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Faced with war and the acceleration of the crisis of capitalism:

Revolutionaries have a historic responsibility

Third Manifesto of the ICC

Capitalism leads to the destruction of humanity... Only the world revolution of the proletariat can put an end to it

The acceleration of capitalist decomposition poses the clear possibility of the destruction of humanity

The significance of the summer of anger in Britain
The return of the combativity of the world proletariat

The United States

The superpower in capitalist decadence is now at the epicentre of social decomposition (I)

Critique of "communisers" (parts I & II)

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

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Faced with war and the acceleration of the crisis of capitalism

Revolutionaries have a historic responsibility

The attitude of communists in the face of war has always been a clear class frontier between the camp of the proletariat and the camp of the bourgeoisie. Confronted with an unparalleled descent into the barbarism of war, with the ceaseless torrent of nationalist propaganda and the shameful lies of bourgeois pacifism, genuine revolutionaries have not bargained with the political principles of the workers' movement, they have not hesitated to mount an unflinching defence of proletarian internationalism.

When the proletariat was betrayed on the eve of the First World War and led into the trenches by Social Democracy, the revolutionaries who had remained loyal to internationalism, though small in number, made no concessions to the calls for a "Sacred Union" against "German militarism" on one side or "Tsarist autocracy" on the other.

On the contrary! When the chauvinist hysteria was at its height, including in the ranks of the proletariat, they came together, in spite of many confusions among them, at Zimmerwald in 1915, then at Kienthal the following year. The revolutionaries who were clearest about the new situation opened up by the war, the Zimmerwald left, and the Bolsheviks in particular, waged a bitter struggle in these conferences to clarify the road ahead and to hold high the banner of internationalism and autonomous proletarian struggle: the working class has no camp to choose and must not align itself with any other class. The only possible way to stop the war was the independent struggle of the proletariat on the basis of its specific interests!

During the Second World War, the atrocious height of several decades of counter-revolution, the revolutionary forces, those of the communist left, although scarce and dispersed, never stopped denouncing the war and intervening within their class to affirm, in an extremely difficult context, that it had to develop its struggle against all the imperialisms. There again, revolutionary organisations did not wait with folded arms until the proletariat mobilised en masse against the war. Rather they tried to act as a determined spearhead in the defence of internationalism, putting forward the necessity to overthrow the capitalist system, even though, in the context of the Second World War, the proletariat was absolutely unable to carry out this titanic task.

Following in the footsteps of our predecessors, several revolutionary organisa-

tions, including the ICC, distributed a "Joint Statement" in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, beginning with the words "*The workers have no country! Down with all the imperialist powers! In place of capitalist barbarism: socialism!*"

Those who see no further than the end of their noses will not fail (and have not failed) to pour derision on this appeal by a handful of small, inaudible organisations unknown in the working class. We have no illusions about this; we know perfectly well that only a tiny part of the class has had access to this statement, that its influence in the proletariat is restricted to a very small minority.

But we also know where we come from, we remember the lessons of Zimmerwald, of Kienthal, and of the combat of the communist left during the Second World War: the "handfuls of small, inaudible and unknown" organisations were able to take up their responsibilities, conscious of the need to regroup revolutionary forces on the basis of serious political clarification, in order to carry out a determined intervention in the proletariat on the clearest possible basis. As the Joint Statement puts it: "*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.*"¹

This is the task that consistent revolutionary organisations must take on today!

1. "Joint Statement of groups of the international communist left about war in Ukraine", *International Review* n° 168.

It's not a question of looking at past history from a balcony and commenting sagely on the state of the world: revolutionaries are fighters not academics! Neither is it a question of rushing into an artificial political agitation, of inventing an influence in the working class and sweeping away its immense difficulties with the power of our words and the correctness of our positions. Such an immediatist approach can only lead to demoralisation or, even worse, to the most shameful opportunism, making concessions on our principles in order to gain an influence which we don't have and can't have in the present situation.

But, right now, even if it is not yet in a position where it can fight directly against imperialist war, the proletariat has shown its ability to raise its head in response to the consequences of the war and the economic crisis. For several months now, the proletariat in the United Kingdom has been in struggle. Of course, the bourgeoisie, its left parties and its trade unions, are doing all they can to channel the workers' anger and lead it into the dead-ends of sectionalism or electoralism, identity-based protests or inter-classist movements. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of workers have come out onto the streets to express their anger, to discuss, and refuse to keep their heads down. And this in a country which has not seen significant struggles for 40 years! In many other countries, anger is growing; there are more and more struggles against inflation, lay-offs and the "reforms" of the bourgeoisie. These struggles are a ferment for the development of class consciousness. It is thus up to revolutionaries not only to defend the autonomy of the class struggle against the traps laid by the bourgeoisie, but also to show the link between the attacks hitting the proletariat in all countries and the historic crisis of capitalism, of which war is a caricatural expression as well as a powerful accelerator.² The more revolutionaries are armed politically to defend this orientation, the more their influence will be really decisive, in the first instance among workers searching for class positions.

2. See our International Leaflet: A summer of anger in Britain; the ruling class demands further sacrifices, the response of the working class is to fight!" published in this issue of the *International Review*.

Continued on page 7

Third Manifesto of the ICC

Capitalism leads to the destruction of humanity... Only the world revolution of the proletariat can put an end to it

130 years ago, when tensions between capitalist powers were growing in Europe, Frederick Engels posed the dilemma for humanity: Communism or Barbarism.

This alternative was concretised in the First World War which broke out in 1914 and caused 20 million deaths, another 20 million invalids, and in the chaos of war there was the Spanish flu pandemic with more than 50 million deaths.

The revolution in Russia in 1917 and the revolutionary attempts in other countries put an end to the carnage and showed the other side of the historical dilemma posed by Engels: the overthrow of capitalism on a world scale by the revolutionary class, the proletariat, opening up the possibility of a communist society.

However, there followed:

- the crushing of this world revolutionary attempt, the brutal counter-revolution in Russia perpetrated by Stalinism under the banner of "communism";
- the massacre of the proletariat in Germany, initiated by Social Democracy¹ and completed by Nazism;
- the enlistment of the proletariat in the Soviet Union, the massacre of the proletariat in that country, and;
- the enlistment of the proletariat behind the flags of anti-fascism and the defence of the "socialist" fatherland which led in 1939-45 to another new milestone of barbarism, the Second World War, with 60 million dead and an infinite sequel of suffering: the Nazi and Stalinist concentration camps; the Allied bombings of Dresden, Hamburg and Tokyo (January 1945); the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the USA.

Since then, war has not stopped claiming lives on every continent.

First came the confrontation between the US and Russian blocs, the so-called Cold War (1945-89), with an endless chain of localised wars and the threat of a deluge

1. Faced with the revolutionary attempt in Germany in 1918, the social democrat Noske said that he was ready to be the bloodhound of the counter-revolution.

of nuclear bombs hanging over the entire planet.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1989-91, chaotic wars have bloodied the planet: Iraq, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia, Sudan... The war in Ukraine is the most serious war crisis since 1945.

The barbarity of war is accompanied by a proliferation of mutually reinforcing destructive forces: the COVID pandemic which is still far from being overcome and which heralds new pandemics; the ecological and environmental disaster that is accelerating and amplifying, combined with climate change, causing increasingly uncontrollable and deadly disasters: drought, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, etc., and an unprecedented degree of pollution of land, water, air and space; the severe food crisis bringing famines of biblical proportions. Forty years ago, humanity was in danger of perishing in a Third World War, today it can be annihilated by the simple aggregation and lethal combination of the forces of destruction currently at work: *“In the end, it is all the same whether we are wiped out in a rain of thermonuclear bombs, or by pollution, radio-activity from nuclear power stations, famine, epidemics, and the massacres of innumerable small wars (where nuclear weapons might also be used). The only difference between these two forms of annihilation lies in that one is quick, while the other would be slower, and would consequently cause still more suffering.”*²

The dilemma posed by Engels takes a much more pressing form: COMMUNISM or THE DESTRUCTION OF HUMANITY. The historical moment is serious, and

2. “Theses on Decomposition”, Thesis 11.

internationalist revolutionaries need to affirm it unequivocally to our class, because only our class can open up the communist perspective through a permanent and relentless struggle.

Imperialist war is capitalism's way of life

The mass media falsify and underplay the reality of the war. In the early stages the media was devoted to the war in Ukraine 24 hours a day. But as time has gone by, the war has been trivialised, not even producing headlines, its echoes not going beyond threatening statements, calls for sacrifices to “send weapons to Ukraine”, hammering out propaganda campaigns against the enemy, fake news, all served with vain hopes of “negotiations”...

To trivialise war, to become accustomed to the repellent smell of corpses and smoking ruins, is the worst of treachery, it is concealing the serious dangers that menace humanity, it is to be blind to all the threats that are permanently hanging over our heads.

Millions of people, in Africa, Asia or Central America, know no other reality than WAR; from cradle to grave they live in an ocean of barbarism where atrocities of all kinds proliferate: child soldiers, punitive military operations, hostage-taking, terrorist attacks, mass displacement of entire populations, indiscriminate bombings.

While the wars of the past were limited to the front lines and the combatants, the wars of the 20th and 21st century are TOTAL WARS that encompass all spheres of social life and their effects spread throughout the world, dragging down all countries, including those that are not direct belligerents. In the wars of the 20th and 21st century, no inhabitant or place on the planet can escape their lethal effects.

On the front line, which can span thousands of kilometres and extend over land, sea and air... and through space! ... Life is cut

short by bombs, shooting, mines, and even, in many cases, by “friendly fire” ... Seized by a murderous insanity, forced through the terror imposed by higher ranks, or trapped in extreme situations, all the participants are forced to carry out the most suicidal, criminal and destructive actions.

On one part of the military front there is “remote warfare” with the relentless deployment of ultra-modern machines of destruction: planes dropping thousands of bombs without pause; drones remotely controlled to attack enemy targets; mobile or fixed artillery relentlessly pounding the enemy; missiles covering hundreds or thousands of kilometres.

The so-called home front becomes itself a permanent theatre of war in which the population is taken hostage. Anyone can die in the periodic bombardment of entire cities... In the centres of production, people work at gunpoint, under the control of the police, parties, trade unions and all the other institutions in the service of the “defence of the homeland”, while at the same time they run the risk of being ripped apart by enemy bombs. Work becomes an even greater hell than the daily hell of capitalist exploitation.

The dramatically rationed food is a filthy, stinking soup... There is no water, no electricity, no heating... Millions of human beings see their existence reduced to surviving like animals. Shells fall from the sky, killing thousands of people or causing terrible suffering, on the ground, endless police or military checkpoints, the danger of being arrested by armed thugs, state mercenaries referred to as “defenders of the homeland” ... You have to run to take refuge in filthy, rat-infested cellars ... Respect, the most elementary solidarity, trust, rational thought ... are swept away by the atmosphere of terror imposed not only by the government, but also by the National Union in which parties and trade unions participate with merciless zeal. The most absurd rumours, the most implausible news circulate incessantly, causing an hysterical atmosphere of denunciation, indiscriminate suspicion, massive stress and pogrom.

War is a barbarism willed and planned by governments that aggravate it by consciously propagating hatred, fear of the “other”, rifts and divisions between human beings, death for death’s sake, the institutionalisation of torture, submission, power relations, as the only logic of social evolution. The violent fighting around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine shows how the two sides have no scruples about the risk of provoking a radioactive catastrophe a lot worse than Chernobyl and with tremendous consequences for the population of European.

The threat of the use of nuclear weapons looms ominously.

The ideology of war

Capitalism is the most hypocritical and cynical system in history. Its whole ideological art consists in passing off its interests as the “interest of the people” adorned with the loftiest ideals: justice, peace, progress, human rights...!

All states fabricate an IDEOLOGY OF WAR designed to justify it and to turn their “citizens” into hyenas ready to kill. *“War is methodical, organised, gigantic murder. But in normal human beings this systematic murder is possible only when a state of intoxication has been previously created. This has always been the tried and proven method of those who make war. Bestiality of action must find a commensurate bestiality of thought and senses; the latter must prepare and accompany the former.”*³

The great democracies have PEACE as a cornerstone of their war ideology. Demonstrations “for peace” have always prepared imperialist wars. In the summer of 1914 and in 1938-39 millions of people demonstrated “for peace” in an impotent cry of “people of goodwill”, exploiters and exploited holding hands, which the “democratic” side never stop using to justify the acceleration of war preparations.

In the First World War, Germany had mobilised its troops in “defence of peace”, “shattered by the Sarajevo attack on its Austrian ally”. But on the opposing side, France and Britain went to the slaughter in the name of peace “shattered by Germany”. In World War II, France and Britain feigned a “peace” effort at Munich in the face of Hitler’s ambitions, while frenetically preparing for war, and the invasion of Poland by the combined action of Hitler and Stalin gave them the perfect excuse to go to war... In Ukraine, Putin said until hours before the invasion on 24 February that he wanted “peace”, while the United States relentlessly denounced Putin’s warmongering...

The nation, national defence and all the ideological weapons that gyrate around it (racism, religion etc.) is the hook to mobilise the proletariat and the whole population in imperialist slaughter. The bourgeoisie proclaims in times of “peace” the “coexistence between peoples”, but everything vanishes with imperialist war, then the masks fall off and everyone spreads hatred of the foreigner and the staunch defence of the nation!

They all present their wars as “defen-

sive”. A hundred years ago, the ministries in charge of military barbarism were called “ministries of war”; today, with the worst hypocrisy, they are called “ministries of defence”. Defence is the fig leaf of warfare. There are no attacked nations and aggressor nations, they are all active participants in the deadly machinery of war. Russia in the current war appears as the “aggressor” as it is the one that has taken the initiative to invade Ukraine, but before that the United States, in a Machiavellian manner, expanded NATO to several countries of the old Warsaw Pact. It is not possible to take each link in isolation, it is necessary to look at the bloody chain of imperialist confrontation that has been gripping the whole of humanity for more than a century.

They always talk of a “clean war”, which follows (or should follow) “humanitarian rules” “in accordance with international law”. This is a despicable fraud, served with unbridled cynicism and hypocrisy! The wars of decadent capitalism live by no other rule than the absolute destruction of the enemy, and that includes terrorising the subjects of the enemy with merciless bombing ... In war a relationship of force is established where ANYTHING GOES, from the most brutal rape and punishment of the enemy’s population, to the most indiscriminate terror against their own “citizens”. Russia’s bombing of Ukraine follows in the footsteps of the US bombing of Iraq, the American like the Russian governments in Afghanistan or in Syria and before that of Vietnam; France’s bombing of its former colonies, such as Madagascar and Algeria; the bombing of Dresden and Hamburg by the “democratic allies”; and the nuclear barbarity of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The wars of the 20th and 21st centuries have been accompanied by methods of mass extermination employed by all sides, although the democratic side usually takes care to subcontract it to shady individuals who get the blame.

They dare to talk of “just wars”!!! The NATO side supporting Ukraine says it is a battle for democracy against despotism and the dictatorial regime of Putin. Putin says he will “denazify” Ukraine. Both are blatant lies. The side of the “democracies” has just as much blood on its hands: blood from the countless wars they have provoked directly (Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan) or indirectly (Libya, Syria, Yemen...); blood from the thousands of migrants killed at sea or at the frontier hotspots of the USA or in Europe... The Ukrainian state uses terror to impose the Ukrainian language and culture; it kills workers for the sole crime of speaking Russian; it forcibly enlists any young person caught in the streets or on the roads; it uses the population, including those in hospitals, as human shields;

3. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet*.

it deploys neo-fascist gangs to terrorise the population... For his part, Putin, in addition to bombings, rapes and summary executions, displaces thousands of families to concentration camps in remote places; imposes terror in the “liberated” territories and enlists Ukrainians for the army by sending them to the slaughterhouse on the front line.

The real causes of war

Ten thousand years ago one of the means that broke up primitive communism was tribal warfare. Since then, under the aegis of modes of production based on exploitation, war has been one of the worst calamities. But certain wars have been able to play a progressive role in history, for example, in the development of capitalism, forming new nations, extending the world market, stimulating the development of the productive forces.

However, since the First World War, the world has been totally divided up among the capitalist powers, so that the only way out for each national capital is to wrest markets, zones of influence, strategic areas from its rivals. This makes war and all that goes with it (militarism, gigantic accumulation of armaments, diplomatic alliances) the PERMANENT WAY OF LIFE of capitalism. A constant imperialist pressure grips the world and drags down all nations, big or small, whatever their ideological mask and alibi, the orientation of the ruling parties, their racial composition or their cultural and religious heritage. ALL NATIONS ARE IMPERIALIST. The myth of “peaceful and neutral” nations is a pure fraud. If certain nations adopt a “neutral” policy, it is to try to take advantage of the conflict between the most resolutely opposing camps, to carve out their own zone of imperialist influence. In June 2022, Sweden, a country that has been officially neutral for more than 70 years, has joined NATO but it has not “betrayed any ideals”, it has continued its own imperialist policy “by other means”.

War is certainly good business for corporations engaged in arms manufacture, and it may even temporarily benefit particular countries but, for capitalism as a whole, it is an economic catastrophe, an irrational waste, a MINUS that weighs on world production that inevitably and negatively causes indebtedness, inflation and ecological destruction, never a PLUS that could increase capitalist accumulation.

An unavoidable necessity for the survival of every nation, war is a deadly economic weight. The USSR collapsed because it could not withstand the crazy arms race that the confrontation with the

USA entailed and which the latter took to the ultimate with the deployment of the Star Wars program in the 1980s. The United States, which was the great victor of World War II and enjoyed a spectacular economic boom until the late 1960s, has encountered many obstacles to preserving its imperialist hegemony, of course since the dissolution of the blocs, which has favoured the emergence of a dynamic of reawakened new imperialist appetites - especially among its former ‘allies’ - of contestation and every one for themselves, but also because of the gigantic military effort that American forces have had to make for more than 80 years and the costly military operations it has had to undertake to maintain its status as the world’s leading power.

Capitalism carries in its genes, in its DNA, the most exacerbated competition, the EACH AGAINST ALL and the EVERYONE FOR THEMSELVES, for every capitalist, as well as for every nation. This “organic” tendency of capitalism did not appear clearly in its ascendant period because each national capital still enjoyed sufficient areas for its expansion without the need to enter into conflict with its rivals. Between 1914-89 it was attenuated by the formation of large imperialist blocs. With the brutal end of this brutal discipline, centrifugal tendencies are shaping a world of murderous disorder, where any imperialisms with global ambitions for world domination, as well as imperialisms with regional pretensions, and more local imperialisms are all compelled to follow their expansive appetites and their own interests. In this scenario, the United States tries to prevent anyone from overshadowing it by relentlessly deploying its overwhelming military power, relentlessly building it up, and by launching constant, strongly destabilising military operations. The promise in 1990, after the end of the USSR, of a “New World Order” of peace and prosperity was immediately belied by the Gulf War and then by the wars in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan, which fuelled the warlike tendencies in such a way that the “most democratic imperialism in the world”, the USA, is now the main agent for spreading warlike chaos and destabilising the world situation.

China has emerged as a contender of the first order to challenge America’s leadership. Its army, despite its modernisation, is still a long way from acquiring the strength and experience of its American rival; its war technology, the basis of its armaments and effective military deployments, is still limited and fragile, a far cry from the US; China is surrounded in the Pacific by a chain of hostile powers (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, etc.), which block its imperialist maritime

expansion. Faced with this unfavourable situation, it has embarked on a gigantic economic-imperialist enterprise, the Silk Road, which aims to establish a global presence and a land expansion through Central Asia in one of the most unstable areas of the world. This is an effort with a very uncertain outcome that requires a total and immeasurable economic and military investment and political-social mobilisation beyond its means of control, which is essentially based on the political rigidity of its state apparatus, a heavy legacy of Stalinist Maoism: the systematic and brutal use of its repressive forces, coercion and submission to a gigantic, ultra-bureaucratised state apparatus, as was seen in the growing number of protests against the government’s “zero Covid” policy. This aberrant orientation and the accumulation of contradictions that deeply undermine its development could eventually undermine the clay-footed colossus that is China. This, and the brutal and threatening response of the US, illustrates the degree of murderous insanity, of blind flight into barbarism and militarism (including the growing militarisation of social life), that capitalism has reached as symptoms of a generalised cancer that is eating away at the world and now directly threatens the future of the earth and the life of humanity.

The whirlwind of destruction that threatens the world

The war in Ukraine is not a storm out of a blue sky; it follows the worst pandemic (so far) of the 21st century, COVID, with more than 15 million dead, and whose ravages continued with draconian lockdowns in China. However, both should be seen in the context of, as well as stimulating, a chain of catastrophes striking humanity: environmental destruction; climate change and its multiple consequences; famine returning with great force to Africa, Asia and Central America; the incredible wave of refugees, which in 2021 reached the unprecedented figure of 100 million people displaced or migrating; the political disorder taking hold of the central countries as we have seen with the governments in Britain or the weight of populism in the United States; the rise of the most obscurantist ideologies...

The pandemic has laid bare the contradictions that undermine capitalism. A social system that boasts impressive scientific advances has no other recourse than the medieval method of quarantine, while its health systems collapse and its economy has been paralysed for almost two years, aggravating a skyrocketing economic crisis. A social order that claims to have progress as its banner produces the most backward and irrational ideologies that

have exploded around the pandemic with ridiculous conspiracy theories, many of them from the mouths of “great world leaders”.

