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Faced with chaos and barbarism, the responsibility of revolutionaries

Democratic campaigns against working class consciousness

Faced with the rising tide of populism
The capitalist left can't save a dying system

Ukraine, Middle-East, Philippines, Taiwan, Africa
The deepening and extension of wars reflect the growing impasse of capitalism

More than a century of conflict in Israel/Palestine

Prague "Action Week"
Activism is a barrier to political clarification

Two years on from the Joint Statement of the Communist Left on the war in Ukraine

Manifesto of the Communist Left to the workers of Europe, June 1944

The struggle against imperialist war can only be waged with the positions of the Communist Left

How the bourgeoisie organises itself

This crisis is going to be the most serious in the whole period of decadence

Critique of the so-called "Communisers", part iv

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Faced with chaos and barbarism, the responsibility of revolutionaries

Gone are the days when, despite the reality of a world dominated by a system of exploitation that is leading humanity more and more explicitly to its doom, the media persisted in spreading a little optimism to lull the exploited to sleep by suggesting reasons to hope for a better capitalist world. Now, the accumulation of catastrophes of all kinds is such that it makes it much harder to see anything other than hell on earth. Adapting to this situation, propagandist intoxication more and more attempts to confine thinking to “end of the world” doomsday scenarios and does everything to divert the exploited from the idea that another future is both indispensable and possible, that it is maturing in the bowels of society and that it will be the outcome of the class struggle of the proletariat, if it succeeds in overthrowing capitalism.

Unprecedented chaos and barbarity... is not an inevitability

The world situation, as dramatic and crushing as it is, is not inevitable and can be explained in ways other than by the lies of those who have a vested interest in the perpetuation of capitalism: exploiters of proletarian labour power, politicians of all stripes, democrats of the left and right, populists and those on the far left who are capital's last line of defence.

Capitalism, more than any other mode of production before it, has developed the productive forces that have made it possible, for the first time in human history, to build a society free of necessity, without social classes: communism. In this sense, it represented a progressive stage in the history of humanity. The First World War – with its millions of deaths and destruction the like of which history had never witnessed – signalled the entry of this system into irreversible decline, the perpetuation of which now increasingly threatens the very existence of humanity. With two world wars to its credit, and an uninterrupted succession of increasingly deadly local wars, since the collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1990 it has entered a new and final stage of its decadence, its final phase, that of the general decomposition of society, of it rotting on its feet. It is only through the materialist and historical framework of decomposition, as the ultimate phase of the decadence of capitalism, that it is really possible to apprehend the “end of the world” phenomena that are invading society and to combat their cause: the persistence of the domination of capitalist relations of production that have become obsolete.

Society is in a state of decomposition across the board, with the development of a generalised mentality of “every man for himself”, the growing instability of international “regulatory” structures and political apparatuses, but also an explosion

in drug use, criminal activity, religious fanaticism, depression and suicide,¹ and a turning away from rational thought. The wave of populism is itself a product of this decomposition, which is increasingly affecting the ability of sections of the bourgeoisie to manage capital “rationally”. Two articles in this issue of the *International Review* illustrate this: “How the bourgeoisie organises itself”, in particular the section “The rise of populism: the most spectacular expression of the bourgeoisie’s loss of control over its political apparatus” and “The left of capital cannot save this dying system.”²

In addition to the social irresponsibility of the bourgeoisie, this decomposition is contributing to the accelerated deterioration of the environment, motivated by the profits obtained by stealing natural resources, and thus to the worsening of climate change, as witnessed by the frequency and scale of climatic disasters around the world.

Clearly, the decomposition of society does not eliminate the fundamental contradictions of capitalism; on the contrary, it only aggravates them. The global economic crisis, back since the end of the 1960s, is inexorably and irreversibly worsening, with manifestations that will be deeper and more destabilising than the 2008 recession, and which will arguably break all the records of the great crisis of 1929 and 1930 (read “This crisis is going to be the most serious of the entire period of decadence” in this issue of the *International Review*). But at the same time, while inflicting further suffering on humanity, with in particular a considerable reinforcement of the exploitation of the working class, and openly revealing the bankruptcy of capitalism, the economic crisis will provide

1. Read our article “Theses on Decomposition”, *International Review* n° 107.

2. Read also “The rise of populism is a pure product of the decomposition of capitalism”, ICC Online

the ferment for new developments in the class struggle and in the consciousness of the working class.

At the same time, the barbarity of war is spreading uncontrollably and ever more dramatically across every continent. War is currently raging in Ukraine and in the Gaza Strip in the Middle East; the threat of a future confrontation between China and the United States is unabated...³ The working class has no side to choose in all these wars, whether current or in the making, and must staunchly defend the banner of proletarian internationalism everywhere. For a whole period, the working class will not be able to stand up directly against war. On the other hand, the class struggle against exploitation will take on greater importance because it pushes the proletariat to politicise its struggle, with a view to overthrowing capitalism.

There is no other realistic perspective for humanity. Not only are we confronted with each of the capitalist calamities we have mentioned – decomposition, crisis, war, destruction of the environment – but all these scourges interweave and interact in a kind of “whirlwind effect” with more destructive effects than the simple addition of the scourges considered in isolation from each other.

The class struggle resurfaces on the world stage

While the aspects of society which represent the prospect of the destruction of humanity occupies all the media space, there is another factor at work, in relation to which the bourgeoisie is very discreet: the resumption of the class struggle on a global scale, the development of which represents the only possible future for humanity. Thus, after the considerable difficulties encountered by the class struggle following the political exploitation by the bourgeoisie of the collapse of the Eastern bloc, the proletariat is making its return to the social scene. It took the proletariat three decades, from the 1990s onwards, to digest the disgusting ideological campaign which hammered home, in every possible tone and through the media on every continent, that the collapse of the

3. See “A ‘Promised Land’ of Imperialist Confrontation” and “The deepening and extension of wars express the growing impasse of capitalism” in this issue of the *International Review*.

Stalinist regimes – falsely identified with the future communist society which is its antithesis – signalled the end of the project to build a communist society on a global scale. These campaigns even went so far as to decree the end of the class struggle, of the working class and of history itself. Even if the working class tried to raise its head through certain struggles over the last thirty years, these were considerably limited by the fact that the workers no longer recognised themselves as a class distinct from society, the main exploited class in society, with a project of its own. Yet it was the working class's gradual recovery of its class identity that made possible the emergence of struggles in the United Kingdom, the "Summer of Anger" in 2022, the biggest wave of strikes in that country since 1979. This revival of class struggle carries within it the proletariat's recovery of its own political project, the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a communist society.⁴

Articles in the ICC press have illustrated, followed and commented on the most striking expressions of this renewal of class struggle.⁵ Since the publication of issue n° 171 of the *International Review* alone, major struggles have taken place in Quebec, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Turkey and Northern Ireland. Such struggles are obviously the result of the growing refusal of the working class to put up with worsening exploitation and miserable conditions that go with it (the slogan "enough is enough" voiced by the workers in Britain). Even beyond the immediate awareness of workers in struggle, these movements constitute the beginning of a response to the hell on earth to which capitalism condemns humanity.

The intervention of revolutionaries must be in the vanguard at every level of the struggle of the working class and its awakening to consciousness.

As a product of the historic struggle of the world proletariat, the activity and intervention of revolutionaries are indispensable. This is true at every period in the life of society, from the birth of the workers' movement to the present day, both in the rise of capitalism and the development of the workers' movement and in its decline; whether it is by being in the vanguard of the working class struggle to give it direction, during revolutionary periods, or in the worst

4. On this subject, read "After the rupture in the class struggle, the necessity for politicisation", *International Review* n° 171.

5. For example, *International Review* n° 169 "The return of the combativity of the world proletariat", and *International Review* n° 170 "Report on class struggle for the 25th ICC congress."

moments of retreat, resisting politically and being very much in the minority, in order to save and maintain the heritage to be handed down. But it's also true in all "intermediate" situations, such as the one we are currently experiencing, when there is no possibility of a real influence within the working class and where the function of revolutionaries cannot be that of a party, revolutionary activity is nevertheless essential and indispensable on many levels, in particular with regard to the preparation of the conditions for the emergence of the future party.

In fact, in all circumstances, the activity of revolutionaries is far from being limited to the production of a press or leaflets and their distribution, even if these tasks are indeed essential and very demanding. Thus, as a condition for producing the press, the organisation must have the capacity to comprehend the evolution of the world situation at all levels, which presupposes a permanent collective effort of analysis, which may require a return to the basics, to update and enrich the framework of analysis. As "*there can be no revolutionary movement without a revolutionary theory*" (Lenin), and because the world is not static, revolutionaries must bring their political positions to life in the light of reality. This is how, for example, Lenin, aware that the moment favourable to revolution was approaching, undertook to write *The State and Revolution*,⁶ which was a continuation and clarification of marxist theory on the question of the state. It was a similar consideration which, in a completely different context, led our organisation to make an analytical effort to understand, at the end of the 1980s, the significance of the accumulation of phenomena of social decomposition, and to show that this was by no means something fortuitous or normal in the life of capitalism, but corresponded to a new phase in the decadence of capitalism, that of its decomposition.

It is this approach that enables the ICC to understand the current dynamics of imperialist conflict, not as a confrontation between two rival imperialist blocs – as was the case in the period 1945 to 1989 – but first and foremost as an expression of every imperialist country's quest for survival in the global arena. As the United States battles for world leadership, it has not hesitated to push Russia into invading Ukraine in order to weaken it considerably and prevent it from supporting China against the United States.

It is also this kind of analysis which enables the ICC to understand and defend

6. On this subject, read our article "Lenin's 'State and Revolution': Striking Validation of Marxism", *International Review* n° 91.

the fact that, since the disappearance of the imperialist blocs, the historical alternative is no longer "World Revolution or World War", the two terms being mutually exclusive, in particular because a proletariat which is not defeated globally is an obstacle to its recruitment for war. The two antagonistic dynamics in the present situation are not mutually exclusive: on the one hand, the sinking of society into decomposition, with the disappearance of society and all human life on earth at stake, and on the other, the development of the world class struggle until the proletariat takes power. However, the final outcome of these two dynamics is indeed exclusive to one or the other.

In the proletarian milieu, and certainly among those seeking class positions, there are divergences or questions as to the way in which the historical alternative is posed in the present situation. Some of these divergences have to do with whether or not we recognise the current phase of decomposition of capitalism. The ICC has developed a critique of the "vulgar materialist" approach which underlies the rejection of the notion of the decomposition of capitalism (see the section "The marxist method, an indispensable tool for understanding the present world" in the "Update of the Theses on Decomposition, 2023" in *International Review* n° 170) and we can only encourage its critics, as well as its defenders, to engage in debate on this question. But it is not the only issue that needs to be clarified as a matter of priority. Indeed, the development of war tensions requires the utmost clarity and firmness regarding our attitude and intervention in the face of this situation.

The defence of proletarian internationalism as set out in the *Communist Manifesto* is irrevocable: "*Proletarians have no country; proletarians of all countries unite*". However, in the face of the current conflicts, in particular the one in the Gaza Strip, there is a tendency among groups of the Communist Left (the Bordigists) but also within a fringe that shares a certain proximity to class positions, to set aside the intransigent position "*Proletarians of all countries unite*" in favour of dubious formulas that "forget" the proletariat of the Gaza Strip, dissolving it into the "Palestinian people". Such confusions, which must be discussed and fought against, are very damaging insofar as they open a breach in the principles which the working class must defend to be able to face up to the development of military conflicts which will increase throughout the world.⁷

7. On this question, read our articles in this issue of the *Review*: "'Prague' Action Week": Activism is an obstacle to political clarification" and "The fight

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Democratic campaigns against working class consciousness

With the presidential race in the United States and the European elections, the various bourgeois factions in the state apparatus have developed a vast ideological campaign in defence of democracy and its institutions, “threatened” by the rise of populism.

The working class must not give in to the siren song of democracy

Such a campaign, designed to last a long time, represents a real danger for the working class: it could weaken the tendency that has existed within the working class for several decades to turn away from the electoral circus as it became increasingly clear to workers that voting does nothing to defend their living conditions, which are constantly under attack from the state and the bosses, and that the left defends and will always defend the interests of capitalism.

By exploiting the spontaneous rejection of populism, of its assumed xenophobia, of its openly authoritarian discourse – a rejection which exists in a large part of the working class - the bourgeois factions of the left or the right are trying to bring the workers back to the rotten terrain of democracy, through which the bourgeoisie imposes its dictatorship over the whole of society in the most underhand way. The speeches warning that “democracy is threatened” by populism have had a certain effect on people’s minds, with a sharp rise in voter turnout in the European elections, particularly in France (first in the European elections, then in the parliamentary elections).

To follow the bourgeoisie on this terrain is to defend interests which are not those of the working class, to choose the defence of one bourgeois camp against another, whereas the only camp that the working class should choose is that of its autonomous struggle against capitalism in crisis and all its war-mongering. This warning is all the more necessary as political chaos and populism are set to become even more important, and with them the bourgeoisie’s campaigns to defend its “democracy”.

Chaos at work in the United States

Populism and its putrid ideology have long existed in the United States, and for decades the bourgeoisie has been able to prevent them from having too great an influence on

the state apparatus. Today, their growing presence seems inexorable and attempts to stop it seem fruitless. Although the most responsible factions of the bourgeoisie are still working to curb its rise to power, as we have seen in France recently, even with Trump’s defeat, populism is already and will continue to be a factor in weakening the United States, both within the state apparatus and American society, and internationally. For its part, the discredited Democratic camp, at the head of a state that has stepped up its attacks and was unable to quickly rule out the candidacy of a weakened Biden, is going into the elections with an undeniable handicap. We can therefore expect a merciless confrontation between the Democrats and the Republicans in the next American elections.

The electoral campaign is, in fact, already more violent than the previous one, not only in terms of rhetoric. The hostilities between the two camps have already been punctuated by nothing less than an assassination attempt on Trump. The fact that Trump has escaped this, with incredible self-assurance, makes him appear more powerful than ever, a situation he is sure to exploit to his advantage. And if, for a short time, he tried to play the “national reconciliation” card, adorning himself with the halo of a martyr, he very quickly abandoned it and returned to the posture of demolishing the opposing camp, without worrying about the consequences for the functioning of state institutions in the future. Moreover, a number of the obstacles to his new candidacy that the Democratic camp had put in place, particularly on the legal front, have recently been swept aside by a judicial system, part of which is clearly in Trump’s pocket.

Trump’s style, built on rhetoric, threats and violence, is nothing new, having already left its mark on previous election campaigns when the incumbent violently contested his defeat, notably by encouraging a mob of his fanatical supporters to storm the Capitol. A new defeat for the Republican camp could give rise to unrest on an even greater scale. In a country where

the population is heavily armed, Trump’s supporters, whipped into a frenzy for months and fed conspiracy theories, could embark on seditious adventures and spread chaos across the country. Trump’s pledge to take revenge on state officials he considers his enemies, replacing 400,000 of them if elected, also augurs post-election unrest. On the other hand, if Trump wins, his policies, which are seen as dangerous to US capital and its imperialist interests, will be challenged within various state bodies such as the army and the secret services.

So the only certainty is that, whatever the outcome of the elections, tensions and chaos are bound to develop in the world’s leading power, albeit in different forms and at a different pace depending on whether the Democrats or the Republicans win the next elections. Whatever happens, it will have catastrophic repercussions around the world. With Biden finally giving way to his vice-president Harris, the alternative between the Republicans and the Democrats is no alternative for the working class, which will have to resist this false choice in a very difficult context.

The prospect of a destabilised European Union

Tensions between the states of the European Union are growing, promising here as well the development of instability in the historic heartland of capitalism. The decomposition of capitalism is exacerbating the tendency for states to go it alone and is also at the root of the rise of populism. The factors of division are weighing ever more heavily.

The political upheavals in the United States are having an impact on the strategy of European states, which are facing an uncertain future with regard to America, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine and a menacing Russia. The confrontation between the United States and China, at the heart of global imperialist issues, is exacerbating tensions within the European Union itself: between those countries, such as Poland, which clearly favour the Atlanticist option, and those, such as France, which wish to assert a degree of independence from the United

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Faced with the rising tide of populism

The capitalist left can't save a dying system

Capitalism – the mode of production that reigns over every country on the planet – is dying. In historic decline for over a century, the acceleration of its decay has been more and more visible for the last three decades and especially since the beginning of the 2020s, where its multiple crises – economic, military, ecological – are coming together to create a deadly whirlwind which is significantly exacerbating the threat of the destruction of humanity.

The ruling class in capitalism, the bourgeoisie, has no solution to this nightmarish scenario. Unable to offer any perspective for society, it is caught up in the desperate logic of a decomposing society: every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost! This has become the dominant rule in international relations, expressing itself in the extension of barbaric wars across the planet. But it is also the leading tendency within each nation: the ruling class is more and more divided into cliques and clans, each putting their own interests above the needs of the national capital; and this situation is making it increasingly difficult for the bourgeoisie to act as a unified class and maintain overall control of its political apparatus. The rise of populism in the last decade is the clearest product of this tendency: the populist parties are an embodiment of the irrationality and “no future” of capitalism, with their promulgation of the most absurd conspiracy theories and their increasingly violent rhetoric against the established parties. The more “responsible” factions of the ruling class are concerned about the rise of populism because its attitudes and policies are directly at odds with what’s left of the traditional consensus of bourgeois politics.

To take one example: imperialist strategy. One of the reasons why there is such opposition, within the American ruling class itself, to the return of Trump to the presidency, is that he would undermine the main planks of US policy on key questions like strengthening NATO and supporting Ukraine in the war against Russia, while giving a free hand to the most aggressive factions of the Israeli bourgeoisie in the Middle East. Like Trump, Le Pen, Farage and other populists in Europe are also notoriously pro-Russian in their international outlook, which runs counter to the current policies of the most important Western states. With the US Democrats somewhat paralysed over whether or not to replace the ageing Biden in time for the November election, a “Second Coming” of Donald

Trump seems increasingly likely, opening the prospect of a further acceleration of chaos in international relations.

More generally, populism is the offspring of a growing disillusionment with the “political class”. It feeds off discontent with the venality and corruption of established politicians, their litany of broken promises, and their role in reducing the living standards for the majority of the population. Hence the populists’ claim to express a true rebellion of “the people” against the “elites” and their demagogic demands to improve the living standards of the “native” population by scapegoating and excluding migrants and foreigners.

Election results in Britain and France: a barrier to the populist upsurge?

The results of the elections in Britain and France show that the “responsible” factions of the ruling class are not prepared to lie down and concede defeat to the populists.

The British bourgeoisie has a long-standing reputation as the most experienced and intelligent ruling class in the world, a reputation which has outlasted Britain’s decline as a world power. In the 1980s, for example, the political and economic policies of Thatcherism, and the division of labour between the right in power and the left in opposition, served as an example to follow across the whole western bloc, most obviously in the USA itself. But the last few years have witnessed the Tory party, in its attempts to “contain” the rise of populism, become increasingly infected by it, notably thanks to the Brexit disaster and the incompetence and brazen lying of successive Tory premierships. In the space of less than five years, the Tories have gone from the huge victory of 2019 to the near wipe-out of the 2024 elections, which has seen a Labour landslide and the biggest electoral defeat in Tory history. The Conservatives lost 251

seats and this included a number of former cabinet ministers (such as Grant Shapps and Jacob Rees-Mogg) and even a former prime minister (Liz Truss). In numerous constituencies the Tories finished third, behind the Liberal Democrats and, more significantly, Farage’s Reform UK.

In one of his first speeches as PM, Keir Starmer proclaimed that his government would fight to “make you believe again”. Fully aware of the very widespread cynicism towards politicians among the population, the Labour government is selling a vision of strong and stable government in contrast to the chaos of the last few years. It talks about “change” but it is extremely cautious in the promises it is making, and even more cautious about spending its way out of Britain’s economic problems. On foreign policy there will be almost no change at all in the previous government’s support for US and NATO policies towards Ukraine, the Middle East and China.

Labour’s ability to present itself as the new party of order and sensible government is an expression of the remaining intelligence of the British ruling class, its understanding that the Tory policy of controlling populism by injecting a whole number of populist themes into its own body has been a complete failure. In this sense it has added a few bricks to the barrier against the populist upsurge. But even in the UK, this is a very fragile barrier.

For one thing, the Labour landslide was based on a very low turnout: only 60% of the electorate cast their vote, an indication that cynicism towards the political process remains very widespread. Secondly, it was very clear from the polls that the Labour vote was not founded on any great enthusiasm for its policies but was primarily motivated by a desire to get rid of the Tories. And perhaps most importantly, the Tories’ defeat was in part due to a widescale defection to Reform, boosted by Farage’s decision to take on the leadership of the party and stand in the election. Even though Reform only won 5 seats in parliament, they obtained 14.3% of the vote, putting them third in terms of total votes cast. Farage made it very clear that he didn’t expect to win many seats and that the fight against Labour (and the centre) has only just begun.

The British two-party system, with its “first past the post” principle, has long been advertised as a foundation stone of British political stability, a method of avoiding the turbulence of coalition politics which reigns in the many parliamentary systems based on proportional representation. In this case, the British approach has proved to be an effective block on smaller parties like Reform having a significant presence in parliament. But the two-party system also depends on the stability of the two main parties themselves, and what emerged from the 2024 election was a historic crippling of the Conservatives – a blow from which they may not recover.

Another key indication that we may not be in for a long period of “strong and stable” Labour rule is its attitude to the class struggle. Starmer, Angela Rayner (Deputy Prime Minister) and others may emphasise their personal working class origins, but this is more a counter to the populists’ claims that they “speak for ordinary people” than as a means of presenting Labour as a party of the working class, still less as a “socialist” party. Starmer’s Labour is very much a rehash of Blair’s New Labour, claiming to hold the ground of the “centre-left”, in opposition to the “left wing excesses” of Jeremy Corbyn which cost it dear in 2019. But in between 2019 and 2024 Britain has seen an important revival of class struggles which acted as a beacon to workers’ resistance around the world. These struggles have died down but they are still simmering. The present Labour regime would not be well equipped ideologically to respond to a new outbreak of class movements and would find itself rapidly losing credibility as an improvement on the Tories.

