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In the face of a mad rush towards chaos and war, the world-wide development of the class struggle

Resolution on the international situation, December 2023

**Massacres and wars in Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Azerbaijan...
Capitalism sows death! How can we stop it?**

Call from the communist left

Ukraine: Two years of imperialist confrontation; two years of barbarism and destruction

Spiral of atrocities in the Middle East: the terrifying reality of decomposing capital

War atrocities used to justify...new atrocities

The USA: Superpower in the decadence of capitalism, today epicentre of social decomposition (part II)

After the rupture in the class struggle, the necessity for politicisation

**Critique of the so-called "Communisers", part III
Jacques Camatte: From Bordighism to the negation of the proletariat, parts 1 & 2**

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In the face of a mad rush towards chaos and war, the world-wide development of the class struggle

All the calamities generated by capitalism – exploitation, misery, unemployment, climatic disasters and war – are weighing more and more heavily and dramatically on the life of society, and in particular on the exploited class and the world's poor. The deadly conflict in Ukraine, for example, looks set to last until both sides are exhausted, while the more recent and particularly barbaric conflict in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas carries the risk of uncontrolled escalation of war in the region. After 30 years of paralysis in the face of the bourgeoisie's attacks, our class is beginning to resist new, more violent attacks through often massive struggles. This other dynamic, at work since the Summer of Anger in 2022 in the UK, illustrates the existence in society of two opposing and antagonistic poles:

On the one hand, an infernal spiral of convulsions, chaos and destruction, increasingly driven by imperialist war and the general militarisation of society, combining their effects with those of the decomposition of society,¹ the economic crisis and the ecological crisis. All these factors do not act independently of each other, but combine and interact to produce a “whirlwind effect” (the existence of which the most far-sighted members of the world bourgeoisie cannot fail to recognise²) which concentrates, catalyses and multiplies each of the effects of the various factors involved, causing devastation on an even higher level.

On the other hand, stimulated by a wave of economic attacks leading to a considerable deterioration in its living conditions, the working class is fighting on its own class terrain with determination and often en-masse in the world's main industrialised countries.

The dynamics of the first pole – capitalism's spiral of convulsions – can only lead to a dramatic sinking of humanity into misery, chaos and warlike barbarity, or even to its disappearance in the not-too-distant future if nothing is done to reverse the course of events. The second pole, on the other hand, is that of the opening up of another perspective for humanity, driven by the development of the class struggle. Thus, **if the working class is capable not only of developing its struggles to the**

level of the bourgeoisie's attacks, but also of raising their politicisation to the level of what is at stake in history, then, after the first world revolutionary wave of 1917-23, the prospect of the overthrow of capitalism on a world scale will open up once again.

The convulsions of capitalism

a. The rising tide of social breakdown

This is the product of a situation where, in the 1980s, faced with a deepening economic crisis with no way out, the two fundamental and antagonistic classes of society confronted each other without succeeding in imposing their own decisive response (that of world war for the bourgeoisie, that of revolution for the proletariat). The inability of the ruling class to offer the slightest perspective for society as a whole, and the inability of the proletariat to openly assert its own, led to a period of generalised decomposition, of society rotting on its feet as the contradictions of capitalism in crisis deepen.³

A further worsening of the crisis could only give greater impetus to all the ravages of the decomposition of society that has been going on for 25 years, to the increasing fragmentation and dislocation of the social fabric, to such an extent that some of its expressions are now clearly part of this desolate landscape: the degradation of thinking, the explosion of mental and psychological illnesses, the development of the most irrational and suicidal behaviour, the irruption of violence into every aspect of social life, mass killings carried out by unbalanced people, harassment in schools and on the Internet, savage settling of scores between gangs, etc.

None of the global factions of the bour-

geoisie has been spared the decomposition of its system, as shown by the rise of populism with the arrival in government of aberrant figures such as Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Milei in Argentina, etc. In some countries, the rise of populism to power is synonymous with no less aberrant choices, irrational from the point of view of the interests of the bourgeoisie itself, with possible global repercussions. For example, if Trump returns to power in the next US elections, he is likely to withdraw financial and military support for Ukraine – although this war was originally intended to weaken Russia and thus deprive China of possible Russian military support in a likely future military conflict between the US and China. Similarly, it is foreseeable that Trump in power will only encourage Netanyahu to go on the offensive everywhere, risking a regional conflagration that would require Uncle Sam to become heavily involved in the region to defend its hegemony.

b. The climate crisis is the result of capitalism's over-exploitation of nature

Recent events leave no room for doubt or relativisation when it comes to the consequences of ecological damage on the habitability of the planet and the survival of many species, including, ultimately, the human species: catastrophic massive flooding in Pakistan; temperatures rising this summer to over 40 degrees in the countries of southern Europe; pollution that forced schools to close in India for the Christmas holidays in November, causing respiratory problems in 1 in 3 children; the current pneumonia epidemic among children in China; famines in Africa, etc.

Subjected to the laws of capitalism, nature will be less and less able to shelter and feed the human race: fish stocks are threatened not only by industrial over-fishing, but also by ocean warming; soil exhaustion and water shortages – resulting from persistent drought – are considerably reducing yields, particularly in tropical and subtropical areas. In the Horn of Africa, more than 23 million people are acutely food insecure and 5.1 million children suffer from acute malnutrition. And the worst is clearly ahead of us, as the environment approaches a series of “tipping points” where the damage caused will become uncontrollable, leading to new levels of

1. “All these signs of the social putrefaction which is invading every pore of human society on a scale never seen before, can only express one thing: not only the dislocation of bourgeois society, but the destruction of the very principle of collective life in a society devoid of the slightest project or perspective, even in the short term, and however illusory.” “Theses on decomposition”, *International Review* n° 107.

2. Cf. the report presented at the Davos Forum in January 2023, referred to in the “Update of the Theses on Decomposition (2023)”, 25th ICC International Congress, *International Review* n° 170.

3. “Theses on decomposition”, *International Review* n° 107.

destruction.⁴

In the face of these disastrous prospects, major international conferences such as COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates are nothing more than discussion forums designed to give the illusion that “something is being done”, while certain sections of the ruling class are becoming increasingly “realistic” by opting to adapt to inevitable global warming rather than try to fight it. In fact, the objective function of COP 28 (and of all the others that have preceded or will follow) is to maintain the mystification that capitalism can solve the climate challenge, while the inability of the various national bourgeoisies to put aside their rivalries is leading humanity towards oblivion.

Faced with those who have no illusions about COP-type deceptions, there are calls to fight for the planet from groups that are often critical – even radically critical – of the COP meetings or even of today’s society, but which, in their programme, do not put forward the only solution to the climate problems: the overthrow of capitalism by the only force in society capable of doing so, the working class.

c. The cancer of war and militarism

War under decadent capitalism is plunging humanity into misery and threatening its survival, taking on proportions unequalled in human history. The two World Wars and the many “local” conflicts that have continued since the Second World War are an edifying illustration of this.

There are currently 56 wars worldwide, involving 1.1 billion people (14% of the world’s population). War is thus the most “dynamic” component of the spiral of destruction ravaging the world.

While the carnage continues in Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, the South Caucasus and Nagorno-Karabakh, and war tensions persist in the Balkans, a new imperialist war zone, the one between Israel and Hamas, is making its brutal appearance, with its trail of destruction, mass emigration, and civilian deaths. The current wars in Ukraine⁵ and the Middle East⁶ are a dramatic confirmation of this dynamic,

and, for now, are its high point.

These wars have already killed or wounded hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians. They are plunging large sections of the population into extreme poverty. Their impact extends beyond the borders of Ukraine, Russia and Palestine. For example, the damage caused to Ukraine’s agriculture, or the blockade on that country’s exports of agricultural products, has led to the worsening and spread of malnutrition throughout the world. What’s more, the ferocity of the Israeli bourgeoisie is not leaving a single square metre of land in the Gaza enclave safe from the bombs (and from hunger and epidemics) and is causing a gigantic exodus of the Palestinian population.

The risks of collateral effects also threaten populations even far from the battlefields, with, for example in Ukraine, the possible emission of radioactive clouds from nuclear power stations damaged accidentally or deliberately during the fighting.

Not only do people suffer from war, but so does the planet. The war machine’s need for oil, gas and coal is leading to an exorbitant increase in the consumption of fossil fuels. While the failure of COP 28 to commit to reducing fossil fuel consumption was rightly attributed to the veto by Saudi Arabia and other oil producers (which in reality merely concealed a veto by most states), what was deliberately left in the dark was the insatiable need for oil, gas and coal by armed forces (tanks, military vehicles, combat aircraft, all of which consume a lot of fuel) the world over, starting with the most powerful countries. A study of the carbon consumption of the US armed forces as a whole (air force, army and navy) reveals that they alone “*pollute and consume more fuel than most countries in the world*”.⁷ The armed forces of EU countries contribute more to the greenhouse effect than all the cars in Portugal, Norway and Greece put together, not to mention the “carbon footprint” of the European military industry. We should also take into account the pollution of the soil and atmosphere in war zones as a result of the munitions fired. If all these considerations were carefully avoided in the discussions at COP28, it is precisely because capitalism is war, and the only way to get rid of war is to get rid of capitalism.

As for the economic cost of all wars (the destruction of economic and social infrastructures, spending on weapons, etc.), this is ultimately borne by the population, the working class in particular, through ever-

increasing levies on national budgets.

The economic irrationality of war during the decadence of capitalism is obvious: all belligerents lose. But what is most striking is that, with the period of decomposition, the irrationality of war also affects the strategic gains expected by all the belligerents, including the “victors”. Everyone loses out in this respect. And the war that has just broken out in the Middle East is already more irrational and barbaric than the one in Ukraine.

d. The ingredients for the next economic recession are there

The crisis of overproduction which reappeared in 1967, and whose first effects were at the origin of the international waves of class struggle, has since only worsened despite all the efforts of the bourgeoisie to slow its course. And it couldn’t be any other way, because there is no solution to the crisis within capitalism. The only thing it can do, and which it has already used and abused, is to postpone the effects until later. So not only is debt, the main palliative to capitalism’s historic crisis and already used on a massive scale, losing its effectiveness – thus further restricting the possibility of reviving the economy – but, what’s more, the existence of this colossal accumulated debt makes capitalism vulnerable to ever more devastating convulsions.

After the open crisis of 2008, which marked the end of the “opportunities” offered by globalisation, the even more obvious inability of the ruling class to overcome the crisis of its mode of production has resulted in an explosion of every man for himself in relations between nations and within each nation, with the gradual return of protectionism and the unilateral calling into question, on the part of the two main powers, of multilateralism and the institutions of globalisation. As a result, the bourgeoisie today finds itself more ill-equipped than ever to deal with the deepening of the current crisis and its possible brutal expressions, especially as the unity of action of the bourgeoisie at international level, which still existed at the time of the 2008 crisis, is de facto excluded.

The situation is made all the more serious by the fact that three factors are playing an increasingly important role in worsening the crisis: social breakdown, climate change and war. Indeed:

- social breakdown is increasingly contributing to the disorganisation of production and trade;
- climate change is impacting agricultural production and productivity in the United States, China and Europe. Extreme rainfall and flooding are ir-

4. The collapse of the system of ocean currents such as the Gulf Stream, an essential regulator of the planet’s climate, could, if confirmed, radically alter the Earth’s climate and considerably weaken the human species in the space of a few decades. The melting of the tundra and ice caps in the North and the decline of the Amazon rainforest (increasingly threatened by drought and forest fires) raise the frightening prospect that the forest will begin to emit more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than it can absorb.

5. See: “Spiral of atrocities in the Middle East: the terrifying reality of the decomposition of capitalism”, in this issue of the Review.

6. See: “Ukraine: Two years of imperialist confrontation, barbarity and destruction”, in this issue of the Review.

7. This study is based on another published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*.

reparably ruining entire regions or even states (such as Pakistan) by destroying vital infrastructure and disrupting the functioning of the industrial production system;

- war represents a huge cost for the economy, due to the increase in unproductive expenditure (armaments) but also to the destruction caused by conflicts.

For all these reasons, the next open expression of the economic crisis promises to be more serious than that of 1929.

A new level of peril

All states are now preparing for “high-intensity” warfare. Military budgets are rising rapidly everywhere, so that the proportion of national wealth devoted to armaments is back to the same level as – and even exceeds – that reached at the height of the confrontation between the blocs. Every national capital is reorganising its national economy to strengthen its military industry and guarantee its strategic independence.

The worsening of imperialist tensions and conflicts over the last two years shows that **war, as an action desired and planned by the capitalist states, is becoming the most powerful factor in chaos and destruction.**

a. The perpetuation of the conflicts in Ukraine and Israel/Palestine represents an enormous potential for amplifying war and chaos

In Ukraine, both sides need to enlist more soldiers to maintain the current pressure on the fronts and the balance of military forces. This means more sacrifices on both sides and more repression of any expression of resistance to the demands of the state. It is already clear that the United States will not be able to maintain its financial and military support for Ukraine at its current level, and it is foreseeable that Europe will not be able, or even willing, to take over from the United States in this respect. This issue is likely to divide Europe, weaken it and possibly, in the long term, lead to its break-up, leaving a patchwork of imperialist tensions between its former members.

In the Middle East, after three months of conflict, nothing seems able to calm Netanyahu’s imperialist aims, which unashamedly include the eradication of the Gazans. The massive US military presence in the region – justified by the fact that Israel has for decades been a strategic support for US imperialism in the Middle East – has so far prevented the enormous powder keg that is the Middle East from igniting, notably by pitting Israel against

Iran, which is supported by its various militias in Lebanon and Yemen. The fact that the United States had to hastily assemble a naval force to secure maritime traffic on the Red Sea, affected by hostile fire from the Yemeni Houthis, is a serious indication of the explosive nature of the situation. The fact that a number of European countries have kept their distance from this American initiative speaks volumes about the difficulties that the United States may encounter in the future in this area.⁸

b. The limits of American global strategy

The backdrop to the current world situation is the US bourgeoisie’s plan to halt China’s expansion before it threatens US military and economic domination of the world.⁹ Preventing this from happening will necessarily involve a military confrontation, the consequences of which would be disastrous for the world, even if the scale of such a conflict would be limited by several factors, in particular the absence of established world imperialist blocs and the fact that the American bourgeoisie will face certain limits in getting an undefeated working class to accept the consequences of war, a class which has recently demonstrated its fighting spirit in the face of economic attacks.¹⁰ The war in Ukraine was entirely in the service of this perspective of the United States, which incited Russia to invade Ukraine.¹¹ But the fact that this conflict is dragging on beyond what was certainly expected by the United States, as well as the outbreak of war in the Middle East – against the grain of Uncle Sam’s plans – are complicating the United States’ task enormously, as the following passages from an article in the newspaper *Le Monde* highlight: “*Faced with new conflicts in Europe and the Mid-*

8. “Although the United States announced in December that it had the support of more than twenty countries, reinforcements to the coalition have so far been extremely limited, sometimes amounting to no more than sending a few extra officers: three Dutch, two Canadians and around ten Norwegians. At the end of December, Denmark announced that it would be sending a frigate ‘before the end of January’, but this deployment required parliamentary approval. Italy also announced that it was sending a ship to the Red Sea at the end of December, before distancing itself from the anti-Houthi coalition. Like Paris and Madrid, which diverted a vessel already operating in nearby areas (the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Hormuz), Rome wanted to retain autonomous command over its vessel.” “Coalition anti-Houthists: les États-Unis en manque de renforts en mer Rouge”, *Le Monde* (January 12, 2024)

9. Read “Resolution on the international situation”, December 2023, in this issue of the Review.

10. Read: “After the rupture in the class struggle, the necessity for politicisation”, in this issue of the Review.

11. Read “Resolution on the international situation”, December 2023, in this issue of the Review and “Resolution on the international situation, 25th ICC Congress”, *International Review* n° 170.

*dle East, and tensions in the Indo-Pacific, Washington must mobilise its forces on all fronts, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of its military apparatus at a pivotal political period. (...)”*¹²

c. What kind of war could the current dynamic lead to?

World War III is not on the agenda in the current situation. Contrary to the rhetoric – wherever it comes from – pointing to the prospect of a Third World War, the current proliferation of conflicts is not the expression of a dynamic towards the formation of two imperialist blocs, a prerequisite for a Third World War, but confirms on the contrary the tendency towards “every man for himself” in imperialist confrontations. The fact that we live in an essentially multipolar world is reflected in the multiplicity of conflicts under way around the world, as illustrated, for example, by the ambiguous relations between Russia and China. While Russia has shown itself very willing to ally itself with China on specific issues, generally in opposition to the United States, it is no less aware of the danger of subordinating itself to its eastern neighbour, as demonstrated by the fact that it is one of the main opponents of China’s “New Silk Road” towards imperialist hegemony.

The multipolarity underpinning current imperialist conflicts should not, however, lead us to underestimate the danger of uncontrolled military conflicts erupting, as happened at the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022.¹³

d. World war is not on the agenda, but the destruction of humanity through mounting chaos is increasingly a real threat.

In the central capitalist countries, the bourgeoisie does not for the moment have the political and ideological means to maintain its control over the working class – which has not suffered physical and political defeat – with a view to a frontal and total military confrontation with another power, requiring the proletariat to bear the sacrifices necessary for the war effort.

That said, even in the absence of a world war between rival imperialist blocs, for which the conditions are not ripe, the current situation is full of perils that threaten humanity, including war. The number of local wars is on the increase, with increasingly damaging consequences for life on earth, which is at the mercy of the use of all kinds of weapons, including nuclear and chemical weapons.

12. “The American army faced with the challenge of more wars”, *Le Monde*, 12 January 2024.

13. “Resolution on the international situation”, December 2023, *ibid.*

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Resolution on the international situation, December 2023

Introduction

The evolution of the world situation since the 25th ICC Congress amply confirms what was stated in the resolution we adopted on the international situation. Not only is decomposition becoming the decisive factor in the evolution of society, as we had anticipated as early as 1990,¹ but in the present decade, *“the aggregation and interaction of destructive phenomena produces a ‘whirlwind effect’ that concentrates, catalyses and multiplies each of its partial effects, provoking even more destructive devastation.”*²

Concretely, the economic crisis deepens and there is a significant deterioration of the living conditions of the working class, which encourages a “rupture” with the situation of passivity and the development of combativity and potentially of consciousness, expressing a movement towards the adoption of a revolutionary perspective, even if it is still slow and fragile. At the same time, the ecological deterioration and the multiplication of the imperialist war zones (Ukraine, Armenia/Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Africa, Middle East) show the perspective of destruction and ruin that capitalism offers to humanity.

In the realm of the environmental crisis, recent events leave no room for doubt or relativising the consequences of ecological damage for the habitability of the planet and the survival of many species (including, ultimately, the human species). Recent illustrations have been the massive floods in Pakistan, or the rise in temperature this summer to over 40 degrees in the countries of southern Europe, the pollution that has forced schools to close in India for the Christmas vacations in November and that causes 1 in 3 children to have respiratory problems, the current pneumonia epidemic among children in China, the famines in Africa, etc.

Of all the elements of the “whirlwind effect” however, it is imperialist war which immediately accelerates the course of events in the world situation. Since the 25th Congress, we have witnessed a kind of stalemate in the war in Ukraine, the resurgence of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the warlike tensions in the Balkans and above all the war between Israel and Hamas. In the background is the growing confrontation between the US and China. This proliferation of conflicts is not the expression of a dynamic towards the formation of imperialist blocs but confirms the “every man for himself” tendency of imperialist confrontations in this period.

1. With respect to the analysis of the imperialist confrontations during the cold war, the co-ordinates of marxist analysis have changed in the present situation; mainly on the possibility of the formation of imperialist blocs and on the confrontation of classes. In spite of this, the Bordigists (*Programma, Le Proletaire, Il Partito*) and Damenists (ICT) insist on seeing in the

present situation the formation of two opposing imperialist blocs around China and the US, and therefore the march towards a third world war, based on the assumption of the defeat of the proletariat. In fact, even the “experts” of the bourgeoisie tend to recognise the dominant trend of imperialist conflicts is toward “multi-polarity”.³

In the resolution on the international situation of the 24th congress, we wrote:

“the march towards world war is still obstructed by the powerful tendency towards indiscipline, every man for himself and chaos at the imperialist level, while in the central capitalist countries capitalism does not yet dispose of the political and ideological elements - including in particular a political defeat of the proletariat - that could unify society and smooth the way towards world war. The fact that we

*are still living in an essentially multipolar world is highlighted in particular by the relationship between Russia and China. While Russia has shown itself very willing to ally with China on specific issues, generally in opposition to the US, it is no less aware of the danger of subordinating itself to its eastern neighbour, and is one of the main opponents of China’s “New Silk Road” towards imperialist hegemony.”*⁴

2. The recognition of the unruly correlation of imperialist forces, defined essentially by the tendency to “every man for himself”, must not lead to an underestimation of the danger of the explosion of uncontrolled military conflicts, as happened at the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022. The US-China conflict could well lead to direct military confrontation, so the threat of open conflict here (somewhat underestimated in the 25th Congress Resolution on the International Situation) must be further analysed.

The US’s proclaimed geo-political strategy since 1989 has been to prevent the emergence of any power that could rival its massive military superiority on the world stage. This doctrine at once confirmed that its primary ambition was not the recreation of a bloc, and at the same time indicated that, unlike the 1st and 2nd World Wars where it waited in a defensive posture before emerging with the spoils, it now had to take the military offensive on the world stage and become the dominant force of imperialist destabilisation.

The fiascos in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that the politics of the world cop only produced more chaos, showing at the same time the decline of US imperialism. More recently it has tried to react by turning to a stricter defence of its own interests (Trump’s “America first” and Biden’s “America is back”), even though this triggers even greater chaos. As we had already identified, China’s enormous economic, technological and military development is a threat to American dominance.

For this reason, the US is developing a policy that seeks to hinder the progression of economic, technological and military development in China, with the relocation of companies, limitations on collaboration in cutting-edge university research, the blocking of technology exports, the

1. The decadence of capitalism is not a homogeneous and regular process: on the contrary, it has a history with different phases. The phase of decomposition has been identified in our Theses as *“the expression of the entry of decadent capitalism into a specific - and last - phase of its history, that in which social decomposition becomes a factor, even the decisive factor, in the evolution of society”* (Thesis 2). It is evident that, if the proletariat were not capable of overthrowing capitalism, we would witness a terrible agony that would lead to the destruction of humanity.

2. *“The acceleration of capitalist decomposition poses the clear possibility of the destruction of humanity”*, *International Review* n° 169, 2023.

3. *“Update of the theses on decomposition (2023)”*, *International Review* n° 170.

4. *“Resolution on the international situation adopted by the 24th ICC congress”*, *International Review* n° 167, 2022.

“quadruple chip alliance” between the US and Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, which seeks to isolate China from the world supply chains of microchips, etc. On the military side, it is trying to establish a geopolitical encirclement to guarantee control of the Indo-Pacific and the Asian continent with initiatives such as the QUAD, the “NATO of Asia”, which groups the US with Japan, India, Australia and South Korea, or AUKUS, a military cooperation treaty with Australia and the United Kingdom. The US encirclement continues to tighten, and the latest steps have been the installation of American military bases in the Philippines and gaining Vietnam as an ally in the region. Ultimately, for the US, the war in Ukraine also has the objective of isolating China strategically and militarily, bleeding Russia dry, stripping it of any world power relevance and trying to prevent China from taking advantage of its military technology or its energy resources and its experience in the world imperialist “great game”. The bloody stalemate of the war in Ukraine has advanced this US project of bleeding Russia dry.

Recently, the policy of encircling China has been compounded by a series of provocations such as Pelosi’s visit to Taipei, the shooting down of weather balloons accused of spying, the announcement of 345 million dollars in military aid to Taiwan, or Biden’s declarations that the US will not hesitate to send troops to the island to defend it from a Chinese invasion.

All these American initiatives together point to a strategy of isolation and provocation of China, which the US is trying to push into premature confrontations for which it is not yet equipped and which could include military clashes. This in fact reproduces the policy of encircling the ‘USSR’ which forced the latter to get involved in imperialist adventures beyond its real economic and military means, and which ended up producing the collapse of the imperialist bloc it led.

There is no doubt that China has learned and is taking note of the lessons of the collapse of the Eastern bloc; but we should not rule out the possibility that, faced with the continuation and intensification of US pressure, it may end up having no choice but to respond; and therefore we should not underestimate the possibility of a conflict, particularly in the China Sea around Taiwan. Evidently, in the event of such a conflict, the consequences would be disastrous and terrible for the whole world, even if the scale of such a conflict would be limited by several factors, in particular the absence of global imperialist blocs and the incapacity of the US bourgeoisie to drag an undefeated working class into

a full-scale mobilisation for war.

3. The bloody conflict presently in the Middle East erupted precisely in the context of the chaotic and unpredictable expansion of the tendency of every imperialist power acting for itself, and not from any movement towards the solidification of blocs.

The withdrawal of a strong US military presence in the Middle East entrusted to Israel the maintenance of the Pax Americana in the region within the framework of the Oslo agreements (1993), which recognised the principle of “two States” (thus of a local Palestinian State). Apparently calm reigned, which had even allowed the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, sanctioning peace between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and excluding Iran. However, Israel has in practice continued and intensified a policy of harassment of the Arab population and support for the settlers in the West Bank, sabotaging the Palestinian Authority (PA) by supporting Hamas, which is now its mortal enemy, thus in practice sabotaging the American mandate. The situation has reached a limit with the Netanyahu government in conjunction with the extreme right. The finance minister has called on the army to take revenge for attacks on the settlers by burning Palestinian homes, and the presence of Israel’s soldiers competes with that of the PA police. So Hamas, which won the last elections in the Gaza Strip, rather than wait idly for the fate of the West Bank, has launched a desperate attack. That attack however coincided with the ambitions of another regional power – Iran – which saw a weakening of its presence in the region and which in turn, under the auspices of China, had signed in March an agreement with Saudi Arabia on the “Silk Road”, in direct competition with that of Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

The *Wall Street Journal* made public what everyone knew: the Hamas attack was openly prepared and supported by Iran and Hizbollah in southern Lebanon.

Israel’s response, razing Gaza under the pretext of wiping out Hamas, shows a scorched earth policy on both sides. Hamas’ murderous rage finds in Israel’s exterminating vengeance the other side of the coin. And globally, the fire in the region is a call for the intervention of other regional powers, and particularly Iran, which is the main beneficiary of the situation of the breakdown of the regional balance.

This, however, does not benefit the US. The Biden administration has had no choice but to reluctantly support the Israeli army’s response, trying, albeit futilely, to lower the tension, and has been forced to re-establish its military presence in the

area by sending “*Along with the aircraft carrier Ford, the cruiser Normandy and the destroyers Thomas Hudner, Ramage, Carney and Roosevelt, and will increase the presence of squadrons of F-35, F-15, F-16 and A-10 fighter planes in the region.*”⁵ Some have already had to intervene in the face of attacks on American troops in Iraq. The objective is to dissuade Iran at all costs from a direct intervention or one carried out through Hizbollah but also dissuade Israel from trying to carry out its threat to “wipe Iran off the map”.

For its part, Russia undoubtedly benefits from the fact that the focus of attention and war propaganda is shifting from Ukraine to Palestine. This interferes with the financial and military resources that the US could employ on the Russian front and “gives a respite” to the intensity of its war there. Moreover, Putin benefits from US support for the savagery of Israeli repression by denouncing the hypocrisy of American society and of the “West”, which for its part criticises the occupation of Crimea but consents to the invasion of Gaza. However Russia cannot significantly advance its own interests in the region through this war.

China might likewise welcome the weakening of the US policy of “pivot to the East”; but war and the destabilisation of the region goes against its own geopolitical interests in charting the new Silk Road.

The current war in the Middle East is therefore not the result of the dynamics of the formation of imperialist blocs, but of the “every man for himself”. Just like the confrontation in Ukraine, this war confirms the dominant trend of the global imperialist situation: a growing irrationality fuelled by the tendency for each imperialist power to act for itself and the bloody policy of the dominant power, the USA, to counter its inevitable decline by preventing the rise of any potential challenger.

4. The war in the Middle East has an impact on the working class as a whole in the central countries that is even greater than that of Ukraine. On the one hand because in some countries like France, a large percentage of immigration comes from Arab countries,⁶ but also because the “defence of the Palestinian people” has long been part of the baggage of the “left ideology” of the Trotskyist and anarchist groups, and also, it must be said, of the support for “national liberation” of some Bordigist groups like Programma. Thus we have seen demonstrations of 30,000 in Berlin, 40,000 in Brussels and 35,000 in Madrid, more than 500,000 in London, in defence

5. This is about 5,000 soldiers. *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 2023.

6. 10% of the population of France is Muslim, i.e. approximately 6 million.

of the Palestinians and for peace. On the other hand, Zionism covers itself with “the Jewish question”, which not only has historical connotations, but also involves a part of the population in Europe and the USA. This explains the demonstrations and acts against anti-Semitism in France, recently in London, Paris, or in Germany; and also the campaigns in American universities, such as Harvard, where students who have denounced the massacres have been accused of anti-Semitism.

In spite of this, the war in the Middle East is probably not going to put an end to the dynamic of “rupture” of the passivity of the working class that we identified starting from the “summer of discontent” in Great Britain, which does not have as its starting point a response to war, which in the present situation would demand a development of consciousness and a politicisation in the class as a whole that for the moment is not the case, but rather the deepening of the economic crisis.

When Internacionalismo raised the perspective of a resumption of the class struggle in the 1960s, its analysis was based fundamentally on two elements: 1) the end of the period of ‘prosperity’ after World War II and the perspective of the crisis; 2) the presence of a new generation in the working class that had not suffered a defeat. The dimension taken by the struggles in May 68 in France and the Hot Autumn in Italy 69, etc. was, in addition to the above, also the product of the lack of preparation of the bourgeoisie.

The condition that the proletariat is not defeated is equally determinant and the most important in the present situation. On the other hand, the present situation of worsening decomposition and whirlwind effect presents elements that are an obstacle to the struggle and the raising of consciousness of the proletariat; but it also contains a qualitative aggravation of the economic crisis, which is expressed in a significant deterioration of the living conditions of the proletariat. The decision to enter into struggle, not to resign oneself, not to trust and wait for “a new development of the economy”, means a reflection on the global situation, a distrust towards the expectations that capitalism can offer, a minimum balance sheet of what we have been promised and has not been fulfilled. In this sense, “enough is enough” implies a subterranean maturation of consciousness. This approach has an international dimension for the working class as a whole. The example of the struggles in France and the UK, and now in the US, is also part of a reflection through which workers in other countries identify with those who participate in those struggles. This is also

part of the beginning of a reflection on class identity.

It is true that, indirectly, the question of war is present in this process. This maturation has taken place during two decades of aggravation of the imperialist conflicts simultaneously with the aggravation of the economic crisis; moreover, the “rupture” has taken place in spite of the outbreak of the Ukrainian war. In fact, the development of the struggles necessarily leads to the embryonic beginning of a reflection linking the crisis and the war, for example when it is seen that inflation is increasing because of the expenditure on armaments and that sacrifices are demanded of us in order to increase the defence budgets.

5. Nevertheless the worsening world situation is full of danger for the working class. Who can predict the consequences of a war between the US and China, the scale of which may dwarf any conflict since 1945? Or the effects of other catastrophes that the period of decomposition will bring?

In this period of decomposition, not only have the conditions of aggravation of imperialist conflicts changed, passing from the “Cold War” between two imperialist blocs to “every man for himself”; they have also changed from the point of view of class confrontation.

During the Cold War period, the resistance of the proletariat, the fact that the bourgeoisie had not managed to defeat the working class, meant the latter was the main obstacle to the total imperialist war. And the class confrontation could be analysed in terms of an “historical course”, as the Italian Left in exile (Bilan) had done in the 1930s, in the face of the 1936 war in Spain and the Second World War: either a course towards the defeat of the proletariat and world war, or a course towards decisive confrontations and the revolutionary perspective.

In the present period of chaotic aggravation of the imperialist conflicts according to the tendency of “every man for himself”, the fact that the proletariat is not defeated does not prevent the proliferation of warlike confrontations which, although for the moment involve the countries where the proletariat is weaker, as in Russia/Ukraine or the Middle East, does not exclude the possibility that some of the central countries could embark on warlike adventures.

Thus, while in the years 1960-90, time was in favour of the proletariat which could absorb and develop the lessons of its failures and hesitations to prepare new assaults in its struggle against capitalism, since then, as we wrote in the “Theses on decomposition” in 1990, the period of decomposition has indeed created a race

against time for the working class. This is why revolutionary organisations must include in their intervention an insistence on the development of consciousness about this fact in the working class as a whole.