The pandemic has a direct cause in the worst ecological disaster that has been threatening humanity for years. Driven by profit and not by the satisfaction of human needs, capitalism is a predator of natural resources, as it is of human labour, but, at the same time, it tends to destroy natural balances and processes, modifying them in a chaotic way, like a sorcerer’s apprentice, provoking all kinds of catastrophes with increasingly destructive consequences: global warming, triggering droughts, floods, fires, collapse of glaciers and icebergs, massive disappearance of plant and animal species with unforeseeable consequences and heralding the very disappearance of the human species to which capitalism is leading. The ecological disaster is exacerbated by the necessities of war, by war operations themselves (the use of nuclear weapons is an obvious expression) and by the worsening of a world economic crisis that forces every national capital to further devastate numerous areas in a desperate search for raw materials. The summer of 2022 is a glaring illustration of the serious threats facing humanity at the ecological level: rising average and maximum temperatures – the hottest summer since records began internationally – widespread drought affecting rivers such as the Rhine, the Po and the Thames, devastating forest fires, floods such as the one in Pakistan affecting a third of the country’s surface area, landslides... and, in the midst of this devastating panorama of disaster, governments withdraw their ridiculous “environmental protection” measures in the name of the war effort!

“*The final outcome of the capitalist mode of production is chaos*”, said the Platform adopted by the first Congress of the Communist International in 1919. It is suicidal and irrational, contrary to all scientific criteria, to think that all these ravages would be no more than a sum of passing phenomena, each resulting from distinct causes. There is a continuity, an accumulation of contradictions, which make a common bloody thread, which binds them together, converging in a lethal whirlwind which threatens humanity:

- We are witnessing an acceleration of all the contradictions of capitalism combining with each other and provoking a multiplying effect on the factors of destruction and chaos;
- The economy is plunged not only into crisis but also into increasing disorder (constant supply bottlenecks, a convergence of situations of overproduction

and shortages of goods and labour);

- The most industrialised countries, which are supposed to be oases of prosperity and peace, are being destabilised and are themselves becoming major factors in the dizzying increase in international instability.

As we said in the Manifesto of our 9th Congress (1991): “*Never has human society seen slaughter on such a scale as during the last two World Wars. Never has scientific progress been used on such a scale in the service of destruction, death, and human misery. Never has such an accumulation of wealth gone side by side with, indeed created, such famine and suffering as that of the Third World countries during the last decades. But it seems that humanity has not yet plumbed the depths. The decadence of capitalism means the system’s death-agony, but this agony itself has a history: today, we have reached its ultimate phase, the phase of general decomposition. Human society is rotting where it stands.*”.⁴

The response of the proletariat

Of all the classes in society, the most affected and hardest hit by war is the proletariat. “Modern” war is waged by a gigantic industrial machine which demands a great intensification of the exploitation of the proletariat. The proletariat is an international class that HAS NO HOMELAND, but war is the killing of workers for the homeland that exploits and oppresses them. The proletariat is the class of consciousness; war is irrational confrontation, the renunciation of all conscious thought and reflection. The proletariat has an interest in seeking the clearest truth; in wars the first casualty is truth, chained, gagged, suffocated by the lies of imperialist propaganda. The proletariat is the class of unity across barriers of language, religion, race or nationality; the deadly confrontation of war compels the tearing apart, the division, the confrontation between nations and populations. The proletariat is the class of internationalism, of trust and mutual solidarity; war demands suspicion, fear of the “foreigner”, the most abhorrent hatred of “the enemy”.

Because war strikes at and mutilates the very core of the proletarian being, generalised war necessitates the prior defeat of the proletariat. The First World War was possible because the then parties of the working class, the socialist parties, together with the trade unions, betrayed our class and joined their bourgeoisies in the framework of NATIONAL UNION

4. “Communist revolution or the destruction of humanity”

against the enemy. But this betrayal was not enough. In 1915, the Left of social democracy grouped together in Zimmerwald and raised the banner of struggle for world revolution. This contributed to the emergence of mass struggles that paved the way for the Revolution in Russia in 1917 and the worldwide wave of proletarian onslaught in 1917-23, not only against the war in defence of the principles of proletarian internationalism, but against capitalism by asserting its capacity as a united class to overthrow a barbaric and inhuman system of exploitation

An indestructible lesson of 1917-18! The First World War was not ended by diplomatic negotiations or by the conquests of this or that imperialism, IT WAS ENDED BY THE INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY UPRISING OF THE PROLETARIAT. ONLY THE PROLETARIAT CAN PUT AN END TO MILITARY BARBARISM BY TURNING ITS CLASS STRUGGLE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF CAPITALISM.

In order to open the way to the Second World War, the bourgeoisie ensured not only the physical but also the ideological defeat of the proletariat. The proletariat was subjected to merciless terror wherever its revolutionary attempts had gone furthest: in Germany under Nazism, in Russia under Stalinism. But, at the same time, it had been recruited ideologically, behind the banners of anti-fascism and the defence of the “Socialist Fatherland”, the USSR. “*Unable to launch its own offensive the working class was led, bound hand and foot, into the second imperialist war. Unlike World War I, the Second World War did not provide the working class with the means to rise up in a revolutionary way. Instead it was mobilised behind the great ‘victories’ of the ‘Resistance’, ‘anti-fascism’, and colonial and national ‘liberation’ movement.*”⁵

Since the historic resumption of the class struggle in 1968, and throughout the period when the world was divided into two imperialist blocs, the working class in the major countries refused to make the sacrifices demanded by war, let alone go to the front to die for the Fatherland, thus closing the door to a Third World War. This situation has not changed since 1989.

The fight against inflation and the fight against the war

However, the “non-mobilisation” of the proletariat of the central countries for war IS NOT ENOUGH. A second lesson emerges from historical developments since 1989: MERE PASSIVITY TO WAR

5. “Manifesto of the First International Congress of the ICC”, 1975.

OPERATIONS, AND SIMPLE RESISTANCE TO CAPITALIST BARBARISM IS NOT ENOUGH. STAYING AT THIS STAGE WILL NOT STOP THE COURSE TOWARDS THE DESTRUCTION OF HUMANITY.

The proletariat needs to move to the political terrain of the general international offensive against capitalism. *“The working class will only be able to answer capital’s attacks blow for blow, and finally go onto the offensive and overthrow this barbaric system thanks to: (-) an awareness of what is at stake in the present historical situation, and in particular of the mortal danger that social decomposition holds over humanity; (-) its determination to continue, develop and unite its class combat; (-) its ability to spring the many traps that the bourgeoisie, however decomposed itself, will not fail to set in its path.”*⁶

The backdrop to the accumulation of destruction, barbarism and catastrophes that we are denouncing is the irreversible economic crisis of capitalism that is at the root of its functioning. From 1967 capitalism entered into an economic crisis from which, fifty years later, it is unable to escape, on the contrary, as shown by the economic upheavals that have been taking place since 2018 and the growing escalation of inflation, it is worsening considerably, with its consequences of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and famine.

The capitalist crisis affects the very foundations of this society. Inflation, insecurity, unemployment, hellish pace and working conditions that destroy workers’ health, unaffordable housing... all testify to an unstoppable degradation of working class life and, although the bourgeoisie tries to create all imaginable divisions, granting “more privileged” conditions to certain categories of workers, what we see in its entirety is, on the one hand, what is possibly going to be the WORST CRISIS in the history of capitalism, and, on the other hand, the concrete reality of the ABSOLUTE PAUPERISATION of the working class in the central countries, fully confirming the accuracy of the prediction which Marx made concerning the historical perspective of capitalism and which the economists and other ideologues of the bourgeoisie have so much mocked.

The inexorable worsening of the crisis of capitalism is an essential stimulus for the class struggle and class consciousness. The struggle against the effects of the crisis is the basis for the development of the strength and unity of the working class. The economic crisis directly affects the infrastructure of society; it therefore lays

bare the root causes of all the barbarism that hangs over society, enabling the proletariat to become conscious of the need to completely destroy the system and no longer try to improve some aspects of it.

In the struggle against the brutal attacks of capitalism and especially against the inflation that hits workers as a whole in a general and indiscriminate way, workers will develop their combativity, they will be able to begin to recognise themselves as a class with a strength, an autonomy and a historical role to play in society. This political development of the class struggle will give them the capacity to put an end to war by putting an end to capitalism.

This perspective is beginning to emerge: *“in the face of the bourgeoisie’s attacks, anger has been building up and today, the working class in Britain is showing that it is once again prepared to fight for its dignity, to reject the sacrifices that are constantly demanded by capital. Furthermore, it is indicative of an international dynamic: last winter, strikes started to appear in Spain and the US; this summer, Germany and Belgium also experienced walkouts; and now, commentators are predicting ‘an explosive social situation’ in France and Italy in the coming months. It is not possible to predict where and when the workers’ combativity will re-emerge on a massive scale in the near future, but one thing is certain: the scale of the current workers’ mobilisation in Britain is a significant historical event. The days of passivity and submission are past. The new generations of workers are raising their heads.”*⁷ We are seeing a break from years of passivity and disorientation. The return of workers’ combativity in response to the crisis can become a focus of consciousness animated by the intervention of communist organisations. It is clear that each manifestation of the breakdown into the decomposition of society manages to slow down workers’ combative efforts, or even paralyse them at first: as was the case with the movement in France 2019, which was hit by the outbreak of the pandemic. This means an additional difficulty for the development of struggles. However, there is no other way than struggle, the struggle itself is already the first victory. The world proletariat, even through a process necessarily strewn with pitfalls and traps set by the political and trade union apparatuses of its class enemy, with bitter defeats, keeps intact its capacities to be able to recover its class identity and finally launch an international offensive against this dying system.

7. “A summer of anger in Britain: The ruling class demands further sacrifices, the response of the working class is to fight!”, International Leaflet, August 2022, published in this issue of the *International Review*.

The obstacles that the class struggle has to overcome

The twenties of the twenty-first century will therefore be of considerable importance in the historical evolution of the class struggle of the workers movement. They show – as we have already seen since 2020 – more clearly than in the past, the perspective of the destruction of humanity that capitalist decomposition holds. At the opposite pole, the proletariat will begin to take its first steps, often hesitant and full of weaknesses, towards its historical capacity to pose the communist perspective. Both poles of the alternative, Destruction of Humanity or Communist Revolution, will be posed, although the latter is still a long way off and faces enormous obstacles in asserting itself

It would be suicidal for the proletariat to try and conceal or underestimate the gigantic obstacles that come both from the activity of Capital and its states and from the putrefying atmosphere that is contaminating the social environment all over the world:

1. The bourgeoisie has drawn the lessons of the GREAT SHOCK of the initial triumph of the Revolution in Russia and the world revolutionary wave of 1917-23, which showed “in practice” what the Communist Manifesto declared in 1848: *“A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism... The bourgeoisie produces... its own grave-diggers ... the proletariat”*.

It COLLABORATES INTERNATIONALLY against the proletariat as was seen in the face of the revolution in Russia 1917⁸ and Germany in 1918 or against the mass strike in Poland in 1980.

It has developed a gigantic apparatus of control, diversion and sabotage of workers’ struggles made up of trade unions and parties of all political colours, from the extreme right to the extreme left.

It uses and is going to use all the instruments of its state and the mass media to launch constant ideological campaigns and co-ordinate political manoeuvres aimed at counteracting and obstructing the consciousness and struggles of the proletariat.

2. The decomposition of capitalist society exacerbates the lack of confidence in the future. It also undermines the con-

8. The combined armies of the United States, France, Great Britain and Japan collaborated from April 1918 with the remnants of the former Tsarist army in a horrific Civil War that caused 6 million deaths.

6. “Theses on Decomposition”, Thesis 17.

fidence of the proletariat in itself and in its strength as the only class capable of overthrowing capitalism, giving rise to “every man for himself”, generalised competition, social fragmentation into opposing categories, corporatism, all are a considerable obstacle to the development of workers’ struggles and above all their revolutionary politicisation.

3. In this context, the proletariat is in danger of being dragged into interclassist struggles or piecemeal mobilisations (feminism, anti-racism, climate or environmental questions...), all of which open the door to a diversion of its struggle onto a terrain of confrontation between fractions of the bourgeoisie.
4. *“Time is no longer on the side of the working class. As long as society was threatened with destruction by imperialist war alone, the mere fact of the proletarian struggle was sufficient to bar the way to this destruction. But, unlike imperialist war, which depended on the proletariat’s adherence to the bourgeoisie’s ‘ideals’, social decomposition can destroy humanity without controlling the working class. For while the workers’ struggles can oppose the collapse of the economy, they are powerless, within this system, to hinder decomposition. Thus, while the threat posed by decomposition may seem more far-off than that of world war (were the conditions for it present, which is not the case today), it is by contrast far more insidious.”*⁹

This immensity of dangers should not push us into fatalism. The strength of the proletariat is the consciousness of its weaknesses, its difficulties, the obstacles which the enemy or the situation itself raise against its struggle. *“Proletarian revolutions ... constantly criticise themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with merciless thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more colossal than ever, recoil constantly from the indeterminate immensity of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: Hic Rhodus, hic salta!”*¹⁰

The response of the Communist Left

In serious historical situations such as far-

9. “Theses on Decomposition”, Thesis 16.

10. Marx: “18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”.

reaching wars like the one in Ukraine, the proletariat can see who are its friends and who are its enemies. These enemies are not only the major figures such as Putin, Zelensky or Biden, but also the parties of the extreme right, right, left and extreme left, who, with a wide range of arguments, including pacifism, support and justify the war and the defence of one imperialist camp against another.

For more than a century only the Communist Left has been and is capable of denouncing imperialist war systematically and consistently, defending the alternative of the class struggle of the proletariat, of its orientation towards the destruction of capitalism by the world proletarian revolution.

The struggle of the proletariat is not limited to its defensive struggles or mass strikes. An indispensable, permanent and inseparable component of it is the struggle of its communist organisations and, concretely, for a century now, of the Communist Left. The unity of all groups of the Communist Left is indispensable in the face of the capitalist dynamic of the destruction of humanity. As we already affirmed in the Manifesto from our first congress (1975): *“Turning its back on the monolithism of the sects, the International Communist Current calls upon the communists of all countries to be aware of the immense responsibilities which they have, to abandon the false quarrels which separate them, to surmount the deceptive divisions which the old world has imposed on them. The ICC calls on them to join in this effort to constitute (before the class engages in its decisive struggles) the international and unified organisation of its vanguard. The communists as the most conscious fraction of the class, must show it the way by taking as their slogan: ‘Revolutionaries of all countries, unite!’”*

ICC (December 2022)

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Faced with war and the acceleration of the crisis of capitalism

Because the other lesson from the experience of the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences is the necessity to construct the revolutionary organisation. Without the world party of the proletariat, without this most conscious and determined part of the working class, there can’t be a victorious revolutionary struggle against the crisis and the wars of capitalism. At Zimmerwald and Kienthal, as within the communist left, revolutionaries, despite their difficulties, their confusions, sometimes their errors, have always tried to confront their points of view, to defend the necessity to debate the divergencies within the proletarian camp. At the conferences of 1915 and 1916, in spite of profound disagreements, they did not hesitate to come together and publish a Manifesto to put forward what they had in common: proletarian internationalism!

The twenties of the 21st century

The acceleration of capitalist decomposition poses the clear possibility of the destruction of humanity

The war in Ukraine is not a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky. Its devastation comes at the same time as a number of other catastrophic phenomena: climate change, environmental degradation, an accelerating economic crisis, political convulsions that are afflicting even the oldest country in capitalism (the United Kingdom), the return of terrible large-scale famines with mass migrations of populations fleeing war zones, slaughter, persecution, destitution... This combination of phenomena, and their interdependence and interaction, has led the International Communist Current to adopt and publish the document which appears below, which aims to integrate these aspects into a broader historical framework and which also takes account of the very important situation of the large-scale strike movement that has shaken the United Kingdom, an expression of deep discontent branded by the media "the summer of discontent".

1. The 20s of the 21st century are shaping up to be one of the most turbulent periods in history, and indescribable disasters and suffering are already mounting up. It began with the Covid-19 pandemic (which is still out there) and a war in the heart of Europe which has lasted for more than nine months and whose outcome no one can foresee. Capitalism has entered into a phase of serious difficulties on all fronts. Behind this accumulation and entanglement of convulsions lies the threat of the destruction of humanity. And, as we already pointed out in our "Theses on Decomposition",¹ capitalism "*is the first [society] to threaten the very survival of humanity, the first that can destroy the human species*" (Thesis 1).

2. The decadence of capitalism is not a homogeneous and uniform process: on the contrary, it has a history which is expressed in several phases. The phase of decomposition has been identified in our Theses as "*a specific phase, the ultimate phase of its history, the one in which decomposition becomes a factor, if not the decisive factor, of the evolution of society*" (Thesis 2). It is clear that if the proletariat is not able to overthrow capitalism, there will be an agonising descent into barbarism, leading to the destruction of humanity.

3. Following the sudden outbreak of the Covid pandemic, we identified four characteristics of the phase of decomposition:

- The increased severity of its effects. The pandemic caused between 15 and 20 million deaths, the general paralysis of the economy for more than a year, the

collapse of national health systems, the inability of states to co-ordinate internationally to combat the virus and produce vaccines, each state sinking instead into a policy of every man for himself. Such a situation not only indicates the impossibility of the system to escape its laws dictated by competition, but also that with the exacerbation of these rivalries comes the negligence, aberration and chaos of bourgeois management and this at the heart of the most powerful and developed countries of the planet.

- The irruption of the effects of decomposition at the economic level. This tendency, already noted at the 23rd Congress of the ICC, has been fully confirmed and is quite "novel" because since the 1980s the bourgeoisie of the central countries had managed to protect the economy from the main effects of decomposition.²
- The growing interaction of its effects, which aggravates the contradictions of capitalism to a level never reached before. Indeed, in the previous thirty years, the bourgeoisie had more or less succeeded (especially in the central countries) in isolating or limiting the effects of decomposition, generally preventing them from interacting. What has become clear over the last two years is the interaction and interweaving of a warlike barbarism, a phenomenal ecological crisis, the chaos in the political apparatus of a good number of important bourgeoisies, the continuing pandemic and the growing risk of new health crises,

famines, the gigantic exodus of millions of people, the spread of the most retrograde and irrational ideologies, etc. All this develops in the midst of a virulent worsening of the economic crisis which further threatens entire sections of the population, in particular those proletarians exposed to growing impoverishment and an accelerated deterioration of their living conditions (unemployment, precariousness, difficulty finding food and housing...).

- The growing presence of its effects in the central countries. If, for the last thirty years, the central countries were relatively protected from the effects of decomposition, today they are being hit hard and, worse still, they tend to become its greatest propagators, as in the United States, where in early 2021 we witnessed the attempted storming of the Capitol by the supporters of the populist Trump as if it were a regular banana republic.

4. 2022 provided a striking illustration of these four characteristics, with:

- The outbreak of war in Ukraine.
- The appearance of unprecedented waves of refugees.
- The continuation of the pandemic with health systems on the verge of collapse.³
- A growing loss of control by the bourgeoisie over its political apparatus; the crisis in the UK was a spectacular manifestation of this.
- An agricultural crisis with a shortage of many food products in a context of widespread overproduction, which is a relatively new phenomenon in more than a century of decadence: "*In the short term, climate change is attacking the foundations of food security. Rising*

3. Globally, the risk to human health in all countries, including the "most developed", has increased dramatically, while scientists also warn of the possibility of new pandemics. The study by a team from London University College published in The Lancet also shows how the climate crisis has increased the spread of dengue fever by 12% between 2018 and 2021 and that "*deaths from heatwaves have increased by 68% between 2017 and 2021, compared with the period between 2000 and 2004*".

1. Adopted in 1990. See *International Review* n° 107.

2. See: "Report on the Economic Crisis for the 24th ICC Congress - July-2020", *International Review* n° 167.

temperatures and extreme climate variations threaten to jeopardise the harvests; in fact, in 2020, crop growing times have been shortened by 9.3 days for maize, 1.7 days for rice and 6 days for wheat in winter and spring, compared to the period between 1981 and 2004.⁴

- The terrifying famines that are affecting more and more countries.⁵

The aggregation and interaction of these destructive phenomena produces a ‘vortex effect’ that concentrates, catalyses and multiplies each of its partial effects, causing even more destructive devastation. Some scientists, like Marine Romanello of University College London, have formed a clear view on this: “*Our report for this year reveals that we are at a critical juncture. We see how climate change is severely affecting health worldwide, while the continued global dependence on fossil fuels is exacerbating this health damage amidst a multiplicity of global crises*”. This “vortex effect” expresses a qualitative change, the consequences of which will become increasingly evident in the coming period.

In this context, it is important to stress the driving force of war, as an action deliberately pursued and planned for by capitalist states, having become the most powerful and aggravating factor of chaos and destruction. In fact, the war in Ukraine has had a multiplier effect on the escalation of barbarism and destruction, involving the following elements:

- The risk of bombing nuclear power plants is always present, as can be seen particularly around the Zaporizhzhia site.
- The threat from the use of chemical and nuclear weapons.
- The violent ramping up of militarism with its consequences for the environment and the climate.
- The direct impact of the war on the energy crisis and the food crisis.

4. *The Lancet* (2022). It should be noted that while the huge ecological deterioration is not the only factor in the food crisis, the concentration of production in very few countries and the heavy financial speculation with wheat and other basic foods further aggravate the problem.

5. In its own way, the International Monetary Fund acknowledges the reality of the situation: “*it is more likely that growth will slow further and that inflation will be higher than expected. Overall, the risks are high and broadly comparable to the situation at the start of the pandemic - an unprecedented combination of factors is shaping the outlook, with individual elements interacting in ways that are inherently difficult to predict. Many of the risks described above are essentially an intensification of the forces already present in the baseline scenario. In addition, the realisation of short-term risks may precipitate medium-term risks and make it more difficult to resolve long-term issues*”.