In France, as in Britain, we have seen from within the bourgeois political apparatus a rather intelligent response to the rise of populism and the danger of Le Pen’s Rassemblement National winning a majority in parliament. The New Popular Front was cobbled together soon after Macron declared a snap election in response to the successes of RN in the EU elections. It brought together all the main forces of the left: the Socialist and Communist Parties, La France Insoumise, the Greens and some of the Trotskyist groups. After RN’s victory in the first round of the legislatures, they made a deal with Macron’s centre party, Renaissance, not to oppose each others’ candidates in the second round if it meant losing ground to the RN, and the manoeuvre worked: the RN failed to win a majority in the National Assembly.

Does this mean that Macron’s gamble of calling the snap election has paid off? In fact, it has created an extremely uncertain situation in French bourgeois politics. Al-

though the left and the centre were able to do a deal against the RN, Macron will face a divided parliament, made up of three main groupings which are in turn split into several sub-groups. This situation is thus still likely to make his job far more difficult than before. In contrast to Britain, France does not have a strong centre-left party because the Socialist Party was totally discredited by its years in power when it rained down attacks on the working class. The French Communist Party is also a shadow of its former self. The most dynamic force in the New Popular Front is La France Insoumise, which touts its working class and socialist credentials, its links to the workers’ struggles against the neo-liberal policies of Macron (for example, it calls for dropping the rise in the pension age to 64, a key issue in the recent strikes and demonstrations in France, and restoring it to 60). LFI is also highly critical of NATO and of the war in the Middle East, which does not make it a reliable supporter of Macron’s foreign policy. All this points to the conclusion that the French barrier against populism and political chaos is perhaps even more fragile than the British.

To some extent, the uncertainty facing the French political apparatus is a reflection of a more historically based weakness of the French bourgeoisie, which has not enjoyed the same political stability as its British counter-part and has been plagued by divisions between particular interests for much longer. One of the reasons why the Socialist Party lost its credentials as a working class party was its untimely accession to power in the 80s, where it was obliged to carry out some ferocious attacks on the working class, rather than remaining in opposition like the Labour Party in the UK. And this inability to conform to an international strategy of the ruling class was an indication of this historic incoherence of the French ruling class and its political machinery.

The capitalist left against the working class

In France, there was more enthusiasm in the streets for the “defeat” suffered by RN than for the “triumph” of Labour in the UK. The blocking of RN from government meant that some of its more openly repressive and racist policies against immigrants and Muslims would not be put into effect, and this no doubt was felt as a relief to many, above all those from an immigrant background. But this enthusiasm contains real dangers, above all the idea that the left is really on the side of the workers, and that capitalism is only represented by the far right or Macron’s neo-liberalism.

The very fact that the left parties have played such a crucial part in the effort to block the RN is proof of the bourgeois nature of the left. Populism is certainly an enemy of the working class, but it is not the only one, and combining with other parties to bring stability to the existing political apparatus is an action in the service of capitalism and its state. Moreover, since this action is carried out in the name of defending democracy against fascism, it is a means of reinforcing the fraudulent ideology of democracy. Let us not forget the role that the left has played in the past to save capitalism in its hours of need: from World War One when the opportunists of Social Democracy put the interests of the nation above the interests of the international working class and helped recruit the workers for the war fronts; to the German revolution of 1918 when the Social Democratic government acted as the “blood-hound” of the counter-revolution, using the proto-fascist *Frei Korps* to crush the insurrectionary workers; and most tellingly, to the 1930s when the “original” Popular Fronts helped to prepare the working class for the slaughter of the Second World War, precisely in the name of defending democracy against fascism.

The working class should have no illusion that those who take part in the bourgeois political machine, whether from the right or the left, are there to protect the workers from attacks on their living standards. On the contrary, the only option for a bourgeois government and the parties within it, faced with a capitalist system which is falling apart at the seams, is to demand sacrifices by the working class in the name of defending the national economy and its imperialist interests, up to and including sacrificing themselves on the altar of war. We have already seen this amply demonstrated by Blair’s New Labour government in Britain and Mitterand’s Socialist Party government in France.¹

The defence of workers’ interests lies not in the ballot box or in putting our trust in the parties of the enemy class. It can only be based on the independent, collective struggles of the workers as a class against all attacks on our living and working conditions, and on our very lives, whether these attacks come from the right or the left wings of the ruling class.

Amos

1. See for example: “Blair’s legacy: A trusty servant of capitalism”, *World Revolution* n° 304.

Ukraine, Middle-East, Philippines, Taiwan, Africa...

The deepening and extension of wars reflect the growing impasse of capitalism

Faced with the total impasse in which capitalism finds itself and the failure of all economic “remedies”, the bourgeoisie has no choice but to rush forward by means that can only be military. The aggravation of war and warlike tensions in Ukraine, the Middle East and Africa, and the growing threats in Asia (Philippines, Taiwan, etc.) are the main vectors of a world situation in which war, economic crisis and ecological disaster are worsening and reinforcing each other. The world proletariat is paying the consequences on the front lines in Russia and Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza, in Yemen and the Sahel, etc. In the face of increasing austerity measures to finance the war, misery, insecurity and fear for the future are deepening everywhere. Although the proletariat is reacting more and more through struggle to unbearable economic attacks, there is still a long way to go before the development and politicisation of its struggles make it possible to challenge capitalist domination.

While the polarisation of tensions between the United States and China constitutes the central axis of imperialist tensions in the world, and the various military clashes directly or indirectly linked to this major confrontation, the imperialist dynamic is not one of stable alliances leading to the formation of imperialist blocs with a view to a Third World War. This does not mean, however, that humanity can sleep soundly: the current trend towards uncontrolled imperialist chaos is also a threat to its survival.

Since the collapse of the blocs, the determination of the United States to maintain its position as the world’s leading power, and to impose its imperialist order, has been a major contribution to the current imperialist disorder. Following the direction set by the Obama administration, the US bourgeoisie has implemented a policy of a “pivot” towards Asia, weaving a network of economic and military alliances (AUKUS, Quad) to isolate China, on the model of its encirclement of the USSR¹ which contributed to the collapse of the Eastern bloc. Undermining the alliance between Russia and China is an important objective of this policy, which is why the US helped provoke the war in Ukraine in order to “bleed” Russia.² Another strand of US imperialism’s strategy was the Pax Americana in the Middle East, with the

2020 Abraham Accords which aimed to neutralise Iran and its proxy militias in the region and block the presence of China and its “Silk Roads”. The chaos that gripped the region following the bloody attack by Hamas, and Israel’s genocidal response, which together risk setting the region ablaze, ran counter to the interests of the United States, which had to mobilise considerable military resources to prevent any destabilisation threatening the order “guaranteed” by the Abraham Accords.

To add to the confusion, the populist and Democratic factions of the American bourgeoisie defend different imperialist orientations, which would make the outlook even more unpredictable in the event of a Trump victory in the next presidential elections: “*Trump whiplashes between a wish to project US power abroad and isolationism; recently he has vowed to withdraw from NATO, end imports of Chinese goods, deploy the US military onto American streets to fight crime and deport immigrants, and ‘drive out’ ‘warmongers’ and ‘globalists’ from the US government. Other conservative leaders – such as Florida Governor Ron de Santis and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy – express outright hostility toward sustaining the United States’ international commitments. Most GOP presidential candidates offered unconditional support for Israel after Hamas’ attack [...] On Ukraine, the party’s politicians are split, with just over half of House Republicans voting in September 2023 to halt US aid to Kyiv’s defense against Russia’s invasion.*”³

3. “The Case for Conservative Internationalism” by Kori Schake, a member of the Security Council and the State Department under Bush Jr, Professor and Director of Foreign and Defence Policy Studies at

Stalemate in the Ukraine war

After two and a half years, the war appears to have reached a stalemate. The Ukrainian offensive has been a failure and Russia is struggling to advance beyond its positions. Both sides are faced with the need to mobilise more people and resources on the front lines, while the ruins of towns and cities and the losses and deprivation of the population continue to mount.

The cause of this impasse is not that Russia’s resistance to the “bloodletting” and its ability to remain a world power have been underestimated. Rather, they have been overestimated. At the root of the current impasse is the spiral of chaos unleashed by the war in Ukraine.

Firstly in Russia itself, where economic growth is in reality the result of the war economy, which eats up all resources and heralds “bread today and hunger tomorrow”: “...over a third of Russia’s growth is due to the war, with defence-related industries flourishing at double-digit growth rates. [...] The military sector is receiving a disproportionately high amount of government spending, and it is also siphoning off labor from the civilian workforce, leading to an abnormally low unemployment rate of 2.9% [...] The interaction between military spending, labour shortages and rising wages has created an illusion of prosperity that is unlikely to last [...] Putin is facing an impossible trilemma. His challenges are threefold: he must fund his ongoing war against Ukraine, maintain his populace’s living standards and safeguard macroeconomic stability. Achieving the first and second goals will require higher spending, which will fuel inflation and thus prevent the achievement of the third goal.”⁴ This scenario of inflation, deteriorating state services (health, education, etc.) and family debt will no doubt change the way Russia’s main working class concentrations have experienced the war so far.⁵

the American Enterprise Institute. *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2024.

4. “Putin’s Unsustainable Spending Spree”, by Alexandra Prokopenko (former adviser to the Russian central bank until 2020, currently working at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Centre think-tank), *Foreign Affairs*, website, 8 January 2024.

5. “Russia ranks nearly last in the world in the scale

1. See previous ICC articles: “The war in Ukraine, a giant step into widespread barbarism and chaos” and “The significance and impact of the war in Ukraine.”, *International Review* n° 168.

2. At the start of the war, in March 2022, the French finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, summed up Biden and Von der Leyen’s statements as follows: “We are going to cause Russia’s economic collapse”.

What's more, the productivity of the Russian economy and its technological level are so low⁶ that the country has to buy arms from North Korea.⁷ Added to this is a demographic problem and a shortage of skilled labour, exacerbated by the flight of young technology-sector workers.

But economic problems are not the only ones facing Putin. The Russian Federation has 24 republics (including the occupied territories of Ukraine) from which Putin's government has withdrawn the prerogatives of autonomy (with the exception of Chechnya), though not without resistance and repercussions (in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Central Asia, as witnessed by the recent Khorasan attack in Moscow). The uneven distribution of the war effort, with selective enlistment in peripheral regions and the withdrawal of resources to concentrate them in Moscow, all adds to tensions and, in the event of the collapse of the Russian army, would create a situation of possible break-up of the Federation and the emergence of multiple warlords armed with nuclear warheads, a nightmarish vision that the other powers, including the United States, want absolutely to avoid... while in fact helping to provoke it. Another element which is straining the cohesion of the bourgeoisie in Russia is the struggle between its different factions. Despite Putin's iron dictatorship, it is clear that Wagner's rebellion and the "accidental" deaths of Prigozhin and Navalny, as well as the successive changes in the military high command, illustrate the reality of harsh conflicts within the state.

In geostrategic terms, Russia has already lost its bid to prevent NATO's eastward expansion, which has seen the integration of Poland and the three Baltic states. Following the war in Ukraine, Finland and Sweden applied for membership. Moreover, Russia's international isolation is making it more dependent on China.

There is no guarantee that, in this chaos, Putin (or anyone else) will not, in desperation, resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction.

and speed of automation of production: its robotisation is just a microscopic fraction of the world average". From "The Five Futures of Russia", by Stephen Kotkin, (Kleinheinz Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution), in *Foreign Affairs* May/June 2024.

6. Between the beginning of the 21st century and today, the working-age population has lost more than 10 million people, and the population aged between 20 and 40 (considered to be the most productive age group in terms of labour) will continue to decline over the next decade.

7. "...the limits of the country's diminished labor force are becoming ever more evident, even in that high-priority sector [war production] which has around five million fewer qualified workers than it needs", "The Five Futures of Russia".

Impasse in the United States

The United States has consciously pushed Russia into a new offensive in Ukraine, but the prolongation of the war and the stalemate in the conflict are now working against its own interests. First of all, the war is draining economic, military and diplomatic resources that could be used to strengthen the US presence in Asia. It also reinforces the deep divisions within the American bourgeoisie: the Republicans were blocking a \$60 billion support package for Ukraine and, for his part, Trump declared that if he were to win the election, he would not continue to support Ukraine. Pursuing this provocative line, he went so far as to say that he would let Russia "do whatever it wants" regarding its intimidation of Europe, even threatening to withdraw the United States from NATO should the European countries fail to increase their military spending.⁸ The war is also a source of tension with the European allies, on whom the United States has imposed a policy of sanctions against Russia and increased spending on arms.

However, abandoning support for Ukraine is not a reasonable option for the US bourgeoisie, principally because it would weaken its credibility as an imperialist sponsor and deterrent – as Taiwan's foreign minister said: "Support for Ukraine is essential to dissuade Xi from invading the island".

Like Russia, not only China but also India and the EU are watching what the United States is going to do and what a new Trump administration might entail. Ukraine is particularly worried. Faced with the risk of a withdrawal of military and financial support for Ukraine, the Biden administration's diplomacy has been intensely active in recent months,⁹ starting with the draft security pact with Ukraine that is due to be approved at the next NATO summit in Washington "which would not bind NATO members to mutual defence, but would probably reaffirm long-term support for Ukraine".¹⁰ This follows the decision at NATO's 75th anniversary summit in April to accelerate increases in military spending and to admit Finland and Sweden.¹¹ In Paris on April 2, US Secre-

8. "If he [Trump] wins", *Time*, vol. 203, n°s 17-18.

9. "Biden is growing bolder on Ukraine", by Ian Bremmer, in *Time*, vol. 203, nos. 21-22, 2024.

10. "According to NATO spokesman and Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, NATO plans to provide €10 billion over five years... 'Ministers discussed how best to organise NATO's support for Ukraine to make it stronger and more sustainable', a senior NATO official said" ("Western countries plan to release €100 billion to support the Kiev regime", in *Diplomatie Internationale* n° 5).

11. "Secretary of State Antony Blinken is active on all fronts and is multiplying initiatives", Karin Leiffer

tary of State Blinken also urged the EU to "increase arms and munitions production to produce more, faster, and to support Ukraine against Russia [...] the challenges Ukraine faces will not go away tomorrow". The House of Representatives chaired by Mike Johnson (a Trumpist Republican) finally agreed to vote to release aid funds to Ukraine, bowing to pressure from the Biden administration.

The recent summit "for peace in Ukraine" in Bürgenstock, Switzerland (15-16 June) deserves a special mention. Zelensky brought together one hundred delegations, but since the spring, the French, German, British and American delegations compiled a *Zero draft* which reduced the 10 points initially proposed by Ukraine to four and excluded in particular those referring to the withdrawal of Russian troops and the territorial integrity of Ukraine, limiting themselves to pointing out the nuclear risk and the need not to block food trade. In July, *Le Monde Diplomatique* published an article based on a report by *Foreign Affairs*, according to which, since the beginning of the war in March 2022, Western countries had blocked a peace agreement by pushing Ukraine to continue the war until Russia was defeated. According to the article, Putin is quoted as saying that Boris Johnson (then British Prime Minister) called on Ukrainians to "fight Russia until victory is achieved and Russia suffers a strategic defeat."¹²

Stalemate in Europe

Washington has imposed its discipline on the European powers by applying sanctions against Russia, financing the war in Ukraine and increasing NATO's military spending, but the EU countries are trying to resist: their delivery of arms and support to Ukraine has been slow and limited, which does not contradict the fact that each country is increasing significantly its own arsenal and military reach. The EU's leading power, Germany, is an explosive concentration of all the contradictions of the unprecedented situation opened by the war in Ukraine. Threatened by the chaos in the East, the end of multilateralism is affecting its export-dependent economic power, forcing it to increase its military spending with a view to rearmament and finally, with the sanctions against Russia having dealt a major blow to its supplies of Russian gas, it is being forced to look for alternative sources of energy. In the

in *Diplomatie Internationale* n° 5.

12. "The talks that could have ended the war in Ukraine", abridged version of an article in *Foreign Affairs*, April 2024, by Samuel Charap (political scientist) and Sergueï Radchenko (history professor at Johns-Hopkins University), in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2024.

current situation, Germany is obliged to submit to American military tutelage which is why, for the time being, it is one of the main supporters of American imperialist policies.

The war has caused divisions within the EU and NATO, between those who defend an openly pro-Putin policy, such as Hungary and Slovakia, and those who, like France, want greater independence from the United States. The recent European elections also showed that in various national capitals, populist factions are defending policies contrary to the interests of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, as in the case of Le Pen's RN in France, which favours greater entente with Moscow, and Salvini's La Lega in Italy. Chinese imperialism is trying to widen this divide by offering support to US dissidents, and Xi Jinping has organised selective trips to divide Europe, avoiding certain capitals like Berlin but travelling to Paris.

In any case, the war in Ukraine is forcing the European powers to adopt a policy of rearmament, austerity and sacrifices for the working class. In the EU, a war economy is being erected, with the bourgeoisie justifying it by the threat from Russia. Von der Lyden, the newly re-elected President of the European Commission, declared that *"although the threat of war is not imminent, we must prepare for it"*.

But the working class in the core countries of Western Europe has shown that it is not prepared to accept further sacrifices without a fight. As shown by the "summer of anger" in 2022 in Great Britain, with the slogan "enough is enough", or the fight against the extension of the retirement age in France, we are witnessing a renewed combativeness that will develop in the face of attacks on our living conditions.

From Pax Americana to scorched earth policy

*"Biden's effort to achieve an Israel-Saudi normalisation deal was the most recent component of a long American campaign to strengthen cooperation between self-described moderate regional actors. The normalisation talks built on the success of the 2020 Abraham Accords, which paved the way for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, and opened up unprecedented opportunities for bilateral trade, military cooperation and people-to-people engagement. The opening with Riyadh would have boosted this trend, putting Iran on the back foot even as it strove to secure its own rapprochement with Riyadh."*¹³

13. "Iran's Order of Chaos", by Suzanne Maloney

The aim of this Pax Americana was to immobilise Iran and its proxy militias,¹⁴ as well as establish a trade route from India to prevent the deployment of China's Silk Roads project in the region; at the same time, it would allow military resources to be redirected towards Asia and the China Seas, the primary centre of imperialist tensions. This plan had been based on the recognition of a Palestinian state, demanded by Arab countries, and Saudi Arabia in particular, as a condition for the establishment of relations with Israel. As a result, the Palestinian Authority lost all credibility in Gaza to Hamas, and in the West Bank it proved powerless in the face of the occupation of land by Israeli settlers pushed by the extreme right-wing government and supported by the army. This strategy prevented the establishment of any Palestinian forces in the region and neutralised Iran's interests. Certainly, the previous Trump administration had no qualms about recognising the annexation of the Golan Heights or moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which could only be seen as provocations. All this left no room for anything other than a desperate reaction.

The murderous 7 October mission by Hamas, prepared and supported by Iran, was an attack on this strategy, which turned the whole region upside down. *"Several US presidents had hoped to play down America's role in the Middle East without too much cost – in Biden's case, to focus on the challenge of China and the growing threat of Russia. But Hamas and Iran have brought the US back."*¹⁵

Indeed. The US's largest aircraft carrier returned to the region's shores at the head of a strike force and a number of special operations selectively punished pro-Iranian militias: *"Joe Biden's rapid deployment of US military assets to the region, as well as his diplomatic efforts with Lebanon and other key regional players, avoided the full-scale war that Hamas might have hoped to precipitate. A series of US strikes against Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, Syria and Yemen degraded the capabilities of these groups and signalled to Tehran's partners that they would pay the price for their continued aggression against the Americans. However, the risk of American miscalculation and complacency will increase with time"*.¹⁶

But what Washington could not stop was Israel's whirlwind of revenge. Hamas has

(Vice President of the Brookings Institution and Director of its Foreign Policy Programme), in *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2024.

14. Pro-Iran militias, such as Hezbollah, the Houthis and Hamas itself.

15. See note 13.

16. Ibid.

lit the fuse to a scorched earth policy in the region, but it is Israel that is carrying it out. The Zionist state stopped obeying US orders a long time ago. Its far-right government has only reinforced this tendency to retaliate.

The United States has supported Israel's murderous response in Gaza (over 38,000 deaths to date), while trying to contain the escalation of open warfare against Iran. But this situation undermines their rhetoric in Ukraine, where they are supporting a country invaded by its neighbour (Russia), while in Gaza, they are in practice supporting Israel's invasion and its extermination of Palestinians. It also undermines their propaganda as the leader of world democracy. Furthermore, the continuation of the war and its extension across the Middle East undermines the path previously favoured by the United States in the region. For this reason, *"Washington's most urgent task is ending the war in Gaza"*.¹⁷ Whether the US can impose its authority on the region, and in particular restrain Israel's belligerent rampage, is another question.

The head of US diplomacy, Blinken, has already made eight visits to the region since the start of the war, with the aim of building on the alliance with Saudi Arabia. For the first time since 7 October, in March the United States did not veto a ceasefire resolution at the UN, allowing it to pass, albeit on the grounds that it was "non-binding". The Americans also concocted a plan with Qatar and Saudi Arabia for the release of Hamas prisoners, which was approved by the UN Security Council in June. Netanyahu has already ignored other calls for a ceasefire, leading in April to Benny Gantz's resignation from the war cabinet, effectively forcing its dissolution and accepting his call for early elections in September.

Faced with US initiatives to contain Israel's imperialist aspirations and discipline it, the Israeli government is opening up new war fronts with provocations such as the attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, which killed seven commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, the attacks on Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, and recently the attack on Yemen, in an attempt to force Washington to assume its role as regional policeman; but this has been at the risk of setting the region ablaze by fostering war with Iran. For the first time,

17. "The war that remade the Middle East", by Maria Fatappie (Head of the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa Programme at the Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome, and Vali Nasr Majid Khadduri, Professor of International and Middle Eastern Affairs at the John Hopkins University School of International Studies, (previously Senior Advisor to the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2009 to 2011), *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2024.

the Mullahs' regime in April launched a direct attack against Israel.