2.12.2023

Massacres and wars in Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Azerbaijan...

Capitalism sows death! How can we stop it?

“Horror”, “massacres”, “terrorism”, “terror”, “war crimes”, “humanitarian catastrophe”, “genocide”... the words splashed across the front pages of the international press speak volumes about the scale of the barbarity in Gaza.

On 7 October, Hamas killed 1,400 Israelis, hunting down old men, women and children in their homes. Since then, the State of Israel has been taking revenge and killing en masse. The deluge of bombs raining down day and night on Gaza has already caused the death of more than 10,000 Palestinians, including 4,800 children. In the midst of ruined buildings, the survivors are deprived of everything: water, electricity, food and medicines. At this very moment, two and a half million Gazans are threatened with starvation and epidemics, 400,000 of them are prisoners in Gaza City, and every day hundreds fall, torn apart by missiles, crushed by tanks, executed by bullets.

Death is everywhere in Gaza, just as it is in Ukraine. Let's not forget the destruction of Mariupol by the Russian army, the exodus of people, the trench warfare that buries people alive. To date, almost 500,000 people are thought to have died. Half on each side. A whole generation of Russians and Ukrainians is now being sacrificed on the altar of the national interest, in the name of defending the homeland. And there's more to come: at the end of September, in Nagorno-Karabakh, 100,000 people were forced to flee in the face of the Azerbaijani army and the threat of genocide. In Yemen, the conflict that nobody talks about has claimed more than 200,000 victims and reduced 2.3 million children to malnutrition. The same horror of war is being waged in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Haiti, Syria, Afghanistan, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Congo, Mozambique... And the confrontation is brewing between Serbia and Kosovo.

Who is responsible for all this barbarity? How far can war spread? And, above all, what force can oppose it?

All states are war criminals

At the time of writing, all nations are calling on Israel to “moderate” or “suspend” its offensive. Russia is demanding a ceasefire, having attacked Ukraine with the same ferocity a year and a half ago, and having massacred 300,000 civilians in Chechnya in 1999 in the name of the same “fight against terrorism”. China says it wants peace, but it is exterminating the Uighur population and threatening the inhabitants of Taiwan with an even greater deluge of fire. Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies want an end to the Israeli offensive while they decimate the population of Yemen. Turkey opposes the attack on Gaza while dreaming of exterminating the Kurds. As for the major democracies, after supporting “Israel’s right to defend itself”, they are now calling for “a humanitarian truce” and “respect for international law”, having demonstrated their expertise in mass slaughter with remarkable regularity since 1914.

This is the primary argument of the State of Israel: “the annihilation of Gaza is legitimate”: the same was said about the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the carpet-bombing of Dresden and Hamburg. The United States waged the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the same arguments and the same methods as Israel today! All states are war criminals! Big or small, dominated or powerful, apparently warmongering or moderate, all of them are in reality taking part in imperialist war in the world arena, and all of them regard the working class as cannon fodder.

It is these hypocritical and deceitful voices that would now have us believe in their drive for peace and their solution: the recognition of Israel and Palestine as two independent and autonomous states. The Palestinian Authority, Hamas and Fatah are foreshadowing what this state would be like: like all the others, it would exploit the workers; like all the others, it would repress the masses; like all the others, it would go to war. There are already 195 “independent and autonomous” states on

the planet: together, they spend over 2,000 billion dollars a year on “defence”! And by 2024, these budgets are set to explode.

Current wars: a scorched earth policy

So why has the UN just declared: “We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. It’s been thirty days. Enough is enough. It has to stop now”? Obviously, Palestine’s allies want an end to the Israeli offensive. As for Israel’s allies, those “great democracies” that claim to respect “international law”, they cannot let the Israeli army do what it wants without saying anything. The IDF’s massacres are all too visible. Especially since the “democracies” are providing military support to Ukraine against “Russian aggression” and its “war crimes”. The barbarity of the two “aggressions” must not be allowed to appear too similar.

But there is an even deeper reason: everyone is trying to limit the spread of chaos, because everyone can be affected, everyone has something to lose if this conflict spreads too far. The Hamas attack and Israel’s response have one thing in common: the scorched earth policy. Yesterday’s terrorist massacre and today’s carpet bombing can lead to no real and lasting victory. This war is plunging the Middle East into an era of destabilisation and confrontation.

If Israel continues to raze Gaza to the ground and bury its inhabitants under the rubble, there is a risk that the West Bank will also catch fire, that Hezbollah will drag Lebanon into the war, and that Iran will end up getting too involved. The spread of chaos throughout the region would not only be a blow to American influence, but also to the global ambitions of China, whose precious Silk Road passes through the region.

The threat of a third world war is on everyone’s lips. Journalists are openly debating it on television. In reality, the current situation is far more pernicious. There are no two blocs, neatly arranged and disciplined, confronting each other, as there were in 1914-18 and 1939-45, or

throughout the Cold War. While the economic and warlike competition between China and the United States is increasingly brutal and oppressive, the other nations are not bowing to the orders of one or other of these two behemoths; they are playing their own game, in disorder, unpredictability and cacophony. Russia attacked Ukraine against Chinese advice. Israel is crushing Gaza against American advice. These two conflicts epitomise the danger that threatens all humanity with death: the multiplication of wars whose sole aim is to destabilise or destroy the adversary; an endless chain of irrational and nihilistic exactions; every man for himself, synonymous with uncontrollable chaos.

For a third world war, the proletarians of Western Europe, North America and East Asia would have to be prepared to sacrifice their lives in the name of the Fatherland, to take up arms and kill each other for the flag and national interests, which is absolutely not the case today. But what is in the process of developing does not need this support, this enlistment of the masses. Since the early 2000s, ever wider swathes of the planet have been plunged into violence and chaos: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Ukraine, Israel and Palestine... This gangrene is spreading little by little, country by country, region by region. This is the only possible future for capitalism, this decadent and rotting system of exploitation.

To put an end to war, capitalism must be overthrown

So what can we do? The workers of every country must have no illusions about a supposedly possible peace, about any solution from the “international community”, the UN, or any other den of thieves. Capitalism is war. Since 1914, it has practically never stopped, affecting one part of the world and then another. The historical period before us will see this deadly dynamic spread and amplify, with increasingly unfathomable barbarity.

The workers of every country must therefore refuse to be carried away, they must refuse to take sides with one bourgeois camp or another, in the East, in the Middle East, and everywhere else. They must refuse to be fooled by the rhetoric that asks them to show “solidarity” with “the Ukrainian people under attack”, with “Russia under threat”, with “the martyred Palestinian masses”, with “the terrorised Israelis”... In all wars, on both sides of the borders, the state always leads people into believing that there is a struggle between good and evil, between barbarism and civilisation. In reality, all these wars are

always a confrontation between competing nations, between rival bourgeoisies. They are always conflicts in which the exploited die for the benefit of their exploiters.

The solidarity of the workers therefore does not go to the “Palestinians” as it does not go to the “Israelis”, the “Ukrainians”, or the “Russians”, because among all these nationalities there are exploiters and exploited. It goes to the workers and unemployed of Israel and Palestine, of Russia and Ukraine, just as it goes to the workers of every other country in the world. It is not by demonstrating “for peace”, it is not by choosing to support one side against the other that we can show real solidarity with the victims of war, the civilian populations and the soldiers of both sides, proletarians in uniform transformed into cannon fodder, into indoctrinated and fanaticized child-soldiers. The only solidarity consists in denouncing ALL the capitalist states; ALL the parties that call on us to rally behind this or that national flag, this or that war cause; ALL those who delude us with the illusion of peace and “good relations” between peoples.

This solidarity means above all developing our fight against the capitalist system that is responsible for all wars, a fight against the national bourgeoisies and their state.

History has shown that the only force that can put an end to capitalist war is the exploited class, the proletariat, the direct enemy of the bourgeois class. This was the case when the workers of Russia overthrew the bourgeois state in October 1917 and the workers and soldiers of Germany revolted in November 1918: these great movements of struggle by the proletariat forced the governments to sign the armistice. This is what put an end to the First World War: the strength of the revolutionary proletariat! The working class will have to win real and definitive peace everywhere by overthrowing capitalism on a world scale.

This long road lies ahead of us. Today, it means developing struggles on a class terrain, against the increasingly harsh economic attacks levelled at us by a system plunged into an insurmountable crisis. Because by refusing the deterioration in our living and working conditions, by refusing the perpetual sacrifices made in the name of balancing the budget, the competitiveness of the national economy or the war effort, we are beginning to stand up against the heart of capitalism: the exploitation of man by man.

In these struggles, we stand together, we develop our solidarity, we debate and become aware of our strength when we are united and organised. In its class

struggles, the proletariat carries within it a world which is the exact opposite of capitalism: on the one hand, the division into nations engaged in economic and warlike competition to the point of mutual destruction; on the other, a potential unity of all the exploited of the world. The proletariat has begun to walk this long road, to take a few steps: during the “summer of discontent” in the United Kingdom in 2022, during the social movement against pension reform in France in early 2023, during the historic strikes in the health and automobile sectors in the United States in recent weeks. This international dynamic marks the historic return of workers’ combativeness, the growing refusal to accept the permanent deterioration in living and working conditions, and the tendency to show solidarity between sectors and between generations as workers in struggle. In the future, movements will have to make the link between the economic crisis and war, between the sacrifices demanded and the development of arms budgets and policies, between all the scourges that obsolete global capitalism carries with it, between the economic, war and climate crises that feed on each other.

Against nationalism, against the wars our exploiters want to drag us into, the old watchwords of the workers’ movement that appeared in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 are more relevant today than ever:

“The workers have no homeland!

Workers of all countries, unite!”

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

International Communist Current,
7th November 2023

Call from the communist left

Down with the massacres, no support to any imperialist camp!

No to pacifist illusions!

For proletarian internationalism!

The present imperialist bloodbath in the Middle East, is only the latest in over a century of almost permanent war that has characterised world capitalism since 1914.

The multi-million massacres of defenceless civilians, the genocides, the reduction of cities, even entire countries to rubble have brought nothing except the promise of more and worse atrocities to come.

The justifications or “solutions” proposed by the various contending imperialist powers, large or small, to the present carnage, like all those before it, amount to a gigantic deception to pacify, divide and prepare the exploited working class for fratricidal slaughter on behalf of one national bourgeoisie against another.

Today a deluge of fire and steel is raining down on the people living in Israel and Gaza. On one side, Hamas. On the other, the Israeli army. In the middle, workers being bombed, shot, executed and taken hostage. Thousands have already died.

All over the world, the bourgeoisie is calling on us to choose sides. For the Palestinian resistance to Israeli oppression. Or for the Israeli response to Palestinian terrorism. Each denounces the barbarity of

the other to justify war. The Israeli state has been oppressing the Palestinian people for decades, with blockades, harassment, checkpoints and humiliation. Palestinian organisations have been killing innocent people with knife attacks and bombings. Each side calls for the blood of the other to be spilled.

This deadly logic is the logic of imperialist war! It is our exploiters and their states who are always waging a merciless war in defence of their own interests. And it is we, the working class, the exploited, who always pay the price, with our lives.

For us, proletarians, there is no side to choose, we have no homeland, no nation to defend! On either side of the border, we are the same class! Neither Israel, nor Palestine!

Only the united international proletariat can put an end to these increasing massacres and the imperialist interests that lie behind them. This unique, internationalist, solution, prepared by a handful of communists of the Zimmerwald Left, was validated in October 1917 in Russia when the revolutionary working class struggle overthrew the capitalist regime and established its own political class power. By its example October inspired a wider, international revolutionary movement that forced the end of the First World War.

The only political current that has survived the defeat of this revolutionary wave and maintained the militant defence of internationalist principle has been the

Communist Left. In the thirties, it preserved this fundamental working class line during the Spanish war and the Sino-Japanese war while other political currents like the Stalinists, Trotskyists or Anarchists chose their imperialist camp that instigated these conflicts. The Communist Left maintained its internationalism during the Second World War while these other currents participated in the imperialist carnage that was dressed up as a fight between “fascism and anti-fascism” and/or defence of the “Soviet” Union.

Today the meagre organised militant forces of the Communist Left still adhere to this internationalist intransigence but their scant resources are further weakened by fragmentation into several different groups and a mutually hostile, sectarian spirit.

That’s why, in the face of an increasing descent into imperialist barbarism these disparate forces must make a common declaration against all imperialist powers, against the calls for national defence behind the exploiters, against the hypocritical pleas for “peace”, and for the proletarian class struggle that leads to the communist revolution.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

International Communist Current

Internationalist Voice

17.10.2023

Why this appeal?

Only 20 months ago, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a similar common statement was proposed to the Communist Left groups by the ICC. The groups that did sign it apart from the ICC – Istituto Onorato Damen, Internationalist Voice, International Communist Perspective (South Korea) – have subsequently produced two *Discussion Bulletins* of Groups of the Communist Left debating their respective positions and differences and have held public meetings in common.

However, other Communist Left groups refused to sign the appeal (or didn’t reply at all) even though they agreed with its internationalist principles. Given the yet greater urgency of defending this principle in common today we ask these groups – listed below – to reconsider and sign this appeal.

One argument against signing the common statement on Ukraine was that other differences between the groups were too great to permit it. There’s no denying the existence of these important differences, whether on questions of analysis, theoretical questions, conception of the political party, or even on the conditions of membership for militants. But the most urgent and fundamental principle of proletarian internationalism, the class frontier that distinguishes revolutionary political organisations, is vastly more important. And a common statement on this question does not mean that the other differences are forgotten. On the contrary the *Discussion Bulletins* show that a forum for debate of them is possible and necessary.

Another argument was that a more practical influence of the internationalist

perspective in the working class, wider than a mere appeal limited to the Communist Left, was needed. Of course all internationalist militant communist organisations want more influence in the working class. But if internationalist organisations of the Communist Left are not even able to practically act together on their fundamental principle at crucial moments of imperialist conflict how then do they expect to be taken seriously by wider sections of the proletariat?¹

The present Israel – Palestine conflict, more dangerous and volatile than all the previous ones, coming less than two years after the re-emergence of imperialist war in

¹ For an in-depth debate on these arguments see “Correspondence on the Joint Statement of groups of the Communist Left on the war in Ukraine” on the ICC website.

Ukraine, and alongside many other imperialist conflagrations that have recently been reignited (Serbia/Kosovo, Azerbaijan/Armenia, and the increasing tensions between the US and China over Taiwan) means that a common internationalist statement is even more pressing than before.

That's why we directly and publicly ask the following groups to show their willingness to co-sign the statement against the imperialist war printed above, which can then if necessary be amended or reformulated according to its common internationalist purpose:

To:

ICT (Internationalist Communist Tendency)

PCI (*Programma Comunista*)

PCI (*Il Partito Comunista*)

PCI (*Le Prolétaire, Il Comunista*)

IOD (Istituto Onorato Damen)

Other groups outside the Communist Left who agree with the internationalist positions defended in this appeal can announce their support for this appeal and distribute it.

Continued from page 3

The future belongs to the class struggle

Facing the pole leading to the destruction of humanity stands the alternative pole of the class struggle of the proletariat. The former, with its accumulation of barbarity and mortal perils on an ever-expanding scale, appears like a Goliath, terrifying and disproportionate, faced with the David of a revival of the class struggle, less than two years old.

How can the proletarian David put an end to the downward spiral of convulsions, chaos and destruction of decaying capitalism? By following in the footsteps of the first worldwide attempt by the proletariat to overthrow capitalism in 1917-23. It was the Russian revolution of 1917 that put an end to the First World War. Conversely, the defeat and enlistment of the proletariat in the Second World War opened the door to an endless succession of wars (Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East). A clear lesson can be drawn from the period 1914-68: only the world proletariat can put an end to war, while its enlistment under bourgeois banners opens the door to the unleashing of militarism.

The period 1968-1989 is also rich in lessons. The historical re-emergence of our class, expressed in struggles such as May '68, the hot autumn in Italy, the mass strike in Poland, etc., halted the march towards the Third World War which, with its unbridled race for nuclear weapons, could have wiped out the planet. However, these workers' struggles went no further than constituting an obstacle to the march towards world war, because they were confined to the economic level without being able to become more politicised by questioning capitalism and understanding the historical stakes of the class struggle. As a result, they were unable to prevent capitalism from rotting on its feet and its consequences for all aspects of life in society, including the exacerbation of every man for himself at the imperialist level.¹⁴

The massive strikes in Britain in the summer of 2022, with their slogan "Enough is enough", were the first in a new international dynamic of class struggle, breaking with a whole period of 30 years of retreat.

Since then, major mobilisations have taken place in France, Germany, Canada, Denmark, the United States, Iceland, Bangladesh, Scandinavia... most of them

constituting, in the opinion even of the bourgeois media, a "historic event", marking a "break" with the previous situation in terms of massiveness and combativity. They are being led by a new generation of workers who have not been subjected to the steamrolling of the campaigns on the death of communism and the "disappearance" of the working class developed by the bourgeoisie following the collapse of the Stalinist regimes; on the contrary, they are the product of a maturing of consciousness within our class, fed by a considerable worsening of the attacks of capitalism in crisis.¹⁵

In this respect, this renewal of the class struggle is comparable to the emergence of the class struggle in 1968, faced with the return of the open crisis of capitalism and carried by a new generation of the working class which had not, like its elders, been wiped out in terms of consciousness by the counter-revolution following the failure of the revolutionary wave of 1917-23. But the new generation is now faced with a much more difficult task than the '68 generation. At that time, the bourgeoisie had to mobilise its trade unions, its left wing and sometimes its extreme left. However, the level of politicisation achieved by the working class at that time proved insufficient to cope with a series of obstacles: democratic illusions in Poland, which were largely responsible for the defeat of the 1980 struggles, and the resurgence of corporatism in the countries of Western Europe, as a consequence of the impact on the working class of the development of the "every man for himself" mentality in society. From now on, it will be up to current and future generations of workers to raise the politicisation of their struggles to a much higher level in order to direct them towards the revolutionary perspective of overthrowing capitalism. Revolutionaries have a fundamental role to play in this necessary awakening of consciousness.

The role and responsibilities of revolutionaries

For a political vanguard to be fully involved in the struggle of the working class and capable of guiding it, it is essential that it has been able to emerge from the process of confrontation of political positions initiated by the activity of the Communist Left and its intervention in struggles. In this sense, the organisations which belong to this current must assume such a responsibility, which is far from being the case today, preoccupied as they are with immediate recruitment, often at the price of opportunist concessions.

14. See "After the rupture in the class struggle, the necessity for politicisation" in this issue of the Review.

15. Ibid.

Ukraine: Two years of imperialist confrontation; two years of barbarism

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a “special operation” against Ukraine, intended as a Blitzkrieg¹ from the north and east, with the intention of changing the government in Kyiv and occupying the Donbas, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. In response, the Ukrainian state declared the military mobilisation of the population and a democratic campaign was launched among the major Western powers to support the defence of Ukraine. All this suggested that this was just a “limited” operation, like the occupation of Crimea in 2014.

Today, on the other hand, the situation is more like what Rosa Luxemburg described at the beginning of her *Junius Pamphlet* on the First World War: “*The trains full of reservists are no longer accompanied by virgins fainting from pure jubilation. They no longer greet the people from the windows of the train with joyous smiles... The cannon fodder loaded onto trains in August and September is mouldering in the killing fields of Belgium, the Vosges, and Masurian Lakes where the profits are springing up like weeds... Cities become piles of ruins; villages become cemeteries; countries, deserts; populations are beggared; churches, horse stalls. Soiled, dishonoured, drenched in blood, covered in filth; this is what bourgeois society looks like, this is what it is.*”

The war in Ukraine displays all the characteristics of imperialist war in the decadence of capitalism, and in particular in its period of decomposition.

War tends to become permanent and thus expresses the tendency of war to become the way of life of capitalism.

Since the First World War (4 years), and especially after the Second World War (5 years), war has not ceased, causing far more death and destruction overall than in the two world wars: Korean War (3 years; although it was falsely halted by an armistice signifying a temporary suspension and not a termination of war); Vietnam (20 years); Iran-Iraq (8 years); Afghanistan (20 years); Iraq War (8 years); Angola War (13 years); 1st and 2nd Congo War (1 year and 5 years)... Today, there have been an estimated 183 armed conflicts in the world since the end of the Second World War.

The war in Ukraine has been going on for almost two years² and is now in a state of stagnation following the failure of the Ukrainian counter-offensive, which can only be a prelude to further escalation. Indeed, since the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014, the war in Donetsk has not ceased. But beyond that, through the clash between NATO’s extension to Moscow’s doorstep and the Russian Federation’s resistance to this pressure, the confrontation is laying the foundations for persistent and escalating fighting:

“Ukraine has built an impressive fighting force with tens of billions of dollars’ worth of aid, extensive training and intelligence support from the West. The Ukrainian armed forces will be able to hold at risk any areas under Russian occupation. Further, Kyiv will maintain the capability to strike Russia itself, as it has demonstrated consistently over the past year.

“Of course, the Russian military will also have the capacity to threaten Ukrainian security. Although its armed forces have suffered significant casualties and equipment losses that will take years to recover from, they are still formidable. And as they demonstrate daily, even in their current sorry state, they can still cause significant death and destruction for Ukrainian military forces and civilians alike.”³

The war in Ukraine also confirms the trend towards greater direct involvement of the central countries of capitalism in imperialist warfare. Indeed, this war signifies the further return of war to Europe

since 1945, that had already appeared in the Balkan war of the 1990s. It also pits Europe’s two largest countries against each other, including the world’s second largest nuclear power.

What’s more, this war directly involves the major European powers⁴ and the United States, which are helping to finance it and send weapons and military training.⁵ So it’s hardly surprising that this war is raising the spectre of a world war:

“Before the Russian invasion, many believed that the wars between the great powers of the 21st century, if they were to take place, would not resemble those of the past. They would be fought with a new generation of advanced technologies, including autonomous weapons systems. They would take place in space and cyberspace; the presence of soldiers on the front lines would probably not matter much. Instead, the West had to admit that this was a new war between states on European soil, fought by large armies over territories of several square kilometres. And this is just one of the many ways in which the invasion of Russia is reminiscent of the two world wars. Like those wars, this one was fuelled by nationalism and unrealistic expectations of how easy it would be to overwhelm the enemy. Fighting took place both in civilian areas and on the front lines, ravaging towns and driving people from their homes. The war consumed enormous resources and the governments involved were forced to call on conscripts and, in the case of Russia, mercenaries. The conflict has led to a search for new and more lethal weapons, with the risk of dangerous escalation. This situation is also felt in many other countries.”⁶

1. Blitzkrieg: German term for a rapid, energetic military campaign aimed at a clear victory that avoids the possibility of total war (Wikipedia).

2. According to a study by the University of Uppsala (Sweden) based on conflicts between 1946 and 2021, 26% of wars between states end in less than a month, and 25% in a year; but it also shows that if the conflict lasts more than a year, it tends to drag on for at least a decade.

3. “An Unwinnable War”, article by Samuel Charap, (RAND Corporation), published in *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2023. The author was a member of the US State Department’s policy planning team during the Obama administration.

4. “The bloc has provided military assistance to Ukraine - the first time that European institutions have directly provided military assistance (including lethal aid) to a state, on top of finally ending their resistance to getting involved militarily in support of a third state at war.” “No turning back! How the Ukraine war has profoundly changed the EU”, article published in *The Guardian*, 30/09/23..

5. 18 EU Member States train Ukrainian soldiers (according to *Guardian Weekly*, idem).

6. “How wars Don’t End” article by Margaret MacMillan, Emeritus Professor of International History at Oxford, published in *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2023.

A total war

Another characteristic of wars in decadence (and all the more so in the current final phase of decomposition) is that they require the mobilisation of all the nation's resources and the enrolment of the entire population at the front or in the rear. The media insisted that in both Russia and Ukraine, while the war was going on at the front, life in the rear continued as normal in Moscow or Kyiv. This is only half the truth. It is true that, particularly in Russia, it was mainly Wagner mercenaries and the Kadyrovtsis who were sent to the front,⁷ and that conscription has for the moment carefully avoided places where the proletariat is concentrated: *"The Kremlin has relied disproportionately on fighters from Russia's poorest regions composed of large populations of ethnic minorities, including once rebellious republics such as Chechnya and provinces such as Buryatia and Tuva. In Tuva, for instance, one of every 3,300 adults has died fighting in Ukraine. The comparable figure for Moscow is 1 of every 480,000 adults."*⁸

It is also true that it is necessary, as far as possible, to maintain production: in Ukraine, for example, companies have the right to "save" up to 50% of their managers and skilled workers from conscription (in return, they make it easier to recruit the other 50% by threatening them with dismissal) and that both governments have an interest in maintaining a semblance of "normality" at the rear.

But the war was above all a total war, with barbarity raging on the front lines and among the civilian population. From the very first day of the war, Zelenski forbade adult men of fighting age to leave the country, but this did not prevent hundreds of thousands of them from accompanying the 8 million Ukrainian refugees abroad and tens of thousands from fleeing the mobilisation clandestinely. In Russia too, since the partial mobilisation of September 2022, the government has been able to enlist any citizen of fighting age, which immediately led to around 700,000 men fleeing the country, and no doubt more later.

On the front line, *"Western intelligence agencies have estimated that during some of the worst fighting, Russia has suffered*

*an average of more than 800 killed and wounded per day, and Ukrainian officials have acknowledged peaks of between 200 and 500 Ukrainian casualties per day. Russia has already lost more soldiers in this war than in its ten years of fighting in Afghanistan"*⁹.

Drawing on official American sources, in mid-August this year the *New York Times* estimated the number of dead, wounded and maimed in the war at around 500,000, including 70,000 dead and 120,000 seriously wounded on the Ukrainian side,¹⁰ where more reliable data is available. According to Ukrainian sources, Russian troops are being re-supplied by released convicts who have been blackmailed into going to war. The officers despised them and sent them to die on the front line without bothering about the wounded, let alone the dead.

As for the civilian population, since the first Russian assault, mass graves of the murdered and tortured have been discovered in the suburbs of Kyiv, then in Bucha, with evidence of hundreds of summary executions and rapes of women and children, which have been exploited to the hilt in order to boost anti-Russian war propaganda. The incessant bombardments are destroying people's homes and basic infrastructure, and causing a ceaseless number of casualties. Entire towns, such as Mariupol, have been completely destroyed. The rain of missiles does not stop, not only on the eastern front, but also in Kyiv. Railway stations (Kramatorsk, April 2022), cafés and restaurants, hospitals, maternity wards, power stations and even nuclear power stations like Zaporizhzhia have been seriously threatened.

Every day, tens of thousands of shells are fired by both sides,¹¹ sowing terror and destruction when they explode, but also when they fail to explode, because they remain a threat that can continue to kill and maim. The cluster bombs supplied by the United States in recent months, as their name suggests, explode at the same time as they seed the whole area with explosives. Ukraine is now one of the countries with the most landmines in the world: anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, which explode when stepped on, but also

when cars or buses carrying fleeing civilians pass by. Retreating Russian troops lay mines all over the place and set traps by leaving explosives on corpses in abandoned houses, and the Ukrainian army mines the front line to prevent the Russians from advancing. Mines are dropped by missiles or drones everywhere:

*"Some 174,000 square kilometres of Ukraine are suspected of being contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance. This is an area the size of Florida, or around 30% of Ukrainian territory. This estimate takes into account areas occupied by Russia since its full-scale invasion, as well as areas reclaimed from the Kharkov region in the east to the outskirts of Kyiv, such as Bucha. According to Human Rights Watch, mines have been identified in 11 of Ukraine's 27 regions."*¹²

Not to mention the ecological consequences of the war, which we have already referred to: *"Chemical factories were bombed in a particularly vulnerable country. Ukraine occupies 6% of European territory, but contains 35% of its biodiversity, with some 150 protected species and numerous wetlands."*¹³

This is the image recently painted by journalists in Kryvyi Rih, a major industrial centre near Zaporizhzhia, the country's 7th largest city: *"The queues outside the recruitment centres are gone. Everyone in Ukraine now knows what army life is like. Disabled ex-soldiers are a common sight and families are in regular contact with loved ones at the front"*¹⁴

But the main victim of the war has been the working class. Workers' families were bombed in the rear and they were recruited from the factories to go to the front, subjected to blackmail for dismissal, rather like Russian convicts. What's more, once they were mobilised, they lost their wages, which they exchanged for the meagre monthly pay of 500 euros given to soldiers at the front. In addition, the state has abandoned insurance for the wounded and maimed. For those who remain at work, in July 2022 the Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) approved the suspension of most of the laws governing the labour code, arbitrarily granting freedom to company management in wage negotiation and dismissal.

7. The soldiers of Chechen leader Kadyrov.

8. "The Treacherous Path to a Better Russia", article by Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz, published in *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2023. Andrea Kendall is Senior Fellow and Director of the Transatlantic Security Program at the Center for a New American Security. From 2015 to 2018, she was Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council, part of the US Federal Intelligence Directorate. Erica Frantz is an associate professor of political science at Michigan State University.

9. "How wars Don't End" article by Margaret MacMillan, Emeritus Professor of International History at Oxford, published in *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2023.

10. "Growing doubt in Ukraine", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English Language edition, November 2023.

11. One of the journalists who witnessed the siege of Mariupol right up to the end recounts that *"at one point, people didn't know who to blame for the bombing, the Russians or the Ukrainians"* "A harrowing film exposes the brutality of Russia's war in Ukraine", *Vox* – Voxmedia. The film referred to is "20 days in Mariupol" and follows the capture of the city by Russian forces.

12. "There are now more landmines in Ukraine than almost anywhere else on the planet", *Vox* (Voxmedia).

13. See "War in Ukraine: a giant step into barbarism", *International Review* n° 168. The quote is from Iryna Stavchuk, Ukrainian Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, published in "Les guerres contre nature", *Le Monde* 11 June 2022.

14. "Growing doubt in Ukraine", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English Language edition, November 2023.

The economy at the service of war

In the imperialist wars of decadence (and also of course in its current final phase of decomposition), war is not at the service of the economy, unlike in the ascendant period of capitalist expansion in the 19th century, when colonial wars enabled the global expansion of capitalism, or when national wars provided a framework for capitalist development. In the present period, the economy is at the service of war¹⁵ and this is confirmed by the war in Ukraine, starting with Russia.

In his end-of-year interview, Mr Putin boasted of a 3.5% increase in production in Russia, but this figure largely reflects the increase in war production:

*"The Kremlin is throwing the household furniture out of the window by increasing its military budget by 68% between now and 2024. The defence industry is preparing to rapidly supply the front line. An investigation by the Ukrainian media outlet Skhemy, based on satellite observations, shows the construction or expansion of several key factories in the Russian military-industrial system. In the aerospace sector, these include the Gorbunov factory in Kazan (production of Tu-16, Tu-22 and Tu-160 bombers), the Irkutsk factory (Su-30 fighters) and the Ekaterinburg factory (engines and gearboxes for Mi-24 and Ka-52 military helicopters). Others, specialising in mechanical engineering at Dombur (Kh-22, Kh-55 and Kh-101 missiles) and Kronstadt (Orion and Helios military drones), as well as Kalashnikov (ammunition for Zala, Lancet and Italmas marauders), have also developed their industrial facilities."*¹⁶

According to official figures, the population's income has fallen by 10% over the last decade, and the country's economic situation is reminiscent of that of the Stalinist USSR at the time of the collapse of the Eastern bloc, of which economic stagnation and backwardness were precisely a major cause:

"The country's economy is stagnant, with few sources of value other than the extraction and export of natural resources. The entire system is rife with corruption and dominated by inefficient state-owned or state-controlled enterprises, and international sanctions limit access to capital and technology. Russia struggles to develop, retain and attract talent; the state

*chronically underfunds scientific research; and bureaucratic mismanagement hinders technological innovation. As a result, Russia lags far behind the United States and China in most metrics of scientific and technological development. Military spending has largely plateaued in the last four years, and the population is forecast to decline by ten million people by 2050."*¹⁷

The war also had a major impact on the economies of the major European powers. The United States used the war, which it helped to start, not only to "bleed" Russia and make it more difficult to form an alliance with China,¹⁸ but also to impose on the European powers its policy of sanctions against the Russian Federation and its financing of the war in Ukraine.