In this context, we can see the calamity of the growing environmental crisis, which is reaching levels never seen before:

- A summer heat wave, the worst since 1961, with the prospect of such heat-waves becoming a permanent feature.
- A drought unlike any before, the worst in 500 years according to experts, even affecting rivers such as the Thames, the Rhine and the Po, which are usually fast flowing.
- Devastating fires that were also the worst in decades.
- Uncontrollable floods like those in Pakistan, which affected a third of the country's land area (and large-scale flooding in Thailand).
- A risk of collapse of the ice caps after the melting of glaciers comparable in size to the surface of the United Kingdom, with catastrophic consequences.

Other data linked to the environmental crisis, which at the same time aggravates it, relates to the dilapidated state of nuclear power plants⁶ in the context of the energy crisis (resulting from the economic crisis) but also as a consequence of the war in Ukraine. There is clearly a risk of unprecedented disasters in addition to the risk of Ukrainian nuclear power plants being hit by bombs.

The seriousness of the situation is becoming even more clear. One person who can in no way be suspected of being an enemy of capitalism has declared that “*the climate crisis is killing us. It would not only end any question about the health of our planet, but also that of its entire population through the contamination in the atmosphere*.” (says Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General in a message to his General Assembly in September 2022).

5. Underlying this catastrophic development is the dramatically worsening economic crisis that has been developing since 2019 and has been exacerbated first by the pandemic and then by the war. This crisis is shaping up to be a longer and deeper crisis than that of 1929. This is because the irruption of the effects of decomposition on the economy tends to cause havoc with the functioning of production, creating constant bottlenecks and blockages in a situation of growing unemployment—combined, paradoxically, with labour shortages in some areas. Above all, it is expressed in the outbreak of inflation, following various successive rescue plans hastily deployed by states in the face of the pandemic and the war, and thus caused and fuelled by a headlong rush into debt. The increase in

6. France, a global nuclear power giant, now has 32 of its 56 nuclear reactors shut down.

interest rates by central banks in an attempt to curb inflation risks precipitating a very violent recession by shackling both states and companies. The proletariat in the central countries now faces a tsunami of misery and brutal impoverishment.

6. Some important countries are now in an increasingly dangerous situation, which may have serious repercussions for the world as a whole:

- Russia will not be able to avoid a massive upheaval. It is unlikely that a simple removal of Putin from office would be without bloody clashes between rival factions. The possible fragmentation of parts of Russia, the world's largest and most heavily armed state, would have unforeseeable consequences for the whole world.
- China is still suffering from repeated blows of the pandemic (with more likely to come), the weakening of the economy, repeated environmental disasters and the enormous imperialist pressure from the US. The economic and strategic initiative of the “New Silk Roads” can only further worsen the predicament of Chinese capitalism.
- As the Resolution on the International Situation of the 24th ICC Congress points out: “*China is a ticking time bomb [...]. The totalitarian control over the whole social body, the repressive hardening of the Stalinist faction of Xi Jinping is not an expression of strength but a manifestation of the weakness of the state, whose cohesion is endangered by the existence of centrifugal forces within society and important struggles of the cliques within the ruling class*”.
- The US itself is in the grip of the most serious conflict inside the bourgeoisie since World War II, “*the extent of the divisions within the US ruling class was laid bare by the contested November 2020 elections, and especially by the storming of the Capitol by Trump supporters on 6 January 2021, driven by Trump and his entourage. The latter event demonstrates that the internal divisions shaking the United States run through society as a whole. Although Trump has been ousted from office, Trumpism remains a powerful, heavily armed force, expressed both on the streets and at the ballot box*.”⁷ This was just confirmed recently with the Biden mid-term elections, where the divisions between the rival parties (Democrats and Republicans) have never been so deep and exacerbated, as have the rifts within each of the two camps. The weight of

7. “Resolution on the international situation of the 24th ICC Congress”, *International Review* n° 167.

populism and of the most retrograde ideologies, marked by the rejection of rational, coherent thought, far from being curbed by attempts to block a new Trump candidacy, has only become more and more deeply and durably entrenched in American society, as in the rest of the world. This is an indication of how rotten the social relations are.

7. The degeneration of the world situation to an unprecedented level is further aggravated by two very important factors linked to the inadequate control of the social relations as a whole by the capitalist states, especially the most powerful ones:

- As we noticed with the Covid-19 crisis and even before (at our 23rd congress), the capacity for the big states to cooperate to delay and lessen the impact of the economic crisis and to limit or postpone the effects of decomposition on the weaker countries, has considerably weakened and the tendency is not for a "return" of "international cooperation", but rather the opposite. Such problems can only aggravate the global chaos.
- On the other hand, within the world's major bourgeoisies, one cannot reasonably detect an emergence of policies that could stem, even partially or temporarily, such a destructive and rapid erosion. Without underestimating the capacity of the bourgeoisie to respond, it is difficult to see, at least for the time being, the implementation of policies similar to those of the 1980s and 1990s that mitigated and delayed the worst effects of the crisis and decomposition.

8. This development, although it may have surprised us by its speed and scale, was largely foreseen in the update of our analysis on decomposition made by the 22nd congress.⁸ On the one hand, the report clearly recognised the rise of populism in the central countries as an important manifestation of the bourgeoisie's loss of control over its political apparatus. Likewise, we identified the irruption of waves of refugees and the exodus of people to the centres of capitalism as another manifestation and placed particular emphasis on the environmental disaster and its scale.

At the same time, the report had identified problems that do not feature prominently in the media currently but which have continued to worsen: terrorism, the housing problem in the central countries, famine and in particular, *"the destruction of human relationships, family ties, and human empathy has only worsened as evidenced by the use of anti-depressants,*

the explosion of psychological pressure and stress at work and the appearance of new occupations intended to 'support' such people. There are also expressions of real carnage like that of summer 2003 in France where 15,000 elderly people died during the heat wave". It is clear that the pandemic has had a considerable influence on the situation, pushing things to the limits, and that suicides and mental health problems during this period have been called "a second pandemic".

9. This current perspective follows coherently from the analytical framework developed by the "Theses on Decomposition" thirty years ago:

- *"In this situation, where society's two decisive - and antagonistic - classes confront each other without either being able to impose its own definitive response, history nonetheless does not just come to a stop. Still less for capitalism than for preceding social forms, is a 'freeze' or a 'stagnation' of social life possible."* (Thesis 4). For thirty years, the decay has only deepened and is now leading to a qualitative worsening, showing its destructive consequences in a way never seen before.
- *"No mode of production can live, develop, maintain itself on a viable basis and ensure social cohesion, if it is unable to present a perspective for the whole of the society which it dominates. And this is especially true of capitalism, which is the most dynamic mode of production in history."* (Thesis 5). The current situation is the continuation of more than fifty years of unabated aggravation of the capitalist crisis without the bourgeoisie having been able to offer a perspective, while the proletariat has not yet been able to advance its own: the communist revolution. It is dragging the world into a spiral of barbarism and destruction in which the central countries, having played a role as a relative brake on decomposition for a whole period, are now becoming an aggravating factor.
- Decomposition *"does not lead back to a previous form of capitalism's life. [...] Human civilisation today is losing some of its gains [...] The course of history cannot be turned back: as its name suggests, decomposition leads to social dislocation and putrefaction, to the void."* (Thesis 11).

10. Faced with this situation, the "Theses on Decomposition", while warning that, *"unlike the situation in the 1970s, time is no longer on the side of the working class"* (thesis 16) and that there is the danger of a slow but ultimately irreversible erosion of the very foundations of communism,

nevertheless make it clear that *"the historical perspective remains completely open"* (thesis 17).

Indeed, *"Despite the blow that the Eastern bloc's collapse has dealt to proletarian consciousness, the class has not suffered any major defeats on the terrain of its struggle. In this sense, its combativity remains virtually intact. Moreover, and this is the element which in the final analysis will determine the outcome of the world situation, the inexorable aggravation of the capitalist crisis constitutes the essential stimulant for the class's struggle and development of consciousness, the precondition for its ability to resist the poison distilled by the social rot. [...] Its struggle against the direct effects of the crisis constitutes the basis for the development of its class strength and unity."* (Thesis 17).

"The economic crisis directly attacks the foundations on which this superstructure rests; in this sense, it lays bare all the barbarity that is battenning on society, thus allowing the proletariat to become aware of the need for a radical change to the system, rather than trying to improve certain aspects of it." (Thesis 17).

This perspective is in fact beginning to emerge: *"In the face of the bourgeoisie's attacks [...] the working class in Britain is showing that it is once again prepared to fight for its dignity, to reject the sacrifices that are constantly demanded by capital. It is indicative of an international dynamic: last winter, strikes started to appear in Spain and the US; this summer, Germany and Belgium also experienced walkouts; and now, commentators are predicting 'an explosive social situation' in France and Italy in the coming months. It is not possible to predict where and when the workers' combativity will re-emerge on a massive scale in the near future, but one thing is certain: the scale of the current workers' mobilisation in Britain is a significant historical event. The days of passivity and submission are past. The new generations of workers are raising their heads"*.⁹

We have identified the struggles in the UK as a break from the passivity and disorientation that had existed previously. The return of workers' combativity in response to the crisis can become a source of consciousness, as can our intervention, which is an essential factor in this situation. It is clear that each acceleration of decomposition succeeds in bringing a halt to the workers' developing combativity: the movement in France 2019 came to a halt when the pandemic broke out. This

8. See "Report on Decomposition Today (May 2017)", *International Review* n° 164.

9. "A summer of anger in Britain: the ruling class demands further sacrifices, the response of the working class is to fight!" International leaflet, published in this issue of the *International Review*.

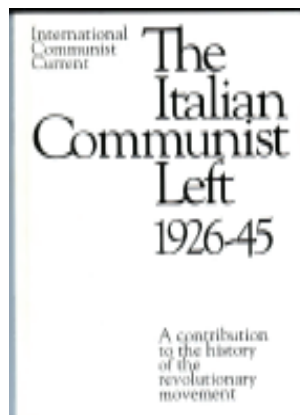
shows an additional and not insignificant difficulty in the face of the development of struggles and the recovery of the proletariat's confidence in itself and in its own forces. However, there is no other way than the struggle. The resumption of the struggle is in itself a first victory. The world proletariat in very turbulent conditions, with many bitter defeats, can finally recover its identity as a class and eventually launch an international offensive against this moribund system.

11. Hence, in this context, the 20s of the 21st century will have a considerable impact on historical development.

They will show with even greater clarity than in the past that the perspective of the destruction of humanity is an integral part of capitalist decomposition. At the other pole, the proletariat will begin to take its first steps, like those expressed in the combativity of the struggles in the UK, to defend its living conditions in the face of the multiplication of the attacks of the different bourgeoisies and the blows of the world economic crisis with all its consequences. These first steps will often be hesitant and full of weaknesses, but they are essential if the working class is to be able to reaffirm its historical capacity to impose its communist perspective. Thus, the two alternative poles of the perspective will confront each other globally: the destruction of humanity or the communist revolution, even if this latter alternative is still very far off and faces enormous obstacles. To deepen the understanding of the historical framework is an immense but absolutely necessary and vital task for the revolutionary organisations of the proletariat, which need to be the best defenders and propagators of a general perspective. It is also a crucial test of their ability to analyse and provide answers to the challenges posed by the different aspects of the current situation: war, crisis, class struggle, environmental crisis, political crisis, etc.

ICC, 28 October 2022

ICC Publications



This history of the Italian Left is not neutral, looking down on the social battlefield. In today's world of decomposing capitalism, the alternative posed more than sixty years ago by the Communist Left is more valid than ever: "communist revolution or the destruction of humanity".

Of course, according to the ruling classes everywhere today, communism, the revolutionary perspective of the working class, has died with the collapse of Stalinism. But this is a monstrous lie. Stalinism was the gravedigger of the 1917 October Revolution, and therefore the deadliest enemy of the communist perspective. Stalinism was the main vehicle for the greatest counter-revolution in history.

In the midst of this defeat the Italian Communist Left remained faithful to the internationalist principles of the working class, and tried to draw the lessons of a counter-revolution which terminally infected even the Trotskyist Opposition.

The aim of this brief history of the struggle of the Italian Communist Left is to help all those who have thrown in their lot with the revolutionary working class to bridge the gap between their past and their present.

The significance of the summer of anger in Britain

The return of the combativity of the world proletariat

Some events have a significance that is not limited to the local or immediate level, but is international in scope. Because of the number of sectors affected, the combativity of the workers involved in the struggle and the widespread support for action among the working population, the wave of strikes which has spread throughout Britain this summer is an event of undeniable importance on the domestic level. But we also need to understand that the historical significance of these struggles goes far beyond their local dimension or even their one-off occurrence.

For decades, the working class in the European states has been under the suffocating pressure of capitalism's decomposition. More concretely, since 2020, it has suffered a number of waves of Covid and then the horror of barbaric war in Europe with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Although these events affected workers' combativity, they did not make it disappear, as struggles in the United States, Spain, Italy, France, Korea and Iran at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 still underlined.

However, the wave of strikes in Britain in

In this context, the entry into struggle of the British proletariat constitutes an event of historical significance on a number of levels

The proletariat in Britain regains its combativity

This wave of struggle is led by a fraction of the European proletariat which has suffered more than most from the general retreat of the class struggle since 1990. Indeed, if in the 1970s, although with a certain delay

particularly affected by de-industrialisation and the transfer of industries to China, India or Eastern Europe. So when the working class suffered a generalised worldwide decline in 1989, it was particularly marked in Great Britain.

In addition, in recent years, British workers have suffered the onslaught of populist movements and above all the deafening Brexit campaign, stimulating the division in their midst between "remainers" and "leavers", and then the Covid crisis which has weighed heavily on the working class, especially in Britain. Finally, and most recently, it has been confronted with intense pro-Ukrainian democratic hype and particularly abject war mongering around the war in Ukraine.

The "Thatcher generation" suffered a major defeat, but today, a new generation of proletarians is appearing on the social scene, which is no longer affected as much as their elders by the weight of these defeats and are raising their heads, showing that the working class is capable of responding through struggle to these major attacks. While keeping a sense of proportion, we are witnessing a phenomenon quite comparable (but not identical) to the one that saw the French working class emerge in 1968: the arrival of a young generation less affected than their elders by the weight of the counter-revolution.

The international importance of the British working class

The "summer of anger" can only be an encouragement for all the workers of the planet and this for several reasons: it is the working class of the fifth world economic power, and an English-speaking proletariat, whose struggles can have an important impact in countries like the United States and Canada or in other regions of the world, like India or South Africa. English being the language of world communication, the influence of these movements necessarily surpasses that of struggles in France or Germany for example. In this sense, the British proletariat shows the way not only to the European workers, who will have to be in the vanguard of the rise of the class struggle, but also to the world proletariat, and



response to the attacks on their living standards caused by the deepening economic crisis, accentuated by the consequences of the health crisis and, above all, by the war in Ukraine, is on a different scale. In difficult circumstances, the British workers are sending a clear signal to workers all over the world: we must fight, even if we have suffered attacks and accepted sacrifices without being able to react; but today "enough is enough": we are no longer accepting this, we must fight. This is the message sent to workers in other countries.

compared to other countries like France, Italy or Poland, British workers developed very important struggles, culminating in the wave of strikes of 1979 ("the Winter of Discontent"), the UK was the European country where the decline of combativity has been the most marked over the last 40 years.

During the 1980s, the British working class suffered an effective counter-offensive from the bourgeoisie which culminated in the defeat of the 1985 miners' strike by Thatcher, the "Iron Lady" of the British bourgeoisie. Moreover, Britain has been

in particular to the American proletariat. In the perspective of future struggles, the British working class can thus serve as a link between the proletariat of Western Europe and the American proletariat.

This importance can also be measured by the concerned reaction of the bourgeoisie, especially in Western Europe, to the danger of the extension of the “deterioration of the social situation”. This is particularly the case in France, Belgium or Germany where the bourgeoisie, in contrast to the attitude of the British bourgeoisie, has taken firmer measures to put a ceiling on oil, gas and electricity increases or to compensate for the impact of inflation and price rises by means of subsidies or tax cuts, while loudly proclaiming that it wants to protect the purchasing power of workers. On the other hand, the extensive media coverage of the death of Queen Elizabeth and the funeral ceremonies was intended to counteract the images of class struggle and instead show a picture of a united British population enveloped in a nationalist fervour and respectful of bourgeois constitutional order. Since then, the bourgeois media has applied a wide blackout on the continuation of the strike movements.

The bourgeoisie knows perfectly well that the deepening of the crisis and the consequences of the war will go on and on. However, the fact that a massive movement is already developing in the face of the first attacks, which are similar for all the detachments of the proletariat, not only in Britain but in Europe and even in the world, attacks which the bourgeoisie is obliged to impose in the present context, can only deeply worry the bourgeoisie.

A break in the dynamics of the international class struggle

Even though the West European proletariat has not been defeated during the last forty years, unlike before the two world wars, the decline in its class consciousness after 1989 (underlined by the campaign on the “death of communism”) has nevertheless been extremely important. Secondly, the deepening of decomposition from the 1990s onwards had increasingly affected its class identity, and this trend could not be reversed by certain movements of struggle or expressions of reflection among minorities of the class in the first two decades of the 21st century, such as the struggle against the Contrat Premier Emploi (CPE) in France in 2006, the “Indignados” movement in Spain in 2011, the struggles at SNCF and Air France in 2014 and the movement against pension reform in 2019 in France or the “Striketober” in the US in 2021.

Moreover, throughout the first two decades of the 21st century, the global working class has been confronted in its struggles with the danger of interclassist movements, as in France with the actions of the “Gilet Jaunes”, the weight of populist mobilisations, such as the MAGA (“Make America Great Again”) movement in the United States, or bourgeois campaigns such as the “marches for the climate” or the “Black Lives Matter” movement and mobilisations in favour of abortion rights in the US and elsewhere. More recently, in the face of the first consequences of the crisis, numerous popular revolts have erupted in various Latin American countries against the rise in the price of fuel and other basic commodities. All these movements



constitute a danger for workers insofar as they drag them onto an interclassist terrain, where they are drowned out by the mass of “citizens” or dragged onto a terrain which is completely bourgeois.

But only the proletariat offers an alternative to the disasters that mark our society. And precisely, unlike these movements which lead the workers onto false grounds, the fundamental contribution of the wave of strikes of the British workers is the affirmation that the struggle against capitalist exploitation must be situated on a clear class ground and put forward clear workers’ demands against the attacks on the workers’ standard of living: *“Moreover, and this is the element which in the final analysis will determine the outcome of the world situation, the inexorable aggravation of the capitalist crisis constitutes the essential stimulant for the class’ struggle and development of consciousness, the precondition for its ability to resist the poison distilled by the social rot. For while there is no basis for the unification of the class in the partial struggles against the effects of decomposition, nonetheless its*

*struggle against the direct effects of the crisis constitutes the basis for the development of its class strength and unity.”*¹ The development of this massive combativity in struggles for the defence of purchasing power is, for the world proletariat, an inescapable condition for overcoming the deep setback it has undergone since the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the Stalinist regimes and for recovering its class identity and its revolutionary perspective.

In short, both from the historical point of view and from the current context facing the working class, this wave of strikes in Britain therefore constitutes a break in the dynamics of the class struggle, capable of setting in motion a “change in the social atmosphere”.

Similarities and differences with May 68 in France

This change in the social atmosphere that has taken place with the struggles in Britain has a certain resemblance, keeping a sense of proportion, with the situation initiated by May 68 in France, which was symbolic of a break with a long period of counter-revolution, cutting through the Stalinist prison for containing the proletariat and bringing a new dynamism, an impetuous worldwide development of workers’ struggles, opening a period of class confrontations which was confirmed in the next two decades with the “Hot Autumn” in Italy: the struggles in Poland in 1970 and 1976 before reaching their culminating point in August 1980; in Belgium between 1970 and 1972, then in 1983 (public sector) and in 1986; in the USA (General Motors in Lordstown, Ohio) in 1972 then a new wave of strikes in the summer of 1986; in France again with the steelworkers in Longwy and Denain in 1979, the railway workers (winter 86) and nurses (October 88); in

¹ “Theses on Decomposition”, (1991) *International Review* n° 107, 2001.



Sweden in 1984; the Rotterdam dockers in the Netherlands in 1984; in Germany, Greece, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa...

The entry into struggle of the proletarians in Britain has an importance comparable to that of May 68 in France, since it is located at the heart of one of the oldest and most developed capitalisms, in western Europe, among the battalions of the proletariat who are most experienced in the class war. In this sense it is destined to play a key role as a spur to the recovery of struggles on a world level. Also in Britain we see the same fire-brakes lit by the bourgeoisie as in May 68, which the working class will encounter in the shape of the same enemies: the unions, the left parties and the leftist organisations whose role is to control and sabotage the struggle, to drag it away from its class terrain.

Similarly, the reawakening of the combativity of the proletariat in Britain in response to the dramatic deterioration of the world crisis of capitalism and to the attacks of the bourgeoisie can, again with all proportions kept in mind, evoke May 68 with the important number of workers involved in a struggle which is hitting the main sectors of economic activity in the country. An analysis of the development of proletarian struggles at the heart of Europe must take account of this historical dimension, recognising that the development of the workers' combativity on its own terrain faced with the crisis and the attacks of the bourgeoisie is being confirmed and expresses a dynamic towards the deepening of the class struggle.