The Netanyahu government is also trying to buy time in anticipation of Trump's victory in the forthcoming US elections, after he announced his unwavering support for an Israeli war against Iran. For Netanyahu himself, beyond imperialist interests with the United States, the pursuit of war is also a personal matter, an attempt to save his skin in the face of numerous public protests against him and the threat of being tried for corruption.

The victim of these imperialist manoeuvres is the population of the whole region, exterminated under the fire of the struggle between the imperialist camps, in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, in Yemen between Iran and Saudi Arabia (and now Israel) and in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel.

Africa: the weak link in US imperialism

Global imperialist chaos is taking concrete form in Africa¹⁸ with the intensification of imperialist conflicts resulting in tens of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees and unprecedented famine. The conflicts involve 31 countries and 295 clashes between militias and guerrillas.¹⁹ Washington and the Western powers are finding it increasingly difficult to counter the growing economic and military influence of China and Russia on the continent. The most glaring example is France's loss of position there.

Africa is crucial to the Chinese economy in terms of supplies of basic raw materials for technological development and oil; but above all, through the Silk Roads project, China has strengthened its military and geostrategic presence in North Africa and the Horn of Africa, even though it currently only has a military base in Djibouti. As for Russia, its mercenary troops (Wagner) have been involved in coups d'état in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and recently in the conflict between Congo and Rwanda.

But the nerve centre of imperialist tensions today is the Horn of Africa, which is directly linked to the Middle East conflict and where control of the Red Sea, through which around 15% of world trade passes, is at stake. Iran is trying to influence the region through the Houthis, China through its presence in Djibouti and Russia through its intervention in Sudan. The

18. According to Zhang Hongming, deputy director of the Institute of West Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Africa is "the weak link in the United States' global strategic design".

19. Wars in the World website

famine in Sudan (the third largest country in Africa), where 25 million people (15% of the population) need humanitarian aid and from which more than 7 million people have fled, confirms the interaction between war, crisis and ecological disaster on a global scale.

Implications for the proletariat

In the United States, the divisions within the bourgeoisie present the working class with false grounds for reflection and opposition to the war. Trump presents himself as the supporter of workers who don't want to get involved in wars that don't concern them and where their children are dying. But his seemingly "pacifist" scenario is mixed with a defence of the homeland, economic sacrifices to rebuild the economy, a rejection of immigration and rampant xenophobia – all of it an alien terrain for the proletariat. Biden and the Democrats, on the other hand, present themselves as the defenders of peace and "international solidarity", while their government is in fact the "bad actor" responsible for the current chaos.

This false choice leads the American proletariat to the bourgeois terrain of anti-racism, anti-populism and the defence of democracy, as we saw during the Black Lives Matter demonstrations or in the mobilisations in opposition to the assault on the Capitol.

It is only on the terrain of the struggle for their living conditions, for their demands, as in the Big Three (car industry) strike or the struggles for education and health in California, that the proletariat is able to fight outside the false alternatives proposed by the bourgeoisie.

In the same way, in the Middle East, the war prevents the expression of an internationalist proletarian struggle against both sides, diverting solidarity with the victims on the ground towards support for the Palestinian or even the Iranian side.

As for the proletariat of Europe, in the region of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, we cannot expect a massive response from it on its class terrain. This includes Russia, even if the continuation of the war means a greater involvement of the central battalions of this part of the proletariat. In the future, the aggravation of the economic and financial crisis will pose, more in Russia than in Ukraine, the conditions for a mobilisation of the proletariat to defend its living conditions.

The workers' struggle in Britain under the slogan "enough is enough", and in other countries such as the United States and France, shows that the proletariat is

not prepared to sacrifice itself for war and has been stimulated to reflect on the links between economic crisis and war as well as the disastrous future that capitalism has in store for us.

The impact of the war in the Middle East is, however, a momentary obstacle to the development of class struggle. It favours appeals to choose one of the imperialist camps, to take sides in the war, which the proletariat must reject and fight with the greatest energy.

H.R. (23 July 2024)

More than a century of conflict in Israel/Palestine

Since 7 October 2023, the Middle East has once again been embroiled in an escalation of barbaric violence that defies all comprehension. Following the raid by hundreds of Hamas terrorists who massacred and kidnapped as many people as they could on Israeli territory, and the salvos of thousands of missiles fired from Gaza, the Israeli army's response has been devastating, with the systematic bombardment and destruction of population centres, the death of tens of thousands of people, mainly women and children, and the further displacement of the entire population of the Gaza Strip, with whole families forced to sleep in the streets. The Palestinian population is being held hostage by both Hamas and the Israeli army, with the surrounding Arab states (Egypt, Jordan) doing everything they can to prevent the displaced Palestinians from fleeing to their territories. And from Hezbollah in the north to the Houthis in the Red Sea, a creeping extension of the war threatens the whole region.

A "promised land" of imperialist confrontation

In the face of all this carnage, indignation and anger are not enough. Above all, we need to analyse and understand the historical context that led to these massacres. Behind the claims of pro-Zionist democrats about the "sacred right of the Jews to found and defend their State" or the slogans of the pro-Palestinian left advocating a "free Palestine, from the river to the sea", lies a mobilisation of the population of the region, and in particular the working class, with a view to multiplying the carnage for the benefit of sinister imperialist manoeuvres and confrontations that have been going on for more than a century: "*The geopolitical landscape of the contemporary Middle East is incomprehensible without knowing the last hundred years of imperialist manoeuvres.*"¹

As capitalism passed into its decadent epoch, marked by the outbreak of World War 1, the formation of new nation states lost any progressive function and served only to justify brutal ethnic cleansing, mass exoduses of populations and systematic discrimination against minorities. We need only recall how, almost simultaneously with the formation of the Zionist state in the late 1940s – and also as a consequence of British imperialism's double-dealing – there was a forced mass exodus of Muslims from India and Hindus from Pakistan, provoked by horrific pogroms on both sides. More recently, the break-up of Yugoslavia led to bloody civil wars and massacres. So the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with its massacres and refugees, while it has its specific aspects, is not an exceptional evil, but a classic product of

the decadence of capitalism. In this context, the internationalist position defended by the Communist Left rejects any support for a capitalist state or proto-state and the imperialist forces that support them. Today, the destruction of all capitalist states is on the agenda by a single means: international proletarian revolution. Any other "strategic" or "tactical" objective is a support for the murderous logic of imperialist war.

The history of the confrontation between the Jewish and Arab bourgeoisies in Palestine illustrates how the "national" movements of both Jews and Arabs, while engendered by the ordeal of oppression and persecution, are inextricably intertwined with the confrontation of rival imperialisms, and how these movements have both been used to eclipse the common class interests of Arab and Jewish proletarians, leading them to slaughter each other for the interests of their exploiters.

Palestine: narrow national ambitions and imperialist manoeuvring ground

From the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, once the globe had been divided between the main European powers, the nature of imperialist conflicts took on a qualitatively new character, with increasingly open and violent confrontation between these and other powers in different parts of the world: between France and Italy in North Africa, between France and Britain in Egypt and the Sudan, between Britain and Russia in Central Asia, between Russia and Japan in the Far East, between Japan and Britain in China, between the United States and Japan in the Pacific, between Germany and France over Morocco, etc. From this

time onwards, various powers, such as Germany, Russia and Britain, also had their sights set on parts of the declining Ottoman Empire.²

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War 1 offered no opportunity for the creation of a great industrial nation, either in the Balkans or in the Middle East, a nation that would have been capable of competing on the world market. On the contrary, the pressure of confrontation between imperialisms led to fragmentation and the emergence of embryonic states. Just as the mini-states in the Balkans have remained the object of imperialist scheming right up to the present day, the Asian part of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East, has been and remains the theatre of permanent imperialist conflict.

Already during World War 1, taking advantage of Germany's defeat and Russia's ousting from the imperialist scene (faced with the revolutionary movement), France and Great Britain divided up the supervision of the "abandoned" Arab territories between them (Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916). As a result, in April 1920, Britain received a "mandate" from the League of Nations over Palestine, Transjordan, Iran and Iraq, while France received one over Syria and Lebanon. Virtually all the persistent ethno-religious conflicts we hear about in the region today – between Jews and Arabs in Israel/Palestine, Sunnis and Shiites in Yemen and Iraq, Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, Christians, Sunnis and Shiites in Syria, the Kurds in Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan – can be traced back to the way the Middle East was carved up around 1920. As far as Palestine is concerned, as long as the Ottoman Empire existed, it had always been considered part of Syria. But now, with the British Mandate over Palestine, the imperialist powers were creating a new "entity" separate from Syria. Like all these new "entities" created during the decadence of capitalism, it was destined to become a permanent theatre of conflict and intrigue between imperialist powers.

In none of the Arab countries or protectorates did the local bourgeoisie actually have the means to set up economically and politically solid states, free from the grip of the "protecting" powers, and the call for "national liberation" was in reality

1. W. Auerbach, "Zionism and Marxism", *Intransigence* website, 2018. *Intransigence* was an online publication produced by the ICT and a number of other groups to facilitate discussion. It has since closed and can no longer be accessed online. ADD NOTE ON WALTER AUERBACH?

2. See "Notes on the history of imperialist conflicts in the Middle East, Part 1", *International Review* n° 115, 2003.

nothing more than a reactionary demand. While Marx and Engels in the 19th century had been able to support certain national movements – on the sole condition that the formation of nation states could accelerate the growth of the working class and strengthen it so that it could act as the gravedigger of capitalism – the economic and imperialist reality in the Middle East showed that there was no longer room for the formation of a new Arab or Palestinian nation. As elsewhere in the world, once capitalism entered its phase of decline, no national faction of capital could play a progressive role, thus confirming the analysis made by Rosa Luxemburg as early as World War 1: “*The nation state, national unity and independence, such were the ideological flags under which the great bourgeois states of the heart of Europe were constituted in the last century. [...] Before extending its network over the whole globe, the capitalist economy sought to create for itself a single territory within the national limits of a state [...]. Today, (the national phrase) serves only to mask imperialist aspirations, unless it is used as a war cry in imperialist conflicts, the only and ultimate ideological means of capturing the attention of the popular masses and making them play the role of cannon fodder in imperialist wars.*”³

Weak bourgeoisies, manipulated by British imperialism

During World War 1, the two Mandatory Powers had made promises to the subjugated peoples then under the thumb of the Sultan of Istanbul. Great Britain in particular had raised hopes of independence for the Arabs, and even the formation of a great Arab nation (see the McMahon-Hussein correspondence of 1915-1916) and had succeeded in fomenting a revolt by Arab tribes against the Ottomans (coiled by T.E. Lawrence, “Lawrence of Arabia”). But on the other hand, for Britain, Palestine represented a strategic position between the Suez Canal and the future British Mesopotamia, vital for defending its colonial empire, which was coveted by other powers. From this point of view, British power was not unsympathetic to colonisation “imported” from Europe, constituting a sort of control force for the region, following the example of the Boers in South Africa or the Protestants in Ireland. Hence the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which expressed the British government’s commitment to a Jewish national home in Palestine (“*The establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people*”). Moreover, a Jewish legion, the Zion Mule

Corps, fought as part of the British army in the Middle East during World War 1. In short, “perfidious Albion” was playing both sides.

At the end of the war, the situation of the Palestinian ruling class was precarious. Separated from its historic links with Syria, it was even weaker than the Arab bourgeoisies in other regions. With neither a significant industrial base nor financial capital, due to its economic backwardness, it could only rely on politico-military mobilisation to defend its interests. As early as 1919, at the first Palestinian national congress in Jerusalem, Palestinian nationalists called for Palestine to be included as “*an integral part... of the independent Arab government of Syria within an Arab Union, free from all foreign influence or protection*”.⁴ Palestine was envisaged as part of an independent Syrian state, governed by Faisal, appointed by the Syrian National Council in March 1920 as constitutional king of Syria-Palestine: “*We consider Palestine to be part of Arab Syria and it has never been separated from it at any time. We are bound by national, religious, linguistic, moral, economic and geographical borders*”.⁵ Demonstrations were organised throughout Palestine from 1919 onwards, and in April 1920 riots in Jerusalem left around ten people dead and almost 250 injured. However, the nationalist movement was quickly put down by the British army in Palestine, while French forces crushed the forces of the Arab kingdom of Syria in July 1920, not hesitating to use their airforce to bomb the nationalists. Already in Egypt in March 1918, demonstrations by Egyptian nationalists, but also by workers and peasants demanding social reforms, were put down by both the British army and the Egyptian army, killing more than 3,000 demonstrators. In 1920, Britain bloodily crushed a protest movement in Mosul, Iraq.

At the same time, the Palestinian ruling class, despised by its Syrian, Egyptian and Lebanese counterparts and proclaiming its autonomy in a world where there was no longer any room for a new nation state, was faced with a fresh “rival” from outside. As a result of England’s support for the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine, the number of Jewish immigrants increased sharply, and England initially used the Jewish nationalists both against its main rival, France, and against the Arab nationalists. It encouraged the Zionists to argue at the League of Nations

4. “From Wars to Nakbeh: Developments in Bethlehem, Palestine, 1917-1949”, Adnan A. Musallam [Internet Archive of 19 July 2011] (accessed 29 May 2012).

5. Meir Litvak, *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

that they wanted neither French protection in Palestine (as part of “Greater Syria”) nor international protection, but British protection. In Palestine itself, funding from the European and American Jewish bourgeoisie enabled the settlements to expand rapidly, leading to increasingly violent clashes with the original Palestinian populations on the ground. In 1922, at the start of the British Mandate over Palestine, 85,000 of the 650,000 inhabitants of Palestine were Jewish, i.e. 12% of the population, compared with 560,000 Muslims or Christians. Following massive immigration linked to growing anti-Semitism in Central Europe and Russia – a consequence of the defeat of the world revolutionary wave in these regions – the Jewish population had more than doubled by 1931 to 175,000. It was to grow by a further 250,000 between 1931 and 1936, so that by 1939 it represented 30% of the population.

The considerable increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine and the multiplication of settlements buying up Arab land and Jewish districts in the towns were exploited by the two nationalisms to heighten tensions and encourage confrontations between communities. The Palestinian peasants and workers, as well as the Jewish workers, were faced with the false alternative of taking sides with one faction or another of the bourgeoisie (Palestinian or Jewish). This was already clearly highlighted in 1931 in the review *Bilan*, the organ of the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left: “*The expropriation of land at derisory prices has plunged the Arab proletarians into the blackest misery and driven them into the arms of the Arab nationalists and the large landowners and the emerging bourgeoisie. The latter obviously takes advantage of this to extend its aims of exploiting the masses and directs the discontent of the fellahs and proletarians against the Jewish workers in the same way as the Zionist capitalists have directed the discontent of the Jewish workers against the Arabs. From this contrast between the Jewish and Arab exploited, British imperialism and the Arab and Jewish ruling classes can only emerge strengthened.*”⁶ In fact, this false alternative meant enlisting workers in armed intercommunal confrontations solely in the interests of the bourgeoisie. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, anti-Jewish riots broke out all over Palestine, causing many deaths and injuries: in 1921 in Jaffa, then during the “massacres of 1929” in Jerusalem, Hebron and Safed, with looting and burning of isolated Jewish villages, often completely destroyed, and reprisal attacks on Arab

6. *Bilan* n°s 31 & 32, June-July 1936: See “*Bilan and the Arab-Jewish Conflict in Palestine*”, *International Review* n° 110, 2002.

neighbourhoods, causing the deaths of 133 Jews and 116 Arabs.

After these riots, in the early 1930s the British played the pacification card towards the Arabs by limiting the Jewish self-defence forces, but the persistent tensions and provocations between communities led at the end of 1936 to a widespread revolt by Palestinian nationalists against the British forces and the Jewish communities, which lasted for more than three years (until the end of the winter of 1939). Faced with this explosion of Arab revolt, the Jewish community authorities initially imposed a policy of non-retaliation and restraint on the Haganah, the Jewish self-defence militia, in order to prevent an outbreak of violence. But within these self-defence forces there was a growing call for reprisals in response to the increasing number of Arab attacks. As a result, the Irgun, an armed organisation linked to the Zionist right, V. Jabotinsky's "Revisionist" party, decided to launch indiscriminate reprisal attacks against the Arabs, which ultimately turned into a campaign of terror that left hundreds of Arabs dead. The Arab revolt also led the British to strengthen the Zionist paramilitary forces (development of a Jewish police force and special Jewish units – the Haganah's "Special Night Squads" and the Fosh Commando).

In 1939, the Irgun split into two groups and its most radical fringe founded the Lehi (also known as the "Stern group" or "Stern gang"), which launched a wave of attacks that also targeted the British. From the 1930s onwards, Arab insurgents tended to use guerrilla methods in rural districts and terrorist methods, such as bombings and assassinations, in urban areas. Groups, often of the jihadist type, destroyed telephone and telegraph lines and then sabotaged the Kirkuk-Haifa oil pipeline, murdering soldiers, members of the British administration and Jews. The British reacted violently, especially to acts of Arab terrorism, and took counter-terrorist action, such as razing to the ground Arab villages and neighbourhoods (as in Jaffa in August 1936).

In the end, the Arab revolt was a military failure and led to the dismantling of the Arab paramilitary forces and the arrest or exile of its leaders (including the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini). More than 5,000 Arabs, 300 Jews and 262 British were killed in the fighting. The revolt also led to internal confrontations between factions of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, with Amin al-Husseini's faction attacking the more moderate elements – considered to be "traitors" because they were not nationalist enough for the rebels' taste and because they sold land to the Jews

– and assassinating the Arab policemen who remained loyal to the British. These actions in turn set off a cycle of revenge, leading to the creation of Arab village counter-terrorism militias and the killing of at least a thousand people. At the beginning of 1939, a widespread climate of inter-clan terror prevailed among the Arab population and continued after the end of the revolt.

However, despite being defeated militarily, the Palestinian Arabs obtained major political concessions ("White Paper" of 1939) from the British who feared that they would be supported by Germany. Britain imposed a limit on Jewish immigration and the transfer of Arab land to Jews and promised the creation of a unitary state within ten years, in which Jews and Arabs would share the government. This proposal was rejected by the Jewish community and its paramilitary forces, who in turn launched a general revolt, temporarily frozen by the outbreak of World War 2.

Seeking the support and involvement of the imperialist powers

Too weak to act independently to establish their own nation state, both the Jewish Zionist bourgeoisie and the Palestinian Arab bourgeoisie had to seek the support of imperialist sponsors, whose interference only fanned the flames of confrontation.

Faced with the crushing by the British (and French) of the nationalist movement for a greater Syria and the influx of Jewish settlers from Europe, the Palestinian ruling factions had no choice but to turn to other imperialist powers for support against their Zionist rival. So the Mufti of Jerusalem first sought support from Mussolini's Italy, before turning in the 1930s to Nazi Germany, Britain's great rival. As early as March 1933, German officials in Turkey informed the Nazi authorities of the Mufti's support for their "Jewish policy". After the failure of the Arab revolt of 1936-39 and the split with the more moderate factions within the Arab bourgeoisie, the most radical nationalist leaders, including the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, went into exile and chose the camp of Nazi Germany on the eve of World War 2. After taking part in the 1941 Iraqi uprising, fomented by Germany against the British, the Mufti ended up taking refuge in Italy and Nazi Germany in the hope of obtaining from them the independence of the Arab states.

In the case of the Jewish ruling factions, the situation was more complex, insofar as policy differences emerged between the left and centre factions on the one hand and the "Revisionist" right on the other. The World Zionist Organisation, dominated by the left

in alliance with the centrists, chose to maintain fairly good relations with the British (at least until 1939) and to officially endorse the objective of a "Jewish National Home" without expressing an opinion on the question of independence or autonomy under the British mandate.⁷ The irredentist right, represented by the Revisionist Party and the Irgun, on the other hand, immediately demanded independence and therefore distanced itself from the British.

In line with this, the charismatic leader of the ultra-nationalist right, Vladimir Jabotinsky, maintained in the second half of the 1930s cordial relations with dictatorial and even anti-Semitic regimes such as the Polish and Italian fascist authorities, in order to put pressure on the British. In 1936, the Polish government launched a large-scale anti-Jewish campaign and encouraged Jewish emigration. When he officially stated in 1938 that he wanted "a substantial reduction in the number of Jews in Poland",⁸ Vladimir Jabotinsky decided to commit the Revisionist Party to supporting the authoritarian Polish government, which made no secret of its virulent anti-Semitism. His aim was to try and convince the government to channel the Jews expelled from Poland to Palestine. The revisionists' collaboration with Poland also had a military dimension: arms and money were given to the Irgun and Irgun officers received military and sabotage training in Poland. The Revisionist faction also had an openly fascist wing, first embodied in the Birionim group (a Zionist fascist group founded in 1931 by radicals from the Revisionist party) which openly sympathised with Mussolini, and after the latter's demise in 1943, it continued to exist through certain militants, such as Avraham Stern, an Irgun leader in the second half of the 1930s and founder of Lehi, who was sympathetic to the European fascist regimes and made contact with Nazi Germany. For this fascist wing of Revisionism, Germany was undoubtedly an "adversary" but the British occupier was the real "enemy" preventing the establishment of a Jewish state!

The implacable logic of imperialism in decadent capitalism was bound to drive the various bourgeois factions in Palestine to seek the support of foreign powers and could only promote a multiplication of imperialist intrigues. Thus, the Zionist movement only became a realistic project after receiving the Machiavellian support of British imperialism, which hoped by this means to gain better control of the region.

7. Independence was not officially claimed until May 1942, at the Biltmore Conference.

8. Political programme of OZON, the party in power in Poland, May 1938, reported in Marius Schatner, *Histoire de la droite israélienne*, Éditions Complexe, 1991, page 140.

But Britain, while supporting the Zionist project, was also playing a double game: it had to take account of the very large Arab-Muslim component in its colonial empire and had therefore made all sorts of promises to the Arab population of Palestine and the rest of the region. As for the “Arab liberation” movement, while it opposed Britain’s support for Zionism, it was in no way anti-imperialist, any more than were the Zionist factions who were prepared to attack Britain, since they all sought the support of other imperialist powers, such as triumphant American imperialism, fascist Italy or Nazi Germany.