Up to now, we have taken stock of almost two years of this war without differentiating between the characteristics of wars in decadence or of their final phase of decomposition; but at this stage, there is an important difference to point out, namely the tendency towards "every man for himself", the difficulty of the United States in imposing discipline on its allies and, at the same time, the impossibility for the latter to free themselves from American tutelage, and therefore the impossibility of consolidating an imperialist bloc. What the media call the "West", as opposed to the "Global South", is not a continuation of the American bloc confronting the Eastern bloc during the Cold War, but a game of dupes in which each side defends its interests against the others; it is nothing less than what is actually happening in the "Global South" too.

At the start of the war, France and Germany in particular tried to maintain a dialogue with Putin and to avoid the US policy of dragging the Kremlin into a war of attrition; but in the end they had to comply with sanctions and the financing of the war. In total, the amount spent by the EU on military aid to Ukraine alone is estimated at €5 billion. Macron had to go from claiming that NATO was "brain-dead" to contributing around €3 billion to finance the war and send arms to Ukraine, not without resistance, because its military aid ranks fifth, even behind Finland or Slovakia.

But it is undoubtedly for Germany that the sanctions and the war have had the greatest impact: "Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Europe imported 45% of its gas from Russia, with Germany particularly

resistant to decades-long US warnings that such a dependence on a single ideologically hostile power was foolish.

"Duly, once the war started, Putin resorted to using gas supplies as a weapon of war. From June 2022, gas supplies through Nord Stream 1, the 745-mile pipeline from the Russian coast near St Petersburg to north-east Germany, were cut to 40% of normal. Russia first cited technical problems.

*"By July, the supply had fallen further down to 20% with Gazprom blaming 'routine maintenance and faulty equipment'. By late August, with gas prices spiraling, Nord Stream 1 was not transporting any gas at all."*¹⁹

Then there was the sabotage of Nord-Stream 2, first politically by the EU, then by blowing it up.²⁰ Germany had to reorganise its energy sources, with threats of rationing. In retaliation, Scholz declared a Zitenwenden (change of era) in the country's security policy, meaning a policy of intensive rearmament. This policy is being followed by all EU countries, with a 30% increase in defence spending from February 2022.

For its part, the United States has spent around 250 billion dollars worldwide on armaments and financing the war, and the Biden administration is currently trying to save another 60 billion dollars at all costs. Nevertheless, the US government has benefited economically from the sanctions and energy cuts, which have enabled it to export its own resources.

At the international level, the blockade of grain exports from Ukraine (one of the world's four main grain producers) and of maritime traffic in the Black Sea have caused famines in Africa and, together with arms spending and other unproductive expenditure, have contributed to the rise in inflation, particularly in food prices. All this, in addition to the rise in energy prices and the considerable increase in military budgets, is being passed on to the workers in the form of sacrifices and a marked deterioration in their living conditions.

The irrationality of war in times of decomposition

Groups in the proletarian political milieu in the Bordigist (the various Internationalist Communist Parties) and Damenist (the Internationalist Communist Tendency)

15. See the "Report on the International Situation to the Conference of the Gauche Communiste de France", July 1945, extracts published in "50 years ago: the real causes of the Second World War", *International Review* n° 59.

16. "L'industrie d'armement russe monte en puissance", *Le Monde*, 4 November 2023.

17. "The myth of Russian decline", by Michael Kofman and Andrea Kendall-Taylor (Center for a New American Security), *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2021.

18. See "Significance and impact of the war in Ukraine", *International Review* n° 169, 2022.

19. "No turning back: how the Ukraine war has profoundly changed the EU", *The Guardian*, 30/09/23.

20. It has now been established that this sabotage was of Ukrainian origin, although it is not clear whether it was carried out with the government's consent (see *Le Figaro international*).

traditions defend the view that imperialist war allows the beginning of a new cycle of accumulation. However, at the end of the Second World War, the Gauche Communiste de France, from which we descend, drew the conclusion that, in the decadence of capitalism, war only leads to the destruction of the productive forces:

*“War was the indispensable means for capitalism to open up the possibilities of further development, at a time when these possibilities existed and could only be opened up by means of violence. In the same way, the collapse of the capitalist world, having historically exhausted all possibilities of development, finds in modern warfare, imperialist warfare, the expression of this collapse which, without opening up any possibilities of further development for production, merely engulfs the productive forces in the abyss and accumulates ruin upon ruin at an accelerating rate.”*²¹

And this war is full confirmation of that:

*“Today, the war in Ukraine cannot have directly economic objectives. Neither for Russia, which launched hostilities on 24 February 2022, nor for the United States, which for more than two decades has taken advantage of Russia’s weakening following the collapse of its empire in 1989 to push the extension of NATO right up to the borders of that country. If Russia succeeds in establishing its control over new parts of Ukraine, it will be faced with huge expenditure to rebuild the regions it is ravaging. What’s more, in the long term, the economic sanctions being put in place by Western countries will further weaken Ukraine’s already sluggish economy. On the Western side, these same sanctions will also have a considerable cost, not to mention the military aid to Ukraine, which already runs into tens of billions of dollars. In fact, the current war is yet another illustration of the ICC’s analyses of the question of war in the period of decadence of capitalism, and more particularly in the phase of decomposition that constitutes the culmination of this decadence.”*²²

Indeed, as Putin himself has just stated, *“Ukraine is incapable of producing anything”*; in fact, the Ukrainian economy was already very weak before the war. For example, after independence from the USSR in 1991, production fell by 60% and GNP per capita by 42%; with the exception of precisely the east – which is now the main theatre of war – Kyiv and

the northern oblasts, the main production is agricultural. Today, infrastructure such as the Crimean bridge has been destroyed, entire towns are in ruins, and in some places that were major concentrations of workers, factories are now producing at only 25% of their capacity.

The situation in the energy production and supply sector is indicative of the state of the country. Four nuclear power stations have been shut down, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates the cost of destruction in this sector alone at 10 billion euros, which has plunged 12 million people into energy poverty: *“Last winter, Ukraine suffered power cuts and heating cuts throughout the country. Hospitals were deprived of electricity or had to resort to their own generators. By April, Ukraine’s electricity production capacity had been reduced by 51% compared to just before the Russian invasion, according to the UNDP.”*²³

There is a shortage of basic manpower, particularly in technology and research, most of whose workers have fled the country or been conscripted to the front: *“Many male professors and students have joined the army. Some 2,000 professors and researchers have been unable to continue their work. In some universities, 30% of professors have gone abroad or to the other side of the country. Sixty-three institutions are reporting a shortage of teaching staff.”*²⁴

In these conditions, it is difficult to imagine a reconstruction which would initiate a new cycle of accumulation, and even less so in the perspective of a lasting installation of war in Ukraine. Imperialist war in the decadence of capitalism already presents, in itself, this aspect of permanent destruction as a way of life for capitalism; but in its phase of decomposition, and particularly in recent years, this irrationality takes on a higher, scorched-earth character on the part of the various imperialist parties.

In this war, Russia is destroying infrastructure and production and is in the process of exterminating the population of the territory it claims (the Donbass). While one of its main objectives was to prevent NATO’s presence on its borders, on the one hand it has pushed Sweden and Finland to apply to join, and on the other, instead of Ukraine’s “neutrality”, it finds itself confronted with a militarised country armed to the teeth, equipped with the most modern technology supplied by

all the NATO countries.

The United States, which pushed Putin to start the war in order to “bleed Russia dry” and weaken its possible alliance with China, is faced with the prospect of accepting a possible defeat by Ukraine (supported by NATO and primarily by the United States itself). This would mean weakening their image as the world’s leading power in the eyes of their allies, or leading to an escalation of the war with unforeseeable consequences in the event of NATO’s direct involvement in the conflict, or the use of nuclear weapons. At the same time, instead of the war being a show of force that would have imposed discipline on all its rivals and second- and third-rate powers, the United States is faced with war in the Middle East, Israel’s defiant attitude and the possibility of other regional powers such as Iran becoming involved in the conflict. And while it has so far been able to assert its interests in Europe, the various EU powers have embarked on an arms race that may one day enable them to resist these pressures. This situation is not lost on American analysts:

*“A prolonged conflict would keep the risk of escalation – either Russia’s use of nuclear weapons or a war between NATO and Russia – at a high level of alert. Ukraine would become completely dependent militarily and economically on Western support, which would ultimately pose budgetary problems for Western countries and readiness problems for their armies. The global economic consequences would persist and the US would be unable to devote its resources to other priorities, while Russia’s dependence on China would increase. A long war would also weaken Russia, but the benefits do not outweigh the costs.”*²⁵

On the battlefield itself, this tendency towards irrationality is expressed in the tendency to reproduce on a small scale sieges such as Stalingrad during the Second World War or Verdun during the First World War,²⁶ as in Bakhmut or Mariupol, where, on the pretext of the more or less strategic value of the place, systematic destruction was carried out, with the attendant loss of

25. According to the study by the University of Uppsala (Sweden) referred to in note 2.

26. The expression “bleed to death”, used by Hillary Clinton to describe the United States’ objective vis-à-vis Russia in this war, was used by Erich von Falkenhayn, the German Chief of Staff, during the siege of the fortress of Verdun in the First World War against France, which he wanted to force to exhaust its forces. The failure of the German offensive resulted in carnage, with the loss of 750,000 men (killed, wounded and missing), including 143,000 Germans and 163,000 French.

21. “Report on the International Situation to the Conference of the Gauche Communiste de France”, July 1945, extracts published in “50 years ago: the real causes of the Second World War”, *International Review* n° 59.

22. “Militarism and decomposition (May 2022)”, *International Review* n° 168, May 2022.

23. “Ukraine fears another plunge into cold and darkness”, headlines in the *Washington Post*, Wednesday 11 October 2023.

24. “Ukraine, the education system takes a stand”, article by Qubit, a Hungarian scientific journal, published in *Courrier International* 1275, 23-29 November 2023.

Spiral of atrocities in the Middle East: the terrifying reality of decomposing capitalism

Israel and Gaza since 7 October 2023: war in all its abomination, an explosion of barbarity. On that day, in the name of “*justified revenge*” against “*the crimes of the Zionist occupation*”, thousands of fanatical “*fighters*” from Hamas and its allies poured into the Israeli towns surrounding the Gaza Strip, spreading terror and committing crimes of unlimited savagery against defenceless civilians. No sooner had the Hamas murder squads been repelled than the IDF unleashed all its murderous might on the Gaza Strip in the name of the fight for “*democratic civilisation*” against “*the forces of darkness*”: “*We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly*”, declared Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Galant on 9 October.¹ For more than three months at the time of writing, Israeli aircraft and artillery have been pounding the overpopulated Hamas-controlled enclave day and night, massacring civilians and terrorists alike, while IDF armoured columns have been advancing through the ruins, shooting at anything that moves. Towns completely devastated, hospitals gutted by missiles, crowds of civilians wandering under the bombs, without food or water, families searching for loved ones under the ruins or mourning their dead everywhere... “*Carthago delenda est*” (“*Carthage must be destroyed*”) was the obsessive refrain of Cato the Elder; this same obsession seems to haunt the minds of the ruling factions of the Israeli bourgeoisie. After only three months of conflict, Gaza already has proportionally more dead and destroyed buildings than Mariupol in Ukraine or the German cities bombed during the Second World War. This apocalyptic landscape is that of capitalism in the 21st century.

These tens of thousands of Gazan civilians “*eliminated*”, these millions of others thrown onto roads that lead nowhere, are the victims of the State of Israel, “*the only democracy in the Near and Middle East*”, which claims to be the sole repository of the memory of the Holocaust and its extermination camps. Revolutionaries have been saying it for decades: capitalism is gradually plunging humanity into barbarism and chaos! In the Middle East, capitalism is revealing the future it has in store for all humanity! The war in Gaza is the perfect illustration of the terrifying intensification of the barbarity unleashed by capitalism in the final phase of its decadence, the period of decomposition.

The Middle East, a prime example of capitalism rotting on its feet

The history of the Middle East is a striking illustration of the terrifying expansion of militarism and war tensions, particularly since the decadence of capitalism in the early 20th century. Indeed, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire placed the region at the centre of imperialist appetites and confrontations.²

In particular, after the Second World War, the region was marked by the establishment of the new State of Israel and successive Arab-Israeli wars in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 (not forgetting Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982), and was a central area for confrontation between the Eastern and Western blocs. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Soviet Union and its bloc made persistent attempts to gain a foothold in the region by supporting Arab nationalism and in particular the Palestinian fedayeen and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. These attempts met with strong opposition from the United States and the Western bloc, which made the State of Israel one of the spearheads of their policy. At the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, the American bloc gradually gained overall control of the Middle East and gradually reduced the influence of the Soviet bloc, even though the fall of the Shah and the “*Iranian revolution*” in 1979 not only deprived the American bloc of an important bastion but also heralded, through the coming to power of the retrograde mullah regime, the growing decomposition of capitalism. The aim of this offensive by the American bloc was “*completing the encirclement of the USSR, of depriving this country of all the positions it has been able to maintain outside its direct area of domination. It has as a priority the definitive expulsion of the USSR from the Middle East, through*

and n° 117, 2004.

the disciplining of Iran and the reinser-tion of this country into the US bloc as an important pawn in its global strategy. It has the ambition of going on to recuperate Indochina. In the final analysis, its aim is to completely strangle the USSR, to strip it of its status as a world power.”³

After the implosion of the Soviet bloc at the end of 1989, the 1990s were marked by the spectacular expansion of the manifestations of capitalism’s period of decomposition. In this context, the “*Report on imperialist tensions*” of the 20th ICC Congress already noted in 2013: “*The Middle East is a terrible confirmation of our analyses of the impasse in the system and the flight into ‘every man for himself’.*” It illustrates this in a striking way through the central characteristics of this phase:

- the explosion of imperialist “*every man for himself*” through the expression of the hegemonic appetites of a multitude of states. Iran has expressed its imperialist ambitions, first in Iraq by supporting the main Shiite militias, which dominate a fragmented state apparatus, then in Syria by supporting Bashar al Assad’s regime at arm’s length, on the verge of being swept away by the revolt of the Sunni majority. Through its allies—from Lebanese Hezbollah to the Yemeni Houthis—the country of the mullahs has established itself as a formidable regional power. But Turkey, with its interventions in Iraq and Syria, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, present in Yemen and Egypt, and even Qatar, the backer of groups linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, are not hiding their imperialist ambitions;
- the murderous reactions of the American superpower to counter the decline of its dominance. The United States has provoked and waged two murderous wars in the Middle East (*Operation Desert Storm* by Bush senior in 1991 and *Operation Iraqi Freedom* by Bush junior in 2003), which in the end have only resulted in more chaos and barbarism;
- the terrifying chaos resulting from bloody civil wars (Syria, Yemen) leading to the collapse of state structures, fragmented and failing states (Iraq, Lebanon), traumatised populations and

1. “Un journal non aligné”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2023.

2. For a more detailed overview of imperialist relations in the region up to the Second World War, see “Notes on the history of imperialist conflicts in the Middle East, Part 1” and “Notes on the history of imperialist conflicts in the Middle East, Part 2”, *International Review* n° 115 (French edition), 2003

3. “Resolution on the international situation, 6th ICC Congress”, *International Review* n° 44, 1986.

millions of refugees.

In this dynamic of growing confrontation in the Middle East, Israel has played a key role. As the Americans' first lieutenant in the region, Tel Aviv was destined to be the keystone of a pacified region through the Oslo and Jericho-Gaza accords of 1993, one of the greatest successes of American diplomacy in the region, which granted the Palestinians the beginnings of autonomy and thus integrated them into the regional order conceived by Uncle Sam. However, in the second half of the 1990s, following the failure of the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, the "hard" Israeli right came to power (the first Netanyahu government from 1996 to 1999) against the wishes of the American government, which had supported Shimon Peres. From then on, the Right did everything it could to sabotage the peace process with the Palestinians:

- in February 1994, a Jewish terrorist, a settler belonging to the racist movement created by Rabbi Meir Kahane, massacred 29 Muslims in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron; in November 1995, a young religious Zionist assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin;
- through the secret stimulation of Hamas and its terrorist attacks aimed at undermining the authority of the PLO, to pursue a policy of divide and rule and to justify its increasing control over the Palestinian territories.

From this perspective, the unilateral dismantling of the settlements in Gaza by the Sharon government in 2004 was in no way a conciliatory gesture, as Israeli propaganda presented it, but on the contrary the product of a cynical calculation to freeze negotiations on a political settlement of the conflict at a later date: "[The aim] is to freeze the diplomatic process, [and] when you freeze the political process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion on the subject of refugees, borders and Jerusalem."⁴

Moreover, since the Islamists reject the existence of a Jewish state in Islamic lands, just as the messianic Zionists reject the existence of a Palestinian state in the land of Israel, given by God to the Jews, these two factions are therefore objective allies in the sabotage of the "two-state solution". The right-wing sections of the Israeli bourgeoisie have also done everything in their power to strengthen the influence and resources of Hamas,

insofar as this organisation was, like them, totally opposed to the Oslo Accords: in 2006, Prime Ministers Sharon and Olmert forbade the Palestinian Authority from deploying an additional police battalion to Gaza to oppose Hamas and authorised Hamas to present candidates in the 2006 elections. When Hamas staged a coup in Gaza in 2007 to eliminate the Palestinian Authority and establish their absolute power, the Israeli government refused to support the Palestinian police. As for the Qatari financial funds that Hamas needed to be able to govern, Israel allowed them to be regularly transferred to Gaza under the protection of the Israeli police.

Israel's strategy is clear: Gaza given to Hamas, the Palestinian Authority weakened, with limited control over the West Bank. Netanyahu himself has openly asserted this policy: "Anyone who wants to thwart the creation of a Palestinian state must support the strengthening of Hamas and transfer money to Hamas. This is part of our strategy."⁵ The headlong rush of the right-wing fractions of the Israeli bourgeoisie in power to follow their own imperialist policy, in opposition to Washington's interests, in particular with the successive Netanyahu governments from 2009 to the present day, is a caricature of the gangrene of decomposition eating away at the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie. The State of Israel and Hamas, at different times and with different means, have both practised the "worst-case policy" that has led to today's atrocious massacres.

In view of the priority given to containing Iran, Trump's presidency pursued a policy of unconditional support for this policy of the Israeli right, providing the Israeli state and its respective leaders with pledges of unwavering support on all fronts: supply of the latest military equipment, recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital and of Israeli sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights. It supported the policy of abandoning the Oslo Accords and the "two-state" solution (Israeli and Palestinian) in the "Holy Land". The cessation of American aid to the Palestinians and the PLO and the negotiation of the "Abraham Accords", a proposal for a "big deal" involving the abandonment of any claim to create a Palestinian state and the annexation by Israel of large parts of Palestine in exchange for "giant" American economic aid, were essentially aimed at facilitating the de facto rapprochement between Saudi and Israel: "For the Gulf monarchies, Israel is no longer the enemy. This grand alliance started a long time ago behind the scenes, but has not

yet been played out. The only way for the Americans to move in the desired direction is to obtain the green light from the Arab world, or rather from its new leaders, MBZ (Emirates) and MBS (Arabia), who share the same strategic vision for the Gulf, for whom Iran and political Islam are the main threats. In this vision, Israel is no longer an enemy, but a potential regional partner with whom it will be easier to counter Iranian expansion in the region. [...] For Israel, which for years has been seeking to normalise its relations with the Sunni Arab countries, the equation is simple: it is a question of seeking Israeli-Arab peace, without necessarily achieving peace with the Palestinians. For their part, the Gulf States have lowered their demands on the Palestinian issue. This 'ultimate plan' [...] seems to aspire to establish a new reality in the Middle East. A reality based on the Palestinians accepting their defeat, in exchange for a few billion dollars, and where Israelis and Arab countries, mainly from the Gulf, could finally form a new alliance, supported by the United States, to counter the threat of the expansion of a modern Persian empire."⁶

However, as we pointed out back in 2019, these agreements, which were a pure provocation at both international (abandoning international agreements and UN resolutions) and regional level, could only reactivate the Palestinian bone of contention in the long term, which has been used by all the regional imperialists (Iran of course, but also Turkey and even Egypt) against the United States and its allies. What's more, they could only embolden Israel's counterpart in its own imperialist appetites and intensify confrontations, for example with Iran: "Neither Israel, hostile to the strengthening of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, nor Saudi Arabia, can tolerate this Iranian advance."⁷ The Abraham Accords irrevocably sowed the seeds of the current tragedy in Gaza.

War in Gaza: the growing irrationality and barbarity of imperialist confrontation

Hamas's suicidal attack and Israel's indiscriminate retaliation appear to be the expression of a chaotic and unpredictable dynamic of imperialist confrontation, devoid of any rationality. Indeed, these three months of destruction and massacres around the Gaza Strip are clearly not part of a gradual process of alignment behind a dominant leader or adherence

4. Dov Weissglas, close adviser to Prime Minister Sharon, in the daily *Haaretz*, 8 October 2004, quoted in Charles Enderlin, "Israel's strategic error", *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2024. This quotation and those that follow from the same article are taken from the English Language Edition of LMD.

5. Netanyahu to Likud MPs on 11 March 2019, as reported by the Israeli daily *Haaretz* on 9 October 2023.

6. Extract from the Lebanese daily *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 18 June 2019.

7. "23rd ICC International Congress, Resolution on the international situation", *International Review* n° 164, 2019.

to an imperialist bloc in formation, but illustrate on the contrary the explosion of imperialist “every man for himself”, increasingly interrelated with an exacerbation of militarism, a multiplication of economic upheavals and a growing loss of control by national bourgeoisies over their political apparatus. These bloody confrontations are both inevitable and irrational, because none of the protagonists can really derive any lasting strategic advantage from them (not to mention the economic consequences, which are likely to be catastrophic for everyone).

If we look first at the direct belligerents, it is clear that the choice of the worst-case policy will not ultimately benefit any of them, but will produce a terrifying extension of destruction and barbarism:

- For Hamas, which risked being totally marginalised by the consequences of the Abraham Accords, striking a blow was vital to redirect the international spotlight on the “Palestinian problem”. Clearly, the 7 October attack was only made possible by a rapprochement with Iran, which supplied it with the appropriate weapons, but this rapprochement generated tensions within the organisation between the “military” (the commanders of the al-Qassam brigades) and the “political” leadership, which criticised Iran for its support for Assad during the civil war against Sunni groups in Syria. Moreover, by sending a thousand murderers to massacre civilians, Hamas is exposing itself to possible annihilation in Gaza and in any case to massive destruction of its forces. With these actions, this obscurantist and bloodthirsty band of “God’s madmen”, which has replaced the rotten and corrupt Fatah in Gaza, is a caricature of the irrationality into which the Palestinian bourgeoisie has plunged.
- As for the State of Israel, it has embarked on bloody reprisals which will give rise to a generation of Palestinians drunk with vengeance and which at the same time risk accentuating the internal destabilisation of the country, given the growing chaos which reigns in the Israeli political apparatus: tensions between factions of the bourgeoisie, massive corruption, legislative shenanigans, tensions between the government and the judiciary that poorly conceal score-settling within the state apparatus, the supremacist ravings of the ultra-Orthodox... All this against a backdrop of a considerable explosion in poverty. Above all, the indiscriminate unleashing of vengeance risks seriously destabilising the entire region, insofar as the right-wing factions are aiming to put an end once and for all to the

“two-state solution” by engaging in the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine of its entire Arab population, which can only accentuate opposition to the American “godfather”.

The situation is hardly any different for the other protagonists involved in this conflict:

- In the short term, Iran seems to be gaining some advantage from the situation, but for it is a Pyrrhic victory! In reality, the mullahs’ regime is forced to opt for a headlong rush into provocations because it is under heavy pressure from the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, but also from social tensions within Iranian society itself, which is suffering misery and shortages of vital goods as a result of forty years of a war economy. What’s more, Iran is exposed to harsh reprisals against its positions in Lebanon and Syria, and even to destructive attacks on its territory, such as the recent attacks in Kerman. Israel already regularly bombs Hezbollah or Iranian al-Quds Brigade installations in Lebanon, Syria and even Iraq, and is always ready to attack Iranian nuclear power stations, as in July 2019, when “mysterious” explosions destroyed a nuclear centrifuge construction plant in Natanz.
- Turkey is part of the “Muslim Brotherhood” nebula with Qatar and Hamas and is therefore in the front line in condemning Israel: Erdogan has compared Netanyahu to Hitler and the Turkish police have arrested 33 people suspected of spying for Israel. Ankara is also quick to criticise the lukewarm attitude of the Gulf monarchies, demonstrating “*the emergence of a brutal opposition between the Ankara-Doha axis and the Riyadh-Abu Dhabi axis. In July 2013, this opposition was already perceptible on the Egyptian stage during the coup d’état against President Mohamed Morsi*”.⁸
- From Russia’s point of view, the confrontations in Gaza are certainly diverting the attention of the United States and Europeans from Eastern Europe and reducing the pressure on the Ukrainian front. But the Gaza conflict also puts Moscow in a delicate position, torn between its traditional support for the Palestinian cause and its strategic rapprochement with Iran (which supplies it with drones) on the one hand, and Putin’s good relations with Israel, and Netanyahu in particular, on the other (Israel does not take part in the programme of economic sanctions against Russia and, moreover, refrained

from condemning the occupation of Crimea in 2014). Furthermore, a possible extension of the confrontations and interventions by other powers in the conflict could jeopardise Russian positions in Syria.

- China is also benefiting from the momentary reorientation of Washington’s attention, which no longer places the China Sea and Taiwan at the centre of its immediate concerns. However, while Chinese diplomacy, by reconciling the brotherly enemies Iran and Saudi Arabia and integrating these countries and Egypt into the BRICS, succeeded in relaunching a branch of the “Silk Roads” through the Middle East, which was to end in Israel, the current outbreak of chaos and atrocities risks not only undermining its supply of hydrocarbons, but also constituting a considerable obstacle to the implementation of the “Silk Roads”, which the ailing Chinese economy badly needs.
- Finally, as regards the world’s leading power, the United States, the feverish reaction of the Biden administration, with an express visit by Biden to Tel Aviv and an almost weekly presence in the region by Secretary of State Blinken and Defence Secretary Austin, amply demonstrates that the war in Gaza is seriously disrupting their imperialist policy. During the Obama era, the United States embarked on an “Asian pivot”, a policy of redirecting its economic and military resources to contain the Chinese challenger, a policy pursued and amplified by Trump and Biden. At the same time, they promoted a system of alliances between Israel and several Arab countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, to contain Iran’s imperialist aspirations, delegating to the Jewish state the responsibility for maintaining order in the Middle East. But this was without taking into account the growing instability of alliances and the deep-seated tendency towards “every man for himself”, and above all the increasingly marked tendency of the Israeli bourgeoisie to put its own imperialist interests ahead of those of the United States,

The United States now finds itself backed into a corner by Israel, forced to support Netanyahu’s irresponsible policy of “ethnic cleansing”. Biden himself admitted as much at his press conference on 12 December: “*They want revenge not just for what Hamas has done, but for all the Palestinians. They don’t want a two-state solution*”. The US administration has little confidence in Netanyahu’s clique, which risks setting the region on fire, while counting on American military and

8. *Le Monde diplomatique*, June 2020.

diplomatic support if the conflict escalates. Biden also regularly insists that *“this indiscriminate bombing is causing Israel to lose its international support”*. The war in Gaza is therefore a new pressure point on US imperialist policy, which could prove calamitous if the conflict escalates. Washington would then have to assume a considerable military presence and support for Israel which could only weigh heavily, not only on the US economy, but also on its support for Ukraine and, even more so, on its strategy to contain China’s expansion.

In short, not only does no state have anything to gain from this hopeless conflict, but the continuation of the conflict can only lead to its extension and to even more destruction and barbarism.

This applies first and foremost to Israel, as Mr Steinberg, one of Israel’s leading experts on the Palestinian question, points out: *“The terrorist organisations are trying to delegitimise their greatest enemy in the eyes of international opinion by provoking it into overreacting. This in turn will give them a kind of legitimacy. If Israel doesn’t withdraw from Gaza, it will face an all-pervasive guerrilla war whose objective will be to get it bogged down in the same way as it was in Southern Lebanon. This would threaten Israel’s relations with Egypt and Jordan, and could even endanger its treaties with those countries. Hamas will come out of this stronger.”*⁹ While for Israel, the risk of remaining *“trapped in the infernal circle of the Netanyahu years”* could lead to *“isolation, and social and economic collapse”*.¹⁰ For the Middle East as a whole, the prospect of the conflict spreading to the whole region would generate a new spiral of barbarism, an outbreak of war dominated by *“every man for himself”*, and the destabilisation of many states. The immediate consequences would be particularly devastating for the global economy as a whole, given the zone’s importance in the production of hydrocarbons and in global naval transport. Finally, the conflict could be imported into Europe, with a series of deadly attacks and confrontations between communities.

The risk of a generalised conflagration in the Middle East is not negligible, and increases with the duration of the war. And the danger of the conflict spreading is becoming clearer: Hezbollah is firing rockets daily and, faced with these waves of missiles, the Israeli defence minister has threatened to invade southern Lebanon; Israel has *“liquidated”* one of the leaders

of Hamas with a drone attack on a district of Beirut controlled by Hezbollah; bomb attacks are being carried out in Iran; the Houthis in Yemen attack merchant ships and oil tankers at the entrance to the Red Sea, prompting the formation of an *“international coalition”* involving the United States, Great Britain and other European states to *“guarantee free circulation”* in this artery vital to the world economy.

Far from the *“bloc coherence”* that prevailed until the collapse of the USSR, all the local players are ready to pull the trigger. Above all, the conflict risks opening up a new front, with Iran and its allies in ambush, likely to further weaken American leadership. The political tensions within the American bourgeoisie and the resulting difficulties in controlling its political game are themselves a powerful factor fuelling instability. They limit the freedom of action of the Biden administration and push the Israeli factions in power (like Putin for the conflict in Ukraine) to temporise in the hope of Donald Trump’s return to the presidency. Washington is, of course, trying to prevent the situation from getting out of hand... a perfectly illusory ambition in the long term, given the disastrous dynamic into which the Middle East is sinking.

Whatever action is taken, the dynamic towards destabilisation is inescapable. Basically, then, this is a significant new stage in the acceleration of global chaos. This conflict shows the extent to which each state is increasingly applying a *“scorched earth”* policy to defend its interests, seeking not to gain influence or conquer interests, but to sow chaos and destruction among its rivals. This tendency towards strategic irrationality, short-sightedness, unstable alliances and *“every man for himself”* is not an arbitrary policy of this or that state, nor the product of the sheer stupidity of this or that bourgeois faction in power. It is the consequence of the historical conditions, those of the decomposition of capitalism, in which all states confront each other. With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, this historical tendency and the weight of militarism on society have been profoundly aggravated. The war in Gaza confirms the extent to which imperialist war is now the main destabilising factor in capitalist society. The product of the contradictions of capitalism, the breath of war in turn feeds the fire of these same contradictions, increasing, through the weight of militarism, the economic crisis, the environmental disaster and the dismemberment of society. This dynamic tends to rot every part of society, to weaken every nation, starting with the foremost among them: the United States.

The working class confronted by the barbarity of a system in decomposition

For years, the situation of the population in general and the working class in particular in this region has been dramatic, especially in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. In Palestine, Hamas has bloodily repressed demonstrations against poverty, as it did in March 2019, while its mafia-like leaders gorge themselves on international aid (Hamas is one of the richest terrorist organisations on the planet). Today, all over the world, workers are being asked by the bourgeoisie to choose sides: *“Palestinian resistance”* or *“Israeli democracy”*. As if they had no choice but to support one or other of these bloodthirsty bourgeois cliques.

On the one hand, the Israeli government is justifying the carnage by claiming to be avenging the victims of 7 October and preventing Hamas terrorists from again attacking the *“security of the Jewish state”*. So much for the tens of thousands of innocent victims! Israel’s security is worth a massacre! On the other side, they say: *“We are not defending Hamas, we are defending the right of the ‘Palestinian people’ to self-determination”*, hoping to make us forget that *“the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination”* is just a formula designed to conceal the defence of what must be called the State of Gaza! The interests of proletarians in Palestine, Israel or any other country in the world must in no way be confused with those of their bourgeoisie and their state. A *“liberated”* Gaza Strip would mean nothing more than consolidating the odious regime of Hamas or any other faction of the Gazan bourgeoisie.