There are however considerable differences between the two situations. The context is not at all the same: the working class today has been considerably weakened. The very strong illusions and confusions which the proletariat carries with it on the road towards revolution was one of the major weaknesses of the struggles of May 68 and the twenty years of workers' strug-

gles that followed. This left the proletariat disarmed and disoriented when the eastern bloc collapsed in 1989, enabling the bourgeoisie to develop a gigantic, world-wide ideological campaign against marxism and communism, falsely identified with Stalinism, and presenting the collapse of the latter as a victory for democracy against the totalitarian "Communist" regimes. This ideological campaign, aimed at sapping the self-confidence of the working class and provoking a general reflux in the class struggle, deeply affected the capacity of the proletariat to fight on its class terrain, opening up a new phase of decadent capitalist society, the phase of decomposition. This phase, characterised by the tendency for society to rot on its feet, is the product of a blockage between the classes in which neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie has been able to impose its "way out" of capitalism in crisis: world revolution or world war.

One of the consequences of this difference in context is the following: in the period of developing struggles between 1968 and 1989, the proletariat was able to play a fully active role as a barrier to war in the confrontation between the two blocs: its mobilisation on a class terrain prevented it from being enrolled by the bourgeoisie for war. This was a decisive obstacle to the outbreak of a third world war. But this is no longer the case today, when the working class is not in a position to prevent the descent into military barbarism, as we can see with the war in Ukraine.

This situation demonstrates the accumulation and inter-action of the mortal dangers contained in the final phase of capitalist decadence, which can lead to planet-wide destruction even without the outbreak of world war.

On the other hand, the struggles in Britain show that the proletariat has not suffered a decisive defeat, that it is not already beaten, that it can still raise its

head, in spite of all the difficulties and the new challenges that will inevitably rise up before it, making it clearer than ever that the alternative for the future is communism or barbarism.

Today, if a good number of the illusions and weaknesses which marked the struggles between 1968 and 1989 have fallen away, other major difficulties have arrived on the scene of the class struggle. It has become evident that the road towards the communist revolution is still a long one, littered with increasingly dangerous traps and obstacles. To progress along this road is a huge challenge, but the proletariat has no choice but to engage resolutely in this struggle, which still has the perspective of the class regaining confidence in itself, of developing its struggles to the point where it can affirm itself as the only social force capable of overthrowing and destroying capitalism before it destroys humanity.

A struggle against economic attacks worsened by imperialist war

The importance of this movement is not limited to the fact that it puts an end to a long period of relative passivity. These struggles are developing at a time when the world is confronted with a large-scale imperialist war, a war which opposes Russia and Ukraine on European soil but which has a global scope with, in particular, a mobilisation of NATO member countries which is a mobilisation not only in arms but also on the economic, diplomatic and ideological levels: in Western countries, governments are calling for sacrifices to "defend freedom and democracy". In concrete terms, this means that the proletarians of these countries must tighten their belts even more to "show their solidarity with Ukraine", in fact with the Ukrainian ruling class and the rulers of the Western countries.

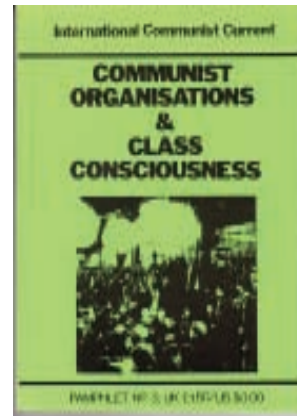
Faced with the conflict in Ukraine, calling for a direct mobilisation of workers against the war is illusory in Western Europe or in the United States; however, since February 2022, the ICC has highlighted that the workers' reaction will appear on the basis of the attack on their wages, products of the accumulation and interconnection of the crises and disasters of the past period, and against the campaign calling for the acceptance of sacrifices in support of the "heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people".

Further, the mobilisation against capitalist austerity also ultimately contains an opposition against war. This is also what the strikes of the working class in the UK bear in embryo, even if the workers are not

probably not expect a series of similar major developments in different countries in the near future, a milestone has been reached. The essential achievement of the struggle of the workers in Britain is to stand up and fight because the worst defeat is to suffer impoverishment without a fight. It is on this basis that lessons can be learned and the struggle can move forward. In this perspective, the strikes represent a qualitative change and herald a change in the situation of the working class vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie: they mark a development of combativity on a class terrain which can be the beginning of a new episode of the struggle, because it is through its massive economic struggles that the working class will be able to progressively recover its class identity, eroded by the pressure of 40 years of decomposition, by the ebb of struggles and consciousness, by the sirens of interclassist movements, populism and environmental campaigns. It is on this basis that the working class will be able to open up a perspective for the whole of society. From this point of view, there is a “before” and an “after” to the summer of 2022.

R. Havanais 22/09/2022

ICC Publications



How does class consciousness develop and what is the role of communist organisations in this process? Why is the consciousness of the class that will make the communist revolution different from that of other revolutionary classes in history? What are the implications for the revolutionary process?



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

Available from our website:

www.internationalism.org

International leaflet

A summer of anger in Britain

The ruling class demands further sacrifices, the response of the working class is to fight!

“Enough is enough”. This cry has reverberated from one strike to the next over the last few weeks in the UK. This massive movement, dubbed “The Summer of Discontent”, referring back to the “Winter of Discontent” in 1979, has involved workers in more and more sectors each day: the railways, the London Underground, British Telecom, the Post Office, the dockworkers in Felixstowe (a key port in the south east of Britain), refuse workers and bus drivers across various parts of the country, those at Amazon, etc. Today it’s transport workers, tomorrow it may be the health workers and teachers.

All the reporters and commentators are referring to this as the biggest working class action in Britain for decades; only the huge strikes of 1979 produced a bigger and more widespread movement. Action on this scale in a country as large as Britain is not only significant locally, it is an event of international significance, a message to the exploited of every country.

With attacks on the living standards of all those exploited, the class struggle is only answer

Decade on decade, as in other developed countries, successive British governments have relentlessly attacked living and working conditions with one consequence: to make those conditions more precarious and flexible in order to improve national competitiveness and profit. These attacks have reached such a level in recent years that infant mortality in Britain has had “an unprecedented increase since 2014” (according to the medical journal *BJM Open*).

This is why the current surge in inflation is a real tsunami. With a 10.1% year-on-year price increase in July, 13% expected in October, 18% in January, the damage is devastating. The NHS has warned that “Many people could be forced to choose between skipping meals to be able to heat their homes, or having to live in the cold and damp instead”. With gas and electricity prices rising by 54% on April 1st and 78% on October 1st, the situation is effectively untenable.

The extent of the mobilisation of the British workers today is finally a match for the attacks they are facing, when in recent decades, suffering from the setbacks of the Thatcher years, they did not have the strength to respond.

In the past, British workers have been among the most militant in the world. The “Winter of Discontent” of 1979, based on the tally of strike days recorded, was the most massive movement in any country after May 1968 in France, even greater than

in the “Hot Autumn” of 1969 in Italy. The Thatcher government managed to suppress its enormous combativity in a lasting way by inflicting a series of bitter defeats on the workers, particularly during the miners’ strike in 1985. This defeat marked a turning point with a prolonged decline of workers’ combativity in the UK; it even heralded the general decline of workers’ combativity across the world. Five years later, in 1990, with the collapse of the USSR, fraudulently described as a “socialist” regime, and the no less false announcement of the “death of communism” and the “definitive triumph of capitalism”, a knock-out punch was landed on workers worldwide. Since then, deprived of a perspective, their confidence and class identity eroded, the workers in Britain, more severely than anywhere else, have suffered from the attacks of successive governments without being able to really fight back.

But, in the face of the bourgeoisie’s attacks, anger has been building up and today, the working class in Britain is showing that it is once again prepared to fight for its dignity, to reject the sacrifices that are constantly demanded by capital. Furthermore, it is indicative of an international dynamic: last winter, strikes started to appear in Spain and the US; this summer, Germany and Belgium also experienced walkouts; and now, commentators are predicting “an explosive social situation” in France and Italy in the coming months. It is not possible to predict where and when the workers’ combativity will re-emerge on a massive scale in the

near future, but one thing is certain: the scale of the current workers’ mobilisation in Britain is a significant historical event. The days of passivity and submission are past. The new generations of workers are raising their heads.

The class struggle in the face of imperialist war

The importance of this movement is not just the fact that it is putting an end to a long period of passivity. These struggles are developing at a time when the world is confronted with a large-scale imperialist war, a war which pits Russia against Ukraine on the ground but which has a global impact with, in particular, a mobilisation of NATO member countries. A commitment in weapons but also at the economic, diplomatic and ideological levels. In the Western countries, the governments are calling for sacrifices to “defend freedom and democracy”. In concrete terms, this means that the proletarians of these countries must tighten their belts even more to “show their solidarity with Ukraine” - in fact with the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and the ruling class of the Western countries.

The governments have unashamedly justified their economic attacks by using the catastrophe of global warming and the risks of energy and food shortages (“the worst food crisis ever” according to the UN Secretary General). They call for “sobriety” and declare the end of “abundance” (to use the iniquitous words of French President Macron). But at the same time they are strengthening their war economy: global military spending reached \$2,113 trillion in 2021! While the UK is among the top five states in military spending, since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, every country in the world has accelerated its arms race, including Germany, a first since 1945!

Governments are now calling for “sacrifices to fight inflation”. This is a sinister joke when all they are doing is making it worse by escalating their spending on war. This is the future that capitalism and its competing national bourgeoisies are promising: more wars, more exploitation, more destruction, more misery.

Furthermore, this is what the workers' strikes in Britain point to, even if the workers are not always fully conscious of it: the refusal to sacrifice more and more for the interests of the ruling class, the refusal to sacrifice for the national economy and for the war effort, the refusal to accept the logic of this system which leads humanity towards catastrophe and, ultimately, to its destruction.

The alternatives are clear: socialism or the destruction of humanity.

The need to avoid the traps of the bourgeoisie

The workers' ability to take this stand is all the more significant given that the working class in the UK has been bludgeoned in recent years by populist ideology, which sets the exploited against each other, divides them into "natives" and "foreigners", blacks and whites, men and women, to the point of making them believe that the insular retreat into Brexit could be a solution to their problems.

But there are other, far more pernicious and dangerous traps set by the bourgeoisie in the path of the working class struggles.

The vast majority of the current strikes have been called by the trade unions, who present themselves as the most effective body for organising the struggle and defending the exploited. The unions are most effective, yes, but only in defending the bourgeoisie and organising the defeat of the working class.

It's enough to remember to what extent Thatcher's victory was made possible thanks to the sabotage of the unions. In March 1984, when 20,000 job cuts were abruptly announced in the coal industry, the miners' reaction was immediate: on the first day of the strike, 100 pits out of 184 were closed down. But a union corset of steel would quickly encircle strikers. The railway workers' and seamen's unions gave token support to the strike. The powerful dockers' union was reduced to making two late calls for strike action. The TUC (the national congress of trade unions) refused to support the strike. The electricians' and steelworkers' unions opposed it. In short, the unions actively sabotaged any possibility of a common struggle. But above all, the miners' union, the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers), completed this dirty work by restricting the miners to futile pitched battles with police in the attempt to prevent the movement of coal from the coking depots (this lasted for more than a year!). Thanks to this union sabotage, to these sterile and endless confrontations

with the police, the repression of the strike was carried out with intense violence. This defeat would be a defeat for the whole working class.

If today, in the UK, these same unions use a radical language and pretend to be advocating solidarity between the various sectors, even brandishing the threat of a general strike, it's because they are alive to the concerns of the working class and they want to take charge of what drives the workers, their anger, their combativity and their feeling that we have to fight together, so that they are better able to sterilise and divert this dynamic. In reality, on the ground, they are orchestrating the strikes separately; behind the unitary slogan of higher wages for all, the different sectors are locked up in and separated in corporatist negotiations; above all, they take great care to avoid any real discussions between the workers from the different sectors. There are no real cross-industry general assemblies anywhere. So don't be fooled when Liz Truss, the front-runner to replace Boris Johnson, says she "won't let Britain be held to ransom by militant trade unionists" if she becomes Prime Minister. She is simply following in the footsteps of her role model, Margaret Thatcher; she is giving credibility to the unions by presenting them as the most combative representatives of the workers in order to better, together, lead the working class to defeat.

In France, in 2019, faced with the rise of combativity and the outburst of solidarity between the generations, the unions had already used the same stratagem by advocating the "convergence of struggles", a substitute for a unitary movement, where the demonstrators who marched in the street were grouped by sector and by company.

In the UK, as elsewhere, in order to build a balance of forces that will enable us to resist the relentless attacks on our living and working conditions, which will become even more violent tomorrow, we must, wherever we can, come together to debate and put forward the methods of struggle that have made the working class strong and enabled it, at certain moments in its history, to shake the bourgeoisie and its system, through:

- searching for support and solidarity beyond "our" factory, "our" company, "our" sector of activity, "our" town, "our" region, "our" country;
- the autonomous organisation of the workers' struggles, in particular through general assemblies, and preventing the control of the struggle by the unions, the "so-called specialists" in the organisation of workers' struggles;

- developing the widest possible discussion on the general needs of the struggle, on the positive lessons to be drawn from past struggles - including the defeats, because there will be defeats, but the greatest defeat is to suffer attacks without reacting to them; the entry into struggle is the first victory of the exploited.

If the return of widespread strikes in the UK marks the return of the combativity of the world proletariat, it is also vital that the weaknesses which signalled its defeat in 1985 are overcome: corporatism and illusions in the trade unions. **The autonomy of the struggle, its unity and solidarity are the indispensable yardsticks in the preparation for tomorrow's struggles!**

And for that, we have to recognise ourselves as members of the same class, a class whose struggle is united by solidarity: the working class. Today's struggles are indispensable not only because the working class is defending itself against the attacks but also because they point the way to the recovery of class identity worldwide, to preparing the overthrow of this capitalist system, which can only bring us impoverishment and catastrophes of all kinds.

There are no solutions within capitalism: neither to the destruction of the planet, nor to wars, nor to unemployment, nor to precariousness, nor to poverty. Only the struggle of the world proletariat together supported by all the oppressed and exploited of the world can open the way to the alternative.

The massive strikes in Britain are a call to action for proletarians everywhere.

International Communist Current, 27
August 2022

The United States

The superpower in capitalist decadence is now the epicentre of social decomposition (I)

The eruption of populism in the world's most powerful country, which was crowned by the triumph of Donald Trump in 2016, brought four years of contradictory and erratic decisions, denigration of international institutions and agreements, intensifying global chaos, leading to a weakening and discrediting of American power and further accelerating its historic decline. The situation is becoming more serious and internal divisions in American social life are appearing openly. The pandemic can be added to this, the management of which has shown the great irresponsibility of the populist approach, ignoring preventative measures proposed by scientists to the point that the United States has the most deaths in the world. State terror, violence in the anti-racist (BLM) demonstrations, the growth of armed supremacist groups, the increase in criminality; and within the framework of this ferocious escalation of events, on 6 January 2021, Trumpist gangs took over the Capitol, the 'symbol of democratic order', to try to prevent the ratification of the result in favour

The formation of the United States: from the American dream to the reality of capitalism

When Marx wrote *Wage Labour and Capital*, and above all *Capital*, those great classic of marxism, he examined the internal workings of the most developed capitalist country of the time: Britain, the home of the industrial revolution and birthplace of modern capitalism. In the 18th century, the United States had barely begun to consolidate itself as a country on the new continent. The Declaration of Independence by the 13 colonies on 4 July 1776 and the drafting of the Constitution of the United States would push forward the dizzying development of capitalism in North America.

In this article we are not going to elaborate on the history of the 13 British colonies. However, we would like to stress that one of the great complaints of the colonies came about because of increases in taxes and the lack of "representation", that is why the slogan was "One Man, One Vote" or "No taxation without representation".

of the Biden faction.¹ The pandemic has accelerated the tendencies to the loss of control of the social situation; the internal divisions of the American bourgeoisie were sharpened in an election where, for the first time in history, the president and candidate for re-election accused the system of the most democratic country in the world of "electoral fraud" in the style of a "banana republic". The USA is now the epicentre of social decomposition.

In order to explain, through a marxist analysis, this "new" situation of the old superpower, we need an historical approach. First of all, we must explain how it was that the United States became the major world power, the country which dominated trade, politics and war, and how its money became a world currency. In the first part of this article we will examine the historic journey undertaken by the United States, from its founding to its highest point, its rise as uncontested world policeman, that's to say that we will look at events from the end of the eighteenth century to the fall of the Eastern Bloc in 1989. This

Democracy began to appear as the best framework for the development of "free enterprise and private property" and it wasn't a coincidence if the United States began to consider itself as the guarantor of democracy throughout the world.

The 18th century was dominated by the great colonial powers: Britain, France, Spain and, to a lesser extent, Holland and Portugal. That is why the recognition of the independence of the United States happened in a climate of rivalries and territorial conflicts between these powers. The Treaty of Paris of 1783 recognised the independence of the United States and their territorial rights up to the Mississippi. France owned Louisiana; Spain dominated Florida and had absolute control over the Vice-Royalty of New Spain, which later became Mexico.

In 1787, the Constitutional Convention decided to create a Constitution for the 13 new states, thus eliminating the confronta-

tion between them (between New Jersey and New York for example). The aim was to resolve the problem of empty coffers in order to face up to invasion from the west by Britain and Spain. At the same time as the endorsement of the Constitution in 1789, the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" was also approved. As the growing bourgeoisie was a new exploiting class and capitalism was a system based on the extraction of surplus value from the working class, all these declarations about "rights" as in the motto of the French revolution "Liberté, égalité et fraternité" were only ideological covers to justify the modern relations of capitalist exploitation, a programme to achieve the consolidation of capitalism against the old feudal regime and its aftermath. These grandiose "declarations" would soon become just a cover for a fierce exploitation without any semblance of humanity: slavery, racism and the fight for civil rights in the United States are a demonstration of the chasm between the "affirmations" of democracy and the reality

1. See "Assault on the Capitol in Washington: the USA at the heart of the worldwide decomposition of capitalism". Published on ICC website.

2. See: "Theses on decomposition", *International Review* n° 107, 2001.

of life under capitalism.

Ships arrived at the East Coast ports filled with immigrants aspiring to the new and fertile territories and wanting to create their own businesses; in other words, the “American dream” was a possibility for millions of migrants to improve their situation. The law permitted migration and numerous Europeans left to colonise the American West. The American population increased enormously thanks to immigration. In 1850, there were 23 million inhabitants and by 1910 there were 92 million, or more than the population of Britain and France put together. In the ascendant stage of capitalism emigration was different to emigration today. At the time of the expansion of capitalism, the possibility of better living conditions was real whereas today it’s simply a matter of a blind and suicidal flight, a real dead-end. Thus today, the caravans of thousands of migrants leaving Central America and trying to get to the United States overland are confronted with hunger, trafficking gangs and state repression, the majority of them finding only unspeakable suffering or death pure and simple.

The expansion of capitalism towards the West was known, in a phrase coined in 1845, as “Manifest Destiny”. Capitalism spread and opened up through the barrel of a gun, with Winchesters in hand; indigenous people were displaced or exterminated and the survivors of this violent and forced expropriation were confined to reservations. “The frontier” was extended throughout the 18th century in the name of a so-called predestination with “a mission dictated by divine will”. “Manifest Destiny” expressed the ideology of the first colonists, Protestants and Puritans, who saw themselves as a “chosen” nation destined to spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This expansion accompanied the arrival of the railways³ and the growing need for the supply of merchandise. It seemed as if capitalism had undergone an unlimited expansion, based on the idea of permanent progress in an almost autonomous state. This “internal expansion” continued until the early 20th century.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the young American republic adopted a doctrine that would mark its history: the Monroe Doctrine. Elaborated in 1823 by Quincy Adams and presented to the US Congress by James Monroe, this doctrine was a cornerstone of American foreign policy which could be summed-up in the phrase “America for the Americans”. It

3. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862. This law authorised the building of a transcontinental railway by two companies, Union Pacific Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad.

was already clear from the Doctrine that the United States was not only proclaiming its will to put an end to the presence of Europeans on American soil but also that the base of this doctrine was in fact insufficient in relation to the territories that the United States were going to dominate on the planet.

This mythical “frontier” underwent a dizzying expansion in the 19th century. Napoléon Bonaparte had re-sold Louisiana and all the Mississippi Basin, and then the Americans brought Florida from Spain (1821) and won the war against Mexico in 1846, gaining more than half of Mexican territory and thus reaching the Pacific Coast. Later, in 1898, the war between the United States and Spain was concluded with an American victory, which took control of Cuba, other Caribbean islands and the far-off Philippines. This already demonstrated the decline of the Spanish Empire and the growth of the United States as a regional power.⁴ “*The same year that George Washington became president of the United States, fifteen ships loaded with silk and tea arrived from the exotic and legendary Asiatic port of Canton, while ships from New York, Boston and Philadelphia boldly penetrated the zone monopolised by the East India Company. And in less than fifteen years American-flagged vessels, armed with their valiant marines, were stopping over in Calcutta, the Philippines, Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco. The history of the foreign trade of the United States began in a spectacular manner.*”⁵ In the Pacific, from the middle of the 19th century, the United States began to make its presence felt in contributing to the “opening” of Japan to capitalism. At the same time, Britain penetrated China and established its relations with this Asiatic country. However, at this stage, the United States did not have enough power to spread its presence and defend its possessions, which came about above all at the beginning of the 20th century.

