroduces the division between power and society, and is thus a major barrier to its emancipation.

“Moreover, the assumption of or participation in state power by the proletarian party will, as the Russian experience shows, profoundly alter its functions. Without entering into a discussion on the function of the party and its relation to the class - which raises another debate - it is enough here to say that the contingent demands of

23. *Communist Manifesto.*

the state would end up prevailing over the party, making it identify with the state and separate itself from the class, to the point of opposing the class”.

The workers’ councils of the future

A question needs to be asked regarding this sketch of a possible transitional state of the future. It is based on the fundamental principle that the proletariat, as the only communist class, must at all times maintain its autonomy from all other classes. The direct translation of this concept is the call for the workers’ councils to exert their dictatorship over the state, and the social composition of these councils is clear: they are city-wide councils made up of delegates elected by all the workplaces in that city. The problem for us is that this notion was put forward at a time – in the 1970s – when the working class still had a definite sense of class identity and, in the central countries of capital, was concentrated in large workplaces like factories, mines, shipyards, etc. But over the last few decades these concentrations have largely been broken up by the process of “globalisation” and the working class has not only been materially atomised by these changes but has also been subjected to a relentless ideological offensive, above all the since the collapse of so-called “Communism” after 1989: an offensive based on the idea that the working class no longer exists, that it is now at best a kind of underclass, even a racial underclass, as in the disgusting notion that the working class is by definition “white”. In the same way our class has been further fragmented by the process of “Uberisation” that seeks to present each worker as an individual entrepreneur. But above all it has been assailed by the propaganda which states that the class struggle is a total anachronism and can only lead not to the formation of a more human society, but to the worst forms of state terror, as in Stalin’s USSR.²⁴

These changes and campaigns have brought great difficulties for the working class and pose real problems about the formation of the workers’ councils of the future. It’s not that the council idea has totally disappeared or turned into a mere appendix of bourgeois democracy. The underlying notion appeared, for example, in the mass assemblies in the movement of the Indignados in Spain in 2011 - and against those groups like Democracy Now who wanted to use the assemblies to give a kind of vampiric life to the parliamentary

24. The report on the class struggle to the 23rd congress of the ICC focuses on this question of class identity. “Formation, loss and reconquest of proletarian class identity”, *International Review* n°164 2020.

system, there were those in the movement who argued that these assemblies were a higher form of self-government than the old parliamentary system. The majority of the protagonists of these assemblies were indeed proletarians, but they were in the main students, unemployed, precarious workers, and they overcame their atomisation by coming together in the town squares or in more local neighbourhood assemblies. At the same time, there was little or no corresponding tendency to hold assemblies in the larger workplaces.

In a sense, this form of assembly organisation was a return to the form of the Commune in 1871, which was made up of delegates from the neighbourhoods (but above all the working class neighbourhoods) of Paris. The workers’ councils or soviets of 1905 or 1917 had been a step forward from the Commune because they were a definite means for enabling the class to organise as a class. The “territorial” form, by contrast, is much more vulnerable to the idea that it is the citizens who are coming together, not a class with its own programme, and we saw this weakness very clearly in the Indignados movement. And more recently, the social revolts that have been sweeping the globe from the Middle East to South America have shown even more clearly the danger of interclassism, of the proletariat being drowned in the protests of the population in general, which are dominated by democratic ideology on the one hand and, on the other, by the despairing, disorganised violence that characterises the lumpen-proletariat.²⁵

We can’t be sure how this problem will be approached in a future mass movement, which may well see the proletariat organising itself through a combination of workplace and street-based mass assemblies. It may also be the case that the autonomy of the working class will have to take on a more directly political character in the future: in other words, that the class organs of the next revolution will define themselves far more than in the past on the basis of their capacity to take up and defend proletarian political positions (such as opposition to parliament and trade unions, the unmasking of the capitalist left and so on). This by no means implies that the workplaces, and the councils that emanate from them, will cease to be a crucial focus for the coming together of the working class as a class. This will certainly be the case in countries like China whose frenzied industrialisation has been the counter-

25. “‘Popular revolts’ are no answer to world capitalism’s dive into crisis and misery”, *International Review* n° 163, 2019.

Continued on page 25

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The Dutch communist left is one of the major components of the revolutionary current which broke away from the degenerating Communist International in the 1920s. Well before Trotsky's Left Opposition, and in a more profound way, the communist left had been able

to expose the opportunist dangers which threatened the International and its parties and which eventually led to their demise. In the struggle for the intransigent defence of revolutionary principles, this current, represented in particular by the KAPD in Germany, the KAPN in Holland, and the left of the Communist Party of Italy animated by Bordiga, came out against the International's policies on questions like participation in elections and trade unions, the formation of 'united fronts' with social democracy, and support for national liberation struggles. It was against the positions of the communist left that Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*; and this text drew a response in *Reply to Lenin*, written by one of the main figures of the Dutch left, Herman Gorter.

In fact, the Dutch left, like the Italian left, had been formed well before the first world war, as part of the same struggle waged by Luxemburg and Lenin against the opportunism and reformism which was gaining hold of the parties of the Second International. It was no accident that Lenin himself, before reverting to centrist positions at the head of the Communist International, had, in his book *State and Revolution*, leaned heavily on the analyses of Anton Pannekoek, who was the main theoretician of the Dutch left. This document is an indispensable complement to *The Italian Communist Left*, already published by the ICC, for all those who want to know the real history of the communist movement behind all the falsifications which Stalinism and Trotskyism have erected around it.

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BASIC POSITIONS OF THE ICC

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

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

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

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

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

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

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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

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