But some will argue that *“the struggle of a colonised country for its liberation”* undermines *“the imperialism of the colonising states”*. In truth, as this article shows throughout, the Hamas attack is part of an imperialist logic that goes far beyond its own interests. *“All the parties in the region have their hands on the trigger”*, said the Iranian Foreign Minister at the end of October. However weak it may be in the face of the power of the IDF, Hamas, like every national bourgeoisie since capitalism entered its period of decadence, can in no way magically escape the imperialist relations that govern the whole international arena. Supporting the Palestinian state means siding with the imperialist interests of Khamenei, Nasrallah, Erdogan and even Putin, who is rubbing his hands at the whole mess. There is no choice between this ir-

9. Quote taken from Charles Enderlin, *“Israel’s strategic error”*, *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2024.

10. Tomer Persico, researcher at the Shalom Institute, New York, quoted *ibid*.

War atrocities used to justify...new atrocities

“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.”¹

The terrible clashes that are once again bloodying the Middle East confirm once again what the great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg wrote while in prison in 1915.

The Hamas militiamen who, on 7 October 2023, committed atrocious crimes against Israeli civilians, women, children and the elderly, were only able to behave with such barbarity because they had been conditioned and systematically brainwashed by the Islamist organisation that runs the Gaza Strip.

Similarly, if today the vast majority of the Israeli population approves of the criminal bombardments and the ground offensive against the inhabitants of Gaza, which have already caused thousands of civilian deaths, it is because they have suffered a terrible trauma with the massacre of 7 October, but also because they too have been the victims of decades of conditioning by the Israeli authorities and the various parties of the bourgeoisie.

Today, with the war between the State of Israel and Hamas, we are once again witnessing the use by the various political forces which defend the perpetuation of the capitalist order of a method which the exploiting class has used on a large scale since the beginning of the 20th century to justify the barbarity of war: the highlighting of atrocities committed by the “enemy” to justify its own atrocities. And there is no shortage of examples throughout the 20th century, the century in which the capitalist system entered its period of decadence.

Certainly, war existed well before this period, as did the justifications by those who waged it. But the wars of the past had never taken the form of a total war, mobilising all the resources of society and involving the entire population, as became the case from 1914 onwards. And it was during the First World War that the propaganda needed to mobilise the broadest possible sectors of a country’s population was taken over in an organised and systematic way by the governments of the belligerent countries.

Confessions from the defenders of the capitalist order

We have already published a very detailed article in our press on propaganda designed “with a view to systematic murder”, to “produce an appropriate intoxication in normally constituted men”, as Rosa Luxemburg wrote. We encourage our readers to read the whole of this article, “Birth of totalitarian democracy”,² published in 2015, from which we will only quote a few short extracts here.

In particular, this article quotes extensively from a book by Harold Lasswell published in 1927 entitled *Propaganda technique in the World War*.³

Here are a few passages:

“The psychological resistance to war in modern nations is so great that every war must appear as a war of defense against a threatening and murderous aggressor. There must be no ambiguity about whom the public is to hate. The war must not be due to a world system of conducting international affairs, nor to the stupidity or malevolence of all governing classes, but to the rapacity of the enemy. Guilt and guilelessness must be geographically established, and all the guilt must be on the other side of the border. If propaganda wants to mobilize all the hatred of the populations, it must ensure that all the ideas in circulation place the sole responsibility on the enemy. Variations may be permitted under certain circumstances which we shall undertake to specify, but this theme must continue to be the dominant motif. The governments of Western Europe can never be perfectly certain that a class-conscious proletariat within the borders of their authority will rally to the clarion of war”.

Propaganda “is a concession to the rationality of the modern world. A literate world, a schooled world, prefers to thrive on argument and news (...) All the apparatus of diffused erudition popularises the symbols and forms of pseudo-rational

appeal: the wolf of propaganda does not hesitate to dress in sheep’s clothing. All the eloquent men of the day – writers, reporters, editors, preachers, lecturers, teachers, politicians – are drawn into the service of propaganda to amplify the voice of the master and to present a master voice. All is conducted with the decorum and trappings of intelligence, for this is a rational epoch, and demands its raw meat cooked and garnished by adroit and skilful chefs”. These “new chefs” must serve up the “raw meat” of unavowable emotion: “A new flame must quench the canker of dissent and temper the steel of pro-war enthusiasm.”⁴

*“To mobilize the hatred of the people against the enemy, it is necessary to represent the opposing nation as a menacing, murderous aggressor (...) It is through the elaboration of war aims that the obstructive role of the enemy becomes particularly evident. Represent the opposing nation as satanic; it violates all the moral standards (mores) of the group and insults its self-esteem. The maintenance of hatred depends upon supplementing the direct representations of the menacing, obstructive, satanic enemy with assurances of ultimate victory”.*⁵

Reading these passages, which illustrate and complement Rosa Luxemburg’s lines in a remarkable way, might lead one to think that Lasswell was a militant fighter against capitalism. In fact, he was an eminent American academic who published numerous works on political science and taught this discipline from 1946 to 1958 at the prestigious Yale University. His 1927 book concluded by advocating government control of communication techniques (telegaph, telephone, cinema and radio) and he put his skills at the service of the American bourgeoisie throughout his life, particularly during the Second World War when he was director of research on communication and war at the Library of Congress (the main and prestigious library in the United States) at the same time as working in the army’s propaganda services.

The war between the Camp of GOOD and the Camp of EVIL

As Lasswell’s writings so eloquently express, the aim of each state waging war is to present the enemy it is fighting as the embodiment of EVIL in order to present

1. Rosa Luxemburg, “The Crisis of Social Democracy”, 1915.

2. “The birth of totalitarian democracy” *International Review* n°155.

3. Harold Lasswell *Propaganda technique in the World War*. First published 1927, Alfred A. Knopf, New York

4. Lasswell, op. cit., p. 221.

5. Lasswell, op.cit., p. 195.

itself as the eminent representative of GOOD. There are many examples of this in history from 1914 onwards, and we can cite just a few.

As our 2015 article put it, *“Britain made the most of Germany’s occupation of Belgium, not without a healthy dose of cynicism, since the German invasion merely forestalled Britain’s own war plans. Much was made of the most lurid atrocity stories: German troops bayoneted babies, made soup out of corpses, tied priests upside down to the clapper of their own church bell, etc.”*

The French bourgeoisie was not to be outdone: in a propaganda postcard, there is a poem in which a soldier explains to his young sister what a “boche” (a term used in France to designate a German and meaning “butcher”) is.

*“Do you want to know, child, what this monster is, a Boche?
A Boche, my dear, is a man without honour,
He’s a sly, heavy-handed, hateful, ugly villain,
He’s a bogeyman, a poisonous ogre.
He’s a devil in soldier’s clothing who burns down villages,
Shooting old men and women without remorse,
Kill the wounded, commit all kinds of looting,
Bury the living and strip the dead.
He’s a coward who slits the throats of children and young girls,
Skewering babies with bayonets,
Massacring for pleasure, for no reason... without quarter
It’s the man, my child, who wants to kill your father,
Destroying your homeland and torturing your mother,
He’s the Teuton cursed by the whole universe.”*

This type of propaganda developed particularly in the wake of the fraternisations that took place at the front at Christmas time in 1914 between German, French and Scottish units. This poem makes it clear: there is no way you can fraternise with “monsters”.

Subsequently, the accumulation of corpses on both sides was used by each belligerent state to justify the demonisation of the enemy. Each side praised the heroism and sacrifice of its own soldiers in the “necessary” task of stopping the “crimes” of soldiers from the other side. Killing human beings was no longer a crime if they wore a different uniform, but a “sacred duty in defence of humanity and morality”.

This demonisation of “enemy” peoples

in order to justify the barbarity of war continued throughout the 20th century and into the early 21st century as war became a permanent manifestation of capitalism’s plunge into its phase of decadence.

The Second World War provides us with an example that is both enlightening and atrocious. For today’s bourgeois propaganda, there was only one “Evil Camp”: Nazi Germany and its allies.

The Nazi regime was the embodiment of the counter-revolution that had befallen the German proletariat after its revolutionary attempts of 1918-23. A counter-revolution to which the “democracies” of the “Camp of GOOD” had made their full contribution and which was completed by Nazism. Moreover, these “democracies” had long believed that they could get along with Hitler’s regime, as evidenced by the Munich agreements of 1938. The atrocities committed by the Nazi regime were used by the Allies’ propaganda to justify their own atrocities. In particular, the extermination of the Jews of Europe by this regime, the most concentrated expression of the barbarity into which the decadence of the capitalist system had plunged human society, constituted a massive argument, presented as “irrefutable”, for the need for the Allies to destroy Germany, which involved in particular the murder of tens of thousands of civilians under the bombs of the Camp of GOOD. After the war, when the populations of the “victorious” countries learned of the crimes committed by their leaders, it was explained to them that the appalling massacres of civilian populations (in particular the bombings of Hamburg between 25 July and 3 August 1943 and those of Dresden from 13 to 15 February 1945 which, using incendiary bombs on a massive scale, mainly targeted civilians, killing a total of over 100,000 people) were justified by the barbarity of the Nazi regime. These same leaders organised massive propaganda on the – real – atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, and particularly the extermination of the Jewish population.⁶

6. The use of the atomic bomb by the American Camp of Good, which razed to the ground the cities of Hiroshima (6 August 1945 - between 103,000 and 220,000 dead according to various estimates) and Nagasaki (9 August - between 90,000 and 140,000 dead), could obviously not be justified by the extermination of the Jews by the Japanese authorities, but it still had to be given a “humanitarian” purpose. Indeed, according to the American authorities, it saved a million lives on both sides by hastening the end of the war. This is one of the most odious lies about the Second World War. In reality, even before the bombings, the Japanese government was prepared to capitulate on condition that Emperor Hirohito retained his throne. The American authorities refused this condition. They absolutely had to be able to use the atomic bomb to find out more about the “performance” of this new weapon and, above all, to send a message of intimidation to the Soviet Union, which the American government predicted would be its next enemy. For his part, Hirohito remained on

However, they were careful not to point out that the Allies did absolutely nothing to help these people, who were refused entry visas by most of the countries in the Camp of GOOD, which even rejected the Nazi leaders’ offers to hand over hundreds of thousands of Jews.

The Communist Left’s denunciation of the hypocrisy of “democracies”

This immoral hypocrisy of the “democratic” bourgeoisie is very well demonstrated, with the evocation of proven historical facts, in an article entitled “Auschwitz ou le grand alibi” (“Auschwitz or the Great Alibi”) which appeared in 1960 in n° 11 of the review *Programme Communiste* (organ of the Bordigist International Communist Party).⁷ Here is the conclusion of this article, which we fully support:

“We have seen how capitalism has condemned millions of men to death by rejecting them from production. We have seen how it massacred them while extracting all the surplus value it could from them. We have yet to see how it continues to exploit them even after their death.”

“It was primarily the imperialists on the Allied side who used it to justify their war and, after their victory, to justify the infamous treatment inflicted on the German people. People rushed to the camps and the corpses, taking horrible photos everywhere and proclaiming: ‘Look what bastards those Krauts are! How right we were to fight them! And how right we are now to give them a taste of their own medicine!’ When you think of the countless crimes committed by imperialism; when you think, for example, that at the very moment (1945) when our Thorez was singing his victory over fascism, 45,000 Algerians (fascist provocateurs!) were falling victim to repression;⁸ when you think that it is

his throne until his death on 7 January 1989, without ever being questioned by the American authorities, even though his personal involvement in the crimes committed by the Japanese armies had been clearly established. One last point of clarification: if the capital of Japan, Tokyo, did not receive an atomic bomb, it was because it had already been practically razed to the ground by multiple ‘conventional’ bombings (with the intensive use of incendiary bombs), particularly those of March 1945, which killed as many people as Hiroshima.

7. This article is based in particular on the book “L’Histoire de Joël Brand” (Éditions du Seuil, 1957, translated from the German: Die Geschichte von Joel Brand, Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln-Berlin, 1956) describing the adventures of this Hungarian Jew who organised the escape of Jews persecuted by the Nazis. In May 1944, Brand was asked by Adolf Eichmann to pass on to the Allies a proposal to “deliver” hundreds of thousands of Jews, a proposal that was refused by the British authorities.

8. Reference to the uprising of the population of Sétif on 8 May 1945, the very day the armistice was signed, which was put down with extreme violence by the

world capitalism that is responsible for the massacres, the despicable cynicism of this hypocritical satisfaction is truly nauseating.

“At the same time, all our good anti-fascist democrats threw themselves on the corpses of the Jews. And since then they have been waving them under the nose of the proletariat. To make them feel the infamy of capitalism? No, on the contrary: to make them appreciate by contrast the true democracy, the true progress, the well-being they enjoy in capitalist society! The horrors of capitalist death must make the proletariat forget the horrors of capitalist life and the fact that the two are indissolubly linked! (...) If we show lampshades made of human skin, it's to make us forget that capitalism has transformed the living human being into a lampshade. The mountains of hair, the gold teeth, the body of the dead man that has become a commodity should make us forget that capitalism has turned the living man into a commodity. It is work, the very life of man, that capitalism has transformed into a commodity. This is the source of all evil. Using the corpses of capital's victims to try to hide the truth, using these corpses to protect capital, is the most infamous way of exploiting them to the bitter end.”

In fact, this article expresses what constitutes a fundamental position of the Communist Left: the denunciation of anti-fascist ideology, of which the evocation of the Shoah is a pillar, as a means of justifying the defence of capitalist “democracy”. As early as June 1945, issue n° 6 of *L'Étincelle*, the newspaper of the Gauche Communiste de France, the political ancestor of the ICC, published an article entitled “Buchenwald, Maïdanek, démagogie macabre”⁹ which developed the same theme and which we reproduce below:

“The role played by the SS, the Nazis and their industrialised death camp, was that of exterminating in general all those who opposed the fascist regime and above all the revolutionary militants who had always been at the forefront of the fight against the capitalist bourgeoisie, whatever form it took: autarchic, monarchic or “democratic”, whoever their leader: Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Leopold III, George V, Victor-Emmanuel, Churchill, Roosevelt, Daladier or de Gaulle.

“The same international bourgeoisie which, when the October revolution broke out in 1917, sought every conceivable means to crush it, which crushed the Ger-

man revolution in 1919 with a repression of unprecedented savagery, which drowned the Chinese proletarian uprising in blood; the same bourgeoisie which financed fascist propaganda in Italy and then Hitler's propaganda in Germany; the same bourgeoisie brought to power in Germany the man it had designated as the gendarme of Europe; the same bourgeoisie today spends millions to finance the setting up of an exhibition on ‘The crimes of Hitler's SS’ and the shooting and showing to the public of films on ‘German atrocities’ (while the victims of these atrocities continue to die, often without care, and the survivors who return have no means of living).

“This is the same bourgeoisie which, on the one hand, paid for the rearmament of Germany and, on the other, mocked the proletariat by dragging it into the war with the anti-fascist ideology; this is the same bourgeoisie which, having favoured Hitler's rise to power, used him to the last in order to crush the German proletariat and drag it into the bloodiest of wars, into the foulest butchery imaginable.

“It is still the same bourgeoisie that sends representatives with wreaths of flowers to bow hypocritically at the graves of the dead it has itself created, because it is incapable of running society and war is its only form of life.

“WE BLAME THEM!

“because the millions of deaths the bourgeoisie has perpetrated in this war are only the latest addition to an already far too long list of martyrs of ‘civilisation’, of capitalist society in decomposition.

“It is not the Germans who are responsible for Hitler's crimes. In 1934, they were the first to pay for Hitler's bourgeois repression with 450,000 human lives, and they continued to suffer this merciless repression when it took place abroad. No more than the French, the British, the Americans, the Russians or the Chinese are responsible for the horrors of the war which they did not want but which their bourgeoisie forced upon them.

“On the other hand, the millions of men and women who died slowly in the Nazi concentration camps, who were savagely tortured and whose bodies are rotting somewhere, who were struck down during this war while fighting or caught in a ‘liberating’ bombardment, the millions of mutilated, amputated, shredded and disfigured corpses, buried under the earth or rotting in the sun, the millions of bodies, soldiers, women, old people and children.

“These millions of dead are crying out for vengeance...”

...and they are demanding vengeance not on the German people, who are still paying, but on the infamous and unscrupulous bourgeoisie, who did not pay, but profited, and who continue to taunt the hungry slaves with their appearance as overfed pigs.

*The only position for the proletariat is not to respond to demagogic appeals to continue and accentuate chauvinism through anti-fascist committees, but the direct class struggle for the defence of their interests, their right to life, a struggle of every day, of every moment until the destruction of the monstrous regime of capitalism”.*¹⁰

Even today, the State of Israel (and those who support it) invokes the memory of the Shoah to justify its crimes. The atrocities suffered by the Jewish people in the past are a way of pretending that this State belongs to the Camp of GOOD, even when it takes its cue from the “democracies” during the Second World War to deliberately massacre civilian populations with bombs. And the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October have enabled it to rekindle the flame in such a spectacular way that even in Israel the voices of those who previously denounced the criminal policies of this state have been silenced, and even swayed into the camp of all-out war.

At the same time, the enemies of Israel and those who support them, who for decades have made the oppression and humiliation of the Palestinian people their business, whether they line up behind Islamic flags or “anti-imperialist” flags, now find, with the massacres committed by the state of Israel in Gaza, a shocking argument to justify their support for a Palestinian state which, like all states, will be the instrument of the exploiting class to oppress and repress the exploited.

To justify the barbarity of war, bourgeois propaganda has made massive use of lies, particularly since 1914, as we have seen above and continue to see. Take, for example, the myth of “weapons of mass destruction” used by the US government in 2003 to justify the invasion of Iraq. But this propaganda is even more effective when it can rely on the real atrocities committed by those designated as the enemy. And these atrocities are not about to disappear; quite the contrary. As the capitalist system sinks deeper into decay and decomposition, they will become more frequent and more abominable. They will, as in the past, be used by every sector of the bourgeoisie to

French government, in which the “Communist” Party led by Maurice Thorez participated.

9. Published in French on the website: Fragments of the History of the Radical Left (Fragments d'Histoire de la gauche radicale).

10. The Tendance Communiste Internationaliste has published an article on its website The Internationalists which deals with the same issues as our present article: “Imperialist Hypocrisy in the East and West.” It is an excellent article which we commend and encourage our readers to consult.

justify its own and future atrocities.

Indignation and anger at these atrocities are legitimate and normal in any human being. But it is important that the exploited, the proletarians, are capable of resisting the sirens of those who call on them to fight and kill the proletarians

of other countries, or to be killed in these battles. No war in capitalism will ever be the “war to end all wars” as the propaganda of the Entente countries claimed in 1914 or as President Bush junior claimed in 2003 when he predicted “an era of peace and prosperity” after the elimination of Saddam Hussein (in fact, the massacre of

hundreds of thousands of Iraqis). The only way to put an end to wars and the atrocities they provoke is to put an end to the system that generates them: capitalism. Any other perspective will only preserve the survival of this barbaric system.

Fabienne, November 24, 2023

Continued from page 14

life and injuries (in Bakhmut, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands were seriously injured and over 50,000 killed).

The situation of the working class

The Ukrainian working class has been very weakened by the deindustrialisation that followed the disintegration of the USSR and by the weight of the ideological campaigns that sought to drag it into the struggles between factions of the bourgeoisie during the “Orange Revolution”²⁷ (2004), the Euromaidan protests (late 2013) and the Crimean war (2014). The February declaration of war was not fought by workers’ mobilisations, but by the mass flight of refugees. Although there have recently been women’s demonstrations in Kyiv calling for the return of soldiers from the front, and the Zelenski government is having serious difficulties recruiting soldiers, we should not expect a workers’ response to the war.

27. “Elections in the United States and Ukraine - The growing impasse of global capitalism”; *International Review* n° 120.

As far as Russia is concerned, despite the information blackout, it seems that the proletariat in the main industrial concentrations is suffering less directly from conscription and bombing, but more and more from the intensification of exploitation and repression in the workplace, as well as from the loss of purchasing power. Its response to the situation remains an unknown for the moment; but what is clear from the evidence so far is that it will need some time to mature.

It is therefore inappropriate to expect the proletariat of either of the two countries concerned to respond in such a way as to put an end to the war.

On the other hand, the current struggles of the world proletariat in the main countries are not the product of a protest against the war either. The world proletariat was able to stop the First World War, but its revolutionary struggle in Russia and Germany was not directly the product of a response to the war, but of the development of its struggles for demands and its consciousness in the face of the collapse

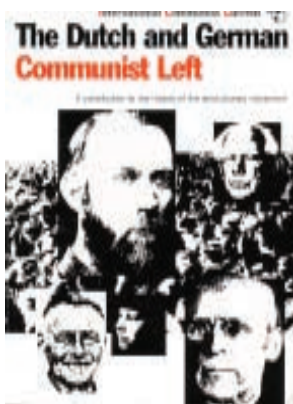
of capitalism. As soon as the German bourgeoisie succeeded in separating the struggle against the war from the revolutionary struggle at the rear, “peace” was used against the revolution.

Today, since the summer of anger in Great Britain,²⁸ workers in the main countries have begun a dynamic of struggles in defence of their living conditions, confirmed in particular by the struggles against pension reform in France and the struggles in the United States (in the automobile, health and education sectors, etc.). Struggles have developed despite the war in Ukraine, and the involvement of various countries in financing and sending weapons to the war is beginning to fuel reflection on the relationship between sacrifice and war within the proletariat.

Hic Rhodes, 29.12.2023

28. The struggles of the summer of 2022 in Great Britain, which, under the slogan “enough is enough”, marked a break with 40 years of passivity after the defeat of the miners’ strikes of 1983, have been called the “summer of anger”; this term refers to the struggles of 1978-1979, which were referred to as the winter of discontent.

ICC Publication



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.

The USA: Superpower in the decadence of capitalism, today epicentre of social decomposition (part II)

The first part of this article¹ described the rise to power of American imperialism, which in the decadent phase of capitalism became the dominant imperialism, leader of the Western bloc that finally triumphed over the rival Soviet bloc in the late 1980s. In the introduction to this first part, it was already emphasised that *“the collapse of the Eastern bloc marked the beginning of a terminal phase in the evolution of capitalism: social decomposition”*, which would not only accelerate the bourgeois system’s descent into chaos and barbarism, but also lead to the decline of American leadership. The second part of this article will focus precisely on highlighting this process, which began in the 1990s: *“In 30 years of rotting bourgeois society, the USA has become a factor in aggravating the chaos, its world leadership will not be recovered, no matter how much the Biden team proclaims it in their speeches, it’s not a question of wishes, it’s the characteristics of this final phase of capitalism that determine the tendencies it is obliged to follow leading inexorably into the abyss if the proletariat cannot put an end to it through world communist revolution.”*²

1. The implosion of the Soviet bloc exacerbates every man for himself and global chaos

The implosion of the Eastern bloc marked the opening of a period of decomposition for capitalism, a period in which there was a dramatic acceleration in the breakdown of the various components of the social body into “every man for himself”, and a plunge into chaos. If there is one area where this tendency was immediately confirmed, it was imperialist tensions: *“The end of the ‘cold war’ and the disappearance of the blocs has thus only exacerbated the unleashing of antagonisms specific to decadent capitalism and aggravated in a qualitatively new way the bloody chaos into which the whole of society is sinking.”*³

In fact, the total disintegration of the Soviet bloc also led to the implosion of the Soviet Union itself, and, as a corollary, to the disintegration of the rival US bloc. The orientation text *“Militarism and decomposition”*⁴ examines the impact of decadent capitalism’s entry into its period of decomposition on the deployment of imperialism and militarism. It begins by pointing out that the disappearance of the blocs does not call into question the reality of imperialism and militarism. On the contrary, they are becoming more barbaric

and chaotic: *“Indeed, it is not the formation of imperialist blocs that is at the origin of militarism and imperialism. Quite the opposite is true: the constitution of blocs is only the extreme consequence (which, at a certain point, can aggravate the causes themselves), a manifestation (which is not necessarily the only one) of the sinking of decadent capitalism into militarism and war. (...) the end of the blocs only opens the door to an even more barbaric, aberrant and chaotic form of imperialism.”*⁵

This exacerbation of warlike barbarity will be expressed more concretely through two major trends, which will mark the development of imperialism and militarism over the last three decades.

A first important feature of this is the explosion of imperialist appetites on all fronts, which will result in the multiplication of tensions and sources of conflict: *“The difference with the period just ended is that these rifts and antagonisms, which were previously contained and used by the two great imperialist blocs, will now come to the fore. (...) as a result of the disappearance of the discipline imposed by the presence of the blocs, these conflicts are likely to be more violent and more numerous, particularly, of course, in those areas where the proletariat is weakest.”*⁶ This multiplication of antagonisms is also a major obstacle to the reconstitution of new blocs in the current period.

The second tendency resulting from the exacerbation of every man for himself is the

explosion of bloody chaos and, as a corollary, attempts to contain it, both of which are factors in the aggravation of warlike barbarism: *“The chaos already reigning in much of the world, and which now threatens the major developed countries and their relations with each other, (...) faced with the tendency towards generalised chaos characteristic of the phase of decomposition, and to which the collapse of the Eastern bloc has given a considerable boost, there is no other way out for capitalism, in its attempt to hold in place the various parts of a body which is tending to break up, than the imposition of the iron corset constituted by the force of arms. In this sense, the very means it uses to try to contain an increasingly bloody chaos are a factor of considerable aggravation of the warlike barbarism into which capitalism is plunged.”*⁷

Indeed, in the face of this predominant historical trend towards every man for himself, the USA, as the only remaining superpower, pursued a policy aimed at countering this trend and maintaining its declining status, exploiting in particular its overwhelming military superiority to impose its leadership on the world and in particular on its “allies”: *“Confirmed as the only remaining superpower, the USA would do everything in its power to ensure that no new superpower – in reality no new imperialist bloc – could arise to challenge its ‘New World Order.’”*⁸ Thus, the history of the last 35 years is characterised not only by an explosion of “every man for himself”, but also by continual attempts on the part of the USA to maintain its hegemonic position in the world and counter the inevitable decline of its leadership. These relentless initiatives by the USA to maintain its leadership in the face of threats from all sides would, however, only accentuate the chaos and the plunge into militarism and barbarism, of which Washington is ultimately the main instigator. What’s more, these initiatives would give rise to internal dissensions within the American bourgeoisie on the policy to be pursued, which will become more pronounced as time goes by.

3. “The United States: superpower in the decadence of capitalism and today epicentre of social decomposition (Part 1)”, *International Review* n° 169, 2023

3. Ibid.

3. “Resolution on the international situation”, pt 6, 9th ICC Congress, *International Review* n° 67, 1991 (French version).

4. *International Review* n° 64, 1991.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. “Resolution on the International Situation”, pt 4, 15th International Congress of the ICC, *International Review* n° 113, 2003.

2. A “new world order” against the spread of chaos

Faced with the disappearance of the blocs and the intensification of chaos, US President George W. Bush senior promoted the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces, to enable Washington to mobilise a broad international military coalition around the USA to “punish” Saddam Hussein.

2.1. The first Gulf War is aimed at countering the rise of “world disorder”

The 1st Gulf War (1991) was actually intended to set an “example”: faced with a world increasingly gripped by chaos and “every man for himself”, the American global policeman wanted to impose a minimum of order and discipline, primarily on the most important countries of the former Western bloc. The only superpower left standing wanted to impose on the “international community” a “new world order” under its aegis, because it was the only one with the means to do so, but also because it is the country with the most to lose from global disorder: “In 1992 Washington adopted a very clear, conscious orientation to guide its imperialist policy in the post-Cold War period, based on ‘a fundamental commitment to maintaining a unipolar world in which the United States has no peer competitor. No coalition of great powers without the United States will be allowed to achieve hegemony’ (Prof. G.J. Ikenberry, Foreign Affairs, Sept/Oct. 2002, p. 49). This policy seeks to prevent the rise of any power in Europe or Asia that could challenge American prominence and serve as a pole of regroupment for the formation of a new imperialist bloc. This was initially spelled out in the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance policy statement drafted by Rumsfeld in 1992, during the last year of the first Bush administration which clearly established this new grand strategy.”⁹

In truth, Bush Senior’s policy, far from ushering the planet into a “new world order” under Washington’s supervision, represented no more than a desperate attempt by the United States to contain the lightning expansion of “every man for himself”; it would fundamentally lead to an accentuation of chaos and warlike confrontations: only six months after the Gulf War, the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia had already confirmed that the “new world order” would not be dominated by the Americans, but by the creeping “every man for himself”.

The bloody civil war resulting from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia (1995-

2001) saw the imperialist appetites of the various “allies” of the former American bloc come to the fore and clash: France and England supported Serbia, Germany Croatia and Turkey Bosnia: “*The conflict in the former Yugoslavia, finally, confirms one of the other major features of the world situation: the limits to the effectiveness of the 1991 ‘Desert Storm’ operation, designed to assert US leadership over the world. As the ICC asserted at the time, the main target of this large-scale operation was not Saddam Hussein’s regime, nor even other countries on the periphery that might have been tempted to imitate Iraq. For the United States, the main aim was to assert and reaffirm its role as ‘world policeman’ in the face of the convulsions arising from the collapse of the Russian bloc, and in particular to win the obedience of the other Western powers who, with the end of the threat from the east, were spreading their wings. Just a few months after the Gulf War, the outbreak of fighting in Yugoslavia illustrated that these same powers, and Germany in particular, were determined to make their imperialist interests prevail over those of the United States.*”¹⁰ In the end, it was by increasingly encircling the whole world in the steel corset of militarism and warlike barbarism by intervening militarily, first alongside Croatia, then Bosnia against Serbia, that President Clinton countered the imperialist appetites of European countries by imposing the “Pax Americana” in the region under his authority (Dayton Accords, December 1995).

Far from suppressing challenges to US leadership and the various imperialist appetites, Operation Desert Storm exacerbated polarisation. Thus, the Mujahideen who had been fighting the Russians in Afghanistan rose up against the US “crusaders” (formation of al-Qaeda under the leadership of Osama bin Laden) and, inspired by the failure of the US intervention in Somalia (operation “Restore Hope” from 1993 to 1994), began a campaign of anti-American jihadist attacks at the end of 1998. After its army’s failure to invade southern Lebanon, the hard-line Israeli right came to power in 1996 (the first Netanyahu government) against the wishes of the American government, which had supported Shimon Peres. From then on, the right did everything in its power to sabotage the peace process with the Palestinians (the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords), which had been one of the greatest successes of Washington’s diplomacy in the region. Finally, the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda in 1994 during the war between local clans, each supported by

Western imperialism, is a dramatic example of where the intensification of imperialist “every man for himself” leads.

One of the most obvious expressions of the contestation of American leadership was the dismal failure in February 1998 of Operation Desert Thunder, aimed at inflicting a new “punishment” on Iraq and, beyond Iraq, on the powers that supported it under the radar, notably France and Russia. Saddam Hussein’s obstruction of visits to the “presidential sites” by international inspectors led the superpower to a new attempt to assert its authority by force of arms. But this time, in contrast to the missile attacks on Iraq which it carried out again in 1996, it was forced to abandon its enterprise in the face of resolute opposition from almost all the Arab states, most of the major powers and with only the (timid) support of Great Britain. The contrast between “Desert Storm” and operation “Desert Thunder” highlighted the deepening crisis of US leadership. Of course, Washington doesn’t need anyone’s permission to strike when and where it wants (as it did at the end of 1998 with Operation Desert Fox). But by pursuing such a policy, the United States put itself at the head of a trend it wanted to counter – that of every man for himself – whereas it had momentarily succeeded in avoiding it during the Gulf War. Worse still: for the first time since the end of the Vietnam War, the American bourgeoisie (the Republican and Democratic parties) showed itself incapable of presenting a united front to the outside world, despite being in a war situation.

2.2. The emergence of explicit tensions within the US bourgeoisie

The erosion of the U.S. bourgeoisie’s ability to manage the political game adequately became apparent at the end of the “Cold War”, and as capitalism entered a period of decomposition in the early 1990s, particularly through Ross Perot’s “independent” candidacy in ‘92 and ‘96. “*This general tendency for the bourgeoisie to lose control of its own policies was one of the primary factors in the Eastern bloc’s collapse; this collapse can only accentuate the tendency:*

- *because of the resulting aggravation of the economic crisis;*
- *because of the disintegration of the Western bloc which is implied by the disappearance of its rival;*
- *because the temporary disappearance of the perspective of world war will exacerbate the rivalries between different bourgeois factions (between national factions especially, but also between*

9. “Notes on the history of US imperialist policy since the Second World War”, Part 2, *International Review* n° 114, 2003.

10. “Resolution on the international situation” (1993), 10th International Congress of the ICC, *International Review* n° 74, 1993.