The long process of the incorporation of the States of the Union began in 1787 up to the last additions in 1959. Alaska was brought from the Russians in 1867, but it was only in January 1959 that Alaska became the 49th state and Hawaii became the 50th in August of the same year. We’re

4. The pretext for this war was the sinking of the battleship USS Maine in Havana Harbour on 15 February 1898. Spain refused to sell Cuba to the Americans and the operation sending in the battleship without notice was an open provocation. There’s still speculation today over “who sunk the Maine”. What is sure is that the crime benefited the United States and after the war against Spain it controlled Cuba, Puerto Rico and even the Philippines. The Machiavellianism of the US bourgeoisie has a long history.

5. Eugenio Pereira Salas: *Los primeros contactos entre Chile y los Estados Unidos. 1778-1809* (Santiago: Ed. Andres Bello, 1971.) (In Spanish).

talking about more than 170 years, a period during which the territory extended up to the conquest of the “final frontier”, that’s to say up to the Pacific coast of California. In the frenetic advance of capitalism over the immense lands of North America, it was necessary to confront the slave states of the South for two reasons: first, to consolidate the unity of the national state by putting an end to Southern secessionism which constantly threatened independence and, on the other hand, to eliminate the archaic system of slavery which then allowed the existence of “free citizens”... free to sell their labour! This was a more necessary undertaking given that right up to the First World War, the United States suffered from a shortage of labour.

In the 19th century, the United States became the greatest importer of slaves. The labour of these agricultural slaves was concentrated in the states of the South. On the other hand, the industrial North was based on the development of the exploitation of wage labour, which posed a problem to capitalism: industry dominated the country and labour had to “circulate freely” so that capital could use it indiscriminately. The slave owners resisted this logic of capital and detached themselves from the industrial North. The bloody civil war (1861-1865) was a total victory for capitalism and gave a harsh lesson against separatist temptations. This advance of capitalism had been saluted by marxism because the relations of bourgeois production brought with them their gravediggers: the modern proletariat. That’s why “*In a congratulatory address to Mr. Lincoln on his re-election as president, we expressed our conviction that the American Civil War would prove of as great import to the advancement of the working class as the American War of Independence had proved to that of the bourgeoisie.*”⁶

While the United States was engaged in its war of secession, in Mexico, France had imposed a member of the House of Habsburg as the Mexican Emperor. Napoleon III intended to fight over the backyard of the United States. It wasn’t a question of the “compliance” of Uncle Sam or because the Monroe Doctrine was a fantasy, no; it was simply occupied by Civil War, but once that ended, the US was able to expel France from its natural zone of influence. So as to teach the Europeans a lesson and

6. The Address to the National Labour Union of the United States was written by Marx and read by him to the meeting of the General Council of the First International in May 1869. See also the letter of December 1864 written by Marx and addressed to Abraham Lincoln in the name of the First International, which was published in Britain in *the Daily News, Reynolds Newspaper* and *the Bee-Hive*. (Address of the International Working Men’s Association to Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America)

keep their future pretensions in check, the United States shot the Emperor Maximilian despite appeals from the European aristocracy and writers such as Victor Hugo. It was an episode that was to give the tone of future global policy.

At the beginning of the 20th century “*the United States constituted the most vigorous capitalist society in the world and had the most powerful industrial production (...) Productivity increased more than ever before, the same for profits, wages and national revenue.*” “*But when Marx died in the 1880s, US capitalism had caught up with British industrial production, and then passed it for good and all, to make the United States the leading industrial power in the world (...)* *The First World War resulted in a considerable drop in European production and an increase in US production, until by the time of the Russian Revolution the United States produced almost as much as the whole of Europe*”.⁷

For the American bourgeoisie and all its ideologues, it seemed that capitalist manna was something like a “natural characteristic” of the system; however, the reality was based on the conquest of a vast territory in which, as the “frontier” advanced towards the west, the demand for all sorts of supplies and goods increased, a process which was also capable of absorbing a great number of immigrants; and, while growth figures climbed, the borrowing which supported this expansion came from Europe. In 1893, Chicago became the site for the World’s Fair, which put the United States in the top rank of industrial powers. But the “American Dream” was in fact reaching its limits; the beginning of the 20th century and the First World War announced the entry of capitalism into its historic decadence and new conditions were appearing, accounting for the evolution of the United States as it began to emerge as a world power.

The First World War and the Great Depression of 1929

The First World War showed the need for a “new division of the world”. Industrial powers like Germany arrived late to the division of the world market. Whereas France and Britain had gained much through the extent of their colonial conquests, and the United States dominated the American continent having consolidated its expansion from East to West, Germany had almost nothing and wanted a new carve-up of the world. Under capitalism there is no other means to find additional territory than from war and from 1914, war became the mode

of life of decadent capitalism.⁸

The “Great War” dragged all of Europe into destruction, massacres and barbarity pure and simple. Germany unleashed hostilities. It was the first time in the modern era that Europe had experienced so dramatic a situation.

The United States maintained its “neutrality” up to 1917. There was an enormous weight of illusions about the unlimited development of capitalism in a country that was far from the problems of Europe. Despite the sinking of the RMS Lusitania by a German submarine in 1915, President Woodrow Wilson maintained “neutrality”; a very useful neutrality as the United States increased production in a remarkable fashion, becoming the great provider of munitions to the Entente: military provisions of all sorts, food, etc. American ships went back and forth across the Atlantic loaded with goods and material in order to supply the war front. That’s why Germany knew that it would have to declare war on the United States in order to put a stop to this logistical support to Britain and France. In 1917, Germany renewed its submarine attacks without limitations. Added to this, Germany interfered in Mexico, profiting from the social upheavals in this country. Berlin asked the Mexican government to declare war on the United States and added that victory for the German camp would see Mexico regain its lost territories.⁹ In order for the US to maintain its role as major supplier and to protect its ships, its Panama Canal and a “back-yard” prey to convulsions, “neutrality” was already useless and entry into the war was an imperious necessity for the American bourgeoisie, despite the attempts of Wilson to block this route. In the final analysis, the logic of capitalism prevailed against puritanical and sincere intentions for the maintenance of peace.

“*America’s entry into the war decisively changed the relation of industrial strength between the combatants, and, in consequence, the relation of military strength. Without the United States the industrial strength of Britain and France on the one hand and of Germany and her allies on the other was at least comparable, but with the United States the relation of strength changed to approximately three-to-one against Germany. With this the prospect of a German military victory became hope-*

8. See: “War, militarism and imperialist blocs in the decadence of capitalism” in *International Review* n°s 52 and 53. On the basis of the analyses of the Gauche Communiste de France, this article explains the different nature of wars in the period of ascendant capitalism and of those in its period of decadence.

9. See the article “The Mexican bourgeoisie in the history of imperialism” in *International Review* n°77, and also (in Spanish) the book, *La guerra secreta en Mexico*, by Friedrich Katz, edition ERA.

less”.¹⁰ The United States sent a million men to the Western Front, the main theatre on war, their industry was the great strategic arm that forced Germany to surrender, and the Treaty of Versailles established the conditions for the vanquished to pay war reparations. The United States pushed for the creation of the League of Nations on the basis of the “Fourteen Points” put forward by Woodrow Wilson. However, the United States never joined this organisation in order to maintain its “neutrality” in the event of future conflicts.

Whereas the industrial centres of Europe and their populations were badly hit by destruction and massacres, the United States, situated thousands of miles away from the battlefields, maintained industry at full growth and a population far away from the direct suffering produced by the war. France and Britain, the “victorious” countries, did not regain their industrial strength. In 1919, all the European belligerents had over 30% lower growth, while the United States came out of the war strengthened and with a concentration of more gold in its coffers than ever before. In the middle of the 19th century, Britain was the uncontested world power and its Empire, over which “the sun never sets” was there to prove it, but after the First World War it had to reluctantly accept its position behind the Americans. The United States passed from the status of debtor to that of a major creditor and lender to Europe during the period after the war. The decline of capitalism inaugurated a new organisation within the imperialist constellation.

“*The plight of the once powerful British economy was typified by the situation in 1926 when it resorted to direct wage cuts in a vain attempt to restore its competitive edge on the world market (...). The only real boom was in the USA, which benefited both from the sorrows of its former rivals and the accelerated development of mass production symbolised by the Detroit assembly lines churning out the Model T Ford. America’s coronation as the world’s leading economic power also made it possible to pull German capital from the floor thanks to the injection of massive loans*”.¹¹

In reality, after the war, there was neither a recovery of the economy nor any expansion of new markets. For the United States, it was thanks to the war that it massively increased its exports to Europe, and the fact of having kept intact its industrial strength which reinforced the idea within the American bourgeoisie of

10. Fritz Sternberg, *Capitalism and socialism on trial*.

11. See “Decadence of Capitalism (x): For revolutionaries, the Great Depression confirms the obsolescence of capitalism” *International Review* n° 146.

7. Fritz Sternberg *Capitalism and Socialism on Trial*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1951 (English translation).

“unlimited growth”. However, 1929 and the Great Depression shattered this ideology and reminded everyone that capitalism had entered into its decadence and crisis and war would henceforth be its modus operandi.

The Great Depression hit America like a biblical curse. Massive unemployment, bankrupt businesses, hunger in the streets... the images of desolation were repeated across the whole country and the ravages spread to the rest of the world. The American state, under the direction of Franklin D. Roosevelt, decided to intervene. State capitalism, which had been taking shape since the First World War, became omnipresent and stepped in to save the economy. The “New Deal” was nothing other than Keynesianism; the state must invest in infrastructure in order to revitalise the whole of industry. The implementation of this plan was delayed and the expected positive effects took time to arrive. Thus, in the 1930s, the world’s bourgeoisie looked for a way out of the situation and the only way out that the bourgeoisie could come up with was - a new world war, that was only possible through the crushing of the proletariat. This time the war would be more devastating and deadlier and the United States would come out of it still better positioned as the uncontested world power.

The Second World War

Once again it was Germany that had to question the status quo. The annexation of Austria and the blitzkrieg invasion of Poland in 1939 opened up new hostilities. The United States, whose territory was sheltered from the battlefields, again maintained its neutrality. While France was invaded by an army of occupation and Britain suffered German bombings, the United States re-activated its role as supplier for the front; unemployment was re-absorbed and American industry again took on its frantic production. It wasn’t the New Deal but rather the war which enabled the recovery of the American productive apparatus.

Germany seemed unstoppable. Within the United States there was strong resistance to any entry into the conflict, the “isolationist” wing normally concentrated in the Republican Party wasn’t in agreement with America’s entry into the war, and there was strong sympathy from sectors of American society towards the Axis powers and particularly towards Germany. The American bourgeoisie knew that Germany would take control of Europe if it didn’t intervene. Contrary to the First World War, this time Japan, which had already spread its imperialist ambitions to Manchuria and

occupied great parts of China, immediately came into the war on the side of the Axis (Berlin-Rome-Tokyo) and tried to dominate the Pacific.

To be able to enter the war it was necessary for the American bourgeoisie to break the isolationists but also to convince the population and neutralise the working class behind the Star Spangled Banner. An attack was necessary in order to justify its entry into the war without resistance. Increasing provocations against Japan bore fruit and in December 1941, the Empire of Hirohito took the bait and attacked Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. The Machiavellianism of the American bourgeoisie is worthy of study: the loss of life and material destruction are secondary when it’s a question of imperialist objectives.¹² Once again, America’s entry into the war tipped the balance in favour of the Allies and all the industry of the former was given over to the furnishing of arms and other material to the Allies. The New Deal hadn’t fulfilled its promise of full employment: in 1938 there were 11 million unemployed and in 1941 it was still more than 6 million. It was only when the whole of the industrial apparatus had been established in order to respond to the demands of the war that unemployment finally fell. And with that the mirage of having surmounted the economic crisis reappeared on the American horizon.

The American bourgeoisie had built a modern army capable of intervening throughout the world and scientific research had already harnessed nuclear fission. Its peace-loving “neutrality” was armed to the teeth. To be an economic power is intimately linked to the capacity of the nation state to defend its interests and to spread them throughout the world.

“Under capitalism, there is no fundamental opposition between war and peace, but there is a difference between the ascendant and decadent phases of capitalist society and, consequently, a difference in the function of war (and in the relationship between war and peace) in the two respective phases. While in the first phase war had the function of enlarging the market with a view towards a greater production of consumer goods, in the second phase production is focused essentially on the production of the means of destruction, i.e. with a view towards war. The decadence of capitalist society is strikingly expressed in the fact that whereas in the ascendant period wars led to economic development, in the decadent period economic activity is geared essentially towards war.”

12. For a better understanding of how the American media compared 9/11 and 1941, see “Pearl Harbor 1941, Twin Towers 2001: Machiavellianism of the US bourgeoisie”, *International Review* n° 108.

*“This doesn’t mean war has become the goal of capitalist production, which remains the production of surplus value, but it does mean that war, taking on a permanent character, has become decadent capitalism’s way of life”.*¹³

The Second World War was clearly much more destructive than the First. Globally more than 50 million died, which included a great number of civilians. The destruction of factories and workers’ districts in enemy countries introduced a new element because, in order to weaken the adversary’s capabilities, it was essential to destroy the centres of the workforce and munitions factories and facilities for producing food and medicines etc. The destruction of Europe enabled the rise of a second-rank power, the USSR, whose imperialist appetites seemed insatiable. The United States had to use its new power, the atomic bomb, in order to negotiate with Stalin from a position of strength. That’s why at Yalta, in February 1945, while the Americans had not yet completed the building of their atomic weapons, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill had left the Russians guessing on the question, the latter wanting to invade Japan before May. Under Harry S. Truman, the Potsdam Agreement was completed by the beginning of August 1945, but Truman received telegrams confirming the success of atomic bomb tests over New Mexico and was able to put more pressure on the USSR knowing that they already had the weapon that would put them on top of the Russians. The United States dropped their atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on a Japan that was already beaten and no longer representing a threat to the Allies, in order to impress the Russians. The atomic bombardment put an end to the ambitions of the USSR. The Second World War was not yet finished and the Cold War had already raised its head.

The Cold War: a consequence of the “American Century”

The United States secured global control at the end of the Second World War. The creation of the UN, the Bretton Woods Agreement (in 1945, 80% of the world’s gold was in the United States), the World Bank, the IMF, GATT, NATO... represented a whole organisational architecture which assured American world superiority at the economic, political and, above all, military levels. American bases multiplied around the planet, 800 of them plus the secret bases

13. 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 Congress of the ICC, quoted in “War, militarism and imperialist blocs in the decadence of capitalism” in *International Review* n° 52.

probably existing in countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia. During the war the US, with over 12 million men under arms, had doubled its Gross National Product, and by the end of the war it accounted for “half of the world’s manufacturing capacity, most of its food surpluses, and almost all of its financial reserves. The United States held the lead in a wide range of technologies essential to modern warfare and economic prosperity. Possession of extensive domestic oil supplies and control over access to the vast oil reserves of Latin America and the Middle East contributed to the US position of global dominance”¹⁴

Thus, “American strength was favoured by advantages accruing from America’s relative geographic isolation. Distant from the epicentre of both world wars, the American homeland had suffered none of the massive destruction of the means of production that the European nations had experienced, and its civilian population had been spared the terror of air raids, bombardments, deportations, and concentration camps that led to the death of millions of non-combatants in Europe (more than 20 million civilians in Russia alone).”¹⁵

From 1945 the major axis of American Cold War foreign policy was the “containment of the USSR” and of the falsely-named “Communist” bloc. The ambitions of the USSR were soon seen openly: Russia swallowed up the Baltic States, installed its government in Poland, negotiated access to the Black Sea with Turkey, fuelled the civil war in Greece, and did not hide its claims towards Japan and the Kuril Islands with which it would strengthen its power from Europe to the Pacific. The United States conceived its “Marshall Plan” strategy in 1947: more than \$12.5 billion for urban reconstruction, for hunger relief, and to supply goods across Europe. In short, a great part of the Marshall Plan was to enable the Europeans to continue buying American goods. Otherwise, the main objective was to prevent the development in Europe of the conditions that allowed the USSR, and the Communist parties faithful to Moscow, to stir up the socially volatile situation and integrate new members into the Russian bloc, the case of Czechoslovakia being an eloquent example that could not be repeated.¹⁶

14. D. S. Painter, *Encyclopaedia of US Foreign Policy*, p.273, originally quoted in, “History of US foreign policy since World War II”, *International Review* n° 113.

15. *Ibid.*

16. The Yalta agreements (1944) united the Czechs and the Slovaks into a single republic with the government under Edouard Benes approved by the Allies. The idea was that the USSR would allow Czechoslovakia to act as a buffer, but Stalin acted to radicalise the Czech Social-Democratic Party (CSK),

At the end of the war, George Marshall arrived in China in order to try to form a coalition. However Mao Tse Tung of the CCP and Chiang Kai-Shek of the Kuomintang, advised by Moscow, put their rivalries to one side and made a common front against the Americans and broke off negotiations in Spring 1946.

At the end of the Second World War, the USSR and the United States met to divide up Korea from the 36th parallel, but in 1950, the North, supported by the Russians, invaded South Korea which was under American control. The horrors of the Cold War had come into macabre fruition:¹⁷ the war lasted 3 years and cost 3 million deaths, with families divided and long-lasting distress for the population of Korea. The United States succeeded in gaining the upper hand and pushed the North Korean forces towards the initially agreed frontier. This war marked the beginning of a situation in which the United States was the first and uncontested world superpower for the next 40 years.

Europe was divided by the “Iron Curtain”. NATO was created in 1949 for the military protection of Western Europe, and in 1955 the USSR responded with the Warsaw Pact. The world was plunged into a permanent threat of conflict, missiles and all sorts of armaments appeared on the landscape as capitalist “peace” became a new Sword of Damocles.

Little by little the United States imposed its authority. In 1956, when the UK and France, with the connivance of Israel, acted impulsively in trying to take back the Suez Canal, the Americans imposed their discipline and relegated France and the United Kingdom to a secondary role behind the USA.

The only direct confrontation between the two bloc leaders, USA and USSR, was the “Cuban missile crisis” in 1962, which ended in a secret agreement between the Kennedy administration and Nikita Khrushchev. Other confrontations of this period were made through the means of intermediaries.

The most important stumbling block for the “American century” was the war in Vietnam. Vietnam was divided between North and South, the South being under

they took the Interior Ministry and the post of Prime Minister (Gottwald), among others. They organised a legal coup d’état, there were intrigues, “suicides” (Jan Masaryk, Minister of Foreign Affairs), militias, etc. and finally, in February 1948, the Stalinists took total control. The United States didn’t react in time, which is what Churchill complained about.

17. The tonnage of atomic bombs was already greater than that of the Second World War, and the use of chemicals such as napalm in Vietnam was a dramatic confirmation of a Cold War of increasing barbarity.

the influence of Washington and the North under the USSR and China. This war led to numerous divisions within the American bourgeoisie and the idea of being “bogged-down in the Vietnamese swamp”, as well as the progress of Moscow in the Middle East, contributed to the Americans ending this war and re-orientating their foreign policy. Although more than 500,000 men had been sent to Vietnam in 1968, they had to abandon this former French colony and, in 1973, the “Paris Accords” were signed stipulating the departure of the Americans from South Vietnam. That soon resulted in the taking of Saigon by North Vietnam in 1975 and a reunification under the “Communist” aegis with the grandiose name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976.

Apart from this fiasco, which was not insignificant, the Americans succeeded in reaching the Moon and leading in technological and scientific research in the military domain. In the rivalry with the “Communist” bloc they were successful in containing the USSR across the whole American continent. Cuba was an exception which Washington guaranteed would not be repeated: the Monroe Doctrine was applied to the letter. Cuban influence was limited to the romanticism around the revolution of the men with beards which nurtured the guerrilla leftism symbolised by Che Guevara. In the Middle East the United States made Israel its bridgehead in order to contain Arab flirtations with Moscow. In the Far East however, the failure of the Vietnam War brought something positive for Washington: it succeeded in drawing China into the Western Bloc and there was a definite break by the former with the Russians. Naturally, the United States would have to abandon its previous position recognising Taiwan as the government of China; imperialism has no remorse or shame, such sentiments do not exist for it and what prevails is the cold calculation of the most sordid interests so as to assure power and control over others. The Cold War saw four decades of manoeuvrings, “containment” and finally the encirclement of the USSR.

The United States did not intervene in the Hungarian uprising of 1956 but when the USSR invaded Afghanistan at the beginning of the 1980s it was forced to support and underwrite the “resistance” against the Soviet invasion, thus giving birth to the mujahideen and what later became al-Qaida, led by Osama Bin Laden, who served alongside the Americans. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, all these “allies” had started to play their own games to the point of daring to rebel against and attack their old master.

Conclusion

From the end of the 18th century the establishment of the United States allowed it to conquer an immense territory and welcome a constant flow of emigration. The industrialisation of the North won out over the anachronistic system of slavery in the South and, with it, capitalism consolidated the basis of its expansion. At the end of the nineteenth century the United States was already a country whose territory spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We should note here that the United States is literally the sum of states which generates a national unity maintained under constraints. But the "Manifest Destiny" was that the United States would spread through the entire world; after all, this "destiny" was that of American capitalism, expressed in the dreams of the first pioneers. The end of American expansion on its home territory and the Monroe Doctrine's demarcation (in the face of the European powers) of the US zone of influence throughout the American continent coincided with the opening of the 20th century and the beginning of capitalism's decadence. The First World War was the open expression of the end of the progressive phase of capitalism and of the beginning of its historic decline.