In a capitalism historically in decline and dominated by the growing barbarity of murderous imperialist confrontations, the only perspective to be defended by revolutionaries was the one already defended by *Bilan* in 1930-1931: “*For the true revolutionary, naturally, there is no ‘Palestinian’ question, but only the struggle of all the exploited of the Near East, Arabs or Jews included, which is part of the more general struggle of all the exploited of the whole world for communist revolution*”.⁹ For the Arab and Jewish proletarians of Palestine, trapped in the nets of the “liberation of the nation”, the 1920s and 1930s were grim years of terror, massacres and permanent fear under riots, attacks, reprisals and counter-reprisals by barbaric bands and nationalist terrorists on both sides.

The founding of the State of Israel, a product of the new imperialist order after the Second World War

The Zionist organisations had categorically rejected the guidelines of the new British plan (“White Paper” of 1939), which involved limiting Jewish immigration and the transfer of Arab land to Jews, as well as the creation of a unitary state within ten years. After World War 2, this opposition led to a head-on confrontation with the Mandatory Power. The British introduced a naval blockade of Palestinian ports to prevent new Jewish immigrants from entering “Mandatory” Palestine, hoping in this way to appease the Palestinian Arab bourgeoisie. For their part, the Zionists used the world’s sympathy and compassion for the fate of the thousands of refugees who had escaped the Nazi concentration camps to put pressure on the British and force the doors of Palestine open to all immigrants.

By 1945, however, the balance of imperialist power had shifted: the United States had consolidated its position at the expense of Britain which, bled dry by the war and on the verge of bankruptcy, had become

a debtor to the Americans. So, from 1942 onwards, the Zionist organisations turned to the United States to obtain support for their project to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In November, the Jewish Emergency Council, meeting in New York, rejected the British White Paper of 1939 and formulated as its primary demand the transformation of Palestine into an independent Zionist state, which ran directly counter to British interests. As the main beneficiaries of the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War 1, France and Britain now found themselves overtaken by American and Soviet imperialism, both of which aimed to reduce the colonial influence of the former top dogs. The USSR offered its support to any movement inclined to weaken British domination and, as a result, supplied arms to the Zionist guerrillas via Czechoslovakia. The United States, the main victor of World War 2, was also keen to reduce the influence of the “proxy” countries in the Middle East and gave arms and money to the Zionists as they fought their British war ally.

As soon as the UN voted on a plan to partition Palestine at the end of November 1947, clashes between Jewish Zionist organisations and Palestinian Arabs intensified, while the British, who were supposed to guarantee security, unilaterally organised their withdrawal and only intervened occasionally. In all the mixed areas where the two communities lived, in Jerusalem and Haifa in particular, attacks, reprisals and counter-reprisals became increasingly violent. Isolated shootings evolved into pitched battles; attacks on traffic turned into ambushes. There were increasingly bloody incidents, which were in turn met with riots, reprisals and other attacks.

The Jewish armed organisations launched a new, intensive and particularly deadly bombing campaign against the British and also the Arabs. On 12 December 1947, the Irgun detonated a car bomb in Jerusalem, killing 20 people. On 4 January 1948, the Lehi blew up a lorry outside Jaffa town hall, which housed the headquarters of an Arab paramilitary militia, killing 15 people and injuring 80, 20 of them seriously. On 18 February, an Irgun bomb exploded in Ramallah market, killing 7 people and injuring 45. On 22 February, in Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini’s men organised a triple car bomb attack with the help of British deserters, targeting the offices of *The Palestine Post* newspaper, the market on Ben Yehuda street and the backyard of the Jewish Agency offices, killing 22, 53 and 13 Jews respectively and injuring hundreds. Finally, the massacre of villagers at Deir Yassin on 9 April, committed by the Irgun and the Lehi, left between 100 and 120 dead. The campaign culminated on

17 September 1948 in Jerusalem, when a Lehi commando assassinated Count Folke Bernadotte, the United Nations mediator for Palestine, and the head of the UN military observers, French Colonel Sérot. Over the two months of December 1947 and January 1948, almost a thousand people were killed and two thousand wounded. At the end of March, a report put the figure at over two thousand dead and four thousand wounded.

From January onwards, under the indifferent eye of the British, the civil war between the communities led to operations that took an increasingly military turn. Armed Arab militias entered Palestine to support the Palestinian militias and attack Jewish settlements and villages. For its part, the Haganah mounted more and more offensive operations aimed at opening up Jewish areas by driving out Arab militias, destroying Arab villages, massacring inhabitants and causing hundreds of thousands of others to flee (in total, during this period and during the Arab-Israeli war that followed the declaration of the founding of the State of Israel, almost 750,000 Arab Palestinians fled their villages). The Arab countries were preparing to enter Palestine to supposedly “defend their Palestinian brothers”.

On 15 May 1948, the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end and the State of Israel was proclaimed on the same day in Tel Aviv. Less than 24 hours later, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq launched an invasion. The war, which lasted until March 1949, cost the lives of more than 6,000 Jewish soldiers and civilians, 10,000 Palestinian Arab soldiers and around 5,000 soldiers from the various Arab military contingents.

If the Palestinian bourgeoisie had been incapable of creating its own state at the time of the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War 1, the proclamation of the State of Israel by the Zionists necessarily implied that this new state could only survive by transforming its economy into a permanent war machine, by strangling its neighbours, by terrorising and displacing the majority of the Palestinian population and above all by seeking imperialist support. Faced with the former “protector” power, Great Britain, which initially opposed the formation of an Israeli state so as not to damage its position towards the Arab world, the new state was able to rely on the United States, which immediately supported the creation of the State of Israel, and on the USSR, which hoped that the formation of an Israeli state would weaken British imperialism in the region.

The Palestinian nationalists, unable to

9. *Bilan* n° 31 (June-July 1936), op.cit.

stand alone against the newly-founded State of Israel, also had to seek support among the State's enemies, such as the bourgeoisies of neighbouring Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Iraq, who were sending their troops against Israel. This war, the first of half a dozen wars and numerous military operations against its neighbours in which Israel had participated since 1948, lasted from May 1948 to March 1949. Because of the poor equipment of the Arab troops, the Israeli forces managed to repel the offensive and not only retain but even expand the territories allocated to the Zionists by the British before 1947. Beyond the grand declarations of solidarity, the neighbouring Arab bourgeoisies above all played their own imperialist cards in "coming to the aid of their Palestinian brothers". Not only did Jordan occupy the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip after the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, but the Arab states also tried in the following years to get their hands on the various wings of the Palestinian nationalists. Shortly after its creation in 1964, Saudi Arabia began to finance the PLO; Egypt also tried to get hold of Fatah (the PLO's political movement); Syria created the As-Saiqa group and Iraq supported the ALF (Arab Liberation Front created in 1969). Despite all the fine speeches about the "united Arab nation", the bourgeoisies of the various Arab countries were and are in fierce competition with each other and do not hesitate to use and if necessary sacrifice the Palestinian population for their own sordid interests.

Palestine at the forefront of the confrontations between the imperialist blocs

Since the day it was founded, the State of Israel has not only been enmeshed in ongoing bilateral conflicts with Palestinian Arabs and its Arab neighbours, but these clashes have always been part of the dynamics of global imperialist confrontation: Israel's strategic position places it at the centre of regional tensions in the Middle East, but also and above all at the heart of global confrontations between major imperialist sharks. From the end of the 1950s onwards, the State of Israel played the role of vanguard for the American bloc in the region.

The start of the Cold War between the American bloc and the Soviet bloc put the Middle East at the centre of imperialist rivalries. After the Korean War (1950-53), which was the first major confrontation between the two blocs, the Cold War intensified and Russian imperialism tried to increase its influence in the countries of the "Third World", which gave the Middle East increasing importance for the leaders of the

two blocs. Although initially the tensions in the region mainly enabled the United States to "discipline" its European allies by preventing them from pursuing their own imperialist interests too intensively (the 1956 Franco-British operation in Suez and the Israeli-Egyptian war), the conflict in the Middle East then evolved over the next 35 years in the context of East-West confrontation, with Palestine as a central theatre of confrontation.

The 1948 war was only the beginning of an endless cycle of military conflicts. From the 1950s onwards, faced with the inability of the Arab League troops to defeat their much smaller but better organised and armed enemy, an arms race began, during which Israel received massive deliveries of weapons from the United States, and the Arab rivals turned to Soviet imperialism, which persistently tried to gain a foothold in the region by supporting Arab nationalism: Egypt, Syria and Iraq, which temporarily united to form the United Arab Republic, became for a time allies of the Eastern bloc, which also supported the Palestinian fedayeen and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Palestine. In 1968, the various Palestinian resistance movements came together under the aegis of Arafat. In the context of the Cold War, with Israel a major ally of the United States, the PLO had to turn to the USSR and its "Arab brothers". However, behind the grand speeches about the "unity of the Arab people", the Arab states once again committed their troops not only against Israel, but also against the Palestinian nationalists, who often act as a disruptive force within these states. They have never hesitated to commit massacres similar to those committed by the Israeli bourgeoisie against Palestinian refugees. In 1970, during "Black September", 30,000 Palestinians were killed in Jordan by the Jordanian army. In September 1982, Lebanese Christian militias, with Israel's tacit agreement, entered two Palestinian camps at Sabra and Shatila and massacred 10,000 civilians.

These attempts by the Eastern bloc to gain a foothold in the region 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. US support for Israel has been a permanent feature of all the conflicts in the region, as has Germany's financial support.¹⁰ This support is not essentially due to the considerable weight of the Jewish electorate in the United States or to the influence of the "Zionist lobby" on American political leaders. Although Israel does not have significant oil resources or

10. Shortly after the creation of Israel, Germany began to support it financially with an annual "compensation fund" of DM 1 billion.

other important raw materials, the country is of major strategic importance to the United States because of its geographical position. Moreover, in its confrontation with a series of local imperialist powers, Israel is financially and militarily totally dependent on the United States, so that Israel's imperialist interests have forced it to seek Uncle Sam's protection. In short, until 1989, the United States could always count on Israel as its armed wing. Moreover, in the series of wars with its Arab rivals – most of whom were equipped with Russian weapons – the Israeli army was a testbed for American weapons.

At the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, the American bloc gradually secured overall control of the Middle East, reducing 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 spread of the decomposition of capitalism. The aim of this offensive by the American bloc was "*to complete the encirclement of the USSR, to strip that country of any positions it may have held outside its direct glacis. The priority of this offensive is the definitive expulsion of the USSR from the Middle East, the bringing to heel of Iran and the reintegration of this country into the American bloc as an important part of its strategic system*".¹¹ In this offensive policy of the Western bloc, Israel played a key role in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 ("Six-Day War") and 1973 ("Yom Kippur War"), the bombing and destruction of a nuclear reactor in Baghdad in 1981 and the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Israel's military action, combined with economic and military pressure from the American bloc, led to the defeat of the Eastern bloc allies in the region, the shift of Egypt and then Iraq to the Western bloc, and a sharp reduction in Syria's control over Lebanon.

However, strengthened by the easing of tensions with Egypt, in July 1980 the Israeli bourgeoisie reaffirmed the transfer of its national capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the incorporation of the Old City of Jerusalem (formerly Jordan) into Israeli territory. Also from this time, the Israeli government decided to step up Jewish colonisation of the West Bank. This exacerbated tensions between the Israeli and Palestinian bourgeoisies and, from 1987 in particular, the spiral of violence escalated sharply. The signal was given by the first Intifada (or "uprising") in 1987. In response to increasing repression by the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza, the Intifada led

11. "Resolution on the International Situation, 6th ICC Congress", *International Review* n° 44, 1986.

to a massive campaign of civil disobedience, strikes and demonstrations. Hailed by leftists as a model of revolutionary struggle, it was always entirely set within the national and imperialist framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

If the first half of the 20th century in the Middle East showed that national liberation had become impossible and that all factions of the local bourgeoisies were subservient in the global conflicts waged between them by the great imperialist sharks, the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 marked nearly forty years of another period of bloody confrontations, inscribed in the merciless confrontation between the Eastern and Western blocs. More than seventy years of conflict in the Middle East have illustrated irrefutably that the decaying capitalist system has nothing to offer but wars and massacres and that the proletariat cannot benefit from choosing one imperialist camp over another.

Palestine at the centre of the irrational dynamic of destruction and massacre in the Middle East

After the implosion of the Soviet bloc at the end of 1989, the 1990s were marked by the spectacular expansion of manifestations of the period of capitalism's rotting on its feet, its decomposition, and in this context, the "Report on imperialist tensions" of the 20th Congress of the ICC noted in 2013: "*The Middle East is a terrible confirmation of our analyses about the impasse of the system and the flight into 'every man for himself'.*"¹² It is a striking illustration of the central characteristics of this period:

- The explosion of the imperialist "every man for himself" is manifested in the all-out expression of the hegemonic appetites of a multitude of states. Iran has expressed its imperialist ambitions, first in Iraq by supporting the Shiite militias which dominate a fragmented state apparatus, then in Syria by supporting at arm's length the regime of Bashar al Assad when it was on the verge of being swept away by the revolt of the Sunni majority. Through its allies – from Lebanese Hezbollah to the Yemeni Houthis – Teheran 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, Libya and Egypt, and even Qatar, the base camp 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 domination led to two bloody 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 only resulted in more chaos and barbarism.

- The terrifying chaos resulting from bloody civil wars (Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan) has led to the collapse of state structures, fragmented and failed states (Iraq, Lebanon), traumatised populations and millions of refugees.

In this dynamic of growing confrontation in the Middle East, the State of 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 agreements of 1993, one of the greatest successes of American diplomacy in the region. These agreements 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:

- through the extension of settlements on the West Bank and support for settlers who were becoming increasingly arrogant and violent: as early as 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 secret support for Hamas and its terrorist attacks in order to undermine the authority of the PLO and pursue a policy of "divide and rule", justifying increasing supervision of the Palestinian territories.

Opposition leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount in September 2000 resulted in a second Intifada, which saw a sharp increase in suicide attacks against Israelis. By the same token, 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: the aim of the withdrawal from Gaza "*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 of the subject of refugees, borders and Jerusalem."¹³ Moreover, since Islamists reject the existence of a Jewish state in Islamic lands, just as 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 sabotaging 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, the Israeli state allowed them to be regularly transferred to Gaza under the protection of the Israeli police.

Israel's strategy was clear: Gaza given to Hamas, the Palestinian Authority weakened, with limited power in the West Bank. Netanyahu himself openly promoted 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.*"¹⁴ The State of Israel and Hamas, at different times and with different means, are sinking into the worst kind of totally irrational policy, which inevitably accelerated the cycle of violence and counter-violence that led to today's atrocious massacres. In fact, the current butchery in Gaza is the continuation of a whole series of attacks and counter-attacks carried out by Hamas and the Israeli army:

- June 2006: Hamas captures Gilad Shalit, an Israeli army conscript, during a cross-border raid from Gaza, which provokes Israeli air raids and incursions.
- December 2008: Israel launches a 22-day military offensive in Gaza after rockets are fired at the town of Sderot, in southern Israel. Around 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis are killed before

¹³ 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*, English language edition, January 2024.

¹⁴ Netanyahu told Likud MPs on 11 March 2019, as reported in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* on 9 October, 2023.

a ceasefire is agreed.

- November 2012: Israel kills Hamas chief of staff Ahmad Jabari, followed by eight days of Israeli air raids on Gaza.
- July/August 2014: The kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers by Hamas triggers a seven-week war.

Deprived of a traditional state structure and the financial resources to build a structured army capable of competing with the Tsahal (the national military of the State of Israel), the Palestinian bourgeoisie has always had to resort to terrorist attacks, as did the Zionists before the proclamation of the State of Israel. From the outset, the PLO applied terrorist tactics which were bound to cause the greatest number of civilian casualties, such as kidnappings, liquidations, hijacking of aircraft and attacks on sports teams (massacre of the Israeli Olympic team at the Munich Olympics in 1972). Since then, suicide attacks have multiplied. Committed by desperate young Palestinians, they are not aimed at military targets, but simply at spreading terror among Israeli civilians in discotheques, supermarkets and buses. They are the expression of a total impasse, of despair and hatred. The massacres of 7 October 2023 are a continuation of this policy, but at an even higher level of brutality and destruction.

The current terrifying drift must also be seen as a continuation of the irresponsible policy pursued by the populist Trump in the region. In line with the priority given to containing Iran, Trump pushed a strategy of unconditional support for Israel's right wing, providing the Israeli state and its respective leaders with pledges of unwavering support on all fronts including the supply of the latest military equipment, recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital and of Israeli sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights. This orientation supported abandoning the Oslo Accords and the "two-state" (Israeli and Palestinian) solution 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 the US's Saudi and Israeli henchmen: "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."¹⁵

However, as we pointed out back in 2019, these agreements, which were a pure provocation at both the international level (abandoning international agreements and UN resolutions) and regionally, could only reactivate the unresolved Palestinian issue, a situation seized upon by all the regional imperialists (Iran of course, but also Turkey and even Egypt) and used against the United States and its allies. What's more, they only emboldened Israel's own annexationist appetites and intensified 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."¹⁶ The Abraham Accords irrevocably sowed the seeds of the current tragedy in Gaza.

The headlong rush of the right-wing factions of the Israeli bourgeoisie in power – more specifically the successive Netanyahu governments from 2009 to the present day – to follow their own imperialist policy is more and more openly opposed to the interests of the most responsible factions in Washington and is a caricature of the gangrene of decomposition eating away at the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie. The opposition between the different political factions in Israel over the policy to be pursued – the clashes between Netanyahu and his Minister of Defence or the chiefs of the Tsahal, the open confrontation between Netanyahu and the current American administration over the conduct of the war – induce a significant dose of uncertainty and irrationality over the outcome of the

current phase of the conflict, all the more so as the shadow of a possible return of Trump to the US presidency hangs over the Middle East, which would give carte blanche to Israeli war policies and thus put an end to any hope of the United States imposing some form of stability in the region.

Nationalism leads the Middle East working class to slaughter

Once again, it is the working class that has suffered most from the consequences of the imperialist policies of the ruling classes. Israeli and Palestinian workers are constantly faced with the daily terror of Palestinian terrorist attacks and Israeli army raids and air strikes. While the endless terror unleashed by their ruling classes has created deep distress among most workers, the nationalism of their rulers also poisons their spirits. The ruling classes on both sides do everything to stir up nationalism and hatred against each other.

In material terms, workers on both sides of the imperialist conflict suffer enormously from the crushing weight of militarisation. Israeli workers are conscripted for 30 months (men) and 24 months (women). The weight of the Israeli war economy has increased the misery of Israeli workers. Palestinian workers, if they are lucky enough to find a job, receive very low wages. Over 80% of the population live in extreme poverty. The only prospect for most of their children is to fall victim to Israeli bullets and bulldozers. And if they protest against their fate, the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas police are ready to crack down on them.

A century of imperialist conflict around Israel has shown that neither Israeli nor Palestinian workers can gain anything by supporting their own bourgeoisie. While the Israeli state has survived only through terror and destruction, the creation of a Palestinian state proper would only mean a new graveyard for Israeli and Palestinian workers. So this call for a Palestinian state is a totally reactionary slogan which communists must reject.

It is absolutely vital for communists to be clear about the perspectives of the working class. While all the leftists presented the Intifada of 1987 and those that followed as social revolts that could lead to liberation, in reality these struggles were only expressions of despair, the flames being lit by the nationalists. In all these confrontations with the Israeli state, the Palestinian workers are not fighting for their class interests but serve only as cannon fodder for their nationalist Palestinian leaders.

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

16. "23rd International Congress the ICC, Resolution on the international situation (2019)", *International Review* n° 164, 2019.

Prague "Action Week"

Activism is a barrier to political clarification

Between May 20 and 26th, an "Action Week" in Prague around the theme "Together against capitalist wars and capitalist peace" attracted groups and individuals from a number of countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Greece, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Britain, Argentina... The majority of groups invited were anarchists, workerists or councilists who have taken an internationalist position against the Russia-Ukraine war and – despite many hesitations and confusions – against the other wars ravaging the planet.¹ The organising committee for the event – which seems to have involved two mainly Czech-based groups, Tridni Valka ("Class War") and the Anti-Militarist Initiative, said in an interview² that they had deliberately not invited the principal groups of the Communist Left, who they claim are not interested in debate but only in creating a "mass party" along Bolshevik lines. Nevertheless, the ICC sent a delegation, as did the Internationalist Communist Tendency; also present were comrades close to the Bordigist group that publishes *Programma Comunista*. Not all the events of the week would be restricted to those formally invited, and for our part we think that the emergence of this opposition to imperialist war is an expression of something deeper taking place in the working class, and communists have a clear responsibility to take part in the process with the aim of clarifying its goals and combating its illusions.

But while the broad attendance of elements looking for internationalist positions was certainly positive, and their physical concentration in Prague made it possible to develop many contacts and discussions on the margins of the "official" event, it has to be said straight away that the event was very poorly organised and indeed chaotic, even if there were encouraging efforts by a majority of the participants to take control of the proceedings.

One of the factors in this disorder is the profound division within the anarchist movement in the Czech Republic. On the weekend of the "Action Week" there was also an Anarchist Bookfair organised by the Czech Anarchist Federation, which openly defends the Ukrainian war effort and supports the formation of anarchist units in the Ukrainian army. The Bookfair issued a statement distancing itself from the Action Week and the Czech AF put out a leaflet denouncing its participants as "anarcho-Putinists". The organising committee also argue that these pro-war anarchists have engaged in a number of provocations against internationalists; most critically, they suspect that they contacted the authorities of the venue where the anti-war congress at the weekend was due to be held and told them the real purpose of the meeting, leading to the cancellation of the booking and forcing the organisers to scabble around for a new venue.

1. <https://actionweek.noblogs.org>. A complete list of invited groups can be found on this site.