*cliques within national states”.*¹¹

This tendency to lose control of the political game came to the fore in 1998, at the height of Operation Desert Fox. The impeachment proceedings against Clinton, which intensified during the events, highlighted the extent to which American politicians, immersed in a real internal conflict, lent credence to the propaganda of America's enemies that Clinton had taken the decision to intervene militarily in Iraq because of personal motives (the “Monicagate” scandal), rather than disavowing it.

3. The crusade against “rogue states”

The 1998 Révolution Internationale Congress resolution, following the failure of Operation Desert Thunder, was prescient: *“While the US has not recently had the opportunity to use its armed might and to participate directly in this ‘bloody chaos’, this can only be a temporary situation, especially because it cannot allow the diplomatic failure over Iraq to pass without a response.”*¹²

3.1. The 9/11 terrorist attack spawns the “War against Terror”

With the coming to power of George W. Bush junior and his team of “neoconservatives” (Vice President D. Cheney, Defense Secretary D. Rumsfeld, his deputy Paul Wolfowitz and J. Bolton), Washington focused its attention on “rogue states” such as North Korea, Iran and Iraq, which threatened world order through their aggressive policies and support for terrorism. The al-Qaeda attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001 prompted President Bush junior to call for a “crusade against terrorism” and launch a “War against Terror”, leading to the invasion of Afghanistan and above all Iraq in 2003. Despite all the American pressure and the presentation of “fake news” at the UN aimed at mobilising the “international community” behind their military operation against the “Axis of Evil”, the United States ultimately failed to corral the other imperialists against Saddam and had to invade Iraq virtually single-handedly, with Tony Blair's Great Britain as its only significant ally. *“If the September 11 attacks allowed the US to draw countries like France and Germany into their intervention in Afghanistan, it didn't succeed in dragging them into its Iraqi adventure in 2003; in fact it even*

*provoked the rise of a circumstantial alliance between these two countries and Russia against the intervention in Iraq. Later on, some of its main allies in the ‘coalition’, which intervened in Iraq, such as Spain and Italy, quit the sinking ship. The US bourgeoisie failed to achieve any of its official objectives in Iraq: the elimination of ‘weapons of mass destruction’, the establishment of a peaceful ‘democracy’; stability and a return to peace throughout the region under the aegis of America; the retreat of terrorism; the adherence of the American population to the military interventions of its government.”*¹³

Despite a colossal commitment of soldiers, weapons and financial resources, these ill-considered interventions by the “neocons” led to a stalemate and ultimate failure, underlined by the withdrawal from Iraq (2011) and Afghanistan (2021). In particular, they highlighted the fact that the USA's claim to play “world sheriff” has only intensified warlike and barbaric chaos: *“The attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by Al Qaeda on 11 September 2001, and the unilateral military response of the Bush administration, further opened the Pandora's box of decomposition: with the attack and invasion of Iraq in 2003 in defiance of international conventions and organisations and without taking into account the opinion of its main ‘allies’, the world's leading power went from being the gendarme of world order to the principal agent of every man for himself and chaos. The occupation of Iraq and then the civil war in Syria (2011) would powerfully stir up the imperialist every man for himself, not only in the Middle East but all over the world.”*¹⁴ This opening of the Pandora's box of decomposition was manifested in particular by the multiplication of terrorist attacks in Western metropolises (Madrid, 2004, London, 2005) and by an all-out increase in the imperialist ambitions of powers – China and Russia, of course, and Iran, which had become increasingly bold and aggressive – but also Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and even the Gulf Emirates and Qatar, leading to barbaric conflicts such as the civil wars in Libya and Syria as early as 2011, and in Yemen from 2014 onwards, the emergence of particularly cruel terrorist organisations such as Islamic State provoking a new wave of attacks, and the “refugee crisis” caused by the sudden, uncontrolled influx of undocumented, stateless people into Europe in 2015.

3.2. The adventurism of the “neocons” reveals the growing contradictions between bourgeois factions

While the obvious impasse in U.S. policy and the aberrant headlong rush into warlike barbarism underline the clear weakening of U.S. global leadership, they also reveal more than ever the internal contradictions and factional divisions within the U.S. bourgeoisie. Already, G. Bush junior had won the presidency through a “stolen election”, which illustrated the unstable nature of the American democratic apparatus: his opponent, Al Gore, had obtained 500,000 more votes than him, but the decision concerning the final distribution of votes only came 36 days later, more specifically in Florida, where Bush's brother was governor. *“A popular e-mail parody of the election began circulating throughout internet asking what the media would say if in an African nation, there was a controversial election in which the winning candidate was the son of a previous president, who had previously served as director of the state security forces (CIA), and where the victory was determined by a disputed counting of the ballots in a province governed by a brother of the presidential candidate.”*¹⁵ The twists and turns of the 2000 elections were a clear indication of the bourgeoisie's difficulty in managing its political system in the face of increasingly obvious centrifugal tendencies.

This is all the more true as factions linked to Christian fundamentalism have begun to make their presence felt on the American political scene. Already present in the Republican Party during the Reagan era, they became stronger and more radical in the “rural states” as a result of the growing chaos and lack of hope for the future. Thus emerged the “Tea Party” which would play an important role in torpedoing the Obama administration's plans, accusing the president of being a “Marxist” and a “Muslim agent”. The Tea Party was not only made up of Christian fundamentalists but also white supremacists, anti-immigrant activists, militia members, etc., a whole cocktail that infiltrated the Republican Party and increasingly threatened the stability of the political system. Federated around opposition to the “Establishment in Washington”, these factions form the swell of the wave of populist ideology on which Donald Trump would later surf.

These centrifugal tensions within the American bourgeoisie were clearly manifested in the headlong rush into the catastrophic Iraqi adventure adopted by the feckless Bush Jr. administration to ensure the maintenance of American su-

11. “Theses: Decomposition, the ultimate phase of capitalist decadence”, point 10, *International Review* n° 107, 2001,

12. “Resolution on the international situation”, pt 8, 13th congress of Révolution Internationale, *International Review* n° 94, 1998.

13. “Resolution on the international situation”, pt 8, 17th ICC International Congress, *International Review* n° 130, 2007.

14. “Report on the pandemic and the development of decomposition”, *International Review* n° 167, 2022.

15. “The election of George W Bush”, *Internationalism* n° 116, winter 2000-2001.

premac: “*The accession [in 2001] of the ‘Neo-Cons’ to the head of the American state represents a real catastrophe for the American bourgeoisie. The question posed is the following: how was it possible for the world’s leading bourgeoisie to call on this band of irresponsible and incompetent adventurers to take charge of the defence of its interests? What lies behind this blindness of the ruling class of the leading capitalist country? In fact, the arrival of the team of Cheney, Rumsfeld and Co. to the reins of the state was not the simple result of a monumental mistake in casting by the ruling class. While it has considerably worsened the situation of the US on the imperialist level, it was already the expression of the impasse facing the US given the growing weakening of its leadership and more generally given the development of the ‘everyman for himself’ in international relations which characterises the phase of decomposition.*”¹⁶

3.3. The Obama presidency: a vain attempt to restore multilateralism

The Obama administration tried to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of the adventurist unilateralism promoted by Bush junior. While reminding the world of America’s absolute technological and military superiority through the execution of Bin Laden in 2011 via a spectacular commando operation in Pakistan, it attempted to put multilateralism back on the agenda by involving Washington’s “allies” in the implementation of American policy. However, it was unable to truly counter the explosion of various imperialist ambitions: China implemented its economic and imperialist expansion through the unfolding of the “New Silk Roads” from 2013 onwards; as for Germany, while it avoided any direct confrontation with the United States, given Washington’s overwhelming military superiority, it markedly strengthened its pretensions through a growing economic-energy collaboration with Russia. France and Britain, for their part, took the initiative of intervening in Libya to oust Gaddafi; Russia and Iran strengthened their positions in the Middle East by taking advantage of the civil war in Syria. Finally, in Ukraine, faced with the victory of pro-Western parties in the “Orange Revolution”, Putin militarily occupied Crimea and supported pro-Russian militias in the Donbass in 2014. Faced with the rise of China as the main challenger threatening US hegemony, there was intense debate within the Obama administration, the state apparatus and the wider US bourgeoisie over a reorientation of its imperialist strategy.

In short: “*The policy of forcing things through, illustrated during the two terms of Bush Junior, has resulted not only in the chaos in Iraq, which is nowhere near being overcome, but also to the growing isolation of American diplomacy... For its part, the policy of ‘co-operation’ favoured by the Democrats does not really ensure the loyalty of the powers that the US is trying to associate with its military enterprises, particularly because it gives these powers a wider margin of manoeuvre to push forward their own interests.*”¹⁷

4. The “America First” policy breaks with the ambition to establish a new world order

At a time when the “world policeman” policy was squandering huge budgets, resulting in massive military deployments around the world (“boots on the ground”) and consequent losses, and at a time when the working masses were not ready to be dragooned (cf. the huge difficulties in recruiting soldiers under Bush junior for the war in Iraq), Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 after a campaign centred on the slogan “America First”. This basically expresses an official recognition of the failure of American imperialist policy over the past 25 years, and a refocusing of that policy on the immediate interests of the United States: “*The Trump administration’s formalisation of the principle of defending only their interests as a national state and the imposition of profitable power relations as the main basis for relations with other states, confirms and draws implications from the failure of the policy of the last 25 years of fighting against the ‘everyman for himself’ tendency as a world policeman in defence of the world order inherited from 1945.*”¹⁸

4.1. The “vandalisation” of imperialist relations

The “America First” policy implemented by the populist Trump went hand in hand with a “vandalisation” of relations between powers. Traditionally, in order to guarantee a certain order in international relations, states based their diplomacy on a principle, summed up by the following Latin formula: “*pacta sunt servanda*” - treaties, agreements are supposed to be respected. When you sign a global - or multilateral - agreement, you’re supposed to respect it, at least in appearance. The United States, under Trump, was abolishing this convention: “*I sign a treaty, but I can abolish it tomorrow*”.

17. “Resolution on the international situation”, pt 7, 18th ICC International Congress, *International Review* n° 138, 2009.

18. “Resolution on the international situation”, pt 13, 23rd ICC International Congress, *International Review* n° 164, 2020.

This happened with the Trans-Pacific Pact (TPP), the Paris Agreement on climate change, the nuclear treaty with Iran and the final agreement on the G7 meeting in Quebec. In their place, Trump advocated negotiations between states, favouring economic, political and military blackmail to impose US interests (cf. the threat of reprisals against European companies investing in Iran). “*The vandalising behaviour of Trump, who can denounce American international commitments overnight in defiance of established rules, represents a new and powerful factor of uncertainty, providing further impetus towards ‘each against all’.* It is a further indication of the new stage in which capitalism is sinking further into barbarism and the abyss of untrammelled militarism.”¹⁹

Trump’s unpredictable decisions, threats and poker tricks had the following effects. They:

- undermined the reliability of the USA as an ally: Trump’s boastful blustering, bluffing and sudden changes of position not only ridiculed the USA, but led to fewer and fewer countries trusting it. In Europe, Trump called NATO into question, openly opposed the EU and, more specifically, Germany’s policy;
- accentuated the decline of the only superpower: the impasse in US policy was vividly accentuated through the actions of the Trump administration. At the G20 in 2019, the isolation of the United States was evident on climate issues and the trade war. Moreover, Russia’s involvement in Syria to save Assad set the USA back and reinforced Moscow’s military aggressiveness and power to cause trouble in the world, while the USA has been unable to contain China’s emergence from outsider status in the early ‘90s to that of a serious challenger, presenting itself as the champion of globalisation through the expansion of the “New Silk Roads”;
- destabilised the global situation and increased imperialist tensions, as seen in the Middle East, where America’s refusal to engage too directly on the ground exacerbated the centrifugal action of various powers, large and small, from Iran to Saudi Arabia, from Israel to Turkey, from Russia to Qatar, whose divergent imperialist appetites are constantly colliding. Washington’s policy has become more than ever a direct factor in aggravating chaos on a global scale.

As a result, “*The current situation is characterised by imperialist tensions all over the place and by a chaos that is*

19. Ibid.

16. “Resolution on the international situation”, pt 9, 17th ICC International Congress, *International Review* n° 130, 2007.

less and less controllable; but above all, by its highly irrational and unpredictable character, linked to the impact of populist pressures, in particular to the fact that the world's strongest power is led today by a populist president with temperamental reactions."²⁰

However, under the Trump administration, an increasingly clear polarisation against China emerged in US imperialist policy, aimed at containing and breaking the rise of the Chinese challenger. Back in 2011, the Obama administration had already decided to attach greater strategic importance to confronting China than to the war on terror: "This new approach, called the 'Asian pivot', was announced by the American president during a speech to the Australian parliament on November 17, 2011."²¹ Although challenged by the emergence of Islamic State under Obama, the strategic reorientation of American imperialist policy towards the Far East clearly took hold under Trump, despite a last pocket of resistance from the proponents of the "crusade" against "rogue states" such as Iran (Secretary of State Pompeo and J. Bolton). The "National Defense Strategy" (NDS), published in February 2018, stated that "the global war on terror is suspended" while "great power competition" becomes a cardinal orientation.²² This implied a major shift in American policy:

- The trade war with China intensified, with the aim of slowing down its economic development and preventing it from developing strategic sectors that directly threaten American hegemony.
- The US re-launched the arms race (calling into question the INF and START multilateral arms control agreements) in order to maintain its technological lead and exhaust its rivals (following the proven strategy that led to the collapse of the USSR). A 6th US Army component is created, designed to "dominate space", to counter China's satellite threats.

Be that as it may, "The defence of its interests as a national state now means embracing the tendency towards every man for himself that dominates imperialist relations: the United States is moving from being the gendarme of the world order to being the main agent of every man for himself, of chaos, of questioning the world order established since 1945 under its auspices."²³

20. "Report on imperialist tensions (June 2018)", *International Review* n° 161, 2018.

21. "The American retreat will have lasted six months...", *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2022.

22. Statement by Defense Secretary James Mattis on 04.26.2018 before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee.

23. "Resolution on the international situation", pt 10, 23rd ICC International Congress, *International*

4.2. Centrifugal tendencies in the American political system intensify

Trump's arrival in power brought into full view the enormous difficulty the bourgeoisie of the world's leading power has in "managing" its electoral circus and containing the centrifugal tendencies growing within it: "The US bourgeoisie's crisis did not come about as a result of Trump's election. In 2007, the report already noted the crisis of the American bourgeoisie by explaining: 'It is first and foremost this objective situation - a situation that excludes any long-term strategy on the part of the remaining dominant power - that made it possible to elect and re-elect such a corrupt regime, with a pious and stupid President at its head [Bush junior]. (...), the Bush Administration is nothing more than a reflection of the dead-end situation of US imperialism' (*The Impact of Decomposition on the Life of the Bourgeoisie*, a report to the 17th ICC Congress). However, the victory of a populist president (Trump) known for making unpredictable decisions not only brought to light the crisis of the US bourgeoisie, but also highlighted the growing instability of the political apparatus of the US bourgeoisie and the exacerbation of internal tensions."²⁴ Trump's populist vandalism therefore only exacerbated already existing tensions within the American bourgeoisie.

A number of factors brought these tensions to a head: (a) The constant need to try and frame the unpredictability of presidential decisions, but above all (b) Trump's option to get closer to Moscow, the old enemy that doesn't hesitate to interfere in the American electoral campaign ("Russiagate"), a prospect totally unacceptable to a majority of the US bourgeoisie, and (c) his refusal to accept the electoral verdict, combine to highlight an explosive political situation within the American bourgeoisie and its growing inability to control the political circus.

- a) A relentless struggle to "contain" the president marked the entire presidency and played out on several levels: pressure exerted by the Republican Party (failed votes on repealing Obamacare), opposition to Trump's plans by his ministers (the Attorney General refusing to resign or the foreign and defence ministers "nuancing" Trump's words), a constant struggle for control of the White House staff by the "generals" (ex-generals McMaster and then Mattis). However, this policy of "containment" did

Review n° 164, 2020.

24. "Report on the impact of decomposition on the political life of the bourgeoisie", 23rd ICC congress, 2019, *International Review* n° 164, 2020. The quote in the excerpt is from the (unpublished) report on the life of the bourgeoisie from the 17th congress.

not prevent "slippages", as when Trump made a "deal" with the Democrats to circumvent Republican opposition to raising the debt ceiling.

- b) Trump and a faction of the American bourgeoisie were considering a rapprochement or even an alliance with Putin's Russia against China, a policy that had various supporters within the presidential administration, such as the first Secretary of State Tillerson, the Secretary of Commerce Ross or even the president's son-in-law, Kushner. This orientation, however, met opposition from large sections of the American bourgeoisie and resistance from most state structures (the army, the secret services), who were by no means convinced by such a policy for historical reasons (the impact of the "Cold War" period) and because of Russian interference in the presidential elections ("Russiagate" again). While Trump never wanted to rule out improved cooperation with Russia (for example, he suggested reintegrating Russia into the G7 forum of industrialised countries), the approach of the dominant factions of the American bourgeoisie, embodied today by the Biden administration, has on the contrary always seen Russia as a force hostile to the continued leadership of the United States.
- c) During the presidential elections of November 2020, opposition between bourgeois factions took on an almost insurrectionary tone: accusations of electoral fraud were made on both sides, and finally Trump refused to recognise the election results. On January 6, 2021, at Trump's call, his supporters marched on Parliament, storming it and occupying the Capitol, the "symbol of democratic order", to overturn the announced results and declare Trump the winner. The internal divisions within the American bourgeoisie have sharpened to the point where, for the first time in history, the president up for re-election is accusing the system of the "most democratic country in the world" of electoral fraud, in the best style of a "banana republic".

5. The policy of provocation towards the Chinese challenger

Despite the vandalism and unpredictability of the populist Trump and the growing fragmentation within the American bourgeoisie over how to defend its leadership, the Trump administration adopted an imperialist orientation in continuity and coherence with the fundamental imperialist interests of the American state, which are

broadly agreed upon within the majority sectors of the American bourgeoisie: to defend the United States' undisputed rank as the world's leading power by developing an offensive attitude towards its Chinese challenger. This polarisation towards China, described as a "constant threat",²⁵ is undoubtedly becoming the central axis of Biden's foreign policy. This strategic choice by the United States implies a concentration of American forces for military and technological confrontation with China. If, as global policeman, the USA already exacerbated warlike violence, chaos and every man for himself, the current polarisation towards China is no less destructive – quite the contrary. This aggression is manifested:

- politically, through democratic campaigns in defence of Uighur rights and "freedoms" in Hong Kong, the defence of democracy in Taiwan, or through systematic accusations of espionage and computer hacking against China, with heavy retaliatory measures;
- on the economic front, through laws and decrees such as the Inflation Reduction Act and the Chips in USA Act, which subject exports of products from Chinese technology firms (e.g. Huawei) to the United States to heavy restrictions in terms of protectionist tariffs and sanctions against unfair competition, but which above all impose a block on the transfer of technology and research to Beijing;
- at the military level, through fairly explicit and spectacular demonstrations of force aimed at containing China: a proliferation of military exercises involving the US fleet and those of its allies in the South China Sea, Biden's pledge of military support to Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression, the establishment of a cordon sanitaire around China through military support agreements (the AUKUS, between the USA, Australia and Great Britain), partnerships clearly directed against China (the Quad involving Japan, Australia and India), but also by reviving bilateral alliances or signing new ones with South Korea, the Philippines or Vietnam.

On the other hand, the considerable fragmentation of the American political apparatus has spread even further, despite the Democratic presidential victory and the presidential nomination of Biden. The mid-term elections in 2022, Trump's candidacy for a new term and the tensions between Democrats and Republicans in Congress have confirmed that the fractures between the parties are as deep and exacerbated as

25. Lloyd Austin, *Memorandum for all department of defence employees*, March 2021.

ever, as are the rifts within each of the two camps. The weight of populism and the most retrograde ideologies, marked by the rejection of rational and coherent thinking, far from being curbed by campaigns aimed at sidelining Trump, have only weighed more and more deeply and durably on the American political game and constantly tend to hinder the implementation of the offensive against China.

These two trends, the intensification of a polarised offensive aimed at provoking the Chinese challenger on the one hand, and the accentuation of the chaos and every man for himself that this provokes, but also the internal tensions between factions of the American bourgeoisie on the other, mark the two major events in imperialist relations in recent years: the murderous war in Ukraine and the butchery between Israel and Hamas.

5.1. War in Ukraine increases pressure on the Chinese challenger

The war in Ukraine may well have been initiated by Russia, but it is the consequence of the United States' strategy of encircling and suffocating it. With the outbreak of this murderous war, the US has pulled off a masterstroke in intensifying its aggressive policy against potential challengers. *"In Washington, many had been waiting a long time for this: an opportunity for America to show off its great-power credentials in a duel with a major competitor, rather than in uncertain operations against poorly armed religious fanatics."*²⁶ Indeed, this war expresses more far-reaching objectives than a simple halt to Russia's ambitions: *"The current American-Russian rivalry is not explained by any fear that Moscow might dominate Europe, but rather by Washington's hegemonic behaviour."*²⁷

Of course, the immediate aim of the fatal trap set for Russia is to inflict a major weakening of its remaining military power and a radical downgrading of its imperialist ambitions: *"We want to weaken Russia in such a way that it can no longer do things like invade Ukraine."*²⁸ The war is also intended to demonstrate the absolute superiority of American military technology over Moscow's rustic weapons.

Secondly, the Russian invasion tightened the bolts within Washington-controlled NATO, forcing reluctant European countries, especially Germany, to rally

26. "The American retreat will have lasted six months...", *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2022.

27. "Why the great powers go to war", *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 2023.

28. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin during his visit to Kiev on 25.04.22. The Biden faction also wanted to "make Russia pay" for its interference in US domestic affairs, such as its attempts to manipulate the last presidential elections.

under the Alliance banner, since they had tended to develop their own policies towards Russia and ignore NATO, which until a few months ago French President Macron had claimed was "brain dead".

But above all, the Americans' primary objective was undoubtedly to send an unequivocal warning to their main challenger, China ("this is what awaits you if you risk trying to invade Taiwan"). This was the culmination of a decade of increased pressure on the main challenger threatening US leadership. The war weakened China's only partner of interest, the one that could in particular provide it with a military contribution, and furthermore put a strain on Beijing's economic and imperialist expansion project, the New Silk Road, a major axis of which passed through the Ukraine.

For the United States, the hundreds of thousands of civilian and military casualties, the extension of warlike barbarity into Central Europe, the risks of nuclear meltdown and global economic chaos are only negligible "collateral effects" of its offensive to guarantee its continued leadership.

5.2. War in Gaza intensifies every man for himself and disrupts American polarisation towards Beijing

After the surprise attack and barbaric massacres perpetrated by Hamas, and Israel's bloody retaliation, crushing tens of thousands of civilians under shells and bombs, the almost permanent presence of American leaders in Tel Aviv (President Biden visited in person, and Secretary of State A. Blinken and Defence Secretary L. Austin spent almost a week there) underlines the feverishness and perplexity of the American superpower about how best to handle the situation. By exerting permanent pressure on the Israeli government while maintaining contact with Arab governments, they are trying to limit Israel's thirst for barbaric vengeance in Gaza or the West Bank and avoid a general conflagration in the region.

Since the Obama era, when the United States began its "Asian pivot", it has not abandoned all ambitions for influence in the Near and Middle East. With the Abraham Accords in particular, Washington worked to establish a system of alliances between Israel and several Arab countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, to contain Iran's imperialist aspirations, delegating responsibility for maintaining order in the region to the Israeli state. But this was without taking into account the dynamics of increasingly unstable alliances and the deep-seated tendency towards every man for himself. For

the Israeli bourgeoisie no longer hesitates to put its own imperialist interests ahead of its traditional allegiance to the United States. While Washington favoured a two-state “solution”, Netanyahu and the right-wing factions of the Israeli bourgeoisie, encouraged by Trump, multiplied annexations in the West Bank, leaving the Palestinians completely on the sidelines. They were clearly playing with fire in the region, but were counting on American military and diplomatic support should tensions escalate. As a result, the United States now finds itself backed into a corner by Israel, forced to support Netanyahu’s irresponsible policies and to question the “Asian Pivot” strategy, which was precisely designed to extricate the United States from the endless conflicts ravaging the Middle East so that it could focus on containing the Chinese challenger. Today, however, they are obliged to send substantial naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean, intervene in the Red Sea, and reinforce their contingents in Iraq and Syria.

The Biden administration’s wilful reaction shows how little confidence it has in Netanyahu’s clique, and how worried it is about the prospect of a catastrophic conflagration in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a new flashpoint for US imperialist policy, which could prove calamitous if expanded. Washington would then have to assume a considerable military presence and support for Israel, which could only weigh heavily not only on the US economy, but also on its support for Ukraine and, even more so, on its strategy to stem China’s expansion. Moreover, the pro-Palestinian rhetoric of Turkey, an “incorrigible” NATO member, will also increase the risk of widening confrontations, as will the virulent criticism of Arab countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Washington is therefore trying to prevent the situation from getting out of hand ... a perfectly illusory ambition in the long term, given the disastrous dynamic into which the Middle East is sinking.

5.3. The explosion of contradictions within its political apparatus undermines US imperialist policy

Meanwhile, the United States is entering a period of electoral campaigning, and the destabilisation of the American political apparatus is accentuating the unpredictability of its political orientations, both internally and externally. Recurrent deadlocks in Congress have confirmed that the fractures between Democrats and Republicans are as deep and exacerbated as ever, as are the rifts within each of the two camps, as evidenced by the complicated election of the Republican speaker of the House of Representatives and the debate among

Democrats over the impact of Biden’s advanced age on his possible re-election. At the same time, campaigns aimed at sidelining Trump (e.g. the various lawsuits brought against him), have only served to divide American society ever more deeply and permanently, and make “The Donald” more popular than ever among a sizeable fringe of the American electorate.

Trump’s new presidential candidacy for the 2024 elections, still favoured by more than 30% of Americans (i.e., nearly 2/3 of Republican voters) and widely considered the favourite for the Republican nomination, is already bringing a dose of uncertainty to U.S. policy and is playing a role in Washington’s positioning in the two conflicts analysed above: in Ukraine, massive military support for Zelensky is now being called into question by the Republican majority’s refusal to endorse budgets for Ukraine, and Putin is counting on the fact that a Trump re-election will change the situation on the ground; in Israel, Netanyahu and right-wing factions are counting on the unconditional support of the Republican religious right to counter the policies of the Biden administration, while they too are awaiting the return of the Trump “messiah”.

In short, the unpredictable nature of US policy does not encourage other countries to take US promises at face value, and is in itself (in addition to its policy of polarisation) a factor in the intensification of chaos in the future.

Conclusions

Like the confrontation in Ukraine, the Gaza war confirms the dominant trend in the global imperialist situation: a growing irrationality fuelled on the one hand by the tendency of each imperialist power to act for itself, and on the other by the bloody policy of the dominant power, the USA, aimed at countering its inevitable decline by preventing the emergence of any potential challenger.

Whatever the outcome of these conflicts, the Biden administration’s current policy of confrontation is far from producing a lull in tensions or imposing discipline between imperialist vultures. Indeed, the policy

- accentuates economic and military tensions with Chinese imperialism;
- exacerbates the contradictions between imperialisms, whether in Central Europe or in the Middle East;
- intensifies the contradictions within the various bourgeoisies, in the United States, Russia, Ukraine and Israel of course, but also in Germany and

China.

Contrary to the rhetoric of its leaders, the offensive and brutal policies of the United States are therefore at the cutting edge of military barbarism and the destructive tendencies of decomposition.

For over 30 years, the struggle of American imperialism against its inevitable decline has increasingly been a central factor in heightening tensions and chaos. The initial success of the current US offensive was based on a characteristic highlighted as early as the early 1990s in the ICC Orientation Text “Militarism and Decomposition”,²⁹ namely the US’s economic and above all military supremacy, which exceeds the sum of potentially competing powers. Today, the USA is exploiting this advantage to the full in its policy of polarisation. However, this orientation has never led to greater order and discipline in imperialist relations – on the contrary, it has multiplied military confrontations, exacerbated every man for himself, sown barbarism and chaos in many regions (Middle East, Afghanistan, Central Europe, etc.), intensified terrorism, provoked huge waves of refugees and multiplied the appetites of small and large sharks alike.

For over 30 years too, the growing political tensions within the US bourgeoisie have been exploited to mystify the struggle of the American proletariat, by attempting to mobilise it in the fight against the “ruling elites”, by trying to divide it into “native” and “illegal immigrant” workers, or by trying to mobilise it in defence of democracy against the racist, fascist right. In this context, the workers’ struggles of 2022 and 2023 in the USA are a clear expression of the American working class’s refusal to be drawn into bourgeois terrain, and of their determination to defend themselves in a united fashion as an exploited class against any attack on their living and working conditions.

R.H. & Marsan 20.12.2023

29. “Orientation text: Militarism and decomposition”, *International Review* n° 64, 1991.

After the rupture in the the class struggle, the necessity for politicisation

"The UK is rocked by a historic strike" (Le Parisien, August 2022).

"Pension reform in France: historic mobilisation" (Midi libre, January 2023).

"Historic strike in German transport for better wages" (Euronews, March 2023).

"Canada: a historic strike by civil servants for a wage increase" (France 24, April 2023).

"United States: historic strike in the automotive sector" (France Info, September 2023).

"Iceland: historic strike against pay inequality" (Tf1, October 2023).

"In Bangladesh, a historic strike by textile workers" (Libération, November 2023).

"In Sweden, a historic inter-professional strike movement" (Libération, November 2023).

"Historic public services strike in Quebec" (Le Monde, December 2023).

The headlines leave no doubt: since July 2022, something is happening within the working class. The workers have returned to the path of proletarian struggle, at an international level. And this is indeed a "historic" event.

The ICC described this as a "rupture". We believe that this is a promising new dynamic for the future. Why is this so?

How can we understand the significance of the current resumption of the struggle?

In January 2022, while the Covid health crisis had not yet finished, we wrote in an international leaflet: *"In all countries, in all sectors, the working class is facing an unbearable degradation of its living and working conditions. All governments, whether of the right or the left, traditional or populist, are imposing one attack after the other as the world economic crisis goes from bad to worse. Despite the fear generated by an oppressive health crisis, the working class is beginning to react. In recent months, in the USA, in Iran, in Italy, in Korea, in Spain, France and Britain, struggles have broken out. These are not massive movements: the strikes and demonstrations are still weak and dispersed. Even so, the ruling class is keeping a wary eye on them, conscious of the widespread, rumbling anger. How are we to face up to the attacks of the ruling class? Are we to remain isolated and divided, everyone in 'their own' firm or sector? That's a guarantee of powerlessness. So how can we develop a united, massive struggle?"*¹

If we chose to produce and distribute this leaflet as early as the first month of 2022, it's because we were aware of the current potential of our class. In June, barely 5 months later, the UK's *"Summer of Anger"* broke out, the biggest wave of strikes in the country since 78/79 and its *"Winter of Discontent"*² a movement that heralded a whole series of "historic" struggles around the world. At the time of writing, this strike wave is spreading to Quebec.

To understand the depth of the process underway, and what is at stake, we need to adopt a historical approach, the same one that enabled us to detect this famous "rupture" as early as August 2022.

1910-1920

In August 1914, capitalism announced its entry into decadence in the most shattering and barbaric way imaginable: the First World War broke out. For four appalling years, in the name of the Fatherland, millions of proletarians had to slaughter each other in the trenches, while those left behind – men, women and children – toiled night and day to "support the war effort". The guns spit bullets, the factories spit guns. Everywhere, capitalism was gobbling up metal and lives.

Faced with these unbearable conditions, the workers rose up. Fraternisation at the front, strikes at the back. In Russia, the momentum became revolutionary: the October insurrection. The proletariat's seizure of power was a cry of hope heard

a united and massive struggle!"

2. As Shakespeare put it in *Richard III*.

by exploited people the world over. The revolutionary wave spread to Germany. It was this spread that put an end to the war: the bourgeoisies, terrified by this red epidemic, preferred to put an end to the carnage and unite against their common enemy: the working class. Here, the proletariat demonstrated its strength, its ability to organise en masse, to take the reins of society into its own hands and to offer the whole of humanity a prospect other than that promised by capitalism. On the one hand exploitation and war, on the other international solidarity and peace. On one side death, on the other life. If this victory was possible, it was because the class and its revolutionary organisations had accumulated a long experience over decades of political struggle since the first workers' strikes in the 1830s.