The United States came out of the First World War much strengthened, with the lenders of yesterday becoming debtors; in contrast to Europe, where even the victors Britain and France were unable to resume their former place in the concert of nations, the United States positioned itself as the world's first power and became the great provider of the Entente. Being geographically distant from the battlefields, its industrial production and its population remained intact and concentrated on production in order to supply the front. The Great Depression showed to what point state capitalism had already taken over economic, social and military life. Although the New Deal didn't resolve the crisis it did show the role of the state. The Second World War more than confirmed the role of the United States as a world power. This time its role as provider was greater, reserves of gold were concentrated in American coffers and its army was present over the whole planet: sky, sea and land. All its productive and scientific apparatus was subordinated to the needs of war. At the end of the Second World War, we saw the crowning of the great victor of two world wars: the United States. The Cold War was completely dominated by the Americans, the Russian bloc imploded in 1989 without a shot being fired or a missile launched from the West. But American domination was founded on shifting sands as its empire was gangrened by the cancer of militarism.

Whereas the Soviet bloc, with Russia at its head, was exhausted and dislocated through the depletion of its productive apparatus after decades of trying to keep up with the arms race, the United States itself undermined its supremacy under the weight of an economy subject to the demands of war. The position of the world's first power isn't defended by poetry but by the maintenance and expansion of a powerful army. It's the same in this period where the "American Century" ends. The weight of military expenditure had driven the USSR into the ground, but the armaments industry is a domain of waste pure and simple for world capital, for capital as a whole, and so the USSR is not alone in suffering from this weight. We will analyse in the second part how these developments have also had a negative effect on the competitive capacity of American capital.

The United States can be considered as the classic country of the decadence of capitalism. If Britain and France were the powers of capitalism's ascendancy, the United States has become the greatest power through the conditions created by the decadence of capitalism, in particular war as "a way of life" of a system in decline. This decadence has opened up its terminal phase, social decomposition, which, since the end of the 1980s, has marked a qualitative accentuation of the contradictions of this mode of production. Thirty years of social decomposition have led the central countries of capitalism, and above all the United States, to become the motor force of chaos.

Marsan

Critique of the "communisers", part I

Introduction to the series on the "communisers"

Since 1989 and the collapse of the falsely named "Communist" regimes of the former imperialist bloc around the USSR, authentic marxism has had to fight back against an intensified campaign of deformations and lies, claiming that marxism is an out-of-date, discredited ideology which, when put into practice, could only prepare the ground for the Stalinist totalitarian gulag. These campaigns have been aided not only by the existence of regimes which have maintained the exploitation and repression of the working class under a Red Flag, but also by all the former expressions of the workers' movement which, having passed over to the side of the bourgeoisie, continue to make use of a disfigured version of marxism as an apology for their participation in imperialist wars and their advocacy of more statified forms of capitalist rule; and this has been a feature of the last 100 years and more. Thus, the mobilisation of the working class for the battlefields of 1914-18 was spearheaded by former Socialists who used passages in Marx and Engels that had been applicable in the period when national wars were still possible to justify their support for an imperialist and reactionary world war. Later on, the Stalinists and Trotskyists demonstrated their adherence to the camp of capital by painting the Second World War with a fraudulent marxist gloss, in particular by appealing for the defence of the "socialist fatherland" or the "degenerated workers' state" in the USSR.

But the counter-revolution which engulfed the working class after the heroic struggles of 1917-23 did not only take the overt forms of Stalinism and fascism. It also required its "democratic" side, above all in the ideology of anti-fascism which was designed to draw in workers and even former revolutionary militants who were sickened by the horrors of fascist repression and mass murder. But on the more theoretical level, this democratic counter-revolution also gave birth to a new deformation of marxism, which has been termed "Western Marxism" and which has been a key component of what we call modernism.¹ Unlike the Stalinists and the Trotskyists, this trend was more amorphous and did not put forward a definite programme for the statification of capital (although it generally accepted that there was indeed something non-capitalist in what Marcuse and others termed "Soviet Marxism"). It was mainly based around the universities or state-sanctioned "institutes for social research" – most notably in the case of the Frankfurt School, the main intellectual

1. In more common parlance, the term "modernism" is used to describe some of the artistic trends that arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and particularly in the wake of the First World War, for example the experimental writing of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Schoenberg's atonal music, or expressionism and cubism in painting. It would of course be interesting to analyse these artistic movements in their historical context (see for example Notes toward a history of art in ascendant and decadent capitalism | International Communist Current (internationalism.org), but here we want to make it clear that our use of the term modernism to describe a particular political current has a very different meaning

inspiration for "Western Marxism".

This trend can be seen as the fountain-head of modernism because it claims to offer a critique of marxism's "outdated dogmas", which may have been valid once but no longer apply in "modern capitalism". Of course, authentic marxism is far from a being a static dogma and must constantly analyse the endless changes brought about by the most dynamic and expansive society yet seen in human history. But the essence of modernism lies in invoking the name of Marx to strip marxism of its founding principles, of all its revolutionary traits. It is thus characterised by some or all of the following elements:

- first and foremost, the rejection of the revolutionary nature of the working class. The failure of the revolutionary attempts of 1917-23 demonstrated, for modernism, the historic failure of the working class, and even its enthusiasm for the counter-revolution – whether because of its submission to fascism (a strong element in the writings of Adorno, for example) or because "traditional" marxism itself was seen as being responsible for Stalinism (which would later align these "post-marxist" ideologies with the main themes of the ideological campaigns which followed the 1989 "collapse of communism"). In the period of the post-war boom, Marcuse, having concluded that the working class of the west had been bought off by economic prosperity and "one dimensional" ideologies like

consumerism, began scrabbling around for other "revolutionary" subjects, such as the students protesting against the Vietnam war or the peasants allegedly leading the "anti-imperialist struggle" in the peripheries of the system;²

- the rejection of any continuity with progressive historical development, both generally and more particularly that of the proletarian movement: Marx is accepted, but often Engels is dismissed as at best a vulgariser; the Second International pays no role in the development of marxism and is identified entirely with its opportunist wing; the same treatment can also be reserved for the Communist International, seen as no more than the source of latter-day "Soviet Marxism";
- in line with the above, the rejection of the goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the construction of a revolutionary class party. Indeed, revolutionary militancy is often presented as the highest form of alienation.

Marxism is thus transformed into an individual utopian rejection of capitalism at the cultural ideological level, distorting the early Marx and his approach to the problem of alienation for this purpose, or turning the critique of political economy into a sophisticated argument in favour of the perennial, unchanging nature of capitalism and a dismissal of the theory of the decadence of capitalism.

2. See Paul Mattick's *Critique of Marcuse: One-dimensional man in class society*, Merlin Press, 1972 for a proletarian response to Marcuse's theorisation of the integration of the working class into capitalism. We will not attempt a more developed critique of the principal figures and ideologies of the Frankfurt school here, although it remains an important task for the future. It is apparent that this school was headed by learned and even brilliant intellectuals who were investigating real questions, notably the way that capitalist ideology penetrates the mass of the population and the working class in particular. In so doing, they attempted to bring together elements of marxism and of Freud's psychoanalysis. But because this attempted synthesis was envisaged not from a communist standpoint, from the standpoint of "social humanity", to use the terminology of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, but from the standpoint of the isolated professor, it not only failed to achieve this overall "critical theory" but, through its very sophistication, served to attract inquiring minds into a project which could only be instrumentalised by the dominant ideology.

Modernism penetrates the revolutionary movement

In our article "Modernism: From leftism to the void", published in *World Revolution* n° 3 in April 1975, we identified the Frankfurt School as one of the main sources of modernism, and showed that its main proponents had openly identified with the ruling class and the imperialist war of 1939-45:

"In the 30s and 40s, the Stalinist fellow-travellers at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt (Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno) began to lay down the framework used by modernists today. According to them, marxism and the proletariat were failing because they were not being 'revolutionary' enough. For example, the workers had not fervently rallied to the defence of Republican Spain in 1936-38... Unable to see that the crushing of the workers' uprisings of 1917-23 ultimately allowed for a new imperialist war, these dilettantes enthusiastically 'chose' to support the Allied side during that very same imperialist conflict".

The article points out, for example, that, during the war, Marcuse served with the US Office of Intelligence Research in the State Department and became acting head of its East European section.

The article's title, locating the origins of modernism in the left wing of capital, is perfectly accurate in this case. However, later experiences confirmed that modernism, like the various distortions of socialism criticised in the Communist Manifesto, could also take root in currents that had initially sought to place themselves on the terrain of the proletariat. In the 1960s, faced with the post-war economic boom, the group Socialisme ou Barbarie (S ou B) set out to prove that Marx had been wrong about the inevitability of economic crises in capitalism. In 1948, after breaking with Trotskyism, S ou B had insisted that capitalism had become a decadent system and were greeted by the Gauche Communiste de France as a potentially positive development, even though the GCF warned them explicitly about the difficulties of a complete break from Trotskyism and about the intellectual arrogance of seeing themselves as alone capable of solving the problems facing the working class and the revolutionary movement, without any reference to the left communist tradition which had already posed profound questions about the defeat of the 1917-23 revolutions and the nature of the "socialist" system in the USSR and elsewhere.³

3. "Communism is on the agenda of history: Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism", *International Review* n°161, 2018.

In reality, S ou B were to prove that they were no less entranced by capitalist growth in the 50s and 60s than a figure like the social democrat Bernstein had been in the 1890s. And as they increasingly came to see the dogmas of Stalinism and Trotskyism as rooted in marxism itself, they began to call into question not only the economic contradictions of the system but even the fundamental contradiction between the working class and capital, replacing it with a nebulous conflict between "order givers and order takers" which reproduced the classic anarchist obsession with "authority". A logical consequence of denying the inner contradictions of capital was the elaboration of a conception of socialism as a system of "self-management" which could co-exist with commodity production – another regression to anarchism presented as a new and radical alternative to "traditional marxism".⁴

S ou B, and in particular their vision of generalised self-management, was a major influence on the situationist current whose moment of glory came in the events of May-June 1968. An article by Marc Chirik in *Révolution Internationale* n° 2, 1969,⁵ showed that S ou B's influence also extended to the situationists' rejection of the marxist conception of the profound link between the class struggle and an objective capitalist crisis. For them the huge class movements of 68 and afterwards were above all the consequence of subjective factors: at a general level, the boredom and alienation of "everyday life" under capitalism, but also, more specifically, of the exemplary intervention of the situationists themselves. The situationists were thus embedded in the modernist world-view, but having participated in a real class movement, and despite the classically "artistic" – in fact petty bourgeois – nature of slogans like "Never Work Ever" – were far less hostile to the struggle of the working class than some of those who succeeded them.

By the early 1970s, both S ou B and the Situationist International had ceased to exist, and the majority of the modernist currents – some of whom had passed through the school of S ou B and situationism, and even the Bordigist branch of the communist left – had developed a more "marxist" language which was able to discern the errors of self-management (even if, as we will see, they often resurrected it in new forms) and insist that communism meant the eradication of the totality of capitalist

4. "Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism Second part: On the content of the communist revolution", *International Review* n° 162, 2019.

5. "Understanding May", republished in *International Review* n° 74, 2009.

social relations, based on wage labour and commodity production. This was the birth of the "communising" current which has since become the main form of modernist ideology. It is no accident that this development coincided with the revival of the communist left. The communisers, such as the Invariance group around Jacques Camatte, the group Mouvement Communiste around Barrot/Dauvé,⁶ or the Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs Révolutionnaires (OJTR) around Dominic Blanc, were much more willing to present themselves as heirs of the historic communist left but also as critics of its limitations, and above all of the "conservatism" of the revived communist left groups with their insistence on the need for militant political organisation and on the defensive struggle of the working class as the precondition for a future communist revolution. The elements in this new trend have referred to themselves as "communisers" because they claim to be the only real communists, the only ones who had understood what Marx meant in *The German Ideology* when he defined communism as "the real movement which abolishes the present state of affairs". In this sense, while there were some early debates between the communisers and the new left communist groups⁷ this updated expression of modernism increasingly became a destructive force against the communist left, as evidenced by the role of the so-called Bérard or ex-Lutte Ouvrière tendency which split with *Révolution Internationale* in 1974 and very rapidly disappeared from political life.

As we have said, the revival of the communist left in the late 60s and early 70s was deeply connected to the earthquake of international class struggle which shook much of Europe and the Americas, and also to the increasingly obvious return of the open economic crisis. In such a period, while the communisers, and above all Camatte, more and more called into question the central importance of the workers' class struggle, the idea that the working class was merely a "class for capital", and that its future lay in its negation rather than its affirmation as a class, carried far less weight than it was to do following the difficulties of the class struggle in the 1980s and above all with the onset of the phase of capitalist decomposition after the collapse of the eastern bloc in 1989. As we have argued elsewhere,⁸ this period has

6. Not to be confused with the existing 'workerist' group Mouvement Communiste.

7. For example, Movement Communiste sent a contribution to the 1973 Liverpool conference organised by Workers Voice following the call by Internationalism in the US for an international discussion network.

8. See the report on class struggle to the 23rd ICC congress: "Report on the class struggle : Formation, loss and re-conquest of proletarian class identity",

been marked by a real weakening of class identity, of the proletariat's awareness of itself as a distinct and antagonistic force within capitalist society. These conditions provided more fertile soil for the communisers, who have in general argued that it is precisely this class identity that the proletariat needs to abolish, not as the ultimate result of a revolutionary struggle, but as its precondition. And in a period in which the crisis of the system is more and more giving rise to popular revolts in which the working class has no distinct role, it can appear that the communisers' ideas are being vindicated, and that we are beginning to see the "revolt of humanity" against capital which Camatte and others predicted back in the 1970s.

In parallel to this, the first signs of a revival of class struggle in the first decade of the new century was accompanied by a certain resurgence of anarchism, attracting young elements looking for revolutionary ideas but for the most part unable to connect with the genuine marxist tradition, which they still tended to associate with the defeat of the Russian revolution and the degeneration of Bolshevism. Given the paucity of anarchism's theoretical framework, the communisers, particularly individuals like Dauvé and groups like *Théorie Communiste*, *Aufheben* and *Endnotes*, were able to offer the anarchist milieu an appearance of theoretical profundity, displaying their familiarity with marxist terminology while in no way challenging most of the central prejudices of anarchism, in particular the rejection of centralised political organisation. Looked at from another angle, the communisation current is itself a new variant of anarchism, as we will seek to demonstrate in subsequent articles in this series. But because many of its adherents refer not just to Marx but to Bordiga, the KAPD, and other components of the tradition of the communist left, they can often be confused with the real left communist tradition, and this can be an extremely negative factor in the political evolution of new elements searching for communist clarity.

For precisely this reason, it is essential that the communist left demarcates itself sharply from the communisation tendency around the most important questions which separate them

First and foremost, by insisting that despite all the changes in the composition of the working class that we have seen over the last few decades, despite all the ideological and political set-backs experienced by the working class, it remains the only revolutionary class in capitalist society, and that its struggles in defence of its material

interests remains the only soil in which a revolutionary assault on capital can grow. Thus, the repudiation of all theories which call on the working class to negate itself or to renounce its defensive struggles.

Second, by reaffirming that to fight against the onslaught of bourgeois ideology, and for the eventual transformation of immediate economic struggles into a political and social offensive against the whole system, the revolutionary minority must be organised on an international scale and on the basis of a coherent political platform. Thus, the critique of the idea that communist militancy is "the highest stage of alienation", that proletarian political organisations can only be "sects" or "rackets" and should dissolve into a loose cooperation between sovereign individuals. In doing so, we will show how hostility to revolutionary organisation has led parts of the communisation current towards political parasitism, and its propensity to individualism towards bourgeois careerism.

Third, by defending the necessity for the working class to fight for its political dictatorship over society in order to begin a period of transition towards communism, as opposed to the communisers view of a kind of "grand dissolution" which bypasses both the need for working class political power and a period of transition.

On the method of this series

We see this series as an offshoot of our long-standing series on the historical development of the communist programme.⁹ Thus, in taking up the points that distinguish us from the communisers listed above, we will also take a historical approach, focusing on certain of the "classical" texts of communisation theory from the 1970s and the trajectory of some of the main figures in the development of communisation theory. Thus, our projected articles will include:

- A review of the ICC's first major combat against modernist/communisation theory in its own ranks, the "ex-Lutte Ouvrière tendency" in the early 70s;
- A reminder of the political trajectory of Jacques Camatte, which in many ways reveals the true "secret" or direction of communisation theory;
- A critique of texts such as Camatte's "On organisation" and the OJTR's "Militancy: The Highest Stage of Alienation"
- A response to certain texts by Barrot/Dauvé on "communist measures" and

the abolition of value.

In carrying out this work, we will also republish some of the ICC's own texts in response to the modernist conception of communism and the class struggle, most of which have not been available for many years.

CDW

From leftism to modernism: the misadventures of the "Bérard tendency"

The previous article in this series introduced the "communisers" and drew out their relationship with the current emerging at the end of the 1960s which the ICC calls modernism. The article showed the bourgeois origin of the modernist ideology by looking at the beginnings and the development of this current. This second part will focus on one of its earliest expressions, the Bérard tendency, which was formed in 1973 within the group Révolution Internationale (RI), the future section of the ICC in France.

Bérard, a new prophet

Although there was an overestimation of the revolutionary dynamic, most of the groups of the proletarian political milieu existing at the time understood that May 68 in France and the Hot Autumn in Italy the following year could by no means be seen as a revolutionary situation. In spite of its combativity and the development of its consciousness, the working class was still dominated by illusions in capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Much time was still needed for its consciousness to be transformed in depth and to become capable of making the revolutionary assault. However, it was necessary to explain concretely why the revolutionary upsurge had receded in most countries by the middle of the 1970s.¹

In an attempt to explain this reflux, a militant of RI, Bérard (or Hembé), put forward the idea that the defensive struggles waged by the proletariat up until then had ended in an impasse due to the illusion that significant reforms in favour of the workers were possible, which prevented them from radicalising their struggles. He argued that if the proletariat were to go forward once more it had to reject, not only these illusions, but also demand struggles as such. His article was accepted as a contribution to the discussion and appeared in the journal *Révolution Internationale (RI)* (new series) n°8, March-April 1974, under the title of "Lessons of the struggle of the English workers". In it he defended the following slogans: "*The dead-end of struggles for economic demands, the impossibility of reformism, the need for a qualitative leap towards the revolutionary unification of the class*". Everyone was agreed that the historical period for reforms had ended

1. The "Resolution on the balance of class forces" adopted at the 23rd Congress of the ICC in 2019 and published in *International Review* n° 164, described and analysed the political swamp that emerged at the end of the 1960s as well as the three waves of workers' struggles that followed and persisted up until 1989.

when the First World War broke out. On the other hand, Marx had emphasised the inadequacy of defensive struggles while by no means denying the need for them. Bérard however was definitely rejecting struggles for economic demands: "*Demand struggles do not become revolutionary; it is the class that becomes revolutionary by going beyond and rejecting the immediate struggle*". Moreover, the proletariat would have to refuse not only its immediate struggles but also its essence as an exploited class. At first the proletariat appears as a "*class for capital*" but as it struggles "*the class must begin to act as the negation of its relationship with capital, therefore no longer as an economic category but as a class-for-itself. Thus, it breaks the divisions that were a part of its previous state and appears no longer as a sum of wage workers but as a movement of autonomous affirmation, that is, the negation of what it was beforehand*". Bérard's article takes up a classic marxist position: "*the proletariat is an exploited and revolutionary class*" only to immediately deny it in the following phrase: "*So it is the very being of the class which constitutes the dynamic link between the various transitory phases, the movement that affirms and denies in different moments of struggle*". According to this conception, the repeated defeats of its resistance struggles must make the proletariat understand the need to negate itself. "*Defeats are fruitful in as far as they unmask the institutions that are counter-revolutionary and sap the credibility of reformism*". And Bérard rejoiced at any significant workers' struggle that made no specific demand.

This is in fact a voluntarist vision which ignores the material forces that make possible the transformation of defensive struggles into revolutionary struggles. Rosa Luxemburg, who participated in the 1905 revolution and who knew what she was talking about, explained that the mass strike is a tangle of economic struggles and political struggles, a dynamic composed of advances

and retreats, in which the workers politicise and organise their struggles, acquire greater unity and a deeper consciousness. In fact, according to Bérard's schema, the workers never returned to their struggle at the end of the 1970s. Yet in July 1980, it was the elimination of price subsidies on consumer goods (the price of meat sold directly to the workers at the work place increased by a dramatic 60%) that sparked off the strikes in the Warsaw suburbs and the Gdansk region. This triggered the mass strike in Poland, the most important battle in the second international wave of workers' struggles.

Discussion began within the RI sections and, one after another, they adopted a position against Bérard's conclusions. But at this point it was important to reply rapidly to Bérard's modernist positions which were a total break with marxism. The reply to his article appeared in issue n°9 of *Révolution Internationale* (new series) of May-June 1974, under the title of "Why the working class is the revolutionary class".² It reasserts the classic marxist position: "*The process by which the working class rises to the level of its historic task is not a separate process that is external to its daily economic struggle against capital. On the contrary, it is within and by means of this conflict that the working class forges the weapons of its revolutionary struggle*". So there are not two working classes but one alone that is both exploited and revolutionary. This is why revolutionary struggles are always preceded by a long period of demand struggles, and it is also why the latter always reappear during the revolutionary period.³ "*And how could it be otherwise when we are dealing with the revolutionary struggle of a class, that is, with a set of men economically determined, united by their shared material situation?*".