2. In *Transmitter* magazine, "Interview with the organising committee of the Action Week".

False political conceptions add to the chaos

However, the chaotic nature of the "Action Week" cannot entirely be blamed on the machinations of the pro-war anarchists. The very conception of an Action Week, and the methods of its organisers, were already deeply flawed.

In our view, the primary need for those searching for a real internationalist practice today is for discussion and political clarification around some very fundamental questions: the historic basis of capitalism's drive towards war and destruction; the counter tendency of the working class struggle for its own interests against the economic crisis in spite of propaganda for national unity; continuing the internationalist tradition of the Zimmerwald Left. While some of the meetings advertised as part of the Action Week contained themes for reflection (such as the relation between capitalist peace and capitalist war, the meaning of revolutionary defeatism, etc), the whole idea of a "Week of Action" could only encourage the immediatist and activist approaches which hold sway over a large number of the participants. This was evident in several of the advertised topics for discussion, such as "how can we aid deserters", "how can we sabotage the war effort", and so on. But the pernicious consequences of this activist focus can best be illustrated by recollecting some of the main events of the week.

– The first event of the week, on Monday 20th, was a protest outside the HQ of

the STV company which supplies material to the Israeli army. Although the organisers insisted that the protest was not calling for support for Palestinian nationalism, it attracted a number of people waving Palestinian flags and could thus only appear as a small adjunct to the pro-Palestine demos going on around the world, notably in the universities of the USA and Europe. Equally important: while there was no sign of the organising committee, the small number of "Action Week" attendees who took part quickly realised that this was an illegal protest and had their IDs noted by the police. Since most of them were foreign nationals, this could have led to their deportation.

- On Wednesday 22nd, the day the ICC delegation arrived, there was a meeting to discuss the principal theme of capitalist war and capitalist peace. The meeting began over an hour and a half late. There was a presentation by a comrade of Anti-Militarist Initiative and the possibility of intervening in the discussion that followed. But the meeting was not chaired, no notes were taken and there was no formal conclusion, although a comrade of the ICC tried to summarise the main points of the discussion, notably the split between activism and a longer-term approach founded on the real movement of the working class.
- On Thursday the plan was to hold a "Desserts for Deserters" event in a park near the city centre: cakes and snacks would be sold and any proceeds would go to helping deserters from the Ukraine war. Quite a few of the people who had been present the previous evening turned up, but there were no cakes. At this point alarm about the level of disorganisation began to spread and an impromptu meeting took place. The event planned for the Friday had been a street demonstration but after the fiasco on Monday people whose security had already been compromised were entirely unwilling to take part in a march which did not express any wider movement and would further expose them to police surveillance.³ This was

3. According to the official organising committee, the march was cancelled because the committee needed time to look for a new venue for the weekend. But this explanation entirely ignores the real reasons for the refusal to go on the march, based on political and security arguments.

unanimously supported by the meeting, which decided that the priority for the next day was to meet together with the aim of developing a real discussion. A new organising committee was set up and given the task of finding the space for such a meeting. Again, no sign of the official organising committee except for the AMI comrade who seemed to be acting as a kind of intermediary.

Steps towards self-organisation

On the Friday further confusion resulted from the announcement that the original venue for the “Congress” on Saturday and Sunday, the culminating event of the Action Week, had been ruled out. But the “unofficial” organising committee managed to find an adequate venue in the outside area of a café and we were able to hold a reasonably well-organised discussion during the afternoon and early evening. The holding of this “self-organised assembly” was an important step forward given the extreme disorder of the event so far – a small reflection of a wider need within the working class to take things into its own hands and create the possibility of debating and making its own decisions. An agenda was drawn up and it was agreed that it was necessary to start with a discussion of the global situation facing the working class. Here the ICC pointed to the spiral of war and ecological destruction across the planet, the necessity to see all the ongoing wars as part of this process, the need for the same level of clarity on the nature of the war in the Middle East as on the Ukraine war. Having mentioned the night before that one of the groups invited to the week, the Anarchist Communist Group, had fallen into the trap of supporting anti-Israel boycotts, we pointed to the fiasco of the Monday protest to illustrate the danger of this kind of unthinking activism. We also repeated the argument that the real movement against war was less likely to come from proletarians of Israel, Gaza or Ukraine, who had been through a serious defeat, than from the workers in the central capitalist countries who had already shown their refusal to pay for the indirect effects of war (inflation etc). But the capacity of the working class as a whole to understand the link between attacks on their living standards and the drive towards war would take time to develop and could not be speeded up by the substitutionist action of small groups.

In this debate, and the one that followed the next day, it was noticeable that there was a convergence between the interventions of the ICC and the ICT, who met more than once to compare notes on the evolution of

the discussion.⁴ And given that the delegations of both groups were clearly playing a constructive role in the discussions and in the organisation of the meetings (including the fact that a member of the ICT had agreed to take part in the unofficial organising committee) there was no sign among the participants at these meetings of the hostility to the groups of the communist left which had been openly displayed by the official organising committee.

This did not at all mean that the whole assembly had adopted the positions of the Communist Left. Despite the initial agreement that we need to understand the overall situation before we can start a discussion of “what is to be done”, the effort to do so was constantly being pulled back into speculations about what action can we take tomorrow to block the war drive – networks of counter-information, aid to deserters, etc. The question of the class struggle as the only alternative to war and destruction was held in abeyance by these speculations. Neither was it possible to develop any discussion about a key item on the agenda: what is the meaning of revolutionary defeatism in this period – the ICC has some serious criticisms of this slogan⁵ but we will have to raise them on other occasions.

And then came a further disruption. On Friday evening a group of people who said they were not the official organising committee but were speaking on its behalf arrived at the meeting and announced a new venue for the “Congress” on Saturday and Sunday. Unfortunately, it would only be big enough to accommodate 25 or 30 people, although the Friday meeting had already drawn twice as many. This would no doubt mean excluding the non-invitees (notably the groups of the Communist Left or “Bolsheviks” who, according to one argument, presumably coming from the official organising committee, had taken over the self-organised assembly).⁶ None of the participants at the Friday meeting spoke in favour of such an exclusion, while a considerable amount of distrust was shown towards the official organising committee who still refused to show

4. Given the shared internationalist positions and traditions of the groups of the Communist Left, the ICC has for decades proposed common written appeals with these groups against imperialist war, including those on the war in Ukraine and in Gaza. Unfortunately, the ICT has, up till now, never agreed to make such common statements that would reinforce the defence of the fundamental class principle against imperialist war. Prior to the Action Week, we wrote to the ICT to propose that our two groups should as far as possible work together during the event.

5. See, for example, the introduction to our pamphlet *Nation or Class?*

6. The original idea for the Congress would be that Saturday would be a public event but Sunday would be restricted to invited groups only.

themselves openly. In a statement on the official website they said that this was normal security procedure, but this didn’t impress comrades whose security had already been exposed by the committee’s ill-advised plans during the week.

The result of all this was further division. On the Saturday, some who had taken part in the Friday meeting decided to go to the new “official” venue, but the majority of the “self-organisers” opted to stay together and meet again the next day. This meant again looking around for a venue, and the one that was found was not as suitable as the one used on the Friday. At this stage we have little information about what happened at the new official venue, although the Anarchist Communist Network have written an article about the week as a whole which contains some information about the discussions that took place.⁷

Regarding the official committee’s position on security, we should also make the point that Tridni Valka claims a certain continuity with the Groupe Communiste Internationaliste, although there have been some unstated disagreements between them in the past, and the GCI as such no longer exists. But the GCI was a group which had a very dangerous and destructive trajectory – above all a flirtation with terrorism which posed a serious danger to the whole revolutionary movement.⁸ This involved a kind of cloak and dagger approach which Tridni Valka appear to have taken on, and which certainly contributed to the disorganisation of the week and the distrust that many of the participants developed towards them.

What outcomes are possible?

Given this litany of division and disorder, there was a feeling among those involved in the “self-organised assembly” that there needed to be some outcome from the week’s events, if only the possibility of continuing the discussion and taking up the many questions that had not been answered. So, on the Sunday there was a final meeting in a park to decide on what to do next. By this time fatigue and division had reduced the numbers attending this meeting, although it included some of those who had been the most constructive in the discussions so far. A mobile contact group had already been set up and would continue, but this cannot be a vehicle for developing a real discussion, so the decision was taken to set up a website which could publish contributions from all the elements involved (including those who attended the “official” congress

7. <https://anarcomuk.uk/articles/>

8. “How the Groupe Communiste Internationaliste spits on proletarian internationalism”, ICC Online.

at the weekend). The comrades close to Programma also proposed a brief "commitment to class war", which was a very general statement of opposition to imperialist wars. The majority of those present voted in favour.⁹ The ICC delegation said it could not sign it—partly because it contains formulations and slogans we don't agree with, but mainly because we didn't feel that the discussions at the meetings had reached a sufficient level of homogeneity for such a joint statement to be issued. Instead, we were in favour of publishing a report on

9. The ICT delegation was not present at this meeting, but they had told us the evening before that they would also not be signing it.

what happened during the week, as well as impressions and reflections by different groups and individuals. In addition, the site could gather and publish information about the current wars that would be hard to come by elsewhere. We will see whether this project comes to fruition.

Despite all its weaknesses and failings, it was important to have taken part in this event. The "real movement" against war is also expressed by minorities searching for clarity, and while we are opposed to forming premature alliances or fronts with groups which still harbour confusions of an activist or even leftist nature, it is

absolutely vital for the groups of the Communist Left to be present in such gatherings, retaining their political independence and pushing for clarification based on the historical struggle of the workers' movement and the indispensable lucidity of the marxist method.

A follow-up to this article will aim to draw the more general political lessons of this event.

Amos, June 2024

Continued from page 2

Faced with chaos and barbarism, the responsibility of revolutionaries

Since its inception, the Communist Left has assumed a leading responsibility in the fight against war at various key moments in history by denouncing the two imperialist camps present: during the Spanish war in 1936, the Republicans on one side and the fascists on the other; during the Second World War: Great Britain, France, Russia and the United States on one side and Germany and Italy on the other, while Trotskyism betrayed the proletariat by defending the democratic camp in Spain and then the camp of Russia and the Allies.⁸ But since

against imperialist war can only be waged with the positions of the Communist Left".

8. On this subject, see our article "Manifesto of the Communist Left to the Proletarians of Europe (June 1944)" in this issue.

then, the main groups of the Communist Left have rejected the various requests from the ICC to take a common position on the various conflicts that have bloodied the world since the end of the 1970s. This refusal arises out of sectarianism or opportunism, as was the case with the war in Ukraine, faced with which the International Communist Tendency (ICT), rejected the approach proposed by the ICC, which was totally in line with that of the Communist Left, instead taking the opposite tack, a broad approach blurring the demarcation that should exist between the **Communist Left that is effectively fighting against war** in general and a whole milieu made up of those who are circumstantially opposed

to this or that war.⁹ In these circumstances, it is only a small number of groups on the Communist Left who have assumed this internationalist responsibility.¹⁰

Sylunken (20/07/2024)

9. See in this *Review* "The fight against imperialist war can only be waged with the positions of the Communist Left".

10. See "Two years on from the Joint Statement of the Communist Left on the war in Ukraine" in this issue.

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Democratic campaigns against working class consciousness

States. Each country is faced with a series of conflicting interests with regard to China, both economic and imperialist.

Tensions have also increased since the start of the war in Ukraine. Even the "Franco-German couple", the driving force behind the European Union, has demonstrated its fragility. Germany, which had been dependent on Russian energy supplies, has suffered from the war on both

economic and imperialist levels, with the weakening of its influence over the countries of Eastern Europe.

As the populist factions of the bourgeoisie gained increasing power at the head of governments, their irresponsible management of state affairs openly threatened the unity of the European Union.

Against the backdrop of war and crisis, tensions over the economy and the "com-

mon" budget, particularly the energy question (which is closely linked to the military question, especially as regards nuclear energy), have also increased. States are more and more tending to prioritise their own interests to the detriment of European unity.

Avefka (30/07/2024)

Two years on from the Joint Statement of the Communist Left on the war in Ukraine

In late February 2022 the ICC proposed a Joint internationalist statement against the imperialist war in Ukraine to the other groups of the Communist Left. These groups are the political descendants of the only proletarian political current that fought against both fascist and democratic imperialist camps in the 2nd World War and thus the only one that can still claim today a continuity in both words and deeds with proletarian internationalism.

In the two years following this statement the ICC also proposed a similar “Appeal” to the same groups concerning the war in Gaza that erupted at the end of 2023. (For the sake of brevity we will refer to both of them as joint statements). In this case, the only group to adhere to our Appeal was Internationalist Voice.

What lessons can we draw from this initiative that can guide us in a period in which imperialist carnage will inevitably increase and spread?

Of the six groups addressed, two agreed with the proposed joint statement, with one group, Internationalist Communist Perspective (Korea), whose origins are not in the Communist Left, supporting it.

At first sight then these internationalist initiatives of the ICC don’t seem to have been a success since they didn’t lead to a united response of the entire or even majority of the Communist Left currents, a response that would have provided a beacon of genuinely communist internationalism to all those workers looking for their class alternative to the imperialist slaughter.

The lack of short-term success of the ICC initiatives will no doubt confirm the illusions of those who, deriding the initiative as “speaking to the converted”, thought that it was possible today to create a wider “anti-war movement” that could put an end to imperialism by “doing something now” and bringing together as many people as possible of whatever political persuasion or probity in a period of working class disorientation on this question of war. The failure of such activist illusions and projects have either led or will inevitably lead to passivity, confusion and “burn out”, or worse, to ending up choosing one of other of the imperialist camps – critically of course.

In reality the experience of the ICC initiatives has important longer-term lessons in advancing a political line of work that must lead to the future party of the working class and the overthrow of world capitalism, which is the only way that imperialist war

can be brought to an end. In other words success or failure is in the last analysis measured with a historical yardstick, not a short-term impression.

Let’s compare these two ICC initiatives of the last two years to similar internationalist appeals to the Communist Left for common work stretching back to 1979 at the time of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. On all previous occasions between then and now, the ICC’s proposals for a joint internationalist statement had never got off the ground and gone beyond the concept stage, because the principle itself of such a public declaration of unity was summarily rejected or ignored by the other groups.

For the first time, the proposal for a joint statement on Ukraine elicited positive responses from two other groups. After one of these groups, the Istituto Onorato Damen, proposed that the ICC draft such a joint statement; the latter subsequently agreed and the text was printed and distributed by the press of the three groups as a leaflet or articles, and served as the basis for joint public meetings and other interventions.¹

This step forward, minuscule as it may appear, prompted certain other advances which shouldn’t go unnoticed:

- One of the refusers of the joint work – the Internationalist Communist Tendency – for the first time engaged in a lengthy correspondence with the ICC over the validity of their reasons for their refusal, which became a polemic of sorts that was worthy of publication to clarify to a wider readership the responsibilities of the Communist Left as a whole faced with the growth of imperialist war.
- The co-signatories of the Joint Statements agreed to produce a discussion bulletin in which the differences of analysis between the participating groups could be elaborated and confronted. So far two editions of these

1. Joint statement of groups of the international communist left about the war in Ukraine, republished in this issue.

bulletins have appeared, which have included the contributions of a relatively new Communist Left group – Internationalist Voice.

- The meaning of Zimmerwald and the Zimmerwald left in World War 1 and its connection with internationalism today came under greater scrutiny.
- The Joint Statements threw into relief the nature of a principled internationalist intervention towards individuals and groups who are not part of the Communist Left but who nevertheless are looking for a clear political orientation and seeking to detach themselves from leftism and confusion.
- The atmosphere of solidarity created by adhering to the initiative also allowed the organisation of two online public meetings, one in Italian and one in English, to discuss and clarify the need for the Joint Statement and the tasks of revolutionaries in the face of imperialist war and new world conditions. These meetings also gave rise to an article drawing a balance sheet article of the discussions.²

Correspondence between the ICC and ICT

This can be read on our website.³ So it is only necessary to summarise the main arguments. First, the ICT insisted that the differences on the analysis of imperialist war (that is on the marxist explanation for imperialist war and its prospects today) between the groups was too great to allow them to sign the Joint Statement, which they otherwise agreed with. Secondly, they questioned the invitation of the Bordigist groups which go under the name of the International Communist Party and can best be distinguished by the names of their main publications (*Programma Comunista*, *Il Comunista/Le Proletaire*, and *Il Partito Comunista*) to the Joint Statement, and on the other hand regretted the absence of some groups from the list of invitees. Thirdly they wanted a wider movement against the war than the Joint Statement that was restricted to the Communist Left.

2. “A balance sheet of the public meetings about the Joint Statement by groups of the Communist Left on the war in Ukraine”, ICC online, June 2022.

3. “Correspondence on the Joint Statement of groups of the Communist Left on the war in Ukraine”, ICC online, August 2022.

The ICC answered that regarding differences of analysis, which are certainly significant, they are still secondary to the fundamental agreement on a common internationalist programme of action between the Communist Left groups. To make secondary differences an obstacle to such joint work is therefore to elevate the interests of one's own group to the detriment of the needs of the movement as a whole – therefore it is classically sectarian. The final version of the Joint Statement in fact was able to accommodate a difference in the analysis of imperialism between the IOD and the ICC in order to underline the essential class position. A difference quite similar to the one the ICT felt was a key reason for not signing the declaration.

On the second point it was ironic that the sectarian ICT complained that each of the Bordigist groups invited all saw themselves as the one and only internationalist communist party in the world. This was a case of the pot calling the kettle black. In fact the ICT, despite describing itself as a “tendency,” considers that its main component, *Battaglia Comunista*, is also the Internationalist Communist Party and is therefore hostile to all the other pretenders to this throne.

Regarding those parasitic grouplets claiming adherence to the Communist Left in words who were not invited to sign the joint statement it was quite logical to exclude them, since in practice these various cabals do everything to vilify the Communist Left. But the ICT, in wanting them invited, were therefore opportunistically open to joining with parasitic slanderers and even snitches who have nothing to do with internationalism in deeds. The ICT's sectarianism toward the rest of the Communist Left – their Bordigist siblings,⁴ and the ICC – therefore found its natural complement in an opportunism toward those outside of the Communist Left and even hostile to the latter.

The desire of the ICT for a “wider movement beyond the Communist Left” thus limited itself immediately by excluding the majority of the genuinely internationalist milieu in existence today. Subsequently their front No War But the Class War was launched with a more elastic criteria for participation than the Joint Statement and so made itself more amenable to a heterogeneous milieu of various anarchists, parasites and even leftists. Its public meetings didn't extend beyond the confines of this milieu. In fact on one occasion the size of the delegations of the ICC to intervene in these public meetings was its largest

component. The NWBCW has proved to be an opportunist bluff whose real purpose was to act as a conveyor belt into the ICT rather than creating a wider audience for authentic internationalism.⁵

Discussion Bulletins of the Communist Left

The Joint Statement provided a principled framework of internationalist unity in action, marxist parameters for discussing and clarifying theoretical and analytical differences between the groups. The Bulletins are not therefore a conglomeration of random positions and ideas but essentially a forum for the confrontation of arguments within the Communist Left, that is, a proletarian polemic.

The two bulletins have so far included: relevant correspondence between them concerning the Joint Statement; statements of analysis of the current situation of the imperialist wars in Ukraine and Gaza according to the respective organisations; and most importantly an ongoing polemic on how the contradictions of capitalism translate into imperialist conflict, whether the latter is directly the result of economic ambitions – such as preservation of the hegemony of the dollar, or the control of oil production and distribution – or refracted through a self-destructive dynamic produced by the impasse of capitalism in its historical epoch of decadence. This polemic is of great interest and importance for understanding the prospects and conditions of militarism today. It should be continued.

The relevance of Zimmerwald

The Communist Left, drawing its inspiration from the history of the revolutionary movement of the working class, naturally looks to the nature and meaning of the Zimmerwald movement in World War 1.

Was Zimmerwald intended to create a wide as possible anti-war movement as the ICT pretend, a kind of anticipation of the NWBCW initiative? Zimmerwald was indeed the first indication that the working class was losing its illusions in the imperialist war and confirmed its hopes that there was an alternative way out. But the real, long-lasting significance of Zimmerwald was in the development of an intransigent internationalist line amongst a small minority called the Zimmerwald Left. The latter recognised that WW1 was only the beginning of an entire historic period that would be dominated by imperialist war

and require a maximum programme for the working class: civil war, the overthrow of the bourgeois regimes, proletarian dictatorship with a new Communist International to replace the bankrupt, chauvinist 2nd International.

The majority of Zimmerwald was ambivalent or opposed to this programme. Instead, seeing WW1 as a temporary aberration, and hoping for a reconciliation or reconstitution of the 2nd International that had collapsed in 1914, they wanted to exclude or neutralise the “trouble makers” and “splitters” of the left. Eventually the class lines that were implicit in these differences were drawn in 1917 by the October Revolution.

The intervention of internationalists into the anti-war movement today

Only the big bourgeoisie and the nation states that protects their privileges is fully committed to the drive to imperialist war made unavoidable by capitalist development. In terms of society as a whole though, imperialist war has a convulsive effect on other classes. The biggest sufferer of imperialism is the working class, since the military juggernaut threatens to divide and drag it into fratricidal slaughter and turn its poverty into destitution. At the same time an intermediate layer - the petty bourgeoisie, caught between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat - foresees the loss of its relatively more secure status as a result of the imperialist maelstrom. In reaction to the latter this layer hopes for a return to normality and peace but sees in the struggle of the working class another threat to its disappearing status, another source of disruption and conflict.

In this situation anti-war sentiments grow both in the proletariat and this intermediate layer, but within this apparently common reaction to imperialism different, antagonistic class interests are concealed. To defend its interests the working class must struggle to detach itself from all the pacifist solutions (however radical they may seem, such as anti-militarism) that are rife amongst the intermediate strata and stand instead on the terrain of its own class struggle that leads the workers towards civil war against the bourgeoisie and capitalism as a whole. The petty bourgeoisie on the other hand, which fundamentally has no historical future, can at best react impotently to imperialist war in various ways and remains trapped in ambiguity. This mixture of a class struggling for consciousness of its internationalist interests and a middle layer that reacts with horror to imperialist barbarism is the social basis for the growth

4. Both the Bordigist parties and the Damenist ICT have common origins in the founding of the Partito Comunista Internazionalista in 1943.