In Germany, in 1919, 1921 and 1923, attempted insurrections were put down in bloodshed (by the social democrats then in power!). Defeated in Germany, the revolutionary wave was broken and the proletariat found itself isolated in Russia. This defeat was obviously a tragedy, but above all it was an inexhaustible source of lessons for the future (how to deal with a strong, organised bourgeoisie, its democracy, its left; how to organise in permanent general assemblies; what role the party had and what relationship it had with the class, with the workers' assemblies and councils...).

1930-1940-1950

Since communism was only possible on a world scale, the isolation of the revolution in Russia inevitably meant degeneration. Thus, from "within", the situation would rot until the triumph of the counter-revolution. The tragedy was that this defeat also made it possible to fraudulently identify the revolution with Stalinism, which falsely presented itself as the heir to the revolution when in reality it was murdering it. Only a handful would see Stalinism as a counter-revolution. Others would either defend or reject it, but all of them would carry the lie of a 'continuity' between Marx, Lenin and Stalin, thus destroying the invaluable lessons of the revolution.

The proletariat was defeated on an international scale. It became incapable of reacting to the new ravages of the economic crisis: galloping inflation in Germany in the

1. "Against the attacks of the bourgeoisie, we need

1920s, the 1929 crash in the United States, mass unemployment everywhere. The bourgeoisie could unleash its monsters and march towards a new world war. Nazism, Francoism, fascism, anti-fascism... on both sides of the border, governments mobilised, accusing "the enemy" of being a barbarian. During these dark decades, internationalist revolutionaries were hunted down, deported and murdered. The survivors gave up, terrified or morally crushed. Still others, disorientated and victims of the "Stalinism = Bolshevism" lie, rejected all the lessons of the revolutionary wave and, for some, even the theory of the working class as a revolutionary class. It was "*midnight in the century*".³ Only a handful stayed the course, clinging to a deep understanding of what the working class is, what its struggle for revolution is, what the role of proletarian organisations is – embodying the historical dimension, continuity, memory and ongoing theoretical effort of the revolutionary class. This current is called the Communist Left.

At the end of the Second World War, major strikes in northern Italy, and to a lesser extent in France, gave reason to believe that the working class was about to awaken. Churchill and Roosevelt also believed it; drawing lessons from the end of the First World War and the revolutionary wave, they "preventively" bombed all the working-class districts of defeated Germany to guard against any risk of an uprising: Dresden, Hamburg, Cologne... all these cities were razed to the ground with incendiary bombs, killing hundreds of thousands. But in reality, this generation was far too marked by the counter-revolution and its ideological crushing since the 1920s. The bourgeoisie could continue to ask the exploited to sacrifice themselves without risking a reaction: it had to rebuild and increase production rates. The French Communist Party ordered us to "roll up our sleeves".

1968

It was against this backdrop that the biggest strike in history broke out: May '68 in France. Almost all the Communist Left ignored the significance of this event, completely failing to understand the profound change in the historical situation. A very small group of the Communist Left, apparently marginalised in Venezuela, took a completely different approach. From 1967, Internacionalismo understood that something was changing in the situation. On the one hand, its members noticed a slight upsurge in strikes and found people around the world interested in discussing

the revolution. There were also the reactions to the war in Vietnam which, while being distorted for pacifist purposes, showed that the passivity and acceptance of previous decades were beginning to fade. On the other hand, they understood that the economic crisis was making a comeback with the devaluation of the pound and the re-emergence of mass unemployment. So much so that in January 1968 they wrote: "*We are not prophets, and we do not pretend to guess when and how future events will unfold. But what we are sure of and aware of concerning the process in which capitalism is currently immersed is that it cannot be stopped (...) and that it is leading directly to crisis. And we are also sure that the opposite process of development of the combativity of the class, which we are now experiencing in general, will lead the working class to a bloody and direct struggle for the destruction of the bourgeois state*". (*Internacionalismo* n° 8). Five months later, the general strike of May '68 in France provided a resounding confirmation of these predictions. It was clearly not yet time for "*a direct struggle for the destruction of the bourgeois state*", but for a historic revival of the world proletariat, stirred up by the first manifestations of the open crisis of capitalism after the most profound counter-revolution in history. These predictions were not an expression of clairvoyance, but simply the result of Internacionalismo's remarkable mastery of marxism and the confidence that, even at the worst moments of the counter-revolution, this group had retained in the revolutionary capacities of the class. There were four elements at the heart of Internacionalismo's approach, four elements which would enable it to anticipate May '68 and then, in the very heat of the moment, to understand the historical break that this strike engendered, i.e. the end of the counter-revolution and the return of the proletarian struggle to the international stage. These four elements were a profound understanding of:

1. the historical role of the proletariat as a revolutionary class;
2. the seriousness of the economic crisis and its impact on the class as a spur to action;
3. the ongoing development of consciousness within the class, which can be seen in the questions raised in the discussions of minorities seeking revolutionary positions;
4. the international dimension of this general dynamic, economic crisis and class struggle.

In the background of all this, Internacionalismo had the idea that a new generation

was emerging, a generation that had not suffered the counter-revolution, a generation that was confronting the return of the economic crisis while having kept all its potential for reflection and struggle, a generation capable of bringing to the forefront the return of the proletariat in struggle. And that's what May '68 was, paving the way for a whole series of struggles at the international level. What's more, the whole social atmosphere was changing: after the years of defeat, workers were thirsty to discuss, elaborate and "remake the world", particularly the youth. The word "revolution" was everywhere. Texts by Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg and the Communist Left were circulating and provoking endless debate. The working class was trying to reappropriate its past and its experiences. Against this effort, a whole host of currents – Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism, Castroism, modernism, etc. – were working to pervert the lessons of 1917. The great lie of Stalinism = Communism was exploited in all its forms.

1970-1980

The first wave of struggles was undoubtedly the most spectacular: the hot autumn in Italy in 1969, the violent uprising in Cordoba in Argentina the same year and the huge strike in Poland in 1970, major movements in Spain and Great Britain in 1972... In Spain in particular, workers began to organise themselves through mass assemblies, a process that culminated in Vitoria in 1976. The international dimension of the wave carried its echoes as far as Israel (1969) and Egypt (1972) and, later, through the uprisings in the townships of South Africa, which were led by struggle committees (the "Civics"). Throughout this period, Internacionalismo worked to bring together revolutionary forces. A small group based in Toulouse and publishing a newspaper called *Révolution Internationale* joined this process. Together, they formed in 1975 what is still today the International Communist Current, our organisation. Our articles proclaimed "*Welcome to the crisis!*" because, in the words of Marx, we must not "*see in misery only misery*" but on the contrary "*the revolutionary, subversive side that will overthrow the old society*".⁴

After a brief pause in the mid-1970s, a second wave of strikes began to spread: strikes by Iranian oil workers and steelworkers in France in 1978, the "Winter of Discontent" in Great Britain, dockworkers in Rotterdam (led by an independent strike committee), and steelworkers in Brazil in 1979 (who also challenged union control). This wave of struggles culminated in the mass strike in Poland in 1980, led by an

3. Title of a book by the journalist and revolutionary Victor Serge.

4. *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847.

independent inter-factory strike committee (the MKS), certainly the most important episode in the class struggle since 1968. Although the severe repression of the Polish workers put a stop to this wave, it wasn't long before a new movement took place with the struggles in Belgium in 1983 and 1986, the general strike in Denmark in 1985, the miners' strike in England in 1984-85, the struggles of railway workers and health workers in France in 1986 and 1988, and the movement of education workers in Italy in 1987. The struggles in France and Italy in particular – like the mass strike in Poland – showed a real capacity for self-organisation with general assemblies and strike committees.

It's not just a list of strikes. This movement of waves of struggles was not going round in circles, but making real advances in class consciousness. As we wrote in April 1988, in an article entitled "20 years after May 1968": *"A simple comparison on the characteristics of the struggles of 20 years ago with those of today will allow us to see the extent of the evolution which has slowly taken place in the working class. Its own experience, added to the catastrophic evolution of the capitalist system, has enabled it to acquire a much more lucid view of the reality of its struggle. This has been expressed by;*

- *"a loss of illusions in the political forces if the left of capital and first and foremost in the unions, towards which illusions have given way to distrust and, increasingly, an open hostility;*
- *"the growing tendency to abandon ineffective forms of mobilisation, the dead-ends which the unions have used so many times to bury the combativity of the workers, such as days of action, token demonstrations, long and isolated strikes..."*

"But the experience of these 20 years of struggle hasn't only produced negative lessons for the working class (what should not be done). It has also produced lessons on what is to be done: the attempt to extend the struggle (especially Belgium '86);

- *"the attempt by workers to take the struggle into their own hands, by organising general assemblies and election, revocable strike committees (France '86, Italy '87 in particular)."*

It was this strength of the working class that prevented the Cold War from turning into the Third World War. While the bourgeoisies were welded into two blocs ready to do battle, the workers did not want to sacrifice their lives, by the millions, in the name of the Fatherland. This was also shown by the Vietnam war: faced with

the losses of the American army (58,281 soldiers), the protest swelled in the United States and forced the American bourgeoisie to withdraw from the conflict in 1973. The ruling class could not mobilise the exploited of every country into an open confrontation. Unlike in the 1930s, the proletariat was not defeated.

1990...

In reality, the 1980s were already beginning to reveal the difficulties the working class was having in developing its struggle further, in carrying forward its revolutionary project:

- The mass strike in Poland in 1980 was extraordinary in terms of its scale and the ability of the workers to organise themselves in the struggle. But it also showed that in the East, illusions in Western democracy were immense. Worse still, in the face of the repression that was falling on the strikers, the solidarity of the proletariat in the West was reduced to platonic declarations, incapable of seeing that on both sides of the Iron Curtain it was in fact one and the same struggle of the working class against capitalism. This was the first indication of the proletariat's inability to politicise its struggle, to further develop its revolutionary consciousness.
- In 1981, US President Ronald Reagan sacked 11,000 air traffic controllers on the grounds that their strike was illegal. This ability of the American bourgeoisie to put down a strike using the weapon of repression showed where the balance of power stood.
- The repression in Poland and the strike in the United States acted as a real blow to the international proletariat for almost two years.
- In 1984, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher went much further. At the time, Britain's working class was reputed to be the most militant in the world, setting a record for the number of strike days year after year. The Iron Lady provoked the miners; hand in hand with the unions, she isolated them from the rest of their class siblings; for a year, they fought alone, until they were exhausted (Thatcher and her government had prepared their coup by secretly accumulating stocks of coal); the demonstrations were put down in bloodshed (three dead, 20,000 injured, 11,300 arrested). It would take the British proletariat 40 years to recover from this blow, and it would remain sluggish and submissive until the summer of 2022 (we'll come back to this later). Above all,

this defeat showed that the proletariat had not managed to understand the trap, to break through the union sabotage and division. The politicisation of struggles remained largely insufficient, which represented a growing handicap.

One little sentence from our 1988 article, which we have already quoted, sums up the crucial problem of the proletariat at the time: *"Perhaps it is less easy to talk about revolution in 1988 than in 1968"*. At the time, we ourselves did not sufficiently understand the full significance of this observation, we were merely sensing it. In fact, the generation that had accomplished its task by putting an end to the counter-revolution in May 1968 could not also develop the revolutionary project of the proletariat.

This lack of perspective was beginning to affect the whole of society: nihilism and drug-addiction were spreading everywhere. It's no coincidence that it was around this time that two little words contained in a song by the punk band The Sex Pistols were being spray-painted on the walls of London: *No future*.

It was in this context, as the limits of the '68 generation and the rotting of society began to emerge, that a terrible blow was dealt to our class: the collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989-91 unleashed a deafening campaign on the "death of communism". The great lie "Stalinism = Communism" was once again exploited to the full; all the abominable crimes of this regime, which was in reality capitalist, were attributed to the working class and "its" system. Worse still, it was trumpeted day and night: *"This is where the workers' struggle leads, to barbarism and bankruptcy! This is where the dream of revolution leads: to a nightmare!"* The result was terrible: the workers were ashamed of their struggle, of their class, of their history. Deprived of perspective, they denied themselves and lost their class memory. All the lessons and achievements of the great social movements of the past fell into the limbo of oblivion. This historic change in the world situation plunged humanity into a new phase of capitalist decline: the phase of decomposition.

Decomposition is not a fleeting, superficial moment; it is a profound dynamic that dominates society. Decomposition is the last phase of decadent capitalism, a phase of agony that will end in the death of humanity or revolution. It is the fruit of the years 1970-1980, during which neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat was able to impose its perspective: war for one, revolution for the other. Decomposition expresses this historical deadlock between the classes:

1. The bourgeoisie did not inflict a decisive historic defeat on the working class that would have enabled it to mobilise for a new world war.
2. The working class, despite 20 years of struggle which prevented the march to war, and which saw important developments in class consciousness, has not been able to develop the perspective of revolution, to pose its own political alternative to the crisis of the system.

As a result, deprived of any way out but still sinking into economic crisis, decadent capitalism has begun to rot on its feet. This putrefaction is affecting society at every level, with the absence of prospects and a future acting like a veritable poison: a rise in individualism, irrationality, violence, self-destruction and so on. Fear and hatred gradually took over. Drug cartels developed in South America, racism was everywhere... Thought was marked by an inability to think ahead, by a shortsighted and narrow vision; the politics of the bourgeoisie was itself increasingly limited to the piecemeal. This daily deluge inevitably permeates the proletarians, especially as they no longer believe in the future of the revolution, are ashamed of their past and no longer feel themselves to be a class. Atomised, reduced to individual citizens, they bear the full brunt of the rotting of society. The most serious problem is surely the amnesia about the gains and advances of the 1968-1989 period.

To drive the point home, the economic policy of the ruling class deliberately attacks any sense of class identity, both by breaking up the old industrial centres of working-class resistance and by introducing much more atomised forms of work, such as the so-called "gig economy", where workers are regularly treated as "self-employed".

For a whole section of working-class youth, the consequence is catastrophic: a tendency to form gangs in urban centres, which express both a lack of any economic prospects and a desperate search for an alternative community, leading to the creation of murderous divisions between young people, based on rivalries between different neighbourhoods and different conditions, on competition for control of the local drug economy, or on racial or religious differences.

While the '68 generation suffered this setback, the generation entering adulthood in 1990 – with the lie of "the death of communism" and the dynamic of social decomposition – seemed lost to the class struggle.

2000-2010

In 1999, at a World Trade Organisation (WTO) conference in Seattle, a new political movement came to the fore: anti-globalisation. 40,000 demonstrators, the vast majority of them young people, rose up against the development of a capitalist society that was commodifying the entire planet. At the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, they numbered 300,000.

What does the emergence of this trend reveal? In 1990, US President George Bush senior promised a "new world order" of "peace and prosperity", but the reality of the decade was quite different: the Gulf War in 1991, the war in Yugoslavia in 1993, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the crisis and collapse of the "Asian Tigers" in 1997, and rising unemployment, job insecurity and "flexibility" everywhere. In short, capitalism continued to sink into decadence. This inevitably prompted the working class and all sections of society to worry, question and reflect. Each in its own corner. The emergence of the anti-globalisation movement was the result of this dynamic: a "citizens'" protest against "globalisation", calling for "fair" global capitalism. It is an aspiration for another world, but on a non-working class, non-revolutionary terrain, on the bourgeois terrain of belief in democracy.

The years 2000-2010 were to see a succession of attempts at struggle, all of which were to come up against this decisive weakness linked to the loss of class identity.

On 15 February 2003, the world's largest recorded demonstration (to this day) took place. 3 million people in Rome, 1 million in Barcelona, 2 million in London, etc. The aim was to protest against the looming war in Iraq – a conflict which would actually break out in March. On the pretext of fighting terrorism, it would last 8 years and kill 1.2 million people. In reaction, there is the revulsion against war, whereas the successive wars of the 1990s had not aroused any resistance. But above all, it was a movement based on civic and pacifist values; it was not the working class that was fighting against the warlike intentions of their states, but a mass of citizens demanding that their governments adopt a policy of peace.

In May-June 2003, a series of demonstrations broke out in France against a reform of the pension system. A strike broke out in the national education sector, and the threat of a "general strike" loomed large. In the end, however, it did not happen, and the teachers remained isolated. This sectoral confinement was obviously the result of

a deliberate policy of division on the part of the unions, but the sabotage succeeded because it was based on a major weakness in the class: teachers saw themselves as separate, not as workers, not as members of the working class. For the moment, the very notion of the working class was still lost in limbo, rejected, outdated and shameful.

In 2006, students in France mobilised en masse against a special precarious contract for young people: the CPE. The movement demonstrated a paradox: the class was still thinking about the issue, but it didn't know it. The students rediscovered a genuinely working-class form of struggle: general assemblies. They were open to workers, the unemployed and retired people, and the interventions of older people were applauded. The slogan used in the marches became: "*Young lardons, old croutons, all the same salad*". This was the emergence of working-class solidarity between the generations, and the understanding that everyone was affected, and that everyone had to pull together. This movement, which went beyond the trade union framework, contained the "risk" (for the bourgeoisie) of drawing employees and workers down a similarly "uncontrolled" path. The government withdrew its bill. This victory marked a step forward in the efforts made by the working class since the early 2000s to emerge from the doldrums of the 1990s. In the heat of the struggle, we published and distributed a supplement in France with the headline "*Welcome to the new generations of the working class*". And indeed, this movement showed the emergence of a new generation that has experienced neither the loss of momentum of the struggles of the 1980s and sometimes their repression, nor directly the great lie "Stalinism = Communism", "revolution = barbarism", a new generation hit by the development of the crisis and precariousness, a new generation ready to refuse the sacrifices imposed and to fight. But this generation also grew up in the 1990s, and what marks it most is the apparent absence of the working class, the disappearance of its project and its experience. This new generation had to "reinvent" itself; as a result, it was taking up the methods of struggle of the proletariat but – and the "but" is a big one – in a non-conscious way, by instinct, by diluting itself in the mass of "citizens". It's a bit like in Molière's play where Monsieur Jourdain makes prose without knowing it. This explains why, once the movement had disappeared, it left no apparent traces: no groups, no newspapers, no books... The protagonists themselves seemed to forget very quickly what they had experienced.

The "*movement of the squares*" (the so-called Arab Spring, Occupy, etc) that

swept the world a few years later was to be a flagrant demonstration of these contradictory forces, of this momentum and these profound and historic weaknesses. Combativity developed, as did reflection, but without reference to the working class and its history, without a sense of belonging to the proletariat, without a class identity.

On 15 September 2008, the biggest bankruptcy in history, that of the investment bank Lehman Brothers, triggered a wave of international panic; it was the so-called “subprime” crisis. Millions of workers lost their meagre investments and pensions, and austerity plans plunged entire populations into misery. Immediately, the propaganda steamroller was set in motion: it was not the capitalist system that was once again showing its limitations, but the crooked and greedy bankers who were the cause of all the ills. The proof is that some countries are doing well, notably the BRICS and China in particular. The very form that this crisis is taking, a “credit crunch” involving a massive loss of savings for millions of workers, made it even more difficult to respond on a class basis, since the impact seems to be affecting individual households rather than an associated class. Which is precisely the Achilles heel of the proletariat since 1990: forgetting that it exists and that it is even the main force in society.

In 2010, the French bourgeoisie seized on this context of great confusion in the class to orchestrate, with its unions, a series of fourteen days of action which ended in victory for the government (the adoption of yet another pension reform), exhaustion and demoralisation. By limiting the struggle to union marches, with no life or discussion in the processions, the bourgeoisie succeeded in exploiting the great political weaknesses of the workers to erase even further the main positive lesson of the anti-CPE movement of 2006: general assemblies as the lifeblood of the struggle.

On 17 December 2010, in Tunisia, a young itinerant fruit and vegetable seller saw his meagre goods requisitioned by the police, who beat him up. In despair, he set himself on fire. What followed was a veritable cry of anger and indignation that shook the whole country and crossed borders. The appalling poverty and repression throughout the Maghreb pushed people to revolt. The masses gathered, first in Tahrir Square in Egypt. The workers who were fighting found themselves diluted in the crowd, in the midst of all the other non-working classes in society. “*Mubarak out*”, “*Gaddafi out*”, and so on. The protagonists demanded democracy and the sharing of wealth. The widespread anger led to these illusory, bourgeois slogans.

In 2011, in Spain, a whole generation of underprivileged people, forced to stay at home with their parents, took inspiration from what is now known as the “Arab Spring” and invaded Madrid’s main square. The slogan was: “*From Tahrir Square to the Puerta del Sol*”. The “Indignados” movement was born and spread throughout the country. Although it brought together all strata of society, as in North Africa, here the working class was in the majority. So the gatherings took the form of assemblies to debate and organise. When we took part, we noticed a kind of internationalist impetus in the many eager acknowledgements of the numerous expressions of solidarity from all corners of the world; the slogan “*world revolution*” was taken seriously, there was a recognition that “*the system is obsolete*” and a strong desire to discuss the possibility of a new form of social organisation.

In the United States, Israel and the United Kingdom, this “movement of the squares” took on the name “Occupy”. The participants spoke of their suffering as a result of the precariousness and flexibility that made it almost impossible to have real, stable colleagues or the slightest social life. This destructuring and relentless exploitation individualises, isolates and atomises. The Occupy protagonists were delighted to be able to get together and form a community, to be able to talk and even live as part of a collective. So there’s already a kind of regression here compared to the Indignados, because it’s less a question of fighting than of being together. But above all, Occupy was born in the United States, the country of workers’ repression under Reagan, the country that symbolised the victory of capitalism over “communism”, the country that championed the replacement of the working class by self-employed individuals, freelancers and so on. This movement was therefore extremely marked by the loss of class identity, by the erasure of all the accumulated but repressed working-class experience. Occupy focused on the theory of the 1% (the minority who own the wealth... in fact the bourgeoisie) to demand more democracy and a better distribution of goods. In other words, dangerous wishful thinking for a better, fairer, more humane capitalism. Moreover, the stronghold of the movement was set up in Wall Street, the New York stock exchange (Occupy Wall Street), to symbolise that the enemy is crooked finance.

But in the end, this weakness also marked the Indignados: the tendency to see themselves as “citizens” rather than proletarians made the whole movement vulnerable to democratic ideology, which ended up allowing bourgeois parties like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain to present themselves as the true heirs of

these revolts. “*Democracia Real Ya*” (Real Democracy Now!) became the watchword of the movement.

In the end, the ebb of this “movement of the squares” further deepened the general retreat of class consciousness. In Egypt, illusions about democracy paved the way for the restoration of the same kind of authoritarian governance that was the initial catalyst for the “Arab Spring”; in Israel, where mass demonstrations once launched the internationalist slogan: “Netanyahu, Mubarak, Assad, same enemy”, the brutal militarist policies of the Netanyahu government took over again; in Spain, many young people who had taken part in the movement became embroiled in the absolute impasse of Catalan or Spanish nationalism. In the United States, the focus on the 1% fuelled populist sentiment against “the elites”, “the Establishment”...

The period 2003-2011 thus represents a whole series of efforts by our class to fight against the continuing deterioration of living and working conditions under capitalism in crisis, but, deprived of class identity, it ended up (temporarily) in a greater slump. And the worsening decomposition in the 2010s would make these difficulties even greater: development of populism, with all the irrationality and hatred that this bourgeois political current contains, proliferation on an international scale of terrorist attacks, seizure of power over whole regions by drug traffickers in South America, by warlords in the Middle East, Africa and the Caucasus, huge waves of migrants fleeing the horror of hunger, war, barbarism, desertification linked to global warming... the Mediterranean is becoming a watery graveyard.

This rotten and deadly dynamic tends to reinforce nationalism and to rely on the “protection” of the state, to be influenced by the false critiques of the system offered by populism (and, for a minority, by jihadism), to adhere to “identity politics”... The lack of class identity is aggravated by the tendency towards fragmentation into racial, sexual and other identities, which in turn reinforces exclusion and division, whereas only the proletariat fighting for its own interests can be truly inclusive.

In short, capitalist society is rotting on its feet.

2020...

But the current situation is not just one of decay. Other forces are at work: as decadence sinks in, the economic crisis worsens and with it the need to fight; the horror of everyday life constantly raises questions in the minds of workers; the struggles of

recent years have begun to bring some answers and these experiences are digging their furrow without us realising it. In the words of Marx: *"We recognise our old friend, our old mole who knows so well how to work underground, only to appear suddenly"*.

In 2019, a social movement developed in France against a new "pension reform" (sic). Even more than the fighting spirit, which is very high, what attracts our attention is the trend towards solidarity between the generations that is being expressed in the processions: many blue-collar workers in their sixties - and therefore not directly affected by the reform - are striking and demonstrating to ensure that younger employees do not suffer this government attack. The intergenerational solidarity that was very much in evidence in 2006 seems to be re-emerging. We heard demonstrators chanting *"The working class exists"*, singing *"We're here, we're here for the honour of the workers and for a better world"*, and defending the idea of *"class war"*. Even if it's a minority, the idea is back in the air, something that hasn't happened for 30 years!

In 2020 and 2021, during the Covid pandemic and its many confinements, we noted the existence of strikes in the United States, Iran, Italy, Korea, Spain and France which, even if they were scattered, testified to the depth of anger, since it is particularly difficult to fight in these times of state-led campaigns in the name of *"health for all"*.

That's why, in January 2022, when inflation made a comeback after almost 30 years of lull on this economic front, we decided to write an international leaflet:

"Prices are soaring, particularly for basic necessities: food, energy, transport... the concrete reality is more and more people struggling to feed themselves, to find accommodation, to keep warm, to travel."

And it is in this leaflet that we announced: *"In every country, in every sector, the working class is suffering an unbearable deterioration in its living and working conditions (...) Attacks are raining down under the weight of the worsening global economic crisis. (...) Despite the fear of an oppressive health crisis, the working class is beginning to react (...) Admittedly, these are not massive movements: strikes and demonstrations are still too few and far between. But the bourgeoisie is watching them like a hawk, aware of the scale of the anger that is growing. (...) So how can we develop a united and massive struggle?"*

The outbreak of war in Ukraine a month later caused alarm; the class feared that the conflict would spread and degenerate.

But, at the same time, the war considerably worsened inflation. Added to the disastrous effects of Brexit, it is the United Kingdom that is hardest hit.

Faced with this unbearable deterioration in living and working conditions, strikes broke out in the UK in a wide range of sectors (health, education, transport, etc.): it was what the media called *"The Summer of Anger"*, in reference to *"The Winter of Discontent"* in 1978/79 (which remains the most massive movement of any country after that of May 1968 in France)!

By drawing this parallel between these two major movements, separated by 43 years, journalists are saying much more than they realise. Because behind this expression of "anger" lies an extremely profound movement. Two expressions will run from picket line to picket line: *"Enough is enough"* and *"We are workers"*. In other words, if British workers are standing up to inflation, it's not just because their situation is unsustainable. The crisis is a necessary whip, but not sufficient in itself. It is also because awareness has matured in the heads of the workers, that the mole which has been digging for decades is now poking out a little piece of its snout. Taking up the method of our ancestors in Internationalismo, which enabled them to anticipate the coming of May 1968 and then to understand its historical significance, we have been able since August 2022 to point out in our international leaflet that the awakening of the British proletariat has a global and historical significance; that's why our leaflet concludes with: *"The massive strikes in the UK are a call to action for proletarians everywhere"*. The fact that the proletariat which founded the First International with the French proletariat in 1864 in London, which was the most combative of the 1970-80 decade, which suffered a major defeat at the hands of Thatcher in 1984-85 and which since then had not been able to react, announces that now "enough is enough" reveals what is maturing in the depths of our class: the proletariat is beginning to recover its class identity, to feel more confident, to feel itself a social and collective force.

Especially as these strikes are taking place at a time when the war in Ukraine and all its patriotic rhetoric are raging. As we said in our leaflet at the end of August 2022:

"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 (...) 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."

While strikes were continuing in the UK, affecting more and more sectors, a major social movement was taking place in France against... pension reform. The same characteristics were apparent on both sides of the Channel: in France, too, the demonstrators emphasised that they belonged to the workers' camp, and the slogan *"Enough is enough"* was taken up in the form of *"ça suffit"*. Obviously, the proletariat in France brought to this international dynamic its habit of taking to the streets en masse, which contrasted with the scattered pickets imposed by the unions in the United Kingdom. Even more significant of the contribution made by this episode of struggle to the global international process was the slogan that flourished everywhere in the processions: *"You give us 64, we'll give you 68"* (the government wanted to push back the legal retirement age to 64, and the demonstrators countered with their desire to re-enact May 68). Apart from the excellent pun (the inventiveness of the working class in struggle), this immediately popular slogan indicates that the proletariat, by beginning to recognise itself as a class, by beginning to recover its class identity, is also beginning to remember, to reactivate its dormant memory. We were surprised, moreover, to see references to the 2006 movement against the CPE. We published and distributed a new leaflet immediately, going back over the chronology of the movement and its lessons (the importance of open and sovereign general assemblies, i.e. really organised and run

by the assembly and not by the unions). When they saw the title, the demonstrators came to ask us for the paper and some, after reading it, thanked us when they saw us again on the pavement.

So it's not just the "break with the past" factor that explains the ability of the current new generation to lead the whole proletariat into the struggle. On the contrary, the notion of continuity is perhaps even more important. So we were right to write in 2020: *"The gains of the struggles of the 1968-89 period have not been lost, even if they may have been forgotten by many workers (and revolutionaries): the fight for self-organisation and the extension of struggles; the beginnings of an understanding of the anti-worker role of the unions and the parties of the capitalist left; resistance to being dragooned into war; distrust towards the electoral and parliamentary game, etc. Future struggles will have to be based on the critical assimilation of these gains, taking them further, and certainly not denying or forgetting them."*⁵

The experience accumulated by previous generations since '68, and even since the beginning of the workers' movement, has not been erased but buried in a dormant memory; reclaiming class identity means that it can be reactivated, and that the working class can set out to reclaim its own history.

In concrete terms, the generations who lived through '68 and the confrontation with the unions in the 70s and 80s are still alive today, and can tell their stories and pass them on. The "lost" generation of the 90s will also be able to contribute. The young people from the 2006 and 2011 assemblies will finally be able to understand what they did, the meaning of their self-organisation, and tell the new generation about it. On the one hand, this new generation of the 2020s has not suffered the defeats of the 1980s (under Thatcher and Reagan), nor the lie of 1990 about the death of communism and the end of the class struggle, nor the years of darkness that followed; on the other hand, it has grown up in a permanent economic crisis and a world in perdition, which is why it carries within it an undiminished fighting spirit. This new generation can draw all the others along behind it, while having to listen to them and learn from their experiences, their victories and their defeats. The past, the present and the future can once again come together. This is the full potential of the current and future movements, this is what lies behind the notion of "rupture": a new dynamic that breaks with the apathy

and amnesia that have dominated since 1990, a new dynamic that reappropriates the history of the workers' movement in a critical way to take it much further. The strikes that are developing today are the fruit of the subterranean maturation of previous decades, and can in turn lead to a much greater maturation.

And obviously, those who represent this historical continuity and memory, the revolutionary organisations, have a huge role to play in this process.

Faced with the devastating effects of decomposition, the proletariat will have to politicise its struggles

Since 2020 and the Covid pandemic, the decomposition of capitalism has accelerated across the planet. All the crises of this decadent system – health, economic, climate, social and war crises – are intertwining to form a devastating vortex.⁶ This dynamic threatens to drag all humanity to its doom.

The working class is therefore faced with a major challenge, that of developing its revolutionary project and putting forward its perspective, that of communism, in this context of generalised rot. To do this, it must be able to resist all the centrifugal forces that are relentlessly exerting pressure on it; it must be able to resist the social fragmentation that encourages racism, confrontation between rival gangs, withdrawal and fear; it must be able to resist the siren calls of nationalism and war (supposedly humanitarian, anti-terrorist, "resistance", etc. – the bourgeoisies always accuse the enemy of barbarity to justify their own). Resisting all this rot which is gradually eating away at the whole of society, and succeeding in developing its struggle and its prospects, necessarily implies that the whole working class must raise its level of consciousness and organisation, succeed in politicising its struggles, and create places for debate, for working out and taking control of strikes by the workers themselves.

So what do all these strikes, described by the media as "historic", tell us about the current dynamic and the ability of our class to continue its efforts, despite being surrounded by a world in perdition?

Social fragmentation versus workers' solidarity

The solidarity that has been expressed in all the strikes and social movements since 2022 shows that the working class, when it fights back, not only manages to resist this social putrefaction, but also initiates

the beginnings of an antidote, the promise of another possible perspective: proletarian fraternity. Its struggle is the antithesis of the war of all against all towards which decomposition is pushing.