2. This text has now been re-published on our website.

3. Even in the period of transition, when the working class has to bear the scourge of the State. That the working class must defend its immediate interests during the dictatorship of the proletariat was demonstrated by Lenin during the debate within the Bolshevik Party on the union question in 1921. This position was taken up again and developed by the Italian Communist Left in the 1930s and by the French Communist Left (GCF) after the Second World War. See our article "Understanding the defeat of the Russian Revolution, 2. 1921: the proletariat and the transitional state" in the *International Review* n° 100, 1st quarter 2000.

As the new prophet of communisation,⁴ Bérard stated in *RI* n° 8 that in revolutionary struggles, “it is not wage labour that confronts capital, but wage labour in the process of becoming something else, of dissolving. The proletariat affirming itself is nothing other than this movement of negation”. Making wage labour dissolve in this way, when in fact it is present even during the phase of the international generalisation of the revolution, is typical of modernist speculation which confuses the departure point with its culmination, its ultimate outcome. In order to make value melt away, it is necessary to have a political organ powerful enough internationally to be able to overturn the system from top to bottom, destroy all economic categories and replace market control with planned production. The reply in *RI* n° 9 had to give a reminder that “given that capitalist production takes place on a world scale and that today every commodity is composed of goods from the four corners of the globe, the abolition of wage-labour can only come to pass when market exchange has been eliminated all over the entire planet. As long as there are parts of the world where the labour product must be bought and sold, the abolition of wage-labour cannot be fully achieved anywhere.”

For the modernists, the abolition of wage labour is just a pious wish because they reject the three conditions that make it possible:

- The seizure of power internationally or at least in the most important countries of the world; this is what Marxists call the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, the destruction of the State and the nation as the condition for the international power of the workers’ councils to emerge.
- The process of the collectivisation (or socialisation) of production which makes it possible to destroy the divisions within capitalist labour and to redirect production towards the satisfaction of human needs.
- The gradual integration of all members of society into associated labour which makes possible the definitive disappearance of the division of society into classes.

It is actually by the proletariat affirming itself, not by negating itself, that the dissolution of classes and the disappearance of the law of value is made possible. The conflict between labour and capital

is constantly present in the class struggle, from the smallest defensive struggle which timidly affirms the solidarity of the workers, to the mass strike, in which the workers have gained a degree of political consciousness and unity that enables them to force through their demands, and even up to the period of transition when they are changing production so radically that we can say with Marx and Engels: “the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labour”.⁵

The ravages of individualism

The discussion was soon to fester. The minority, imbued with a sense of hurt pride, were furious at not finding any echo within the organisation. In issue n° 9 of *RI* another article appeared, “Demand struggles and the emergence of the class-for-itself”, which this time was presented as “a text of the tendency”. This article confirmed the direction that the minority was taking: in view of the difficulties of the class struggle, it was necessary to invent a magic recipe for overcoming the divisions and breaking out of union entrapment. It became increasingly removed from the real world. “Demand struggles exist and are necessary. We have gone over this often enough not to have to repeat it. But our task is to understand and to state [that the working class] must go beyond them by rejecting them and by destroying the organisation that coincides with them (the unions)”. In reality, workers will be faced by the unions for a long time yet - up until the revolution - and it is not by decreeing that they vanish that they can be got rid of. The article is also completely wrong about the nature of the unions; they are not defenders of workers’ demands or the ones who negotiate a good price for labour power. Their function is precisely to encircle and sabotage demand struggles by rejecting the means that would enable them to win (even if this is always temporary): the geographical extension and politicisation of the struggle.

The minority takes a rather original “materialist” direction: “Either there are no demands or else no-one gives a damn about ‘demands’; it is not that material needs do not make themselves felt, on the contrary, general, social revolt expresses the only real material need felt by the class as a class confronted with the degradation of the whole of society, that is,

the transformation of social relations”. Contestation, revolt; this is as far as the horizon of the petty bourgeoisie in May 68 extends. It is true that for us material necessity is manifested in the need for communism as the only possible solution to capitalist contradictions, but it is also manifested in the will to win immediate struggles as a condition for the generalisation of the fight. Because of its idealism the minority was unable to understand the dynamic described in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: “Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers”.

As the discussion developed, the “tendency” adopted an increasingly aggressive tone: it intervened in an irresponsible way in a Public Forum of *RI* and finally published a pamphlet externally (by this time it was calling itself “Une Tendance Communiste”): the pamphlet was entitled “The Revolution will be communist or nothing”. This way of proceeding is typical of those who want to save themselves as individuals rather than going forward collectively to clarify political questions.

Half of the pamphlet is dedicated to replying to the article in *RI* n° 9. The tendency tries again to demonstrate that its position is the materialist one. Let us see how. “No-one can deny that wage labour and associated labour are, in a purely descriptive and static way, the two aspects of the proletariat’s situation in as far as it is an ‘economic category’. However, in our discussion this ‘description’ says nothing about ‘How the working class is the revolutionary class’ (title of the [*RI*] article) because, in order to understand the nature of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject in terms of the ‘concrete human activity’ that Marx talks about, the objective situation must be understood as a contradiction and not as a juxtaposition of fixed attributes. [*RI*] does not say that the class is forced to become revolutionary because the material relations and social objectives within which it exists have entered into contradiction, rather its explanation is that it is revolutionary because 1) it is exploited (wage labour); 2) it is associated (by capital).”⁶ We can borrow from the assessment that Marx made regarding Proudhon: “A petty bourgeois of this kind deifies contradiction, for contradiction is the very basis of his being. He is nothing but social contradiction in

4. According to some theorists, Proudhon is the father of anarchism. The father of communisation is not Bérard but rather Jacques Camatte and the review *Invariance*, which split from the International Communist Party in 1966. We will come back to this in the next articles in this series.

5. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845-1846). Part I: Feuerbach, Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook. D: Proletarians and Communism. Individuals, Class, and Community.

6. The pamphlet of the ex-Lutte Ouvrière tendency (most of the members of this “tendency” were former Trotskyist militants) has been republished in the anthology of François Danel, *Rupture dans la théorie de la révolution [Break with revolutionary theory]. Textes 1965-1975* (2003), and on libcom.org.

action.⁷ Contradiction, as it is seen here, is completely sterile, and the concepts of qualitative leap and of negation, that are so important to marxist dialectic, are used here in a totally metaphysical way; they are a magic wand waved by the intellectual as he pretends to resolve the social problems that trip him up.

In order to look clearly at the contradiction and resolve it, we have to distinguish between what is discarded, what is preserved and what takes on a different meaning. Otherwise, the continuity of the movement as a whole is broken. This is what the marxist dialectic means by transcending what has gone before. This is what Rosa Luxemburg says about the meaning marxism gives to negation and the qualitative leap: "*Socialism is the first popular movement in world history that has set itself the goal of bringing human consciousness, and thereby free will, into play in the social actions of mankind. For this reason, Friedrich Engels designated the final victory of the socialist proletariat a leap of humanity from the animal world into the realm of freedom. This 'leap' is also an iron law of history bound to the thousands of seeds of a prior torment-filled and all-too-slow development. But this can never be realised until the development of complex material conditions strikes the incendiary spark of conscious will in the great masses.*"⁸

Bérard began by rejecting the demand struggles of the proletariat, then its nature as an exploited class: the only way he can resolve his "contradiction" is to quite simply throw out the proletariat itself. His intention was to distinguish himself from Camatte (who had already openly rejected the "theory of the proletariat") and reinstate the proletariat as a revolutionary subject, but the notion of an immediate communisation without a period of transition leads inevitably to the rejection of class autonomy and to diluting the proletariat in the other classes. Thus, "*There is a nucleus determined by material circumstances, in practice a vanguard of the class-for-itself (the workers of large businesses), but this nucleus, by abandoning capitalist relations, tends at once to precipitate 'the imminent passage of the middle classes into the proletariat' (Marx). [...] The 'danger' of dissolving the proletariat into the population does not exist.*"⁹ The autonomy of the class has been a palpable principle of the proletarian struggle since 1848. It

is the thread that ties the partial struggles of the workers to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The loss of class identity that we witness today makes the poison of interclassism even more dangerous. This demonstrates how modernism does the work of the bourgeoisie.

The anti-organisational prejudices of the generation of 68

There have been numerous tendencies throughout the history of the workers' movement, but the Bérard tendency is a false one whose trajectory can easily be explained. All except one of its seven members came from the Trotskyist organisation Lutte Ouvrière (LO). It was in fact an affinity-based regroupment around an element who had a certain charisma and it proved to be a real obstacle for its members as they engaged in the process of breaking with Trotskyism.¹⁰ Immediately after the break with LO, at the beginning of 1973, Bérard wrote a pamphlet: "The break with LO and Trotskyism", which described how Trotskyism had passed into the bourgeois camp after a long opportunist drift and its betrayal of internationalism during the Second World War. This very effective pamphlet had great success and three subsequent editions were produced. The last one came out in 1976 and included an introduction that corrected some ambiguities in the text.¹¹ But without doubt this document demonstrates the talents of its author, as does the article on "The period of transition", especially the second part which appeared in *Révolution Internationale* (new series) n° 8 (March-April 1974), which tackles the question of labour vouchers.¹² Carried away by his polemic with the Lassalliens, Marx considers the possibility that labour vouchers could be used in the period of transition from capitalism to communism as a means of individual payment based on the labour time given to society.¹³ Bérard shows very well that this is a type of wage under another name and is a contradiction in terms that would act more as a fetter on the dictatorship of the proletariat than anything else. His argumentation is based on the criticisms made by Marx himself against the labour vouchers advocated

by Proudhon (*Poverty of Philosophy*) or by Bray and Gray (*Grundrisse*). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx strikes a death blow to this panacea: "*Because price is not equal to value, therefore the value-determining element – labour time – cannot be the element in which prices are expressed.*"¹⁴ In other words, labour time cannot be measured in terms of itself. This critique of the illusions held on the question of labour vouchers that was made at the time by RI is today the position of the ICC.¹⁵

At that time Bérard was participating in the work of reappropriating the historic gains of the Communist Left current and his role was often a positive one, including in the discussions between the various groups that emerged in the United Kingdom.

However, such militant qualities can change from being a factor that strengthen the organisation to a factor towards its destruction. Very quickly, Bérard and his followers were to express extreme confusion and prejudice on the organisation question.

In the Spring of 1973, after five years of its existence, after the regroupment that took place in France,¹⁶ the group RI felt that it was necessary to make another step forward in the construction of the organisation by reappropriating the proletarian principle of centralisation. Up until then there had been an International Commission that had the task of coordinating the discussions that were to lead to the formation of the ICC; the proposal was then made to create an Organisation Commission, whose responsibility it would be to structure and give an orientation to the group. The debates proved to be very lively as a significant minority was still influenced by the contestationist and councilist ideas of May 68. This is why the new Commission was appointed with only a small majority at the national meeting of November 1973. However, the discussion did make it possible to clarify a central principle of marxism: that the organisational question is a vital necessity and an entirely political question in its own right,

This is the question around which the Bérard tendency was formed (very soon af-

7. Marx. Letter of 28th December 1846 to Annenkov.

8. Luxemburg. *The Crisis in Social Democracy* (1915). Chapter 1.

9. Article of the tendency, "Demand struggles and the appearance of the class-for-itself", *Révolution Internationale* n° 9, (May-June 1974).

10. See *International Review* n°s 161 (Autumn 2018) and 162 (Summer 2019): "Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism"

11. The ICC subsequently brought out another pamphlet on the same topic, "Trotskyism against the working class".

12. Marx's hypothesis is made within the framework of the process of socialisation that follows the seizure of power by the proletariat, not within the context of communist society but of a society "*that is emerging from capitalist society*". It has nothing to do with Proudhon's position on labour vouchers.

13. Marx, *Critique of the programme of the German workers' party* (1891). This text is more commonly known as the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

14. Marx, Notes of 1857-1858, known as *Grundrisse*.

15. In the 1930s the Group of International Communists (GIC), revived this position in favour of labour vouchers, expressed particularly in their pamphlet *Principes de la production et de la distribution communiste* [*Principles of communist production and distribution*]. See our critique in *International Review* n° 152, (2nd quarter 2013): "Bilan, the Dutch Left, and the transition to communism (Part Two)".

16. Three communist groups fused in 1973 and took the name of *Révolution Internationale*. On this occasion a new political platform was adopted and was published in the first issue of *RI* (new series).

ter they had been integrated into RI), crying out against the danger of bureaucratisation and demanding safeguards that would give protection against this diabolical threat. This revealed a real hostility towards continuity within the workers' movement and they distrusted totally the organisational measures proposed, mistaking them for the (genuinely) Stalinist practices of the Trotskyists. Contrary to the disinterested nature and devotion of militants of the class of associated labour, the ex-LO tendency was deeply imbued with individualism: "It's enough to signal the fact that some days after the vote installing the Organisation Committee, to which Bérard was opposed, the same Bérard proposed to MC the following deal: 'I will vote in favour of the OC if you propose me for it, otherwise I will fight it'. MC sent Bérard packing with a flea in his ear, but did not make it public in order not to 'crush' Bérard publicly and to allow the debate to go to the roots. Thus the OC only represented a danger of 'bureaucratisation' because Bérard was not put on it. No comment!"¹⁷

Past, present and future of the proletariat

Following the article "Demand struggles and the emergence of the class-for-itself", published in *RI* (new series) n° 9 (May-June 1974), the tendency published "Fractions and the Party" in issue n° 9 of the *Bulletin d'étude et de discussion (Study and discussion bulletin)* (September 1974). It revealed its vision of the proletariat and the organisation of the communist vanguard. It is immediately obvious that there is a break with the continuity of the workers' movement. "If we are to understand what the communist fractions were in this period [of counter-revolution], it will not be by starting off from an organic 'continuity' that does not exist; we must refuse concepts such as 'inheritance', 'acquisitions' which confuse the question. We must stop looking for a purely ideological continuity (ideas giving rise to other ideas). We must start from the actual experience of the proletariat, the need for the class to exhaust in practice all the consequences of the historic crisis of wage labour. We say in practice because the workers come up against, are 'organised' within, capitalist relations and it is in a very concrete way, through bloody defeats, that they come up against a new reality that they cannot yet grasp: the proletariat can no longer assert itself as long as it remains wage labour". Here we can see the shadow of Proudhon, who rejected workers' struggles because,

17. "The question of organisational functioning in the ICC", *International Review* n° 109 (2nd quarter 2002).

according to him, they led to the legitimisation of the boss. The tendency came to the same conclusion as the councilists: "The old workers' movement is dead".

In his reply,¹⁸ comrade MC began by reaffirming the importance of continuity. "As they are not very proud of their parents, they prefer to say that they are bastards, organically as well as politically. To be completely comfortable with this, they want the proletariat and the entire communist movement to do likewise. The presence of this 'continuity', of the 'past', of 'acquisitions' is a nightmare for these comrades who return to it time and again in order to create safeguards against it. They wrap everything up, as is their wont, in a jumble of words, in which there are 'pros' and 'cons' for every taste but they never manage to completely hide the aversion they feel at the very word 'acquisitions', almost as much as for the word 'organisation'. This is understandable: continuity, acquisitions, organisation, all demand a framework and rigorous boundaries which sit ill with those who gossip and chatter about everything while actually knowing very little, and with the phantasies of those who are 'hunting after originality'. 'Have nothing to do with the past' is the rallying cry of all the contestationists of France and the rest of the world, and not for nothing! To talk of a new coherence without identifying where it comes from or on what established positions it is based, to talk of a new coherence 'with no past' betrays megalomaniac pretensions worthy of a Duhring. Wise words about it being 'necessary to go beyond' only serve in this case as a fig leaf; to go beyond is never the same as to obliterate, it always has a basis in the past. To talk about going beyond without first answering the question 'what aspect of the past must be preserved and why' is just a trick and the worst kind of empiricism".

He then goes into the vital importance of the contribution of the Communist Left and of the living tradition that it embodies despite the divergences existing between the groups that are a part of it today. Splits or elements coming out of leftism have always had great difficulty understanding the question of the heritage of the Communist Left, seeing only various heterogeneous and confused communist lefts.¹⁹ This

18. "In reply to the article 'Fractions and the party'" in the same issue of the *Bulletin d'étude et de discussion*, published by RI. It was soon to be replaced by the *International Review* when the ICC was created in 1975.

19. One of the best examples is that of Éveil internationaliste which participated in the 3rd conference of the groups of the Communist Left in 1980. After breaking with Maoism, they wanted to maintain an ex-Maoist coherence and finally sank into oblivion. Certain of their members made another attempt to erase their Stalinist past but found no better solution than to join up with anarchism or the

demonstrates their blindness as regards the enormous step forward that the Communist International (CI) represented and the huge contribution made by all those who, while being part of the CI, were able to identify its opportunist drift and learn the lessons. Conditions at the time made it impossible to unify the various Lefts, but in fact they were united despite national boundaries and their divergences, in their work as a fraction against opportunism and the liquidation of the old party. This is why a tradition of the Communist Left exists today, that is, there is a method, a fighting spirit, a series of positions which distinguish it and which act as a bridge thrown across the abyss of time towards the future world communist party. "Hembé has got the wrong address. He thinks that he is still speaking within and to LO. The various currents of the communist left certainly had their weaknesses and inadequacies. They often groped around and stammered. But they had the undying merit of having been the first to sound the alarm against the degeneration of the CI, of having defended, in different ways but with force, the fundamental principles of revolutionary marxism, of having been at the head of the proletariat's revolutionary combat, and their stammerings were, and still are, an enormous contribution to the theory and practice of the proletariat, addressing as they do the problems and tasks of the proletarian revolution".

By publishing their pamphlet outside of RI and refusing to participate in the National Meeting of November 1974, which was to take stock of the situation as regards the divergences, the ex-LO tendency placed itself outside of the organisation. Given the importance of the organisational question and the destructive role of the "tendency", the general meeting of RI decided to formally exclude its members. At the end of the 1980s Bérard was associated with the *Cahiers du doute (Notebooks of Doubt)*, then he disappeared into the void after having been briefly an advocate of primitivist theses. An altogether logical trajectory, the doubt referred to being not creative scientific doubt but the reflection of an enormous weakness of revolutionary conviction.

Lessons of these first struggles against modernism

The first lesson we must learn is that it is necessary to have in-depth discussions with elements who apply for candidature on the profound significance of the culture of debate within communist organisations, as opposed to democratism which tends to be verbose and to have a fetish

Human Rights League, garnishing this with a tired situationist verbiage.

for divergence.

The second lesson is the importance of the organisation question and the principles that must guide us in the construction of the organisation and the perspective of the future world Party. A profound understanding of the organisation question must prevent the formation within discussions of grouplets, even informal ones, that are based, not on political agreement, but on heterogeneous criteria such as personal affinity, dissatisfaction with this or that orientation of the organisation or the contestation of a central organ. The communist organisation is based on loyalty to the organisation and to revolutionary principles and not on loyalty to one's mates.

The third lesson flows from the error committed at the time by RI, which was not sufficiently attentive towards elements who were breaking collectively from a leftist organisation. Such a split is not systematically destined to failure but experience has shown that it is difficult to bring it to term. Splitting from a cohesive counter-revolutionary entity does not automatically mean understanding and reaching the coherence of revolutionary positions.

Now we come to the final lesson. Communist militancy is based on devotion to the cause, on theoretic vigilance and on revolutionary conviction; this protects us from the sirens of empiricism and immediatism. Modernism and its communisation avatar are, on the contrary, a huge danger acting, as they do, to dissolve the proletariat in the icy waters of doubt and ignorance, which reflects today's world of capitalist decomposition.

The article in *RI* n° 3 (old series), "On organisation", which was written for a meeting organised by *Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières* in 1969, could only set out the premises of the organisation question, by specifically recalling this obvious point: the degeneration and the betrayal of revolutionary organisations of the past does not in any way mean that they were useless or dangerous. In 1973-74 the organisation question was addressed more bluntly and concretely with the process of building the organisation that was taking place (regroupments in various countries, the creation of the ICC). In the face of this practical challenge there was opposition, one expression of which was the Bérard tendency. Because of an incomplete break with Trotskyism and affinity-based defects, the Bérard tendency raised the standard of revolt against centralisation and against the vital need to change from a circle of friends to a political group, to go from the circle spirit to the party spirit. It was the classic expression of the penetration of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology

within the proletariat, which was concretely expressed by an explosion of individualism and opportunist impatience that looks for shortcuts to reaching the communist goal. The fury of the communisers against the revolutionary organisation and the communist programme makes them much more dangerous today than the unoriginal intellectuals who poisoned the movement during the 1970s.

To leave the concluding words to comrade MC: "*What are we to think of these little gentlemen who stroll so casually through the history of the workers' movement as if they were in some local café. From all their cheap and boastful proclamations, the only thing relevant is the following conclusion: 'The need to make a critical break from now on with the past'. RI has always insisted on the need, after fifty years of reaction and counter-revolution, to renew, continue, and transcend the past in a critical way, towards the climax that is the revolutionary assault of the proletariat. [It has placed] as well the emphasis on the fundamentally historic unity of the class, [whereas] contestationist renovators of all stripes have no other desire than to break, efface, sweep away the past in order to start from a virgin present, a new beginning, in other words, themselves*".²⁰

Elberg

20. Marc Chirik, "In reply to the article 'Fractions and the party'", *Bulletin d'étude et de discussion* n° 9, September 1974.

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

As we explained in the preceding articles in this series, the degeneration of the Communist International didn't develop without provoking a response. In the face of this degeneration, left communist fractions stood up and energetically defended the principles being abandoned by the CI and, at the same time, tried to respond to the new questions posed by the entry of capitalism into its phase of decadence. These groups were all excluded and subjected to repression one after the other, while opportunist degeneration ate into the ranks of the International and the Communist Parties betrayed the proletarian camp.