5. “The ICT and the No War But the Class War initiative: an opportunist bluff which weakens the Communist Left”, *World Revolution* n° 398.

of a political marsh between the Communist Left and the left wing of capital today, that seems to be neither one thing nor the other and is marked by constant contradiction and turmoil.

The intervention of internationalist communists towards this milieu is therefore vital in the acceleration of the development of working class consciousness. The internationalist organisations do not by definition arise spontaneously from this marsh, that as a whole essentially represents political confusion, an obstacle to the development of class consciousness. Authentic internationalist organisations are the product of a historical experience of the revolutionary movement, stretching back to the First World War and before. The existence and intervention of the Communist Left, its political presence, is therefore vital in not only combating the influence of the bourgeoisie within the political marsh, also in exposing the difference of class interests between the proletariat and those of intermediate strata, who, despite their radical opposition to the big bourgeoisie, are essentially backward-looking.

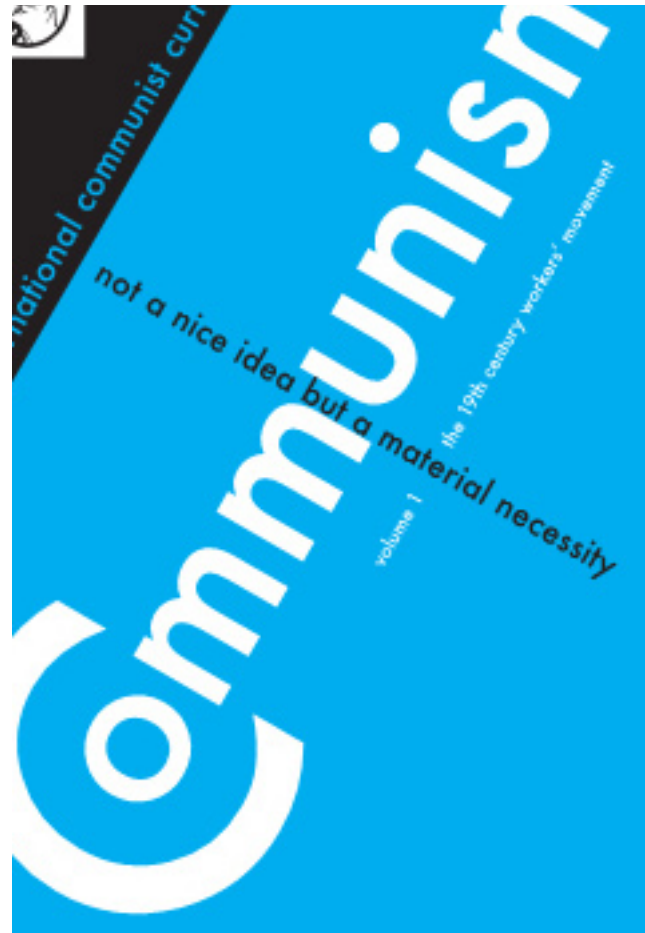
This is the wider importance of the Joint Statement, which in defining the common position of the Communist Left, began to demarcate, in the midst of a milieu of political confusion, an internationalist reference point.

Conclusion

The last two years and the reaction to the Joint Statements have shown that the historical Communist Left is still fragmented and many of its groups have been unable so far to take united internationalist action against the increase in imperialist war. However, small steps in this direction have been made as we outline above. And only the unification of the communist vanguard, not through compromises or amorphous fronts, but through the real clarification of differences, can arm the proletariat in its fight against capitalism and imperialist war.

ICC

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Manifesto of the Communist Left to the Workers of Europe, June 1944

Introduction

With the prospect of a new world war looming, the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left warned the proletariat against the siren songs of the bourgeoisie, aimed at urging it to support one imperialist camp or another. It reminded them that its class interests do not lie in the defence of a homeland, be it “Soviet”, fascist or democratic, but in proletarian internationalism. The Fraction never ceased denouncing the role of recruiting sergeant that the parties that betrayed the working class in 1914, the Socialist parties, were playing once again; but it also denounced the Communist parties (which the Communist Left at the time called centrist parties), who had in turn betrayed the proletarian camp. All their positions and analyses during the thirties converged towards this uncompromising defence of proletarian positions, and this was also the meaning of the Manifesto the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left published in 1935.

Weakened organisationally and disoriented by the outbreak of war,¹ the Italian Fraction found itself powerless to develop a response to the war. Reorganising itself politically, it nevertheless had to face conditions of increasing difficulties. Its intransigent opposition to the war and refusal to sup-

1. After a minority of its members went to support the militias in Spain, a majority of the Fraction were in turn influenced by opportunism, and, in total contradiction with the analysis developed during the 30s, thought that the war would not take place. This disarray led to the abandonment of the publication of the review *Bilan*, to be replaced by *Octobre*, based on the belief that there would soon be an upsurge in the class struggle.

port any imperialist camp whatsoever forced it to go underground. This resulted in the fragmentation and dispersal of its militants.

The occupation of Belgium and France by Germany, the collaboration between the local police and the Gestapo, which worked hand in hand with the Italian OVRA (political police) in the hunt for political refugees, had a disastrous effect on the Italian and Belgian Fractions. Militants were deported and died in concentration camps. Others, ‘more fortunate’, after a stay in German labour camps were handed

over to the Italian police and deported to the islands around Italy, where conditions were less harsh.

Nevertheless, the work of the Italian Fraction and the French Nucleus of the Communist Left resulted in the development of their militant forces in Marseille, Paris and Northern France, leading to the birth of the French Fraction of the Communist Left.² Posters denouncing imperialist war and all the military camps were put up in several French cities. Leaflets in German, English, Italian and French were thrown onto trains leaving for the front. After the American landings on 6 June 44, a call went out to all soldiers and workers, calling on them to show their class solidarity across borders; to cease fire and lay down their arms; to unite against world capitalism “on the international class front”, with a view to transforming the imperialist war into a civil war, for the triumph of the international revolution.

2. Which published *l’Étincelle* in 45-46 and *Internationalisme* until 1952

Manifesto

It will soon be five years that imperialist war has raged in Europe, with all its misery, massacres and devastation.

On the Russian, French and Italian fronts tens of millions of workers and peasants are slaughtering each other for the exclusive interests of a sordid and bloody capitalism, which obeys only these laws: profit, accumulation.

In the course of five years of war, especially the last year – that of the liberation of all peoples, you have been told – many false programmes, many illusions have disappeared, making the mask, behind which the odious face of capitalism has been hidden, fall.

In each country you have been mobilised behind different ideologies, each having the same goal, the same result: to hurl you into the carnage, one against the other, brothers against brothers in misery, workers against workers.

Fascism, National-Socialism, demand “living space” for their exploited masses,

but only do so to hide their fierce will to extricate themselves from the profound crisis which undermines their very basis.

The Anglo-American-Russian bloc wanted – so it appeared – to deliver you from fascism in order to give back to you your freedoms, your rights. But these promises were only the bait to make you participate in the war to eliminate – after having first begotten it – fascism, the great imperialist competitor, outdated as a mode of life and domination for capitalism.

The Atlantic Charter, the plan for the New Europe, was only the smokescreen behind which was hidden the conflict’s real meaning: a war of bandits with its mournful trail of destruction and massacres, all of whose terrible consequences the working class must bear.

Workers

You are told, they would like to make you believe, that this war is not like all the others. You are being lied to. As long as there

are exploiters and exploited, capitalism is war, war is capitalism.

The revolution of 1917 was a proletarian revolution; it was the shining proof of the proletariat’s political capacity to constitute itself as a ruling class and to move towards the organisation of a communist society. It was the response of the labouring masses to the imperialist war of 1914-1918.

But the leaders of the Russian state have since then abandoned the principles of that revolution, have transformed your communist parties into nationalist parties, have dissolved the Communist International and have helped international capitalism to hurl you into the carnage.

If in Russia, they had remained loyal to the programme of the revolution and of internationalism, if they had constantly called on the proletarian masses to unify its struggles against capitalism, if they had not adhered to that masquerade, the League of Nations, it would have been impossible for imperialism to have unleashed the war.

In participating in the imperialist war together with a group of capitalist powers, the Russian state has betrayed the Russian workers and the international proletariat.

Workers of Germany!

Your bourgeoisie counted on you, on your endurance and your productive power, to win a place for imperialism, to dominate the industrial and agricultural basin of Europe. After turning Germany into a barracks, after making you work for four years at breakneck speed to prepare the engines of war, they have thrown you into all the countries of Europe to everywhere bring – as in each imperialist conflict – ruin and dislocation.

The plan of your imperialism has been foiled by the laws of development of international capitalism which has since 1900 exhausted any possibility of a blooming of the imperialist form of domination, and still more so, of every nationalist expression.

The profound crisis which wastes the world, and particularly Europe, is the insoluble crisis, the death crisis, of capitalist society.

Only the proletariat, through its communist revolution, can eliminate the causes of the distress and the misery of the labouring masses and the workers.

Workers and soldiers!

The fate of your bourgeoisie will now be determined on the terrain of imperialist competition. But international capitalism cannot end the war, because war is its last, its only possibility of survival.

Your revolutionary traditions are profoundly rooted in the class struggle of the past. In 1918, with your proletarian leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, in 1923 (despite the opportunism already arising in the Communist International) you engraved on history your revolutionary will and power.

The National-Socialism of Hitler and the opportunism of the 3rd International made you believe that your fate was linked to the struggle against the Treaty of Versailles. This false struggle could only tie you to the programme of your capitalism, which was characterised by a spirit of revenge and the preparation for the present war.

Your interests as workers are only linked to the interests of all the exploited of Europe and of the whole world.

You occupy a critical place to force an end to the monstrous carnage. Following the example of the Italian proletariat, you

must undertake the struggle against war production, you must refuse to fight against your brother workers.¹ Your revolt must be a manifestation of the class struggle. It must be translated into strikes and upheavals. As in 1918, the fate of the proletarian revolution is dependent on your capacity to break the chains that bind you to the monstrous machine of German imperialism.

Workers, Labourers in Germany

They have deported you to build engines of destruction. For each worker who arrives, a German worker can be sent to the front.

Whatever your nationality, you are one of the exploited.

Your only enemy is German and international capitalism; your comrades are the German workers, and the workers of the whole world. You carry with you the traditions and experiences of the class struggles of your countries and the entire world. You are not “foreigners”.

Your demands, your interests, are identical to those of your German comrades. In participating in the class struggle in the factory, at the point of production, you will effectively contribute to breaking the course of the imperialist war.

French workers!

At the time of the strikes in 1936, all the parties manoeuvred to transform your just and legitimate class demands into a demonstration of support for the war which was then being prepared. “The era of prosperity” which the demagogues of the Popular Front presented to you as a full flowering was, in fact, only the profound crisis of French capitalism.

Your ephemeral improvements in living standards and work were not the result of an economic recovery, but were brought about by the need to set the war industry in motion.

The invasion of France has been exploited by all those responsible for the conflict – from the left to the right – to instil in your minds a desire for revenge and hatred against the German and Italian workers, who no more than you bear any responsibility for starting the war, and who, like you bear the terrible consequences of a butchery willed and prepared by all the capitalist states.

1. In 1943, the strikes and class struggle of the proletariat in Italy led to the fall of Mussolini and Italy's call for an armistice. This was the first - and we know today - the only serious breach that the working class made in the second inter-imperialist butchery (Note by the ICC).

The Petain-Laval government speaks to you of a National Revolution. It is the most vulgar lie; the most reactionary method to make you accept without flinching the weight of military defeat for the exclusive benefit of capitalism.

The Algiers Committee² holds out before you the return to pre-war abundance and prosperity. Whatever the colour or form of tomorrow's government, the labouring masses of France and the other countries of Europe will pay a heavy war tribute to the Anglo-American-Russian imperialists in the ruins and destruction caused by the two armies in struggle.

French workers!

Too many among you have been led to believe in, to hope for, the well-being brought by the armies, be they English, American or Russian.

The intrigues and contrasts which already manifest themselves within this “trinity” of thieves on the subject of the division of the spoils foreshadows the fact that the conditions imposed on the proletariat will be hard if you do not take the path of class struggle.

Too many among you have made yourselves the auxiliaries of capitalism by participating in the partisans' war, the most extreme expression of nationalism.

Your enemies are neither the German soldier, nor the English or American soldier, but their capitalism which has led them to war, to killing, to death. Your enemy is your own capitalism, whether it is represented by Laval or De Gaulle. Your freedom is linked neither to the fate nor to the traditions of your ruling class, but to your independence as a proletarian class.

You are the children of the Paris Commune, and it is only by inspiring yourselves by it and by its principles that you will succeed in breaking the chains of slavery that link you to the outdated apparatus of capitalist domination: the traditions of 1789 and the laws of the bourgeois revolution.

Workers of Russia!

In 1917, with your Bolshevik Party and Lenin, you overthrew the capitalist regime and established the first Republic of Soviets. Your magnificent class action opened the historic period of the decisive struggle between two opposed societies: the old, the bourgeoisie, destined to disappear under the weight of its contradictions; the new,

2. The coalition put together by Anglo-American imperialism, with the participation of De Gaulle, to rule France after its “liberation”.

the proletariat, constituting itself as a ruling class so as to move towards a classless society, communism.

In that period too, imperialist war raged. Millions of workers fell on the battlefields of capitalism. The example of your decisive struggle filled the working masses with the will to put an end to the useless massacre. In breaking the course of the war, your revolution became the programme, the battle flag, for the struggle of the exploited of the world. Capitalism consumed by the economic crisis – aggravated by the war – trembled in the face of the proletarian movement which burst over all of Europe.

Surrounded by the White armies and those of international capitalism which sought to eliminate you by famine, you succeeded in extricating yourselves from the counter-revolutionary embrace; thanks to the heroic support of the European and international proletariat, which took the road of class struggle, the bourgeois coalition was prevented from intervening against the proletarian revolution.

The lesson was decisive: henceforth, the class struggle will develop on the international terrain, the proletariat will form its communist party and its International on the programme confirmed by your communist revolution. The bourgeoisie will direct itself towards the repression of the workers movement and towards the corruption of your revolution and your power.

The present imperialist war finds you not with the proletariat, but against it. Your allies are no longer the workers, but the bourgeoisie. You no longer defend the Soviet constitution of 1917, but the “socialist” fatherland. You no longer have comrades like Lenin and his co-workers, but jackbooted, bemedalled generals, just as in all the capitalist countries – the symbol of bloody militarism, the slayers of the proletariat.

You are told that there is no capitalism in Russia, but your exploitation is the same as the rest of the proletariat, and your labour power disappears into the abyss of the war and into the treasuries of international capitalism. Your freedom is the freedom to be made to kill to help imperialism to survive. Your class party has disappeared, your soviets are eliminated, your unions are barracks, and your links with the international proletariat are broken.

Comrades, workers of Russia!

Among you, as everywhere else, capitalism sows ruin and misery. The proletarian masses of Europe, like you in 1917, await the favourable moment to rise up against

the frightful conditions of existence imposed by the war. Like you, they direct themselves against all those responsible for this terrible insanity, whether they be fascists, democrats or Russian. Like you, they try to overthrow the bloody regime of oppression which is capitalism.

Their flag will be your flag of 1917.

Their programme will be your programme, the one your present rulers have taken from you: the communist revolution. Your state is allied with the forces of capitalist counter-revolution. You must be in solidarity with, you must fraternise with, your comrades in struggle, your brothers; you must struggle at their side to re-establish in Russia and in other countries, the conditions for the victory of the world communist revolution.

English and American soldiers!

Your imperialism is developing its plans for the colonisation and enslavement of all peoples, in order to try and save itself from the grave crisis which envelops all of society.

Already before the war, despite colonial domination and the enrichment of your bourgeoisie you were subjected to unemployment and poverty, those without work numbering in the millions.

Against your strikes for legitimate demands your bourgeoisie did not hesitate to employ the most barbarous means of repression: gas.

The workers of Germany, France, Italy, and Spain have accounts to settle with their own bourgeoisie, which like yours is responsible for the filthy massacre.

You are wanted to play the role of cop; you will be sent against the proletarian masses in revolt.

You must refuse to fire, you must fraternise with the soldiers and workers of Europe.

These struggles are your class struggles.

Workers of Europe!

You are surrounded by a world of enemies. All parties, all programmes, have failed the test posed by the war; all play on your suffering, all unite to save capitalist society from collapse.

The whole band of riffraff in the service of high finance, from Hitler to Churchill, from Laval to Petain, from Stalin to Roosevelt, from Mussolini to Bonomi, is in collaboration with the bourgeois state to

preach order, work, discipline, fatherland – in the perpetuation of your enslavement.

Despite the betrayal of the leaders of the Russian state, the formulas, the theses, the predictions of Marx and of Lenin find, in the very perfidy of the present situation, their striking confirmation.

Never has the class division between exploited and exploiters been so clear, so profound.

Never has the necessity to put an end to a regime of misery and blood been so compelling.

With the killing at the front, with the massacres from the air, with five years of restrictions, famine makes its appearance.

The war spreads over the whole continent; capitalism does not know how to, cannot, end this war.

It is not by helping one or the other group of the two forms of capitalist domination that you will shorten the fight.

This time it is the Italian proletariat which has blazed the trail of struggle, of revolt against the war.

As with Lenin in 1917, there is no alternative, no other path to follow outside of the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war.

As long as capitalist rule survives, there will be neither bread, nor peace, nor freedom for the proletariat.

Communist workers!

There are many parties, too many parties. But all of them, even the Trotskyist groups, have fallen into the counter-revolution.

One single party is missing: the proletarian class political party.

The Communist Left alone has stayed with the proletariat, loyal to the programme of Marxism, loyal to the communist revolution. It is only with this programme that it will be possible to give back to the proletariat its organisations, the weapons necessary to its struggle, to victory. These weapons are the new communist party, the new international.

Against all opportunism, against all compromise on the terrain of class struggle, the Fraction³ calls on you to aid the proletariat in extricating itself from the vice of capitalism. Against the united forces of capitalism, the invincible force of the proletarian class must be built.

3. The organisation of the communist Left.

Continued on page 52

The struggle against imperialist war can only be waged with the positions of the Communist Left

The indignation and concern felt by the working class faced with the proliferation of increasingly destructive imperialist wars is being expressed in small minorities seeking an internationalist response.

But what is internationalism? In the name of internationalism, the leftist groups - mainly the Trotskyists - ask us to choose a camp among the imperialist gangsters. For them, to choose Palestine in the name of the "national liberation of the peoples" would be the most internationalist answer! So, they sell us an "internationalism" which is its opposite, because internationalism means fighting against all imperialist camps, for the international class struggle, for the perspective of world revolution which alone can end war.

There are other views of internationalism: anarchists tend to reduce it to a rejection: rejection of armies, rejection of military service, rejection of wars in general. These visions do not go to the root of the problem, which is the decadence of capitalism and its dynamic of destruction of the planet and of all humanity.

It is therefore necessary, first, to clarify what internationalism is, drawing on the historical experience of the proletariat.

Only the working class can end war by putting an end to capitalism

The struggle against war cannot be left to men of goodwill or peace-loving, wise politicians...**the struggle against war is a class question.** Only the working class bears with it the communist perspective, the force and the interests that allow it to put an end to war.

That is why we say in our Third International Manifesto "*Of all the classes in society, the most affected and hardest hit by war is the proletariat. 'Modern' war is waged by a gigantic industrial machine which demands a great intensification of the exploitation of the proletariat. The proletariat is an international class that HAS NO HOMELAND, but war is the killing of workers for the homeland that exploits and oppresses them. The proletariat is the class of consciousness; war is irrational confrontation, the renunciation of all conscious thought and reflection. The proletariat has an interest in seeking the clearest truth; in wars the first casualty is truth, chained, gagged, suffocated by the lies of imperialist propaganda. The proletariat is the class of unity across barriers of language, religion, race or nationality; the deadly confrontation of war compels the tearing apart, the division, the confrontation between nations and populations.*"

Internationalism is the most consistent expression of the consciousness and historical interest of the proletariat.

We can find the foundation stone of internationalism in the *Principles of Communism* of 1847, where in point XIX, Friedrich Engels asks, "*Is a revolution possible*

in one only country?" and his answer is clear: "*No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilised peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others. Further, it has coordinated the social development of the civilised countries to such an extent that, in all of them, bourgeoisie and proletariat have become the decisive classes, and the struggle between them the great struggle of the day. It follows that the communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilised countries - that is to say, at least in England, America, France, and Germany. It will develop in each of these countries more or less rapidly, according as one country or the other has a more developed industry, greater wealth, a more significant mass of productive forces. Hence, it will go slowest and will meet most obstacles in Germany, most rapidly and with the fewest difficulties in England. It will have a powerful impact on the other countries of the world and will radically alter the course of development which they have followed up to now, while greatly stepping up its pace. It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range.*"

The *Communist Manifesto* reaffirms and deepens this principle, proclaiming "*the proletariat has no fatherland, proletarians of the world unite!*"

In the sixties of the 19th century, Marx

and Engels combated the pan-Slavism that opposed the international unity of the working class and argued that the support for certain national wars could accelerate the conditions for world revolution, but not in the name of a so-called "national right". This was the case with the Civil War in US and the German / French war of 1870. As Lenin said in his pamphlet *Socialism and War*, written just before the Zimmerwald Conference of 1915: "*The war of 1870 was a 'progressive war' like those of the French revolution, which while they undoubtedly brought with them all the elements of pillage and conquest, had the historic function of destroying or shaking feudalism and absolutism throughout the old Europe still founded on serfdom.*"¹

The Second International faced a clear change in wars that increasingly took on an imperialist character. So, in 1900, in the Paris Congress, it adopted the position that: "*the socialist deputies to Parliament in all countries are required to vote against all military and naval expenditure, and against colonial expeditions.*"

But the increasing gravity of imperialist tensions, expressing the starting point of the decadence of capitalism and the necessity for proletarian world revolution, raised the need to make internationalism not only a defensive position of rejection of war - a position in which the majority of the Second International tended to remain - but to make the fight against war the fight for the destruction of capitalism. That's why in the Stuttgart Congress (1907), faced with a proposed resolution on war by August Bebel, formally correct but too timid and limited, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Martov proposed an amendment, which in the end was adopted, that insisted on the need "*to profit in every way from the economic and political crisis to raise the people and so to precipitate the fall of capitalist rule.*"

By the same token the Extraordinary Congress of Basel (1912) denounced a possible European war as "criminal" and "reactionary" and declared that it could only "*hasten the fall of capitalism*

1. However, it is necessary to point out that after the Paris Commune and the collaboration of the French and Prussian bourgeoisies in its suppression, Marx came to the conclusion that this marked the end of progressive national wars in the central countries of capitalism.

by unfailingly provoking the proletarian revolution”.