On the picket lines and in the processions of demonstrators, in France and Iceland, the most common expressions are *"We're all in the same boat"* and *"We have to fight together"*.

Even in the United States, a country plagued by violence, drugs, and racial division, the working class has been able to put forward the question of workers' solidarity between sectors and between generations. The evidence emerging from this summer's "historic" strike, the heart of which was the car workers, even shows that the process continues to progress and deepen:

- *"We have to say that enough is enough! Not just us, but the entire working class of this country has to say, at some point, enough is enough (...) We've all had enough: temps have had enough, long-tenured employees like me have had enough... because these temps are our children, our neighbours, our friends"* (Littlejohn, skilled trades maintenance manager at Ford's Buffalo stamping plant in the United States).
- *"All these groups are not simply separate movements, but a collective rallying cry: we are a city of workers – blue-collar and white-collar, union and non-union, immigrant and native-born"* (Los Angeles Times).
- *"The Stellantis complex in Toledo, Ohio, was abuzz with cheers and horns at the start of the strike"* (The Wall Street Journal).
- *"Horns honk in support of strikers outside the carmaker's plant in Wayne, Michigan"* (The Guardian).

This solidarity is explicitly based on the idea that "we are all workers"!

What a contrast to the attempted anti-immigrant pogroms that took place in Dublin (Ireland) and Romans-sur-Isère (France)! In both cases, following a fatal stabbing, a section of the population blamed the murders on immigration and demanded revenge, taking to the streets to lynch people. These are not isolated and insignificant incidents; on the contrary, they herald the general drift of society. Brawls between gangs of young people, attacks, murders committed by unbalanced individuals and nihilistic riots are multiplying and will only increase again and again.

The forces of decomposition will gradually drive social fragmentation; the working class will find itself in the midst of grow-

5. "The Responsibilities of revolutionaries in the current period: the different facets of fraction-like work", *International Review* n° 164, 2020.

6. See: "The acceleration of capitalist decomposition openly raises the question of the destruction of humanity", *International Review* n°169, 2023.

ing hatred. To resist these fetid winds, it will have to continue its efforts to develop its struggle and its consciousness. The instinct for solidarity will not be enough; the working class will also have to work towards unity, in other words, towards taking conscious control of its links and its organisation in the struggle. This will inevitably mean confronting the unions and their permanent sabotage of division. So here we come back to the need to reappropriate the lessons of the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s.

War versus internationalism

The crossing of the Atlantic by the cry “*Enough is enough*” reveals the profoundly international nature of our class and its struggle. The strikes in the United States are the direct result of the strikes in the United Kingdom. So here too we were right when we wrote in the spring of 2023: “*English being, moreover, the language of world communication, the influence of these movements necessarily surpasses the possible impact 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 in particular to the American proletariat.*”⁷

During the strike by the Big Three (Ford, Chrysler, General Motors) in the United States, the feeling of being an international class began to emerge. In addition to this explicit reference to the UK strikes, the workers tried to unify the struggle on both sides of the American-Canadian border. The bourgeoisie was not mistaken: it understood the danger of such a dynamic and the Canadian government immediately signed an agreement with the unions to put a premature stop to this vestige of common struggle and thus prevent any possibility of unification.

During the movement in France too, there were expressions of international solidarity. As we wrote in our April 2023 leaflet: “*Proletarians are beginning to reach out to each other across borders, as we saw with the strike by workers in a Belgian refinery in solidarity with workers in France, or the strike by the ‘Mobilier national’ in France, before the (postponed) visit of Charles III to Versailles, in solidarity with the English workers who have been on strike for weeks for wage increases.*”⁸ Through these still very embryonic expressions of solidarity, workers began to

recognise themselves as an international class: “*We’re all in the same boat!*”

In fact, the return of working-class combativity since the summer of 2022 has an international dimension that is perhaps even stronger than in the 1960s/70s/80s. Why is this so?

- because “globalisation”, this extremely tightly woven global economic fabric, gives the economic crisis an equally immediate global dimension;
- because there are no longer any areas that are “resisting” the economic crisis; China and Germany are now also being hit, unlike in 2008 (which says a lot about the seriousness of this ongoing open crisis);
- because the proletariat faces the same deteriorating living conditions everywhere;
- and, last but not least, because the links between proletarians in different countries have become much closer (economic collaboration via multinationals, intense international migration, globalised information, etc.).

In China, “growth” continues to slow and unemployment to soar. Official Chinese government figures show that a quarter of young people are unemployed! In response, struggles are developing: “*Hit by the drop in orders, factories employing very large numbers of workers are relocating and laying off workers. Strikes against unpaid wages and demonstrations against dismissals without compensation multiplied*”. Such strikes in a country where the working class is under the ideological and repressive blanket of “communism” are particularly significant of the scale of the anger that is brewing. With the probable collapse of the property construction sector just around the corner, we’ll have to keep an eye on the possible reactions of the workers.

For the time being, in the rest of Asia, it is above all in South Korea that the proletariat has returned to strike action, with a major general strike last July.

This profoundly international dimension of the class struggle, this beginning of an understanding that striking workers are all fighting for the same interests whatever side of the border they are on, represents the exact opposite of the intrinsically imperialist nature of capitalism. The opposition between two poles is developing before our eyes: one made up of international solidarity, the other made up of increasingly barbaric and murderous wars.

That said, the working class is still a long way from being strong enough, conscious and organised enough, to stand up explicitly

against war, or even against the effects of the war economy:

- In Western Europe and North America, for the time being, the two major wars underway do not seem to be substantially affecting workers’ combativity. Strikes in the United Kingdom began just after the start of the war in Ukraine, the car industry strike in the United States continued despite the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, and other strikes have since developed in Canada, Iceland and Sweden... But the fact remains that workers have not yet managed to incorporate into their struggle – in their slogans and their debates – the link between inflation, the blows dealt by the bourgeoisie and the war. This difficulty is due to the workers’ lack of self-confidence, their lack of awareness of the strength they represent as a class; to stand up against the war and its consequences appears to be far too great a challenge, overwhelming, out of reach. Achieving this link depends on a higher degree of consciousness. It took the international proletariat three years to make this link in the face of the First World War. In the 1968-1989 period, the proletariat was unable to make this link, which was one of the factors inhibiting its ability to develop its politicisation. So, after 30 years of hindsight, we shouldn’t expect the proletariat to take this fundamental step straight away. It is a profoundly political step, which will mark a crucial break with bourgeois ideology. It is a step that requires an understanding that capitalism is military barbarism, that permanent war is not something accidental but a characteristic of decadent capitalism.
- In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the war has had an absolutely disastrous impact; there has been no opposition – not even pacifist demonstrations – to the war. Although the conflict has already claimed 500,000 lives (250,000 on each side), and young people in Russia and Ukraine are fleeing the mobilisation to save their skins, there has been no collective protest. The only way out is for individuals to desert and go into hiding. This absence of class reaction confirms that while 1989 was a blow against the whole proletariat at world level, the workers of the Stalinist countries were hit even harder. The extreme weakness of the Eastern European working class is the tip of the iceberg of the weakness of the working class in the countries of the whole of the former USSR. The threat of war hanging over the countries of ex-Yugoslavia is partly permitted by this profound weakness of the proletariat living there.

7. “Report on the class struggle to the 25th ICC Congress”, *International Review* n° 170, 2023.

8. Since “L’été de la rupture en 2022”, we’ve written 7 different leaflets, with over 130,000 copies distributed in France alone.

– As for China, it is difficult to assess precisely where the working class in that country stands in relation to the war. We need to keep a close eye on the situation and how it develops. The scale of the coming economic crisis will have a major impact on the dynamics of the proletariat. Having said that, as in Eastern Europe, Stalinism (dead or alive) will continue to play its role against our class. When you have to study the (distorted) ideas of Karl Marx at school, you can only be disgusted with marxism.

In fact, each war – which will inevitably break out – will pose different problems for the world proletariat. The war in Ukraine does not pose the same problems as the war in Gaza, which does not pose the same problems as the looming war in Taiwan. For example, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is creating a rotten situation of hatred in the central countries between the Jewish and Muslim communities, which allows the bourgeoisie to create a huge hype of division.

But in the West as in the East, in the North as in the South, we can nevertheless recognise that, generally speaking, the process of developing consciousness on the question of war will be very difficult, and there is no guarantee that the proletariat will succeed in carrying it through. As we pointed out 33 years ago: *“Contrary to the past, the development of a new revolutionary wave will not come from a war but from the worsening of the economic crisis (...) working class mobilisation, the starting point for large-scale class combats, will come from economic attacks. In the same way, at the level of consciousness, the aggravation of the crisis will be a fundamental factor in revealing the historical dead-end of the capitalist mode of production. But on this same level of consciousness, the question of war is once again destined to play a part of the first order:*

- *“by highlighting the fundamental consequences of this historical dead-end: the destruction of humanity;*
- *by constituting the only objective consequence of the crisis, decadence and decomposition that the proletariat can today set a limit to (unlike any of the other manifestations of decomposition), to the extent that in the central countries it is not at present enrolled under the flags of nationalism.”*⁹

Here again, we can see the extent to which the proletariat’s ability to politicise its struggles will be the key to the future.

Populist irrationality versus revolutionary consciousness

The worsening of decomposition is putting a whole series of obstacles in the path of the working class towards revolution. In addition to social fragmentation, war and chaos, populism will flourish.

Javier Milei has just been elected President of Argentina. The 23rd world power finds itself with a man at the head of its state who declares that the earth is flat! He holds his meetings with a chainsaw in his hand. In short, he makes Trump look like a man of science. Beyond the anecdote, this shows the extent to which decomposition is advancing and engulfing ever larger sections of the ruling class in its irrationality and rot:

- In the United States, Trump is the favourite for the next presidential election.
- In France, for the first time, the possibility of the far right coming to power is becoming credible, and even highly probable.
- Italy is led by the Meloni government.
- In Holland, the victory of Geert Wilde, a self-confessed Islamophobe and Eurosceptic, came as a surprise to all the experts.
- In Germany, populism is also on the rise, fuelled above all by hate speech in the face of massive waves of refugees.

So far, all this putrefaction has not prevented the working class from developing its struggles and its consciousness. But we must keep our minds and eyes wide open to follow developments and assess the weight of populism on the rational thinking that the proletariat must develop to carry through its revolutionary project.

This decisive step in the politicisation of struggles was missing in the 1980s. Today, it is in the much more difficult context of decomposition that the proletariat must succeed in achieving it, otherwise capitalism will sweep all humanity into barbarism, chaos and, ultimately, death.

The victorious outcome of a revolution is possible. It’s not just decomposition that’s progressing, but also the objective conditions for revolution: an increasingly devastating world economic crisis that’s pushing us towards struggle; a working class that’s ever more numerous, concentrated and linked on an international scale; an accumulation of historic working-class experience.

As we slide deeper into decadence, the need for world revolution becomes ever more apparent!

To achieve this, the current efforts of our class will have to continue, in particular the reappropriation of the lessons of the past (the waves of struggle of the 1970s-80s, the revolutionary wave of the 1910s-20s). The current generation that is rising up belongs to a whole chain that links us to the first struggles, the first fights of our class since the 1830s!

Eventually, we will also have to break the great lie that has hung over us since the counter-revolution, namely that Stalinism = Communism.

It is in the heat of the struggles to come, in the political struggle against trade union sabotage, against the sophisticated traps of the great democracies, by managing to come together in assemblies, in committees, in circles to debate and decide, that our class will learn all these necessary lessons. For, as Rosa Luxemburg wrote in a letter to Mehring: *“Socialism is not, precisely, a bread and butter problem, but a movement of culture, a great and powerful conception of the world.”*¹⁰

Yes, this path will be difficult, rugged and uncertain, but there is no other way.

Gracchus

9. “Militarism and decomposition”, *International Review* n° 64, 1991.

10. Rosa Luxemburg, letter to Franz Mehring.

Jacques Camatte: From Bordigism to the negation of the proletariat, part 1

Jacques Camatte is undoubtedly one of the founding fathers of the so-called "communisation" current. In developing a marxist critique of the profound errors of this current, we think that it will be useful to provide an account of Camatte's political wandering from orthodox Bordigism to the total rejection of the "theory of the proletariat" and a theorisation of escape from the class struggle. In our view, while few of the "communisers" have followed Camatte to his ultimate conclusions, in many ways the path he took reveals the real dynamic of the whole tendency.

Our aim here is not to write Camatte's biography, but to examine his trajectory in the light of a number of his most significant theoretical products.

According to Wikipedia, Camatte, at the age of 18, was already a member of the French Fraction of the Communist Left in 1953¹ – in other words, shortly after the split in the Partito Comunista Internazionale (PCInt) in Italy between the tendency around Damen and the tendency around Bordiga. The French Fraction was later transformed into the French section of the Bordigist International Communist Party (PCI) that published *Programme Communiste* and *Le Proletaire*. Camatte was to play an increasing role in the theoretical work of that organisation, while developing a close collaboration with Bordiga. However, by the early 60s he had become dissatisfied with the direction the organisation was following – an activist, trade unionist practice focused around the production of "workers' papers". Camatte considered that, since the period remained essentially dominated by the counter-revolution, the tasks of the ICP were above all theoretical – the denunciation of all forms of revisionism and the restoration of the communist programme. In 1966 Camatte broke from the PCI and began the review *Invariance*, whose "statement of principles" on the

1. But we should take some care with this account, because the actual wording is "Camatte became involved with radical politics from an early age, first joining the Fraction Française de la Gauche Communiste Internationale (FFGCI), a left communist organisation linked to Marc Chirik and Onorato Damen, in 1953". In fact, the French Fraction had split in two in 1945, with one part supporting the PCInt in Italy (in which Damen played a leading role) and the other forming the Gauche Communiste de France around Marc Chirik. For an account of this prior split, see the *Italian Communist Left*, p156.

inside page of the first series shows a clear continuity with the Bordigist tradition:²

"Invariance of the theory of the proletariat:

- "Defended in the Communist League (Communist Manifesto 1848) in the IWA (the work of the General Council in London led by Marx); at the time of the Commune; in the IInd International; against the degeneration and failure of the latter (The socialist left in Germany, Bolsheviks, socialist left in Italy – the abstentionist fraction)
- "Which triumphed in Russia 1917 and internationally: Moscow 1919, foundation of the IIIrd International; Livorno 1921: the break with democracy
- "Defended by the Communist Left against the degeneration of Moscow; against the Sacred Union in the resistance to fascism
- "Which must be restored, as well as the Communist Party – organ of the proletariat class – outside of any democracy, careerism, individualism, against immediatism and any revisionist doubt about the doctrine
- "The aim of *Invariance* is the reformation of the Communist Party"

2. A problem of proletarian morality was posed by the circumstances of the split: again, from the Wikipedia entry: "In 1966, after further controversial writings within the party, Camatte and Dangeville split from the party along with eleven other members. This split was particularly painful, because as Camatte recalls, 'whoever leaves the party is dead to the party.' Since Camatte was the librarian of the ICP's periodicals and literary collection, he had to barricade himself inside of his apartment to keep them. Eventually, he was forced to burn the entirety of the collection that was not written by Bordiga, to prove that he was not an 'academic'. Bordiga later referred to this as 'an act of gangsterism'." Quotes are from the 2019 Cercle Marx interview: the interview has been partly transcribed in English on libcom with the following disclaimer, which we will come back to in a second article. "Note: The group that conducted this interview, Cercle Marx, is a racist pseudo-Debordist/Bordigist group that focuses on the red-brown alliance 'Marxism' of writers like Francis Cousin. We certainly do not intend to host these viewpoints, but we believe that the majority of the interview still holds merit in that it helps to trace the progression of Camatte's thought, which has been more or less ignored by English-speaking audiences for quite a while. With this out of the way, we hope that Libcom's readers will enjoy the text and get something useful out of it".

Working Theses: theoretical advances....

Invariance n° 6, published in April 1969 with the title "La Revolution Communiste, Theses de Travail", is a substantial piece of work, running to over 150 foolscap pages, and it offers us an overview of the main political conclusions and orientations of the review at that moment – which are interesting above all in that they tend to reject some of the holy truths of Bordigism.

It is divided into a number of chapters, dealing with the history of the proletarian movement from its earliest days to the post-WW2 period, including the nature of Stalinist Russia, the colonial question, the economic crisis and the evolution of capitalism

The first chapter, "Brief history of the movement of the proletarian class in the Euro-American area from its origins to our days" confirms that the starting point of *Invariance* was still the marxist tradition and the theory of the proletariat, which, it argues, was confirmed by the revolutionary wave that followed the First World War; and, at this point at least, seems to be committed to the idea that the future communist revolution is the task of the proletariat alone. It also develops a rather coherent analysis of the succession of the various phases of upsurge and counter-revolution in the history of the proletariat, and in particular of the defeat of the revolutionary wave and the struggle of the communist left against the degeneration of the Communist International. But in contrast to the more "traditional" Bordigists, it does not exclude from the communist left currents like the KAPD, whose theses on the party were to be published along with the Manifesto of the Miasnikov group in Russia in later editions of *Invariance*: "A fundamental element for the reacquisition of the doctrinal totality is supplied by the contribution of the communist left of Italy. However, many parallel elements may also be necessary: Tribunists, KAPD, various movements referring to the councils, Lukacs...the work of unification implies the rejection of anathemas" (Thesis 1.5.20, p 37).

At the same time, the text lays out its criticisms of the activist and opportunist slide of the official Bordigists.

"In 1962, the PCI believed it possible – following the agitation begun in 1960 and reinforced during the course of that year – to produce a trade union organ: Spartaco but when you begin to no longer have a materialist, non-voluntarist approach, error is inevitable. The appearance of this sheet was the first theoretical defeat because it meant abandoning the demand to link in an indissoluble unity immediate action (trade union or other according to the organisations: factory committees, enterprise councils, etc) and the mediate, 'political' struggle. All that because with this sheet there was the hope of being more permeable to the class ... In 1963, the movement left behind its original positions and placed itself on a level with the Trotskyist movement with which it entered into competition". Furthermore, "All this also showed the insufficiency of the left's thesis on the unions from the point when it no longer precisely defined their evolution, their integration into the state and the behaviour of workers towards them: desertion." (1.5.10, p33).

We can also note that *Invariance's* view of the conditions for the formation of the party began to edge back towards the position of *Bilan* in the 1930s and the GCF in the 40s, and thus towards the recognition that the "formal" Bordigist party was not really a party at all: "The party can only be reformed through the coming together of two movements: the return of the totality of the theory of the proletariat and the movement towards the unification of the class ... its formal existence today is an embarrassment, if only because, at the end of a certain period, and as a result of the prevailing political fog, it tends to take itself for a *deus ex-machina* and to believe that everything has to go through it, that it must lead everything at the very time when it is least recognised by the real movement" (*Invariance* n° 6, 1-5-18-19, p36-37).

This is no doubt a reference to the ridiculous intervention of the PCI in the May 1968 movement, where the Bordigists, despite tending to reject the entire movement as petty bourgeois, could offer nothing more than a call for the masses to rally behind the banner of the Party. By contrast, several passages in the Theses show that the early *Invariance* saw May 68 as a real rupture with the counter-revolution.

Another positive element of the Theses is the recognition (which it clearly shared with Bordiga³) of capital's growing tendency towards the destruction of nature:

"Marx's predictions (about the exhaustion of the soil by capitalist

agriculture) are being daily verified today. The development of capital presents itself as an immense natural catastrophe: exhaustion of the soil, destruction of flora and fauna. Capital is the reification of man and the mineralisation of nature", 4.3.3, p 111)

... and retreats

At the same time, the Theses fail to advance beyond some of the most important theoretical weaknesses of the Bordigist tradition:

- In the very notion of marxism as an invariant theory, as a "doctrine" which needs only to be restored.⁴ It is certainly true that certain principles of the workers' movement – such as the necessity for internationalism and political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie – do not change throughout the history of the movement, but they still have to be applied according to specific historical conditions, which means, for example, that in the period of the formation of capital as a world system, marxists could support certain national struggles, whereas this became impossible when the system entered its epoch of decline. The notion of an unchanging programme, unrelated to the historical experience of the working class, derives from an idealist, even religious starting point.
- In the distinction between the formal and the historical party, an idea which emerged as a means of justifying the error of the formation of the PCI in 1943-5, and of rejecting the concept of the fraction as developed by the Italian Left between the wars. It's true, as we have noted, that there had been a certain movement in *Invariance* 6 towards a materialist understanding that the party cannot be formed at any moment in the life of the class; but it fails to engage with *Bilan's* contribution on the relationship between fraction and party, so that the partial critique of Bordigist idealism on this question remains stuck in mid-air.
- In the rejection of the theory of capitalism since 1914 as a globally decadent system, and with it, the defence of the notion of the October revolution as a dual revolution: in the view of the Theses, since the proletarian insurrection of October was unable to extend itself internationally, Bolshevik Russia mutated into a kind of bourgeois revolution. This

view was fundamentally at odds with the position of the Italian Fraction, which insisted that proletarian revolution becomes possible because the capitalist system enters into its decadent phase as a whole and not region by region,⁵ excluding all possibility of progressive bourgeois revolutions.

- By the same token, since the Theses argue that there were still areas of the globe where capitalism was still in its youth, we have the idea that not only were "colonial revolutions" still possible, but that they were actually taking place in countries such as Vietnam and Cuba ... The Theses talk about the "undeniable merit" of the theories of Castro, Fanon, Césaire ("at the beginning" at least ...) and conclude that "the influence, in the west, of ideologies born out of colonial revolutions, as well as the return to outmoded positions of the workers' movement (a certain messianism in Africa, Latin America and the USA, for example) still express a social renewal. This derives from the disappearance of the proletarian revolution of 1917-23. The proletariat, in the end, on a world scale, accomplished or supported a bourgeois revolution" (4.6.12, p132). Similarly, "Maoist ideology has a revolutionary character in China in so far as it presents itself as substitute for the ancient Chinese civilisation (it is thus destroying the old superstructures built around the cult of ancestors)" (3.4.11, p87). These false and dangerous positions, which entirely underestimated the inter-imperialist character of the violent battles over the ex-colonial regions, were to have their disastrous outcome in the overt support for the Arab states in the imperialist wars in the Middle East by the Algerian group of the PCI and the resulting explosion of the organisation.

On the other hand, perhaps the most significant element, towards the end of the Theses, lies less in the inability to criticise Bordigist dogma, than in a tendency to open the door to certain modernist ideas which were to develop very rapidly in the ensuing period. Thus, in Thesis 4.6.1 we see the beginning of a new "periodisation" of capital, in which the war of 1914 marks not the definitive onset of the decadent epoch of capital, as the Communist International proclaimed, but the passage from the "formal" to the "real domination" of capital, and from there it was but a short step for Camatte to assert that capital had become entirely autonomous and had achieved a total domination over humanity, so that the

4. For a more developed critique of the concept of *Invariance*, see *International Review* n° 14, "A caricature of the Party: the Bordigist Party" and *International Review* n°158 "The 1950s and 60s: Damen, Bordiga, and the passion for communism".

3. Cf "Bordiga and the Big City", *International Review* n° 166.

5. See *International Review* n° 128, "Communism Vol. 3, Part 5 - The problems of the period of transition".

whole of humanity, rather than the working class, would have to become the subject of the revolution. The step had not yet been taken: "The whole of humanity has a tendency to oppose capital, to revolt against it. But what is the class which can have the maximum of revolutionary coherence, which can have a radical programme for the destruction of capital and at the same time see, describe the future society, communism? It is the proletariat... The working class, by constituting itself as a class, and thus as a party, becomes the historic subject... Man is the negation of capital, but its active, positive negation is the proletariat" (Thesis 4.7.20, p 139).

The transition to modernism

Invariance n° 8, covering the period July to December 1969, is entitled "Transition". The previous issue had continued the "Theses de Travail" and was made up of a whole series of "supporting texts" from the Communist Parties of Italy and the USA, the KAPD, contributions by Pannekoek, Gorter, Lukacs, Pankhurst. In n° 8 we find the theses on the party by the KAPD and the interventions of the KAPD during the debate on trade unions at the Third Congress of the Communist International; a 1937 text on the war in Spain by Jehan, defending the position of the Italian Fraction; and two reprints from *Programma Comunista* – "Relativity and determinism, on the death of Albert Einstein", n° 9 1955; and "Programme du communisme Integral et theorie marxiste de la connaissance", from the Milan meeting of the PCI in June 1962.

At one level, therefore, *Invariance* n° 8 continued the more open attitude to the different currents of the communist left which we already saw in n° 6. But the real significance of the issue is to be found in two short articles at the beginning of the issue: an editorial entitled "Transition" and a second piece entitled "Capitalism and the development of the gang-racket".

The first begins as follows

"The starting point for the critique of the existing society of capital has to be the restatement of the concepts of 'formal' and 'real domination' as the historical phases of capitalist development. All other periodisations of the process of the autonomisation of value, such as competitive, monopoly, state monopoly, bureaucratic etc. capitalism, leave the field of the theory of the proletariat, that is, the critique of political economy, to begin with the vocabulary of the practice of social-democracy or 'Leninist' ideology, codified by Stalinism.

"All this phraseology with which one

pretends to explain 'new' phenomena really only mystifies the passage of value to its complete autonomy, that is, the objectification of the abstract quantity in process in the concrete community.

"Capital, as a social mode of production, accomplishes its real domination when it succeeds in replacing all the pre-existing social and natural presuppositions with its own particular 'forms of organisation' which mediate the submission of the whole of physical and social life to its real needs of valorisation. The essence of the 'Gemeinschaft' of capital is organisation.

Politics, as an instrument for mediating the despotism and capital, disappears in the phase of the real domination of capital. After having been fully used in the period of formal domination, it can be disposed of when capital, as total being, comes to organise rigidly the life and experience of its subordinates. The state, as the rigid and authoritarian manager of the expansion of the equivalent forms in social relation ('Urtex'), becomes an elastic instrument in the business sphere. Consequently, the state, or directly, 'politics', are less than ever the subject of the economy and the 'bosses' of capital. Today, more than ever, capital finds its own real strength in the inertia of the process which produces and reproduces its specific needs of valorisation as human needs in general".

We have already noted that issue n° 6 contained some of the premises of the modernist outlook, linked to the theorisation of the transition from formal domination to real domination. But here the "transition" becomes definitive.

As we have noted elsewhere,⁶ Marx's concept of the transition from formal to real domination has been widely misinterpreted, notably in modernist circles. In a chapter of *Capital* that remained unpublished until the 1930s and was not more widely translated and published until the late 1960s "Results of the immediate process of production", Marx used it to describe the evolution of capital from a phase where its domination over labour remained formal in the sense that it was still marked by precapitalist methods of production, in particular artisanal ones; capital had deprived the individual producer of his or her independence by reducing them to wage labourers, but the actual method of producing remained semi-individual and still included many of the stages of creating the whole product, even when producers were grouped together in centres of "manufacture". The fully fledged factory system, based on developed machinery,

reduced the workers' activity to a series of fragmented gestures, in other words to subordination to the production line, more and more dispensing with all these artisanal vestiges; this evolution also corresponded to the move from the extraction of absolute surplus value (where the rate of exploitation depended to a large extent to the lengthening of the working day) to the extraction of relative surplus value, which made possible a shorter working day but also a more efficient squeezing of productive labour: "The real subsumption of labour under capital is developed in all the forms evolved by relative, as opposed to absolute surplus value."⁷

For a number of groups, some emerging from Bordigism or heading towards fully fledged modernism, such as *Internationalist Perspective*, this transition was more or less equivalent to the "old" move from ascendant to decadent capitalism and provided an alternative way of looking at the principal phenomena of the decadent period, such as state capitalism, with some – like Camatte in the *Theses de Travail* – even seeing the key moment coming in 1914. But as we argued, Marx was clearly talking about a process which was well underway by the mid-19th century and – since, as Rosa Luxemburg pointed out in 1913, large areas of the globe were still essentially part of the pre-capitalist world, even if imperialism was more and more destroying the old forms and imposing its political rule on the colonies – the transition to the modern forms of capitalist exploitation was a process that continued throughout the 20th century and has still not been completed. So as a means of understanding that capitalism has entered its "epoch of social revolution", the concept was not adequate, except in so far as a certain level of global capitalist development was evidently necessary for the world revolution to become possible and necessary. But while Marx's use of the concept had an important, but more restricted implication, for Camatte the concept became the "starting point" for a complete overturning of marxism, for announcing the advent of a world in which capital has become autonomous, has become the "material community", achieving total domination over humanity and the proletariat, signifying the end of

7. "Results of the immediate process of production", section headed "The real subsumption of labour under capital", 1976 Penguin edition, p 1035). The French edition had been translated by Roger Dangeville, who had been close to Camatte while they were in the PCI, but then evolved in a very different direction, with Dangeville publishing *Le Fil du Temps*, an attempt to restore a pure – and extremely sectarian – form of Bordigism. It is worth noting however that Dangeville's interpretation of the transition from formal to real subsumption reproduces some of the same errors as Camatte's. Camatte also accused Dangeville of plagiarising his original translation....

6. See the article in *International Review* n° 60, "The 'real domination' of capitalism and the real confusions of the proletarian milieu".

the “myth of the proletariat” as the revolutionary subject.

We will return to some of these ideas in a second part of the article, but no less significant is the short piece on the development of the “gang-racket”, which provides the theoretical basis for the abandonment of any form of proletarian political organisation, and thus for Camatte’s individual flight away from political engagement within the working class:

“With the constitution of capital as a material being and thus as a social community we have the disappearance of capitalism in its traditional personal form, the relative and sometimes absolute diminution of the proletarians and the growth of the new middle classes. Any human community no matter how small is conditioned by the mode of being of the material community. This mode of being flows from the fact that capital can only valorise itself, and thus exist, develop its being, if a particle of itself, while autonomising itself, confronts the social whole, defines itself in relation to the socialised total equivalent, capital. It needs this confrontation (competition, emulation) because it only exists through differentiation. On the basis is formed a social tissue based on the competition between rival ‘organisations’ (rackets).”

“The various groupuscules are so many gangs which confront each other while having the divinisation of the proletariat as their general equivalent”

The implication, drawn in the editorial headed “Transition”, is obvious: the task of the review *Invariance* “is thus not to be the organ of a formal or informal group but to fight against all the false ‘theories’ produced in by-gone epochs while simultaneously pointing towards the communist future”.

A review which is not the product of a formal or even an informal group can only be the property of a brilliant individual who has somehow escaped the fate which capital remorselessly imposes on all efforts to come together to fight against capitalist domination. Camatte continued this line of argument with a letter dated 4.9.69 which further developed the “theoretical” foundations of the notion of organisation as a racket, which has subsequently been published as a pamphlet “On organisation” in several languages.⁸ The 1972 introduction to this text claims that this position should not be interpreted as a “return to a more or less Stirnerite individualism” and appears to hold out the possibility of some future “union” of revolutionary forces. In our view, however, everything in the text,

as well as the whole of Camatte’s subsequent political trajectory, can only confirm precisely this return to the logic of Saint Max’s “egoism” which Marx attacked so acutely in *The German Ideology*.

The theoretical justification for this relapse is, once again, found in Camatte’s use of the notion of the real domination of capital, which tends to depersonalise the capitalist social relation and replace the reign of the individual capitalist with the anonymous, collective organisation of capital, either through vast “private” corporations or the biggest corporation of all, the state. And indeed, Marx had already noted that in the second half of the 19th century, the capitalist tends to become a mere functionary of capital. Camatte also cites Bordiga’s study of “The economic and social structure in Russia today”, which argues that “*The organisation is not only the modern depersonalised capitalist, but also the capitalist without capital because it doesn’t need any*”. All this is true and flows from the fundamental marxist precept that capital is inherently an impersonal social relation – and from the recognition, developed most lucidly by the communist left, that the organisation of capitalism through the state has increasingly become part of the mode of survival of the system in its epoch of historical crisis (which, as we have seen, Camatte tends to equate with the period of “real domination”). But from here Camatte makes a theoretical leap which neither Marx nor Bordiga would ever have sanctioned.

Thus: “*With the passage to real domination, capital created its own general equivalent, which couldn’t be as rigid as it had been in the period of simple circulation. The state itself had to lose its rigidity and become a gang mediating between different gangs and between the total capital and particular capitals*”.