This final article in the series highlights the trajectory of the principal groups and above all the fundamental lessons that we can draw from their combat.

The reaction to the opportunism within the CI: the birth certificate of the Communist Left

In the second part of this series¹ we showed the basis on which the groups of the left arose within the Third, Communist, International. As we recalled, the founding Congress was marked by some fundamental advances in the understanding of the conditions of the new historic period. However, for the majority, revolutionaries remained marked by the weight of the past and regressions were already being made in the subsequent congresses on a number of questions. This development, which heralded the opportunist degeneration of the CI, had disastrous consequences for the revolutionary consciousness of the working class internationally. But, in the same way as the development of opportunism within the Second International gave rise to a proletarian response in the form of left currents, the growth of opportunism in the Third International met the resistance of the communist left. The latter was essentially an international current and had expressions in numerous countries from Bulgaria to Britain, the United States to South Africa. However, its most important representatives were to be found in the countries where the traditions of marxism were the strongest: Germany, Italy and Russia.

And if these groups didn't reach the same level of clarity and cohesion, all of them looked for an alternative to the degeneration of the CI and tried to defend communist principles and the communist programme while confronting new questions brought about by the entry of capitalism into its period of decadence: questions such as, are the unions still organs of the working class or have they been enmeshed in the cogs of the bourgeois state? Was it necessary to finish with the tactic of "parliamentarism"? How to understand national liberation struggles in the era of global imperialism? What were the perspectives for the new Russian state? The raising of all these problems expressed the will to arm the International which itself was unable to comprehend all the implications of the new period of "wars and revolutions".

But the lefts within the CI remained scattered, having few links between each other. Consequently, they were not really up to taking on the role of an international current of the communist left and thus undertake the real fight of a fraction within the CI. These elements of the left were moreover gradually excluded from the ranks of the CI. This was particularly the case with the Workers' Group, formed in 1922, which was the only real reaction within the Communist Party of Russia to look like a serious fraction able to formulate its critiques, not in the framework of Russia, but against the CI as such,² thus expressing a clear will to become involved in the combat at an international level. But very quickly it became victim of the repression from 1923; its main elements were imprisoned by the GPU, thus preventing the group from developing and fulfilling its role.

This fragmentation increased as the different groups were excluded. "At the time of the death of the CI, the German Left, which was already dispersed into several parts, fell into activism and adventurism, and was eliminated under the blows of a bloody repression; the Russian Left was inside Stalin's prisons; the weak British and American Lefts had long since disappeared. Outside Trotskyism, it was essentially the

2. For a more complete and global idea of the Left Fractions in Russia see: "The Communist Left in Russia: 1918-1930 (Part 1)", *International Review* n° 8 and "The Communist Left in Russia: 1918-1930 (Part 2)", *International Review* n° 9.

Italian Left and what remained of the Dutch Left which, from 1928 on, would maintain a proletarian political activity – without Bordiga and without Pannekoek – by each making a different assessment of the experience that they had had."³ We can really see to what point the reflux of the revolutionary wave during the 1920's and the first blows of the counter-revolution were a terrible test which wiped out a large part of the revolutionary minorities. But whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the lefts, it is nevertheless essential to consider them all as attempts by the proletariat to develop, at the historical level, a consciousness of the conditions of its revolutionary combat to overthrow capitalism. Further, they all had in common the characteristic of joining in the intransigent defence of the class terrain of the proletariat. Similarly, left communism didn't come from out of nowhere but from the revolutionary movement of the time. On the contrary, it constituted an organic reaction to the abandonment of principles by the CI and its former vanguard, the Bolshevik Party. It was thus normal that as in Russia, in Italy, Germany and elsewhere the different groups of the communist left had come from inside the Communist Parties. It was time therefore for the fight of the fraction to straighten up the CI which was bending under the growing weight of opportunism: "It is the responsibility of the minority, which upholds the revolutionary programme, to conduct an organised struggle for its victory within the party. Either the Fraction succeeds, its principles triumph and the party is saved, or the party continues to degenerate and pass bag and baggage into the bourgeois camp. The moment when the proletarian party passes into the bourgeois camp is not easy to determine. However, one of the most important signs of this passage is the fact that no proletarian political life any longer appears within the party. It is the responsibility of the Left Fraction to continue the fight within the party as long as there remains any hope of redressing it; this is why during the late 1920's and early 30's, the left currents did not leave the parties of the CI, but were excluded, often by means of sordid manoeuvres".⁴

3. "Convulsions in the revolutionary milieu: the PCI (Communist Program) at a turning point in its history", *International Review* n° 32 (1st quarter, 1983).

4. "Polemic: Origins of the ICC and the IBRP

1. *International Review* n° 163.

It's not a question here of asking why the fractions of the left were not up to "winning" the combat, nor of why, while the CI noted the reflux in the revolutionary wave, the necessity to fall back in good order and prepare the conditions for the resurgence of a future party was not more largely understood in its ranks. As the saying goes, with enough ifs, buts and maybes you could put Paris in a bottle! What's important to us concerns rather the way in which the left fractions undertook the struggle against the opportunist degeneration of the CI. As we saw above, not all of them were to make the same contribution to the historic struggle of the proletariat against capitalist exploitation and the domination of the bourgeoisie.

It is thus indispensable to be able to draw all the lessons of their trajectories and the evolution that they went through during the counter-revolutionary period which opened up at the end of the 1920's.

The fundamental contribution of the Italian Left

*"Faced with the demise of the CI, the problem is posed of the formation of cadres capable of reconstructing the international organisation of the proletariat. With this aim it is necessary to set up fractions of the left in each country. The political basis of them must be found, in the first place, in the very foundations of the CI and perfected following a critique of all the events following the war. This critique should represent the specific contribution of each proletariat to the problems that the CI wasn't able to resolve at the time of its foundation."*⁵ Such was the orientation proposed by the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy to all the forces of proletarian opposition. This was in 1933, and the Italian Fraction, seeing the death of the CI, made an appeal to draw all the lessons of the setback of the revolutionary wave in order to arm the proletariat for future battles and assume political continuity up to the time when favourable conditions for the upsurge of a new class party came together. In other words, it was a question of taking on the real work of a fraction.

Among all the groups of the left involved in the fight against the opportunist degeneration of the CI at the end of the 20's, the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy made the richest contribution by far. Why? Because it was alone in assimilating in depth the contribution of the Bolshevik Party within the 2nd International between

(part one) – The Italian Fraction and the French Communist Left", *International Review* n° 90 (3rd quarter, 1997).

5. "Draft constitution of an International Bureau of Information", *Bilan* n° 1, November 1933.

1903 and 1917; and because it understood that it was a matter of putting a similar work in place faced with the suicidal path taken by the CI. It was thus a question of presenting itself as: *"an organisation inside the party which is united not by place of work, by language or by any other objective condition, but by a system of common conceptions on the problems posed to the party"*. What appears essential to us here doesn't reside in the content of the debates themselves but rather in the method with which the Italian Left tried to defend its positions with the aim of "redressing" the International. Disagreements between the CI and the CP of Italy appeared very early on, from 1920-21, at the time when the CI declared the slogan of the "United Front", of a "workers' government" and the creation of mass parties through the fusion of the CP with various centrist currents. Up to 1925, the majority of the CP of Italy, animated in particular by Amadeo Bordiga, turned out to be the most determined to counter all this political opportunism. But the process of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Parties changed the conditions in which the left was able to undertake the fight, since the 1925 mid-April enlarged Executive of the CI ordered the elimination of the "Bordiga tendency" for the Third Congress of the CP of Italy. Despite this political manoeuvring, the new "minority" of the Italian CP tried to give itself all the means to pursue the combat within the Communist International. This is what it did at the Pantin Congress of April 1928 by constituting itself as "the Left Fraction of the Communist International" and not only of the Italian CP. Faced with pressures, manoeuvres and the denigrations which became the norm within the Communist Parties, the Fraction never gave up and was able to defend the principles of the communist programme as much through the press – fortnightly publication (monthly from 1933) of the journal *Prometeo* – as through interventions in the factories and demonstrations. It was also very active in opening up to common work with groups at the international level through the confrontation of positions with a view to the regroupment of revolutionary forces on the basis of clear principles and a clear programme.

This work became even more crucial from 1933 when the disarmament of the international proletariat faced by the victory of Nazism in Germany largely consecrated the victory of the counter-revolution. The time was no longer to struggle for turning the CI around but of drawing the lessons of the defeat of the revolution and the degeneration of the International so as to strengthen the world proletariat and prepare the conditions for the resurgence of

the future party. For that to happen it was important not to avoid any questions and of facing up to the fundamental problems confronted by the proletariat and its organisations since October 1917. This theoretical and political work, exemplified by *Bilan*, wouldn't have been possible without a profound understanding of the demands of the work of a fraction. In 1935, taking on board the definitive passage of the CP into the camp of the counter-revolution, it henceforth saw itself as an external fraction in order to continue to lead the fight for communism: *"This special situation of the Third International has already resulted in a great number of capitulations coming mainly from the fact that militants think it is essential to keep the organic links with the Communist Parties, and who haven't understood that the essential is to construct the organism which is demanded by the new situation, and which has to find a communist solution to the same problems which have given birth to centrism."*⁶

The theoretical and political contribution of the Italian Fraction up to 1944-1945 will subsequently be continued and enriched by the Communist Left in France up to 1952 and the International Communist Current from 1975!⁷

The failure of the KAPD to take up the fight of a fraction

Unfortunately the German Left was unable to follow the same trajectory. If, very early on, the KAPD defended clear positions on the rejection of parliamentary work or participation in the unions,⁸ it wasn't able to achieve the same organisational coherence of the Italian Left, seeing itself as having an organic continuity with the old party. Quite to the contrary, its whole trajectory after its exclusion from the CI at its 3rd Congress in September 1921, would even be characterised by calling into question the purely proletarian nature of the revolution in Russia (and of the Bolshevik Party) to the profit of a vision of a "dual revolution", both bourgeois and proletarian; bourgeois, because it suppressed feudalism in order to bring capitalism to the countryside; proletarian, because it suppressed capitalism in the towns. The same incomprehension of the gradual process of degeneration is

6. "The necessity for the Left Fraction of the Communist Party", *Bulletin d'information de la Fraction de gauche italienne* n° 6. What the Italian Left inaccurately called "centrism" within the CI referred to the bureaucratic Stalinist faction, which in reality was the incarnation of the counter-revolution.

7. See especially, "Report on the role of the ICC as a 'Fraction'", *International Review* n° 156 (winter, 2016).

8. See "One hundred years after the foundation of the Communist International, what are the lessons for future struggles? (part 2)", *International Review* n° 163, (second quarter, 2019).

found in its analysis of the 3rd International, which was already thought of as having been totally absorbed by the Russian state. Thus, the KAPD thought that all the sections of the CI (the Communist Parties) were definitively lost. This implied that no revolutionary fractions could arise from within it or within the Communist Parties. This whole theoretical scaffolding justified the proclamation of a Communist Workers' International (KAI). This totally artificial and voluntarist foundation of an alternative International led to the party splitting (between partisans and opponents of the KAI) and its numerical disintegration. It revealed a lack of understanding of the role of the party within the class and the relationship between fraction and party that could only lead to failure.

This suicidal policy was to be heavy with consequence for the revolutionary movement since it considerably weakened the capacity of the left communist fractions to group together in order to carry on the fight against the degeneration of the CI to the end.⁹ The Dutch Left, which subsequently took up the theoretical spirit of the German Left, went on to amplify these errors on the organisational question. The councilist current, in the image of the Group of Internationalist Communists (founded in 1927), came to purely and simply deny the necessity for revolutionary organisations as an active factor of the class struggle and of the development of consciousness. This was to the profit of a federation of “working groups” reduced to the sole role of giving an opinion. This was a real regression on the question of organisation within the communist left since the latter was reduced to a merely decorative addition to the class. Moreover, the century just passed is there to witness the weakness of the councilist current faced with the challenges posed to revolutionaries in the decadence of capitalism.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition: a catastrophic policy

“In the past, we have defended the fundamental notion of the ‘fraction’ against the idea of an ‘opposition’. By fraction we understand it to be the organism which builds the cadres to ensure the continuity of the revolutionary struggle and which is called upon to become the protagonist

9. We can't tarry here over the details of the history of the KAPD. For more ample developments in this respect see: “The conception of organisation in the Dutch and German Left”, *International Review* n° 37 (third quarter 1984); “Theses on the role of the party in the revolution”, *International Review* n° 41 (2nd quarter 1985) and the ICC book *The Dutch Left. Contribution to the history of the revolutionary movement*, “Chapter V: Gorter, the Communist Left and the founding of the KAI”.

of the proletarian victory. Against us, the concept of the ‘opposition’ has triumphed within the International Left Opposition. The latter has affirmed that you should not have to proclaim the necessity for the formation of cadres: the key to events can be found in the hands of centrism and not in the hands of the fraction. This divergence has now taken on a new aspect: the basic contrast is the same, although at a first look it seems that the problem today is this: for or against new parties. For the second time comrade Trotsky totally neglects the work of the formation of cadres, thinking it possible to pass immediately to the construction of new parties and of a new International”. This statement made by the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy in the first number of its theoretical review *Bilan* contains the central question posed to all the organisations engaged in the reaction to the degeneration of the CI: “What are the tasks of the hour? The fight of the fraction or the creation of a new party?” These two discordant approaches express a major divergence between the Left Fraction and the Left Opposition led by Trotsky.

As we described in the preceding article, the years 1921-1922 were marked by the combat led by Lenin against the rise within the Communist Party of Russia and then within the CI of the bureaucratic faction led by Stalin. Although the means Lenin advocated expressed a clear inability to remedy the situation, Lenin well understood that the direction taken by the RCP distanced itself a little more each day from the proletarian camp.

However, he put all his political energy into a desperate battle against the growth of Stalinism and asked Trotsky to join with him in the fight against bureaucratism in general and Stalin in particular.¹⁰

But from 1923, and his forced retreat from political life, a real, open crisis broke out within the RCP. On one side, the bureaucratic faction consolidated its grip, initially under the form of a “triumvirate” formed by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, whose main cement was its need to isolate Trotsky. This enterprise showed itself in the form of a real cabal against the “best of the Bolsheviks”, as he recalled in his autobiography: “*Lenin was resting at Gorki; myself at the Kremlin. The epigones were enlarging the circles of their plot. (...) A whole new science was created: the fabrication of artificial reputations, making up biographical fantasies, claims of a leadership appointed in advance. (...) Later, when Zinoviev and Kamenev fought*

10. For more detail on this see the article “How to understand the defeat of the Russian revolution, 1922-1923: Communist Fractions against the growth of the counter-revolution”, *International Review* n° 101.

Stalin, the secrets of this first period were revealed by the very accomplices in the plot; because it really was a conspiracy. A secret political bureau was created to which all the members of the official political bureau belonged except me. (...) Leaders in the party and the state were chosen systematically according to a single criterion: ‘against Trotsky’. (...) Thus a certain type of ‘careerism’ was determined which later became openly called ‘anti-Trotskyism’. (...) At the end of 1923, in all the sections of the Communist International, the same work was undertaken: Leaders were removed, others kept their places according to the attitude that they had taken towards Trotsky.”¹¹

Since then, during the course of 1923, an opposition appeared in the ranks of the RCP. It took the form of a political platform signed by 46 militants either close to Trotsky, or coming from the Democratic Centralist group. This “Platform of the 46” expressed two things above all:

- the necessity for greater state planning in the economic domain;
- a warning against the suffocation of the internal life of the party.

But, at the same time, the platform publicly took its distance from the Left Communists within the RCP, labelling them “unhealthy”.¹²

Although Trotsky didn't sign the Platform, he openly took part in this left opposition while several times showing hesitations to engage with the struggle against the Stalinist faction in a determined and intransigent way, thus revealing a tendency towards centrism that made him more and more incapable of defending essential principles. This indecision showed itself at the 5th Congress of the CI (June 1924) when Bordiga pressed him to become the spokesman of a Left Opposition at an international level. Trotsky refused, even asking Bordiga to approve the motion of the 13th Congress of the RCP so as not to be excluded.

While we can always invoke individual characteristics, the essential reason for Trotsky's timidity lay in his incapacity:

- to understand that Stalinism constituted the bourgeois counter-revolution in Russia;
- to draw the lessons of how the politics undertaken by the party (in which he had largely participated) had accelerated the

11. Leon Trotsky, *My Life*, “The Conspiracy of the Epigones”, Chapter XL.

12. In reality the Russian Left Communists, in particular Miasnikov's Workers' Group, expressed the clearest vision in Russia about how to fight against the degeneration of the RCP and the CI.

course of its degeneration.

In other words, Trotsky and the opposition in Russia did not understand at all the meaning of the struggle to be waged, namely, fraction work aimed at re-directing the party away from its opportunist course. Instead of that, the Opposition continued to defend tooth and nail “the banning of fractions” adopted at the 10th Congress of the RCP in 1921. Consequently, “*inasmuch as it sees itself, not as revolutionary fraction trying to safeguard the theoretical and organisational gains of the October Revolution, but as a loyal opposition to the Russian Communist Party, it will not go beyond a certain ‘manoeuvrism’, making unprincipled alliances with the aim of changing an almost completely gangrened party (for example, Trotsky looking for the support of Zinoviev and Kamenev who had continually slandered him since 1923). For all these reasons, one could say that the ‘left opposition’ of Trotsky in Russia always fell below the proletarian oppositions which appeared from 1918.*”¹³

However, the oppositional tendency succeeded in organising itself internationally but in a dispersed fashion, without any real rigour on the organisational level. It was only from 1929 and the expulsion of Trotsky from the USSR that an International Left Opposition organised itself in a more centralised way without being able to go beyond the errors and confusions carried by the CI.¹⁴

Consequently, it “*constituted in more ways than one the extension of what had been represented by the setting up and the struggle of the ‘Left Opposition’ in Russia. It went backwards on the main ideas and claimed the first four congresses of the CI. Moreover, it perpetuated the ‘manoeuvrism’ which already characterised the ‘Left Opposition’ in Russia. In many ways this ‘Opposition’ was an unprincipled regroupment of all those who wanted to make a left criticism of Stalinism. It banned all real political clarification within its ranks and left to Trotsky, who was seen as a living symbol of the October Revolution, the task of becoming its spokesman and ‘theoretician’. In these conditions it very quickly became incapable of resisting the effects of the counter-revolution which was developing on a global scale on the basis of a defeat of the international proletariat.*”¹⁵

The incapacity of the Trotskyist current

to become involved in the work of a left fraction, restricting itself to the role of a simple “opposition” to Stalinism, equally led it to see the construction of the party as a matter of “will” without taking into consideration “*the conditions of the class struggle contingent as they are upon the historical development and the rapport de force of the existing classes.*”¹⁶

So, far from bringing forward any credible contribution to the ranks of a working class suffering from the full force of the assaults of the counter-revolution, Trotskyism took over a good number of opportunist positions developed within the CI, actively participating in the disorientation of the world proletariat and finishing up capitulating and abandoning proletarian internationalism during the course of World War II in the name of anti-fascism and the defence of the “workers’ state”.¹⁷

Conclusion

The founding of the Communist International in March 1919 was the most profound undertaking by revolutionaries which provided the working class with an organisation capable of leading it to victory. A century later, the history of this heroic moment of the struggle of the proletariat, and the lessons that revolutionaries have drawn from it, should not be displayed like goods in a shop window. Quite the contrary; all this legacy must be at the heart of the preoccupations of revolutionaries today so that they are able to defend the clearest conception of how the party of tomorrow must be built. We hope that the effort of deepening the questions undertaken throughout this series of articles offers a pertinent contribution to the reflection and to the discussion in the whole of the revolutionary milieu on a subject of such great importance for future combats. For now, we think that we can affirm some major lessons regarding the political conditions in which the party will have to emerge:

1. The foundation of the party must be determined by the conditions of the class struggle.
2. The necessity for the party to be established before the outbreak of a revolutionary wave.
3. The regroupment of revolutionary forces must be based on the clarification of organisational principles and the communist programme. And not on the basis of a simple desire to participate in the revolutionary struggle. As

Bordiga said, the party is above all “*a programmatic body and a will to act*”.

4. In the period preceding the foundation of the party, the fraction type of work is the one and only organisational form allowing revolutionaries to prepare for its construction.

Nadjek (11th November 2022).

13. “Trotskyism, product of the counter-revolution”, *Le Trotskyisme contre la classe ouvrière*, ICC pamphlet in French.

14. The left opposition notably claimed the first four congresses of the CI.

15. “Trotskyism, product of the counter-revolution”.

16. “The methods of Left Communism and those of Trotskyism”, *Internationalisme* n° 23 (June 1947).

17. For more precision on the evolution of the Trotskyism, see our pamphlet in French: *Le trotskyisme contre la classe ouvrière*.

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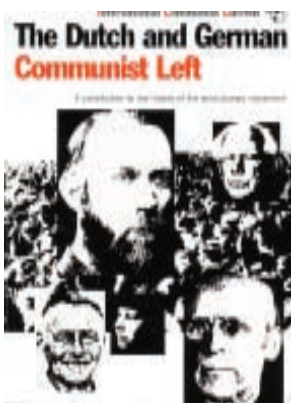
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The Dutch communist left is one of the major components of the revolutionary current which broke away from the degenerating Communist International in the 1920s. Well before Trotsky's Left Opposition, and in a more profound way, the communist left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