However, the majority of parties of the 2nd International “denounced war above all for its horrors and atrocities, because the proletariat provided the cannon fodder for the ruling class. The 11nd International’s anti-militarism was purely negative (...) In particular, the ban on voting war credits did not resolve the problem of the ‘defence of the country’ against the attack of an ‘aggressor nation’. This is the breach through which the pack of social-chauvinists and opportunists poured.”²

Faced with the limitations of the majority position in the parties of the Second International, their confusions on the national question and even the colonialism of Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation in Britain, only the Left of the Second International, especially the Bolsheviks and Rosa Luxemburg, defended internationalism against imperialist war and were for world proletarian revolution. They made it clear that internationalism is the frontier that separates communists from all parties and organisations that defend capitalist war.

The combat at Zimmerwald

The response to the First World War made a clear demarcation between the internationalism of a small minority in the Social Democratic Parties against the majority chauvinism that destroyed the Second International. The internationalists regrouped in the Zimmerwald conferences that started in September 1915.

But Zimmerwald was only a point of departure because it also expressed huge confusion. The Zimmerwald movement was the emanation of the parties of the moribund 2nd International that had collapsed in 1914 and therefore brought together a completely heterogeneous range of forces, united only by a general rejection of the war, but lacking a real internationalist programme.

There were the advocates of an impossible return to a pre-World War I capitalism, who called for “peace” and wanted to confine the struggle to parliament, by abstaining or refusing to vote on war credits (Ledebour of the SPD). There were those who were simply pacifists; there was a wavering centrist wing (Trotsky, Spartacists) and, finally, the clear and determinate minority around Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the Zimmerwald Left.

As our article in *International Review* n° 155 says: “in the context of Zimmerwald,

the right was represented not by the ‘social chauvinists’, to use Lenin’s term, but by Kautsky and his consorts – all those who later formed the right wing of the USPD – whereas the left was made up of the Bolsheviks and the centre by Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg’s Spartacus group. The process which led towards the revolution in Russia and Germany was marked precisely by the fact that a large part of the ‘centre’ was won over to the positions of the Bolsheviks.”³

From the beginning, only the Bolsheviks put forward a genuine and consistent internationalist response defending three key points:

- only the destruction of capitalism could end imperialist war;
- only the proletarian class fighting for the world revolution could fulfil this task;
- it was not possible to return to the Second International. A new International, the Third International, was needed and should be founded as soon as possible.

They led a stubborn and steadfast fight around these three points. They were aware of the confusion that reigned in the “Zimmerwald movement” and that this swampy terrain of eclecticism, of the coexistence of “fire and water”, led to the disarmament of the anti-war struggle and the weakening of the maturing revolutionary perspective, with the workers in Russia at its head.

It’s true that Bolsheviks signed the compromise Zimmerwald Manifesto in 1915, but this did not mean the acceptance of this confusion, particularly the pacifist tone of the Manifesto, but a recognition that it could, by denouncing the social patriots to the whole working class, be a first step in the adoption of an intransigently internationalist line, leading towards a new International. By retaining their critiques of Zimmerwald centrism the Bolsheviks could continue the necessary process of decantation. Given the results of the Zimmerwald conference, the Bolsheviks adopted the following decisions:

- presenting a much clearer draft of the Manifesto than the adopted draft;
- creating their own press organ which regrouped the Left of Zimmerwald;
- waging an intransigent polemic against the different exponents of the right and centrist wing: Plekhanov, Martov and specially Kautsky’s centrism that was even more dangerous than open social-chauvinism.

Today the Internationalist Communist Tendency and certain parasitic groups pretend to be the followers of Zimmerwald. They put a lot of “likes” to Zimmerwald. However, its meaning has been deliberately obscured or even reversed by the ICT and parasitic elements disguised as internationalists. For the ICT the goal of Zimmerwald was supposedly aimed at regrouping as many as possible of those who were against the war as a practical means of organising the masses. “This is not the time for picking and choosing among those who oppose the war on the basis of a revolutionary programme. In the first place, just as before Zimmerwald, all revolutionary and internationalist energies are worth the effort of regroupment. But more than this, the example of France was significant with the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations (Comité pour la Reprise des Relations Internationales - CRRI), which led the most activity and was the heart of the workers’ opposition to the war. From its inception it regrouped revolutionary syndicalists, as well as militants of the Socialist Party, the section of the International which had failed. Indeed, the *raison d’être* of the CRRI was its opposition to the war and to the Sacred Union, to bring together different opponents of them, having come from syndicalism, socialism and anarchism.”⁴ Clearly this distortion and contempt for the facts is aimed at justifying the opportunism of the No War But the Class War (NWBCW) enterprise.⁵ Unlike the Bolsheviks, who despite being in a small minority insisted on the rejection of pacifism, the rejection of the attempt to resuscitate the Second International, and on the struggle for the world party. The guiding principle of the Bolsheviks was to develop a “line of work” for the working class in the epoch of imperialist wars, against the morass of centrist confusion, even if it meant, at the time, numerical isolation.

Zimmerwald was not a collection of “anti-war” elements, as the ICT and parasites claim, even if at the beginning it was still conceived as a grouping within the Social Democratic parties at a time when the latter were still the political reference point of the whole proletariat. The orientation taken by the Bolsheviks was the struggle to overcome this confusion and move towards the formation of the Third International. Zimmerwald was understood to be on a class terrain. But a process of decantation was nevertheless taking place which led the centrists into the

4. “NWBCW and the real international bureau of 1915”, *Leftcom.org*, July 2022.

5. “The ICT and the No War But the Class War initiative: an opportunist bluff which weakens the Communist Left”, *World Revolution* n° 398, Autumn 2023, and *ICOnline*.

2. *Bilan* n° 21 August 1936

3. “Zimmerwald and the centrist currents in the political organisations of the proletariat”, *International Review* n° 155.

counter-revolution, and therefore supporting their own national bourgeoisie, while the intransigent Left remained as the only internationalist proletarian current.

The combat of the Zimmerwald Left was validated in practice by the October proletarian Revolution in 1917 which made the internationalist slogan “turn the imperialist war into a civil war” into a reality. The immediate withdrawal by the new Soviet regime from the Entente imperialist alliance in the midst of the First World War, and the publication of the secret treaties on who would gain what in the event of their victory, sent shock waves through the world bourgeoisie, while the revolutionary upsurge of the European working class was given a tremendous impetus, reflected in the near success of the German revolution and the formation of the Communist International in 1919.

The combat of the Communist Left

If the path of internationalism in the First World War was through the struggle of the Left against the opportunism of the social-chauvinists and centrists, the continuity with that path in the 20s and 30s was through the struggle of the Communist Left against the degeneration of the Communist International in the 20s and subsequently against that of the Trotsky's Left Opposition in the 30s. The Comintern, because of the isolation and degeneration of the revolution in Russia, more and more capitulated to the social chauvinists of the disinterred Social Democracy, expressed in the policy of United Fronts and Workers' Governments. The policy of the 3rd International became increasingly the extension of the interests of the Russian state in place of the needs of the international revolution, which contributed to the defeats of the latter in Germany, Britain, China. A policy that was consolidated in the Comintern's adoption of the nationalist slogan of Socialism in One Country in 1928, and the complete capitulation of the Russian state to the game of world imperialism with the entry of Russia into the League of Nations in 1934.

The Communist Left was the first to oppose this tendency, particularly the tradition of the Italian Communist Left, that was eventually excluded from the Communist Party of Italy and the Communist International. It formed a Fraction in exile and subsequently an international Fraction of the Communist Left.

The combat of *Bilan*

The defeat of the international revolutionary wave by 1928 opened a course toward another imperialist world war, and it was

only the Communist Left which remained true to the internationalist struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, both in the lead-up to the Second World War and during and after the war itself.

Bilan drew a clear line of demarcation against the Left Opposition around Trotsky on the key question of the defence of USSR, a position that helped drag the Trotskyist current into supporting the imperialist war:

“We consider that in the event of war the proletariat of all countries, including Russia, would have the duty of concentrating its forces with a view to transforming the imperialist war into a civil war. The participation of the USSR in a war of robbery would not alter its essential character and the proletarian state could only sink under the blows of the social contradictions which such participation would entail. The Bolshevik-Leninists leave the terrain of Marxism when they urge the proletariat to sacrifice its struggle for world revolution in exchange for a defence of the USSR” (*Bilan* n° 10, August 1934).

Nevertheless, the internationalist litmus test for the revolutionary groups and fractions who had been expelled from the degenerating Comintern was the war in Spain from 1936, where the conflict between the republican and fascist wings of the Spanish bourgeoisie became the terrain for a proxy battle between the contending imperialist powers Britain and France, Russia, Germany and Italy. Yet the Trotskyists who had been excluded from the Communist Parties notably for their attempts to defend internationalism, now, in the name of anti-fascism, defended ‘critically’ the republican side and thus betrayed the proletariat, which they encouraged to choose sides in this inter-bourgeois and inter-imperialist dress rehearsal for the Second World War.

Bilan had to combat this tendency to capitulation that was dragging down the proletarian groups. Its uncompromising loyalty to internationalism led it to a dramatic isolation: only small groups in Belgium or Mexico joined its fight.

The combat of *Internationalisme* (GCF)

However, the Communist Left itself wasn't immune from the dangers of opportunism. A minority of the Italian Fraction broke with the latter and its internationalist principles and joined the anti-fascist war in Spain.

And the Second World War found the Italian Fraction in disarray, with its most notable representative, Vercesi, claiming that the proletariat had disappeared and the

political struggle for internationalism was no longer viable. It was only with extreme difficulty – caught between the Gestapo and the resistance – that a part of the Italian Fraction managed to regroup in the South of France and proclaim the internationalist positions of the Communist Left, that is against both imperialist camps, whether “fascist” or “anti-fascist” in ideology.

Separately, in 1943, the Partito Comunista Internazionale (PCInt) was formed in Northern Italy, after the overthrow of Mussolini, and continued the internationalist policy of the Communist Left. However, neglecting the critique of the opportunism of the Comintern by the Italian Fraction in exile, and ignoring the aim of learning the lessons of a period of defeat for the proletariat, including internationalist intransigence in front of the war in Spain, the PCInt returned to the policy of “going to the masses” and imagined that it could turn the Partisans in Italy, that is those anti-fascist forces working on behalf of allied imperialism, into genuine internationalists.⁶

While the PCInt prematurely abandoned the necessary international fraction work against this opportunist drift, the Communist Left of France (Gauche Communiste de France, which published *Internationalisme*) resolutely continued the work of the Fraction, elaborated the positions that *Bilan* had begun to develop. The GCF clearly denounced the false opposition Fascism v Democracy which had been the banner of mobilisation for imperialist slaughter, while after the Second World War and in the face of the new imperialist configuration (the struggle between the USA and the USSR) it denounced the additional means of enlistment for war: the “national liberation” of the “oppressed peoples” (Vietnam, Palestine etc).

We can conclude that only the Communist Left has remained loyal to the proletariat by defending internationalism against the innumerable military massacres that have bloodied the planet since 1914. That is why in our Third International Manifesto we say “*In serious historical situations such as far-reaching wars like the one in Ukraine, the proletariat can see who its friends are and who are its enemies. These enemies are not only the major figures such as Putin, Zelensky or Biden, but also the parties of the extreme right, right, left and extreme left, who, with a wide range of arguments, including pacifism, support and justify the war and the defence of one imperialist camp against another.*”

6. See “The ambiguities of the Internationalist Communist Party over the ‘partisans’ in Italy in 1943”, *International Review* n° 8

“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’” (Appeal to the Communist Left).

The **critical historical continuity of the communist positions** defended and developed during the last century by the Communist Left is the only one capable of providing a body of analysis (nature of capitalism, decadence, imperialism, war economy, capitalist decomposition etc.), a continuity in the debates and in the intervention in the class, a coherence that provides the weapons of struggle for the world communist revolution against all manifestations of capitalist barbarism and above all, imperialist war.

The combat waged by the ICC

Against the infamous carnage in Ukraine the ICC proposed a Common Declaration of the Communist Left which was signed by 3 other groups. In the face of the new imperialist barbarism in Gaza we have made an Appeal to 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.

All the forces of the bourgeoisie (parties, trade unions, institutions such as churches, the UN etc.) call on the proletarians to choose a camp among the imperialist bandits, to accept the terrible sacrifices that the war dynamic of capitalism imposes, in short, to become themselves caught in the machinery of war and destruction that leads to the annihilation of the planet and the whole of humanity. Only the voice of the Communist Left clearly rises up against this concert of the dead.

The Joint Statement and Appeal of the ICC to the sectarian and opportunist proletarian political milieu today is in continuity of the attitude of the Bolsheviks at Zimmerwald towards the centrists. The Communist Left groups are the only minimum solid class terrain for an internationalist

perspective today. Yet the Communist Left groups descending from the PCInt refused to sign the common proposals. But if these groups had signed the common statements this would have acted as a political beacon for emerging revolutionary forces and could have opened a more intense process of political decantation. The Joint Statement and Appeal⁷ was intended to be an initial step towards the necessary political decantation that the formation of the future party will demand.

The war waged by the bourgeoisie against internationalism

The bourgeoisie needs to silence the internationalist voice of the Communist Left. To this end, it conducts a covert, sly war. In this war it does not openly use the repressive bodies of the state or the big media. Given the small size, the reduced influence, the division, and dispersion of the groups of the Communist Left, the bourgeoisie uses the services of the parasites.

The parasites claim to be internationalist, rejecting the different sides by grandiloquent declarations, but all their efforts are focused on denigrating, slandering, and denouncing genuinely internationalist groups like the ICC. We are talking about snitches and gangsters like the “International Group of the Communist Left” who use “internationalist” verbiage as their passport to attack communist organisations. Their methods are slander, denunciation, provocation, accusations of “Stalinism” against the ICC. They proclaim that our organisation is “outside the Communist Left” and to “fill the vacuum” they shamelessly flatter the ICT by offering it the throne of the “vanguard of the Communist Left”. It is thus a question of creating division within the Communist Left and shamelessly using the sectarianism and opportunism of the ICT to turn it even more strongly against the clearest and most consistent organisation of the Communist Left, the ICC.

The parasitic coterie, a chaotic jumble of groups, and personalities, uses an indigestible rehash of the positions of the Communist Left in order to attack the actual Communist Left, to falsify and denigrate it. This attack comes in different flavours.

On the one hand, there is the blog first called New Course and then disguised as Comunia which tries to pull the wool over our eyes: it uses the confused positions, due

7. “Joint statement of groups of the international communist left about the war in Ukraine”; “Call from the communist left: down with the massacres, no support to any imperialist camp! No to pacifist illusions! For proletarian internationalism!”, originally published in *International Review* n°s 168 and 171 respectively and republished in this issue.

to an incomplete break with Trotskyism, of a genuine revolutionary, Munís,⁸ to present us with a fake Communist Left, completely adulterated and falsified. This enterprise of impersonation promoted by the adventurer Gaizka⁹ was for some time unreservedly supported by the parasitic IGCL

Another front in the war against the Communist Left comes from a farce of a conference held in Brussels, where several parasitic personalities and groupuscules have as a “common ground, which no doubt they would prefer to keep under wraps: it is the conviction that marxism and the acquisitions of the Communist Left over the last hundred years are obsolete and must be ‘supplemented’ or even ‘surpassed’ by recourse to various anarcho-councilist, modernist or radical ecologist theories. That’s why they call themselves ‘pro-revolutionaries’, seeing themselves as a kind of ‘friendly association for the spreading the idea of revolution’. Their message is that the working class must ‘start again’ and under the din of wars, the waves of inflation and misery, the orgy of destruction, wait patiently for these ‘pro-revolutionary’ denizens of the salon to use their incredible brains to come up with some idea on ‘how to fight capitalism.’”¹⁰

The opportunism of the ICT on the question on the struggle against the war

The war of the bourgeoisie against internationalism finds a point of support in the sectarian and opportunist position of the ICT.

The ICT denounce imperialist war, reject all sides in the conflicts, and defend the proletarian revolution as the only way out. But this internationalism runs the risk of remaining pure words, because, on the one hand, they refuse to fight against the war in union with the other groups of the Communist Left (for example, by refusing to participate in the Common Declaration proposed by the ICC from the beginning of the war in Ukraine or by also rejecting the Appeal we have made in the face of the war in Gaza). In the same way, giving internationalism an elasticity that ends up breaking or diluting it, it advocates fronts (for example, the NWBCW) which can fit leftist groups that are “internationalist” in the face of one military conflict but chauvinist in response to another, or confused

8. “Nuevo Curso and the ‘Spanish Communist Left’: What are the origins of the Communist Left?”, *International Review* n° 163, 2019.

9. “Who is who in ‘Nuevo Curso?’”, *ICOnline*, January 2020

10. See “A ‘conference of left communism’ in Brussels? A decoy for those who want to take part in the revolutionary struggle!”, *ICC online*, September 2023.

groups that have a false conception of internationalism.

This sectarian and opportunist position is not new - it has almost 80 years of history as we have seen above in relation to the origins of the PCInt. With the historical recovery of the proletariat since 1968, both the Bordigist groups coming from the PCInt and the Damenist branch, predecessor of the present ICT, display on the one hand the sectarianism of refusing any declaration or common action against the imperialist war proposed by the ICC, and on the other hand collaboration with confused groups or groups clearly situated in the terrain of the bourgeoisie.

So, the ICT, with the sectarianism and opportunism that are in its genes, has rejected all the joint action of the Communist Left proposed by the ICC against imperialist war – since the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 – up to an including the wars in Ukraine and Gaza!

At the same it has created fronts like the No War But the Class War with the argument that that the field of the Communist Left is too narrow and that it barely reaches the working class.

The alleged “narrowness” of the Communist Left leads the ICT to “widen the field of internationalism” by calling for anarchist, semi-Trotskyist, parasitic groups from a more or less leftist-infested swamp to join NWBCW. Thus, the programmatic identity, the historical tradition, the fierce struggle of more than a century, carried out by the Communist Left is denied by an “enlargement” which, in reality, means dilution and confusion.

But, at the same time, real internationalism is trampled underfoot because these “internationalists” are not always internationalists, they are internationalists against some wars, while against others they keep silent or support them more or less openly. Their arguments against war contain numerous illusions in pacifism, humanism, inter-classism. This can be seen in the ICT’s attitude towards the Anarchist Communist Group in Britain (ACG). It welcomes this group’s stance on the war in Ukraine, but at the same time “regrets” its contrary position on the war in Gaza.

The ICT in its opportunist eagerness to “unite” all those who say “something against the war” blurs the demarcation that must exist between the Communist Left that effectively fights against the war and all the other fauna:

1. those who are circumstantially opposed to this or that war (as *Bilan* said “*The character of a war is not given by the specific nature of each*

of the States participating in it, but results from the character of the conflict as a whole. This fact must impel us to take a unified, general and analogous position for all countries, with regard to war”. n° 8, June 1934);

2. those who oppose war in general. These gentlemen reject that “*the working class can know and claim only one type of war: civil war directed against the oppressors in each State and ending in insurrectional victory*”, (*Bilan* n° 16, March 1935).

The ICT want to maintain confusion because it argues “*What we do not think internationalists should be doing is attacking each other. We have always held the view that old polemics would be resolved or made irrelevant by the appearance of a new class movement.*”¹¹

No! Such an approach is radically antagonistic to that of the Bolsheviks in Zimmerwald. Lenin regarded this meeting of “internationalists in general” as a “puddle” and led an uncompromising struggle to separate the truly internationalist position from this puddle of confusion which blocked the consistent struggle against the war.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks showed that the “Zimmerwald majority” practised a “façade internationalism”; their opposition to the war was more empty posturing than real combat. By the same token, we must warn against the present internationalism of the ICT. It is true that the ICT has not betrayed internationalism, but its internationalism is becoming more and more formal and abstract, tending to become an empty shell by which the ICT covers up its sabotage of the struggle for the party, its complicity with parasitism, its collaboration with snitches, its growing connivance with leftism.

Como & C. Mir 22-12-23

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More than a century of conflict in Israel/Palestine

On the other hand, there have been occasional combative reactions by Palestinian workers fighting for their class interests – in 2007 and again in 2015, public sector workers in Gaza went on strike against the Hamas administration over unpaid wages. The same is true in Israel, with a history of strikes against the rising cost of living, such as that of dockers in 2018 and nursery workers in 2021. In 2011, during the demonstrations and assemblies protesting the housing crisis in Israel, there were even tentative signs of Israeli and Palestinian workers coming together to discuss their common interests. But again and again, the return to military conflict has tended to stifle these elementary expressions of class struggle.

Communists need to be clear about the nature and effect of nationalism in stoking up daily violence. But in addition, we have seen how campaigns to support one side or the other in the recent conflict have created real divisions in the working class in the centres of capitalism. Precisely at a time when the working class is emerging from years of passivity and resignation, the streets of the cities in the countries central to the system have been taken over by demonstrations for a free Palestine or “against anti-Semitism” which loudly call on workers to abandon their class interests and take sides in an imperialist war.