From this description – acceptable in certain aspects – of the development of state capitalism we jump to the “political sphere”. And not only the political sphere of the ruling class, but to the political organisations of the proletariat:

“We can see the same sort of transformation in the political sphere. The central committee of a party or the centre of any sort of regroupment plays the same role as the state. Democratic centralism only manages to mimic the parliamentary form characteristic of formal domination. And organic centralism, affirmed merely in a negative fashion, as refusal of democracy and its form (subjugation of the minority to the majority, votes, congresses, etc) actually just gets trapped again in the more modern forms. This results in the mystique of organisation (as with fascism). This was

how the International Communist Party evolved into a gang”.

The trick here is to remove the class struggle from the equation. No distinction whatever is made between the political sphere of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat, which ceases to offer any counter-force to the prevailing features of the existing order.

It is certainly true, as both Marx and Rosa Luxemburg pointed out, that capital has an inbuilt need to penetrate every corner of the planet and every sphere of human activity, that its ideological and moral world-views tend to poison everything, not least the efforts of the working class to associate, to organise, to resist, to develop its own theoretical understanding of social reality. And this is why every form of proletarian organisation is subject to the danger of accommodation to capitalist order, to the tendency towards opportunism and degeneration. But if a different form of society remains possible, if communism is still the only human future, then this is because the proletariat, the working class, indeed provides an antidote to the poison of capital, and its organisations are not a mere passive reflection of the dominant ideology but an arena of combat between the proletarian world view and the encroachments of capitalist habits and ideology.

For Camatte, this may once have been true but it is no longer the case. “*The proletariat, having been destroyed, this tendency of capital encounters no real opposition and so can produce itself all the more efficiently. The proletariat’s real essence has been denied and it exists only as an object of capital. Similarly the theory of the proletariat, Marxism, has been destroyed, Kautsky first revising it and then Bernstein liquidating it*”.

And with one stroke of the pen, the battle of the lefts in the Second and Third International against these attempts to revise and liquidate marxism cease to exist. By the same token, all subsequent efforts by the groups of the communist left to fight for proletarian principles against the penetration of capitalist ideology are doomed to failure and recuperation.

It’s true that the ICP, born out of a current that originated in the resistance to the degeneration of the CI, itself exhibited all the signs of a degenerating organisation; and Camatte has little difficulty showing that the political confusions of the ICP opened the door to bourgeois practises: the theory of organic centralism as a justification for hierarchical, bureaucratic methods, the sectarian vision of itself as the one and

8. An English language translation is available on the marxists.org website.

Jacques Camatte: From Bordigism to the negation of the proletariat, part 2

In the first part of this article¹ we traced Jacques Camatte's political evolution from the Bordigist wing of the communist left to the abandonment of marxism and the theory of the class struggle – into what we term "modernism". In this part, we will look more closely at this "new" outlook, focusing in particular on one of the best known of his works, *The Wandering of Humanity*, which first appeared in the journal *Invariance* (Series 2, n° 3) in 1973.

Despotism of capital

The Wandering of Humanity begins with the assertion that "When capital achieves real domination over society, it becomes a material community, overcoming value and the law of value... Capital, which originally depended on the wage relation, becomes a despot".

In effect, according to Camatte, capitalism, by "autonomising itself", by "running away", has ceased to exist; it has almost turned into a new mode of production. It has "brought about the disappearance of classes" and humanity as a whole is exploited by this strange ghost of capital. Camatte explains further: "During its development capital always tended to negate classes. This has finally been accomplished through the universalisation of wage labour and the formation – as a transitional stage – of what is called the universal class, a mere collection of proletarianised men and women, a collection of slaves of capital. Capital achieved complete domination by mystifying the demands of the classical proletariat, by dominating the proletariat as productive labourer. But by achieving domination through the mediation of labour, capital brought about the disappearance of classes,² since the capitalist as a person was simultaneously eliminated. The State becomes society when the wage relation is transformed into a relation of constraint, into a statist relation. At the same time the State becomes an enterprise or racket which mediates between the different gangs of capital.

"Bourgeois society has been destroyed and we have the despotism of capital."

1. See this issue.

2. *The Wandering of Humanity* - Jacques Camatte. This is the online version of the 1975 translation by Black and Red, the group around Freddy Perlman in Detroit. On the term "despotism", Camatte appends a significant footnote, showing that his choice of the word "despotism" is not accidental: "Here we see a convergence with the Asiatic mode of production, where classes could never become autonomous; in the capitalist mode of production they are absorbed".

Class conflicts are replaced by struggles between the gangs-organisations which are the varied modes of being of capital. As a result of the domination of representation, all organisations which want to oppose capital are engulfed by it; they are consumed by phagocytes".

And this incapacity to oppose capital applies not just to political organisations, doomed as we saw in the first part of this article to end up as mere rackets, but to the working class, the proletariat itself: "The proletariat has become a myth, not in terms of its existence, but in terms of its revolutionary role as the class which was to liberate all humanity and thus resolves all social-economic contradictions."

Camatte is aware that Marx and his followers insisted that the working class had to go beyond the struggle for reforms within capitalist society, and pinned their hopes on the economic crises which would sooner or later result in the decline of the system. But Camatte argues that by overcoming value, capitalism has also overcome the tendency towards crisis: "The moment when the productive forces were to reach the level required for the transformation of the mode of production was to be the moment when the crisis of capitalism began. This crisis was to expose the narrowness of this mode of production and its inability to hold new productive forces, and thus make visible the antagonism between the productive forces and the capitalist forms of production. But capital has run away; it has absorbed crises and it has successfully provided a social reserve for the proletarians". Camatte even suggests that Bernstein was one of the first to grasp this possibility, although this unfortunately led to Bernstein becoming an apologist for "the old bourgeois society which capital was about to destroy".

And what perspectives does the despot capital therefore offer to humanity? Camatte does not rule out the possibility that it will all end in its destruction. As we

pointed out in the first part of this article, Camatte, following Bordiga in particular, was very aware of the growing tendency of capital to destroy the natural environment. "Some production processes carried out over periods of time lead to clashes with natural barriers: increase in the number of human beings, destruction of nature, pollution". However, Camatte seems to consider that these problems can somehow, like the economic crisis itself, be overcome: "But these barriers cannot be theoretically regarded as barriers which capital cannot supersede".

We can understand that in 1973 it was less evident that the ravaging of nature by capital would prove to be an increasingly insurmountable problem for capitalism – not least because, far from subjecting the world to a global despotism which could take effective measures to counter-act the destruction of nature, the advancing decay of capitalism has only intensified the deadly competition between national units, compelling each one of them to continue pillaging all the natural resources available to them.

Camatte's blindness to the inability of capitalism to go beyond brutal competition between its various units is also noticeable in the fact that *Wandering* has nothing whatever to say about the inter-imperialist competition which, in the form of rivalry between the western and eastern blocs, held out a very concrete prospect of the destruction of humanity through nuclear war. So the catastrophic destruction of humanity seems, to Camatte, less likely than a kind of dystopian, science fiction nightmare. Camatte argues that we are already seeing "the transformation of the mind into a computer which can be programmed by the laws of capital", paving the way to a future founded on the "production of a perfectly programmable being which has lost all the characteristic of the species *homo sapiens*".

These predictions do in a certain sense anticipate the technological developments of the last 50 years: the increasing role of personal computers, mobile phones and the internet as vehicles for ideological intoxication; the beginnings of experiments with microchips inserted into the human body; the increasing sophistication of Artificial

Intelligence which has alarmed serious thinkers like Steven Hawking (as well as the likes of Elon Musk... whose billionaire fantasies are certainly part of the problem he is so concerned about³) and has prompted them to issue warnings about AI taking over or even destroying humanity.

It's certainly true that in a society where dead labour dominates living labour, we constantly see the instruments created by human activity becoming increasingly destructive and dangerous: the harnessing of atomic energy is the clearest proof of that. But the present acceleration of the decomposition of the system, the "whirlwind" of effects (war, ecological crisis, pandemics, etc) which we have described elsewhere,⁴ pose a much more immediate threat to human survival than the complete robotisation of the species. In particular, the fears expressed by "tech leaders" about the possible weaponisation of AI are certainly real, but this is essentially an aspect of the insane arms race driven by imperialist competition and growing military chaos.

And the present acceleration of capitalist decomposition points to a very different meaning to the idea of capital "running away" – in sum, that its mad forward flight is taking it to the edge of the cliff, to a fall from which there will be no return. In Camatte's vision there is the notion of capital as an all-powerful entity which can rid itself not only of the contradictions inherent in commodity relations, but even of living human beings. In this sense it has a certain resemblance to the visions of the conspiracy theorists for whom every stage in capital's road to chaos and self-destruction is explained as yet another part of a global master plan, even if the conspiracists take comfort from personalising this omnipotent power in the form of extra-terrestrial lizards, Illuminati or Jews, a story which in turn reiterates an older, gnostic mythology which holds that this fallen, grossly material world is in the unbreakable grip of a malevolent creator deity, so that salvation can only be attained outside the confines of earthly existence.

The same could be said about capitalism's capacity to absorb economic crises: in 1973, faced with the elucubrations of the likes of Marcuse, Castoriadis or the

situationists, our current had to argue very forcefully to show that the post-war boom was indeed over and capitalism was entering an open crisis of overproduction. Camatte was not wrong in noting the increasing tendency of the state to absorb civil society, and to seek to contain the rivalries between different capitalist enterprises (at least within the confines of the nation). But this is precisely what the communist left is referring to when it argues that state capitalism has become a universal tendency in the period of capitalist decline and it is probably significant that Bordiga, from whom Camatte took a number of ideas, himself never accepted the concept of state capitalism.

For the majority of the communist left, however, it is impossible to understand the bourgeoisie's response to its historic crisis without using the concept of state capitalism. The state apparatus has become the irreplaceable instrument to deal with the economic contradictions of the system, but the past few decades have shown that the more the ruling class resorts to state measures to contain the impact of these contradictions, the more it merely puts them off to a later date when they explode in an even more dangerous manner, as with the so-called "financial crisis" of 2008, the product of two decades or more of debt-fuelled growth. We should also recall that it was precisely the attempts of the Stalinist model of state capitalism to "assign value" that led to its ultimate collapse.

And this brings us to more fundamental flaw in Camatte's thesis: the idea that capital has overcome value.

In reality, capital without value is a non-thing, and far from being something that is merely "assigned by capital", it is the imperious need to expand value which has forced capitalism to occupy and commodify every aspect of human activity and every part of the earth's geography. The maintenance of this drive has continued throughout what Camatte calls the period of real domination, but which we see as the epoch of capitalist decadence. The need to expand value remains at the root of this process, even if it has required massive state intervention, astronomical levels of debt and fictitious capital, and thus systematic interference with the operation of the law of value itself. Camatte sees this universalising drive as did Marx, but while for Camatte the process leads to the unsalable despotism of capital through the overcoming of value, for Marx this very push contains the seeds of the system's demise: "This tendency – which capital possesses, but which at the same time, since capital is a limited form of production, contradicts it and hence drives it

towards dissolution – distinguishes capital from all earlier modes of production, and at the same time contains this element, that capital is posited as a mere point of transition."⁵ Rosa Luxemburg in particular later developed this approach to insist that capitalism's drive to achieve total, universal domination could never be achieved since the very attempt to do so would unleash all the underlying contradictions of the system – economic, social and political – and this would plunge it inexorably into an age of catastrophe. Against this vision – which in our view has largely been confirmed by the barbaric trajectory of capitalism in the 20th and 21st centuries – *The Wandering of Humanity* is in part a polemic against the notion of capitalist decadence, in particular as defended by Révolution Internationale, one of the groups that would form the ICC in 1975.

Decline of the capitalist mode of production or decline of humanity?

"The capitalist mode of production is not decadent and cannot be decadent" (*Wandering of Humanity*).

In the article "Decline of the capitalist mode of product or decline of humanity" (originally published in the same issue of *Invariance* and included in the Red and Black pamphlet) Camatte quotes from a passage in the *Grundrisse* which we have had occasion to refer to on several occasions,⁶ principally to show that the decadence of capitalism should not be equated with a cessation of capitalist accumulation or a complete halt in the development of the productive forces:

"The highest development of this basis itself (the flower into which it transforms itself; but it is always this basis, this plant as flower; hence wilting after the flowering and as consequence of the flowering) is the point at which it is itself worked out, developed, into the form in which it is compatible with the highest development of the forces of production, hence also the richest development of the individuals. As soon as this point is reached, the further development appears as decay, and the new development begins from a new basis".

But already in 1972, in an article in *Révolution Internationale* old series, n° 7, "Voluntarisme et confusion", the same passage is used to support the theory of decadence against various groups, mostly of a councilist nature, who denied the connection between revolution and the

3. Musk was a co-signatory of a declaration by 1000 "tech leaders" calling for a pause in the development of AI until more can be found out about its consequence, citing "profound risks to society and humanity". Elon Musk and Others Call for Pause on A.I., Citing 'Profound Risks to Society'. Shortly afterwards, one of the signatories, Geoffrey Hinton, resigned from his job as a leader of Google in order to focus on the risks posed by AI.

4. "The acceleration of capitalist decomposition poses the clear possibility of the destruction of humanity", *International Review* n° 169

5. Notebook V, the Chapter on Capital. *Grundrisse*; p.540 in the Penguin edition.

6. For example "Growth as decay" *World Revolution* n° 389.

objective historical conditions – in short, the necessity for a period of decadence. But according to Camatte, who cites the *Révolution Internationale* article in a footnote, “there is decay because the development of individuals is blocked. It is not possible to use this sentence to support the theory of the decline of the capitalist mode of production”. According to Camatte, “the remainder of Marx’s digression confirms that the decay refers to human beings”.

The attack on the theory of decadence also takes up a major section of *Wandering*, above all in this paragraph: “It makes no sense to proclaim that humanity’s productive forces have stopped growing, that the capitalist mode of production has begun to decay. Such views reveal the inability of many theoreticians to recognise the runaway of capital and thus to understand communism and the communist revolution. Paradoxically, Marx analysed the decomposition of bourgeois society and the conditions for the development of the capitalist mode of production: a society where productive forces could develop freely. What he presented as the project of communism was realised by capital.”

Camatte’s rejection of decadence theory is quite explicitly linked to a rejection of the “myth” of the proletariat and in the end, a rejection of Marx, who while Camatte generously admits may provide some material for understanding the runaway of capital, never really understood it (or its “real domination”). “Thus Marx’s work seems largely to be the authentic consciousness of the capitalist mode of production” – largely because he developed a dialectic of the productive forces, holding that “human emancipation depended on their fullest expansion. Communist revolution – therefore the end of the capitalist mode of production – was to take place when this mode of production was no longer ‘large enough’ to contain the productive forces”. But since capital has “autonomised itself” and can develop without limit, it has already realised what Marx presented as the project of communism.

It is not easy to orient oneself in the maze of Camatte’s theoretical wanderings, but he seems to be saying not only that Marx was wrong to argue that the conflict between the relations of production and the productive forces provide the objective basis for the communist revolution – thus refuting not only the theory of capitalist decadence, in which such a conflict assumes a permanent character, but also Marx’s general approach to historical evolution, upon which the theory of the ascent and decadence of capitalism is based.⁷ For

Camatte, maintaining Marx’s arguments actually expresses a capitalist outlook which sees the aim of communism as a society of perpetual quantitative growth – of accumulation in fact.

This is of course true for the Stalinist caricature of communism, but it entirely forgets that for Marx, the development of the productive forces under communism had an entirely different meaning, since it means above all the flowering of the creative possibilities of humanity, not the endlessly spiralling production of things. Camatte seems to recognise this in some ways, since he says that, for Marx in the third volume of *Capital* and in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, “the discontinuity (between capitalism and communism) lies in the fact that the goal of production is inverted... The goal ceases to be wealth, but human beings”. And yet at the same time, Camatte insists that Marx did not really see a discontinuity because he argues for a transitional phase, the phase of proletarian dictatorship, which is “a period of reforms, the most important being the shortening of the working day and the use of the labour voucher”. Here, according to Camatte, we see “Marx’s revolutionary reformism in its greatest amplitude”.

Alternatively, we can see Camatte’s work as the authentic consciousness of the primitivist standpoint which holds that the development of technology (narrowly identified with the concept of the development of the productive forces) is the real cause of humanity’s ills and that it would be better to return to the communism of the hunter gatherers. Camatte denies that his communism is a simple return to the past, to the “nomadism of a type practised by our distant ancestors who were gatherers”, but it is no accident that fully-fledged primitivists like the group around Fifth Estate in the US were so impressed by Camatte’s theories.

Who is the reformist?

But Camatte does continue to talk about the need for communist revolution. Since “one can no longer hold that there is a class which represents future humanity”, since the proletarian project is no more than a programme for the reform of capital, who will make the revolution? Sometimes it appears to be the work of humanity as a whole, since humanity as such is exploited in the period of real domination: “threatened in

their purely biological existence, human beings are beginning to rise against capital”. But if humanity itself is in decline, where will the movement towards communism come from?

There is much in Camatte’s description of communism in *Wandering* that we can accept, mainly because we have already seen in it the work of Marx and other marxists: its dialectical link to the Gemeinwesen of the past, the archaic human community which Marx studied intently in his later years;⁸ its general social definition: “communism puts an end to castes, classes and the division of labour”; the relationship it restores between humanity and the rest of nature: “it is not domination of nature but reconciliation, and thus regeneration of nature”. And – a view that seems to be in contradiction with his assertion that communism is not a new mode of production – “human beings in communism cannot be defined as simple users... human beings are creators, producers, users. The entire process is reconstituted at a higher level, and for every individual”. In other words, communism means human beings producing what they need and desire in a qualitatively new way, and for this very reason does not cease to represent a “mode of production”. Camatte is also right to insist that “the struggle against reduction of the amplitude of the revolution is already a revolutionary struggle”, since the proletarian revolution, as Marx insisted from the beginning, is the basis not only for abolishing capitalist exploitation, but also for overcoming all the other oppressions, repressions and divisions that hold humanity in check, so that communism will be the starting point for the full flowering of human potential, a potential which we have so far only seen in glimpses.

But unless you can see a “real movement” in this society against the domination of capital – which marxists consider to be the movement of the working class against exploitation – descriptions of future communism fall back into utopianism, as Bordiga once observed. And when we look a bit more closely at what Camatte perceives as signs of a real movement inside the existing order, we see a real “reformism” emerging.

True he argues, in *Wanderings*, that “the goal cannot be realised by the establishment of communities which, always isolated, are never an obstacle to capital, can easily be surrounded by capital... Nor can the goal be reached by the cultivation of one’s own individual being, in which one would finally find the real human be-

7. In particular, in his “Preface to the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy”, reproduced

as an annex to “Decadence of capitalism (ii): What scientific method do we need to understand the present social order...?” *International Review* n° 134, which argues that the Preface provides the methodological underpinning of the idea of the ascent and decline of the successive modes of production since the dissolution of primitive communism.

8. See the article from our series on communism, “The Mature Marx - Past and Future Communism”, *International Review* n° 81.

ing". And yet elsewhere, particularly in the provocatively titled "We must leave this world",⁹ which already suggests the possibility of some kind of magical flight out of the present civilisation, he expresses a strong interest in the possibilities that vegetarian communes, regionalists and ...anti-vaxxers might form a kind of vanguard of resistance against capital.

And more recently, in the Cercle Marx interview referred to in the first part of this article,¹⁰ he expresses a real interest in the Yellow Vests:

"JC: To tell the truth, I know very little about the yellow vest movement. I haven't studied it. But what I felt at the beginning was important was the fact of totally refusing the world as it is. And it is the need for recognition, and it is pretty extraordinary, the fact that we put on a yellow vest that renders visible, and that they go on the roundabouts shows the problem of being seen. But it cannot open onto something else; it maintains itself in opposition to others".

Anything but the class struggle! The result of Camatte's attempt to go beyond the poor old working class struggle and discover the true revolt of humanity reveals itself as a real regression to forms of rebellion which at best dissolve the working class in the "people" and at worst – like the anti-vaxxers of today – have been recuperated by the extreme right wing of capital (hence perhaps his willingness to engage with the dubious Red-Brown alliance advocates of Cercle Marx).

But what betrays this non-revolutionary, even explicitly anti-revolutionary, outlook most clearly is when, at the end of "This World We Must Leave", he warns against the idea of overthrowing capital through a frontal assault: "One must envisage a new dynamic, for the CMP¹¹ will not disappear following a frontal struggle of people against their present domination, but by a huge renunciation which implies the rejection of a path used for millennia" – an argument further advanced in the interview when he warns:

"CM: Do you in a way think that capital has become a totality that no longer has an outside, that no longer has an exterior, and that in relation to this totality class struggle is now only an internal phenom-

enon to capital, that the real opposition for you becomes that between humanity and capital. The real decisive opposition is no longer between classes?

"JC: Yes, and now I go even further, in the sense that we cannot posit an opposition between humans and capital because when we are in this dynamic, we are still in the dynamic of enmity, and to oppose something is to reinforce it... But I saw that now we can no longer fight against capital. Not because capital is too strong but because it keeps it living.

"CM: Fighting against capital inevitably ends up reinforcing it.

"JC: Absolutely

"CM: So you say that we must irrevocably leave this world. If the world is the place of all places, if the world is now obviously that of capital that has become a totality, how can we leave this world? Do you think you've left this world?

"JC: Yes. We cannot leave this world materially, but we leave it insofar as we no longer accept its givens. But we are forced to live. But for example, I live here, I don't vote, it's been 27 years that I haven't gone to vote, but I am on good terms with the mayor. That it's him and not another it's all the same. That's that world. And I live on the outside, as far as I can, because it's obvious that I am caught up by taxes, by this, by that. So by all my thinking process, by all my behaviour, I don't feel myself reproducing this society. But even more than before, with the process of inversion, I move on to something else".

In fact, this idea of an individual "way out" is already theorised in *Wandering*, precisely in the passage that precedes his apparent rejection of reaching communism through setting up anti-capitalist communities or cultivating one's own individual being: "We are all slaves of capital. Liberation begins with the refusal to perceive oneself in terms of the categories of capital, namely as proletarian, as member of the new middle class, as capitalist, etc. Thus we also stop perceiving the other - in his movement toward liberation - in terms of those same categories. At this point the movement of recognition of human beings can begin".

In sum: before you can change the world, change yourself. This individualist, idealist vision is perfectly compatible with the notion of the disappearance of the working class which has reached its paroxysm in the phase of capitalist decomposition. And, according to Camatte, the beginning of liberation is not for workers to recognise themselves as part of a class which is antagonistic to capital, to recover their class

identity, but exactly the opposite: to join the grand dissolution in which classes have no substance and the class struggle merely reflects our enslavement to the categories of capital.

CDW

Postscript

Once again on the wanderings of Bérard

As we showed in a previous article in this series,¹² the influence of modernism in the renascent revolutionary movement of the early 70s was also felt in the "pre-ICC" via the "Bérard tendency". We recalled that this influence expressed itself both in the rejection of the workers' struggle for immediate demands, and, at the organisational level, by an opposition to the first attempts to centralise the Révolution Internationale group on a national level. At a meeting of the group in 1973, focused on the necessity to elect a centralising commission, Bérard warned that this initiative would lead to Trotskyist or Stalinist type Central Committee, to a force for bureaucracy. Comrade Marc Chirik countered with a warning to Bérard: that he and his tendency were heading in the direction of Barrot and Camatte, and thus towards the abandonment not only of revolutionary organisation but of the revolutionary class as well. Bérard indignantly rejected this warning.

Not long afterwards, "Une Tendance Communiste" put itself outside the framework of the organisation by publishing its pamphlet *La Révolution Sera Communiste ou ne Sera Pas*, the one and only public expression of this ephemeral group. In it, there is a section headed "Why Invariance is no longer revolutionary", which, while recognising that the early *Invariance* had made some fruitful contributions (such as on the question of formal/real domination), it subsequently entered the realm of ideology with its vision of a revolution made by "humanity", the consequence of his idea that capital had become a "material community":

"hence his inability to grasp the real contradictions of the period of historical crisis (the exacerbated tendency towards the real domination of capital coming up against the limits of exchange, the tendency towards the proletarianisation of the whole of humanity counter-acted by the inability of the wage relation to integrate those with

9. Originally published in *Invariance*, series 2 n° 5. An English translation by David Brown can be on the Libcom website.

10. Interview with Jacques Camatte (2019), partially translated into English on the Libcom website.

11. CMP; "This abbreviation means the Capitalist Mode of Production, which *Invariance* never spells out. It reminds one of the ancient Hebrews, who showed a similar reluctance in naming their creator" ("Modernism: from leftism to the void", *World Revolution* n° 3).

12. "Critique of the 'communisers' part ii: From leftism to modernism: the misadventures of the 'Bérard tendency'", *International Review* n° 169.

nothing to fall back on (the sans-reserves). Capital becomes abstractly 'unified', completely abstract and goes beyond itself in the material community... The absurdity of a combat of 'humanity' against 'capital' is obviously based on the idea that humanity already exists – and here we have the full reformist, a-classist vision".

And the text also criticises Camatte's accompanying idea that any attempt by communist minorities to organise themselves can only lead to a new racket.

As it happens, Bérard at this point was more influenced by Barrot/Dauvé¹³ than

13 We will return to the main ideas of Barrot/Dauvé in another article.

by Camatte, and was thus able to retain references to the proletariat as the subject of the revolution. It was in fact a kind of half-way house between the position of the communist left that he was leaving behind – in short, Marx's insistence on the need for the working class to affirm its autonomy in the fight against capitalist exploitation, and to exercise its dictatorship during the period of transition towards communism – and Camatte's open abandonment of the proletariat. As we showed in the article on the Bérard tendency, this centrist stance was based on the pseudo-dialectical theory of a simultaneous affirmation/negation of the proletariat.

Many of today's communisers are still residents of this half-way house, but the pull towards Camatte's pure negation of the class struggle is very strong in the modernist milieu. In the case of Bérard, his subsequent – and very rapid – abandonment of the politics of the communist left, of any organised activity, and his evolution towards a kind of primitivism, fully confirmed Marc's prediction.

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rational Gazan gang thirsting for money and blood and Netanyahu's clique of the corrupt and the fanatical.

Finally, to complete the nationalist straitjacket in which the bourgeoisie seeks to imprison the working class, there are the pacifist campaigns: "*We don't support either side! We demand an immediate ceasefire!*" The most naïve no doubt imagine that the accelerated descent of capitalism into barbarism is due to the lack of "good will" on the part of the murderers at the head of the states, or even to a "failing democracy". But those in charge know perfectly well what sordid interests they are defending. Such is the case, for example, with President Biden, supplier of cluster bombs to Ukraine, who is "horrified" by the "indiscriminate bombing" of Gaza while continuing to supply the essential munitions. And if Biden has raised his voice in the face of Netanyahu's methods, it is not to "preserve peace in the world", but to concentrate his efforts and military forces on his rival China in the Pacific, and on Beijing's bulky Russian ally in Ukraine. There is therefore nothing to hope for from "peace" under the rule of capitalism, any more than after the victory of one side or another. The bourgeoisie has no solution to war!

The solution will not come from the proletarians of Gaza, crushed under the bombs, or from those of Israel, appalled by

the barbaric massacres of Hamas and drawn into chauvinist campaigns, as is the case with the proletarians of Ukraine or Russia. It can only come from the international working class, in its rejection of austerity and the sacrifices that the development of economic turmoil and militarism entails.

Through the unprecedented series of struggles in many countries, in the United Kingdom with a year of mobilisations, in France against pension reform, in the United States against inflation in particular, in Canada, Scandinavia and Bangladesh recently, the working class is showing that it is capable of fighting, if not against war and militarism themselves, at least against the economic consequences of war, against the sacrifices demanded by the bourgeoisie to feed its war economy. This is a fundamental stage in the development of combativity and, ultimately, of class consciousness. The war in the Middle East, with the deepening of the crisis and the additional demand for weapons it will generate in the four corners of the planet, will only increase the objective conditions for the proletariat's break with past decades.¹¹

The working class is not dead! Through its struggles, the proletariat is also confronting what true class solidarity is. In the face of war, workers' solidarity is not with the Palestinians or the Israelis. It is with the workers of Palestine and Israel, as it is with

the workers of the whole world. Solidarity with the victims of the massacres certainly does not mean maintaining the nationalist mystifications which have led workers to place themselves behind a bourgeois clique. Workers' solidarity means above all developing the fight against the capitalist system, which is responsible for all wars. As the Communist Left clearly affirmed in the 1930s: "*for real revolutionaries, naturally, there is no 'Palestinian' question, but solely the struggle of all the exploited of the Near-East, Arabs and Jews included, which is part of a more general struggle of all the exploited of the entire world for the communist revolution.*"¹² Revolutionary struggle cannot arise with a snap of the fingers. It certainly won't come from adherence to the nationalist or imperialist camps advocated by the bourgeoisie; today, it can only come through the development of workers' struggles, against the increasingly harsh economic attacks that the bourgeoisie throws at them. Today's struggles pave the way for tomorrow's revolution!

7.1.24 / R. Havanais

11. For further reflection on the reality of the rupture currently taking place within the working class, read the "25th Congress of the ICC: Report on the class struggle", *International Review* n°170, 2023.

12. "The conflict in Palestine and the Italian Left: The internationalist position in the 1930s: *Bilan* n° 30-31" *International Review* n° 110, 2002.

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only proletarian political organisation to an attitude of competition and denigration of other proletarian currents. In this sense, it's true that the ubiquity of gang-like behaviour (including its most vulgar forms, such as theft and violence against other proletarians) has become – notably in the phase of capitalist decomposition – a real danger to the existing proletarian political camp. But for Camatte there simply cannot be a proletarian camp any more: “*all forms of working class political organisations have disappeared. In their place, gangs confront each other in an obscene competition, veritable rackets rivalling each other in what they peddle but identical in their essence*”.

In sum: the very attempt to organise politically against capital is fatally doomed to reproduce capital. So there is no point in fighting it in association with other comrades. Best to retreat into the purity of one's own individual thought. The ego and his own indeed.

The worst of all this is that Camatte cites the militants of the proletarian movement to justify this course towards political suicide. As with all subsequent communisers, Marx's reference to the proletariat as embodiment of the real movement towards communism is called upon: rightly, in relation to the organisation of a class movement that could overcome its early, sectarian phase, but with radically false conclusions for the epoch of “real domination”: “*In Marx's time the supersession of the sects was to be found in the unity of the workers' movement. Today, the parties, these groupuscules, manifest not merely a lack of unity but the absence of class struggle. They argue over the remains of the proletariat. They theorise about the proletariat in its immediate reality and oppose themselves to its movement. In this sense they realise the stabilisation requirements of capital. The proletariat, therefore, instead of having to supersede them, needs to destroy them*”.

This would be true, perhaps, if by the groupuscules, Camatte was referring to the organisations of the left of capital, which the proletariat will indeed have to destroy. But by denying the capacity of communist proletarians to come together and fight the influence of bourgeois ideology in its most radical forms, he removes the possibility of the proletariat really confronting and destroying its myriad false representatives, from the trade unions to the Trotskyist or Maoist organisations.

Perhaps, with this idea of the proletariat destroying the obstacles on the path towards communism, Camatte displays a faint nos-

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talgia for the class struggle, to the original impulse which led him towards proletarian militancy. But now that he has gone over to the idea that the proletariat and marxism have been destroyed, his references to Marx, to Luxemburg, and to previous proletarian upsurges (1905, 1917, 1968) ring hollow. These upsurges, he tells us, left the “stupefied, dumbfounded” groupuscules trailing behind the movement; and he goes on to remind us that Luxemburg, basing herself on the experience of the 1905 mass strike, offers us a coherent theory of the creativity of the masses which radically refutes the “Leninist” theory of class consciousness being introduced into the class from the outside (a position which Lenin himself came to reject). But these partial truths are referenced as part of what has become an effort to conceal the essential: that Marx, even when he lived through moments when he was ready to be isolated and limit his organisational life to cooperation with a few other comrades, or Luxemburg in 1914 when she saw that the Second International had become a “stink-

ing corpse”, never ceased fighting for the restoration and revival of the proletarian political organisation, based on their profound conviction in the revolutionary nature of the working class, the class of association, solidarity and consciousness.

It would be one thing if Camatte's desertion of this fight was no more than an individual flight, an admission that he preferred to cultivate his garden. But the theorisation of this desertion, which has continued for decades and has been continued by Camatte's progeny in the communisation current, is an active encouragement to others to join the flight, and thus has done incalculable damage to the difficult struggle to construct a proletarian political organisation.

In the second part of this article, we will look further into some of the key texts which aimed to justify Camatte's desertion of the class struggle, in particular *The Wandering of Humanity*.

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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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