While the Jewish population of Europe was one of the main victims of the Nazi genocidal regime, the policy of the Israeli state shows that these barbaric crimes are not a question of race or ethnic or religious affiliation. No faction of the bourgeoisie has a monopoly on ethnic cleansing, population displacement, terror and the annihilation of entire ethnic groups. In reality, the “defence mechanisms” of the Israeli state and the Palestinian methods of warfare are an integral part of the bloody barbarism practised by all regimes in rotting capitalism.

R. Havanais. 15.07.2024

11. “The tasks of revolutionaries in the face of Capitalism’s drive to war”, on leftcom.org, October 2023.

Report on the political life of the bourgeoisie

How the bourgeoisie organises itself

Usually, ICC congresses and the meetings of its International Bureau examine three main themes concerning the international situation and which have the greatest impact on our intervention: the economic contradictions of capitalism, imperialist conflicts and the evolution of the class struggle. That said, an examination of the political life of the class enemy, the bourgeoisie, should never be neglected, not least because it completes our knowledge of the society we are fighting and can also provide keys to understanding those three major topics mentioned above. In a totally reductionist, and therefore false, vision of marxism, the starting point is the economic situation of capitalism, which determines imperialist conflicts and the level of class struggle. We have often shown that reality is not so simple, notably by taking up Engels' quotations on the place of the economy, in the last instance, in the life of society.

I. Prologue

This need to examine the political life of the bourgeoisie is present in many of the writings of Marx and Engels. One of the best known and most remarkable texts on this subject is *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In this document, although he refers briefly to the economic situation in France and Europe, Marx sets out to elucidate a sort of enigma: how and through what process could the revolution of 1848 have led to the coup d'état of 2 December 1851, giving full powers to an adventurer, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. In so doing, Marx paints a vivid and profound picture of the political workings of French society at the time. Of course, it would be absurd to transpose Marx's analysis to today's society. In particular, the role played by Parliament today is nothing like that of the mid-19th century. That said, it is fundamentally in the method used by Marx, historical and dialectical materialism, that we can find a source of inspiration for analysing today's society.

The importance of a systematic examination of the political life of the bourgeoisie for an understanding of today's world has been verified on several occasions by the ICC, but it is worth highlighting a particularly significant episode: that of the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union in 1989-90. The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 came as a huge surprise to most proletarian political groups and bourgeois "specialists" who, until the eve of that date, were far from thinking that the difficulties encountered by the countries of the bloc would lead to its sudden and spectacular collapse. However, the ICC had foreseen this major event two months earlier, at the beginning of September 1989, when it drafted the "Theses on the Economic and Political Crisis in the USSR and Eastern Europe".

These are very clear:

– "... since virtually the only cohesive factor in the Russian bloc is that of armed force, any policy which tends to push this into the background threatens to break up the bloc. Already, the Eastern bloc is in a state of growing dislocation. (...).

"We find a similar phenomenon in the peripheral republics of the USSR (...) The nationalist movements which today are profiting from a loosening of central control by the Russian party (...) [have] a dynamic towards separation from Russia. In the end, if the central power in Moscow does not react, we will see an explosion, not just of the Russian bloc, but also of its dominant power. The Russian bourgeoisie, which today rules the world's second power, would find itself at the head of a second-rate power, a good deal weaker than Germany for example." (Point 18)

– "But however the situation in the Eastern bloc evolves, the events that are shaking it today mean the historic crisis, the definitive collapse of Stalinism, this monstrous symbol of the most terrible counter-revolution the proletariat has ever known. The greatest lie in history is being stripped bare today. In these countries, an unprecedented period of instability, convulsions, and chaos has begun, whose implications go far beyond their frontiers. In particular, the weakening, which will continue, of the Russian bloc, opens the gates to a destabilisation of the whole system of international relations and imperialist constellations which emerged from World War II with the Yalta Agreements." (Point 20).

– "The events presently shaking the so-called socialist countries', the de facto disappearance of the Russian bloc, the patent and definitive bankruptcy

of Stalinism on the economic, political and ideological level, constitute along with the international resurgence of the proletariat at the end of the sixties, the most important historic facts since the Second World War." (Point 22).¹

This ability to predict what was going to happen in the Eastern bloc was not the result of any particular talent for reading crystal balls, but of regular monitoring and in-depth analysis of the situation and nature of the countries in this bloc.² It is for this reason that the first part of the theses recalled what we had already written on this question, in order to place the events of 1989 in the context of what we had previously identified, particularly during the workers' struggles in Poland in 1980. The theses cited in particular three articles published in the *International Review* in 1980-81:

– "The international dimension of workers' struggles in Poland", *International Review* n°24;

– "One year of workers' struggles in Poland", *International Review* n°27;

– "Eastern Europe: Economic crisis and the weapons of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat", *International Review* n°34.

This is not the place to review these writings, which are easily accessible on our website. We can just recall two important ideas which, among others, guided our analysis of the collapse of the Eastern bloc a decade later:

– "By forcing it into a division of labour to which the Eastern European bourgeoisie is structurally resistant, the proletarian struggles in Poland have created a living contradiction. It is still too early to predict how it will turn out. Faced with a historically unprecedented situation... the task of revolutionaries is to approach the unfolding events in a modest manner."³

– "... while the American bloc is perfectly

1. Published in *International Review* n°60.

2. Obviously, the essence of this framework of analysis had been transmitted to the ICC by comrade MC ("Marc, Part 1: From the Revolution of October 1917 to World War II"; "Marc, Part 2: From World War II to the present day", (*International Review* n°s 65 & 66) on the basis of reflections that had already taken place in the GCF but also on the basis of reflections that the comrade had carried out as events unfolded.

3. *International Review* n°27.

capable of 'managing' the 'democratisation' of a fascist or military regime when this becomes useful (Japan, Germany, Italy, in the aftermath of the war; Portugal, Greece, Spain, in the 1970s), the USSR cannot accommodate any 'democratisation' within its bloc. (...) A change of political regime in a 'satellite' country carries with it the direct threat of that country becoming part of the opposing bloc."⁴

Today, the examination of the political life of the bourgeoisie retains all its importance. The methodological tool we use for this examination is, of course, our analysis of decomposition, more particularly the question of the loss of control by the ruling class of its political game, of which the rise of populism is a major manifestation. This report will focus on the question of populism for two main reasons:

- on the one hand, this rise of populism has only intensified in recent years;
- on the other, the analyses we have adopted to date on this issue are not without weaknesses; weaknesses that we need to identify and rectify.

II. The rise of populism: the most spectacular expression of the bourgeoisie's loss of control over its political apparatus

a) Populism, a pure product of the decomposition of capitalism

It was only belatedly, at the 22nd Congress of Révolution Internationale (section in France of the ICC) in May 2016, that the ICC began to take the measure of the importance of the populist phenomenon on an international scale. At that same congress, the discussion on the resolution on the situation in France had expressed a lack of mastery and clarity with regard to this question. A motion was adopted insisting on the need to launch a debate throughout the ICC. A year later, the "Resolution on international class struggle" adopted by the 22nd Congress of the ICC said of the populist phenomenon: "*The current populist upsurge has thus been fed by all these factors – the 2008 economic crash, the impact of war, terrorism and the refugee crisis – and appears as a concentrated expression of the decomposition of the system, of the inability of either of the two major classes in society to offer humanity a perspective for the future.*"⁵ While this statement contained a valid analysis, other points in the resolution placed greater emphasis, as a determining factor in the development of populism, on its capacity

to influence the working class. Moreover, the populist phenomenon was not really assessed in the light of the bourgeoisie's own difficulties since entering the phase of decomposition. These ambiguities reflected the lack of homogeneity that went hand in hand with a tendency within the ICC to ignore the framework defended in the "Theses on Decomposition"⁶ in order to understand the political life of the bourgeoisie in the current historical period. This drift was particularly evident in the text "On the question of populism"⁷ and also in the article "Brexit, Trump, Setbacks for the bourgeoisie which do not augur well for the proletariat".⁸ Formally, these two texts do indeed present populism as an expression of "the decomposition of bourgeois political life": "*as such, it is the product of the bourgeois world and its vision of the world – but above all of its decomposition.*"⁹ For all that, it is striking to note the extent to which the "Theses" do not constitute the starting point of the analysis but only one element of reflection among others.¹⁰ In fact, these two texts place another factor at the heart of the analysis: "*The rise of populism is dangerous for the ruling class because it threatens its ability to control its own political apparatus and at the same time maintain the democratic mystification which is one of the pillars of its social domination. But it offers nothing to the proletariat. On the contrary, it is precisely the proletariat's own weakness, its inability to offer any alternative perspective for the chaos threatening capitalism, that has made the rise of populism possible. Only the proletariat can offer a way out of the dead-end that society finds itself in today, and it will never be able to do so if workers let themselves be taken in by the siren songs of populist demagogues promising an impossible return to a past which, in any case, never existed.*"¹¹ Drawing a parallel between the rise of populism and the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, the article "On the question of Populism" concludes: "*If the proletariat is unable to put forward its revolutionary alternative to capitalism, the loss of confidence in the ability of the ruling class to 'do its job' ultimately leads to a revolt, a protest, an explosion of an entirely different kind, a protest that is not conscious but blind, oriented not towards the future but towards the past, that is based not on confidence but on fear, not on creativity but on destruction and hatred.*" In other

6. Published in *International Review* n° 107.

7. Published in *International Review* n° 157.

8. Also published in *International Review* n° 157

9. "On the question of populism", *International Review* n° 157.

10. The paragraph "Populism and decomposition" only comes in the last third of the contribution.

11. "Brexit, Trump: Setbacks for the bourgeoisie that do not bode well for the proletariat", *International Review* n° 157.

words, the main factor in the development and rise of populism in bourgeois politics is what amounts to the political defeat of the working class.¹²

In fact, all the aspects that feed the populist "catechism" (rejection of foreigners, rejection of the "elites", conspiracy theory, belief in the strong and providential man, the search for scapegoats, withdrawal into the "native" community...) are first and foremost the product of the miasma and ideological putrefaction conveyed by the lack of perspective in capitalist society (explained in point 8 of the "Theses on Decomposition"), which primarily affects the capitalist class. But the breakthrough and development of populism in the political life of the bourgeoisie was determined above all by one of the major manifestations of the decomposition of capitalist society: "*the growing difficulty of the bourgeoisie to control the evolution of the situation on the political level. At the root of this phenomenon is, of course, the ever-increasing loss of control by the ruling class over its economic apparatus, which constitutes the infrastructure of society. (...) The absence of any perspective (other than day-to-day stop-gap measures to prop up the economy) around which it could mobilise as a class, and at the same time the fact that the proletariat does not yet threaten its own survival, creates within the ruling class, and especially within its political apparatus, a growing tendency towards indiscipline and an attitude of 'every man for himself'.*"¹³ It is therefore on the basis of the continuing worsening of the economic crisis and the inability of the bourgeoisie to mobilise society for world war that the disintegration of the political apparatus finds its main driving force. This historical groundswell has manifested itself in a growing tendency towards indiscipline, division, every man for himself and, ultimately, the exacerbation of struggles between cliques within the political apparatus. This ferment has provided fertile ground for the emergence of bourgeois fractions with an increasingly irrational discourse, capable of surfing on the most nauseating ideas and sentiments, whose leaders behave like veritable gang leaders vandalising political relations, with the aim of asserting their own interests at all costs, to the detriment of the interests of national capital.

12. It should be noted that this analysis was also reflected in certain documents produced and adopted by the ICC. For example, the "Report on the Impact of Decomposition on the Political Life of the Bourgeoisie" (*International Review* n° 164) states, in speaking of populism, that its determining cause is "*the incapacity of the proletariat to put forward its own response, its own alternative to the crisis of capitalism.*"

13. Thesis 9 of "Theses on the decomposition of capitalism" published in *International Review* n° 107.

4. *International Review* n° 34.

5. Published in *International Review* n° 159.

In this way, while the inability of the proletariat to open the way to a perspective other than that of chaos and capitalist barbarism can only reinforce manifestations of decomposition such as populism, it is not the active factor. Moreover, the last two years have given a stinging rebuttal to such an analysis. On the one hand, we have witnessed a very significant revival of workers' struggles, containing a development of reflection and the maturing of consciousness. On the other hand, under the effect of the unprecedented worsening of decomposition, the rise of populism has nevertheless been fully confirmed. In the final analysis, the thesis put forward in the "On the question of Populism" is totally at odds with the ICC's analysis, which identifies two poles in the current historical situation. What's more, it also amounts to denying the analysis of the historical break in the class struggle, and/or to thinking that the development of the workers' struggle can make populist tendencies recede. Finally, it also leads us to underestimate the fact that the bourgeoisie will exploit populism against the working class.

b) The amplification of the populist phenomenon

The victory of "Brexit" in the United Kingdom in June 2016, followed by Trump's rise to power in the United States a few months later, signalled a spectacular breakthrough for populism in the political life of the bourgeoisie. This trend has continued ever since, making populism a decisive and irreversible factor in the evolution of capitalist society.

Several European countries are now governed in whole or in part by populist factions (the Netherlands, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Finland and Austria), while in the rest of Europe populist and far-right parties have continued to climb in the polls and in votes, particularly in Western Europe. According to some studies, populist parties could come out on top in 9 EU countries at the European elections in June 2024. But the scope of the phenomenon clearly extends beyond Europe. In South America, after Brazil, it is now Argentina's turn to experience it with the arrival in power of Javier Milei. But if populism is a general phenomenon, it is important for our analysis to appreciate above all its breakthrough within the core countries, since such a dynamic not only has a destabilising impact on the situation in the countries concerned, but also on capitalist society as a whole. At present, two countries in particular should be the focus of attention: France and the United States.

In France, the RN (National Rally) achieved a historic score in the June 2022 legislative elections, with 89 deputies on

the benches of the National Assembly. According to a "secret poll" commissioned by the right-wing party Les Républicains at the end of 2023, the RN could win between 240 and 305 seats in the event of early elections following a possible dissolution of the National Assembly. Similarly, its victory in the presidential elections of 2027 is an increasingly credible scenario. Such a situation would certainly aggravate the political crisis facing the French bourgeoisie. But above all, given the RN's proximity to the Putin faction, it would aggravate divisions within the European Union and weaken its ability to implement its pro-Ukrainian policy. Thus, unlike the German bourgeoisie, which for the moment seems to have found the means to contain the risk of the Afd (Alternative for Germany) coming to power (despite the rise of this formation's influence within the German political game), the French bourgeoisie seems to see its room for manoeuvre increasingly limited due to the strong discredit of the Macron faction, in power for 7 years, but principally due to the exacerbation of divisions within the political apparatus.¹⁴

But it is above all the possible return of Trump to the White House in the presidential elections of November 2024 that would mark a profound worsening of the situation, not only in the USA but in the international situation as a whole. The accentuation of centrifugal forces and the trend towards the loss of global leadership have for many years weighed on the ability of the US state to equip itself with the most appropriate faction to defend its interests, as was the case when the neoconservatives came to power in the early 2000s. The Obama era did not put an end to this trend since Trump's arrival in power in 2017 only exacerbated it. The day after his defeat in January 2021, Adam Nossiter, the Paris bureau chief of the New York Times, said: "*In six months, we won't hear any more about him, he'll be nothing away from power*". Over the last four years, the most responsible fractions of the American bourgeoisie have not succeeded in "putting him out of business". Despite numerous legal challenges, smear campaigns and attempts to destabilise those closest to him, Trump's return to the White House in the November 2024 presidential elections is an increasingly likely scenario. His victory in the last Republican primaries even demonstrated the strengthening of Trumpism within the conservative party to the detriment of more responsible fringes.

In any case, a Trump victory would send shockwaves through the international situation, particularly on the imperialist front. By casting doubt on continued support for Ukraine or by threatening to make US pro-

14. See Chapter III of the report.

tection of NATO countries conditional on their creditworthiness, the US political line would weaken the EU and run the risk of aggravating the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. As regards the war in Gaza, Trump's latest "critical" statements about Netanyahu do not seem to call into question the unconditional support of the Republican religious right for the scorched-earth policy pursued by the Israeli government. What would be the consequences of Trump's victory in this respect?

More generally, the return of the populist banner to Washington would have a major impact on the ability of the bourgeoisie to deal with the manifestations of the decomposition of its own system. Trump's victory could thus mean:

- another exit from the Paris climate agreement by the second-largest CO₂-emitting power;
- an increasingly isolationist and economically aggressive policy;
- a worsening of social violence and the disintegration of the social fabric through the crusade against "minorities";
- worsening political chaos fuelled by a spirit of revenge and a desire to settle scores both within the Republican party and more broadly within the political apparatus. As Trump said last December on Fox News, "*I will not be a dictator, except on the first day*"!

However, we must be wary of thinking that all bets are off. On the contrary, the outcome of the presidential election is more unpredictable than ever given the degree of destabilisation of the US political system and the deep and lasting divisions in American society, accentuated both by populist rhetoric and by the Biden administration's anti-Trump campaign.

III. The various bourgeois strategies for containing populism

Unlike the rise of fascism in the 1930s, populism is not the result of a deliberate will on the part of the dominant sectors of the bourgeoisie. The most responsible sections of the bourgeoisie are still trying to implement strategies to contain it. The "Report on the impact of decomposition on the political life of the bourgeoisie" for the 23rd Congress of the ICC in 2019,¹⁵ assessed these different strategies:

- anti-populist politics;
- the adaptation of populist ideas;
- the formation of populist governments;
- rebuilding the left/right divide.

15. Published in *International Review* n° 164.

What has been the evolution over the last five years? As the “Resolution on the international situation” at the 25th ICC Congress states, “*The rise of populism, oiled by the total lack of perspective offered by capitalism and the development of every man for himself at the international level, is probably the clearest expression of this loss of control, and this trend has continued despite counter-movements by other, more ‘responsible’ factions of the bourgeoisie (e.g. the replacement of Trump, and the rapid dumping of Truss in the UK),*”¹⁶ Consequently, while the more responsible fractions have not remained inactive, these various strategies have proved less and less effective and cannot constitute a viable and sustainable response.

a) Anti-populist policies (France/Germany/USA)

As mentioned above, the campaign to discredit and eliminate Trump from the presidential race has not yet borne fruit. On the contrary, the various lawsuits that have been brought against him have boosted his overall popularity among a significant section of the American electorate. At the same time, the new candidacy of Biden, aged 81, who has publicly shown clear signs of senility, is clearly not an asset for the American bourgeoisie. All the more so as the government’s economic attacks have greatly accentuated its discredit. However, this choice by default (despite disagreements within the Democratic party) expresses a crisis in the renewal of the party’s leadership and above all deep divisions within the party’s political apparatus, which are having repercussions on the electorate. For example, the dissatisfaction of the Arab community with the US position on the war in Gaza means that there is a risk of defeat in the swing state of Michigan. Similarly, the growing influence of the wokist and identity-based ideology advocated by the party’s left wing could lead to a shift away from some minorities and young people, who are more concerned about the deterioration in working and living conditions. In particular, surveys seem to show that part of the African-American electorate could be seduced by Trump.

In France, while the bourgeoisie once again managed to repel the RN in the 2022 presidential elections by re-electing Macron, this tour de force was not without collateral effects. The multiple attacks on the working class since 2017, as well as the lack of experience and amateurism that regularly manifests itself, has only served to increase the executive’s already well-developed discredit. The real danger of a large RN victory in the European elections forced Macron to change government by

appointing a young and loyal prime minister (G. Attal) who was supposed to lead the anti-RN crusade between now and June. However, this government is experiencing the same difficulties as the previous one, despite the intensification of rhetoric against the RN and even the majority’s attempt to recuperate far-right ideas.

But the greatest weakness lies fundamentally in the divisions and the “every man for himself” attitude that is increasingly corrupting the political game, including within the various parties, first and foremost within the presidential camp. The relative majority obtained by the government party in the legislative elections has accentuated the tendency towards centrifugal forces. Faced with the difficulties of forging stable alliances on key reforms, the government is obliged to make regular use of Article 49.3, which allows it to dispense with the vote of the deputies in the Assembly. Similarly, the traditional parties, which were largely scuttled by the bourgeoisie in the 2017 election, remain more fragmented than ever, as in the case of the right-wing party Les Républicains. This heir to the Gaullist party, which has been in power most of the time since the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958, now has just 62 MPs and is made up of at least three increasingly fractured tendencies. This political crisis could severely handicap the bourgeoisie’s ability to put forward a credible candidate capable of fending off Marine Le Pen, whose chances of victory in the 2027 elections have never been stronger. In the meantime, the French bourgeoisie could be faced with other obstacles. What would happen in the event of a stinging defeat for the Macronist list in the European elections? Similarly, the right is now threatening to table a motion of censure if the government decides to raise taxes. The other opposition parties, in particular the RN, would jump on board. Such an outcome would lead to early general elections with an unpredictable scenario, except for the fact that it would accentuate the political chaos in which the French bourgeoisie is immersed.

With regard to Germany, the 2019 report concluded: “*the situation is complex and Merkel’s relinquishment of the CDU presidency (and therefore in the future of the post of chancellor) heralds a phase of uncertainty and instability for the dominant bourgeoisie in Europe.*” The outbreak of war in Ukraine has particularly affected the traditional political line of the German ruling class. Internally, the weakening of the traditional parties (SPD, CDU) has continued, necessitating the formation of coalitions linking the three main parties together at a time when relations are increasingly conflictual. At the same time,

Germany is not exempt from the rise of populism and the far right. In fact, the populist AfD party has become Germany’s second most popular party. Unlike the RN in France, some of whose positions are showing signs of responsibility, the AfD’s political positions (rejection of the EU, xenophobia, openness towards Russia, etc.) are, for the moment, too strongly at odds with the interests of national capital to allow it to be involved at the highest level of government. However, its stance of opposing the government elite and its condemnation as a total opponent of the integrity of the federal state will make it a rallying point for protest voters for a long time to come.

b) The takeover of populist ideas by traditional parties: political developments in the UK.

“*Brexit was accompanied by the transformation of the centuries-old Tory party into a populist hodgepodge that relegated experienced politicians to the sidelines and gave government posts to ambitious, doctrinaire mediocrities, who then disrupted the competence of the departments they headed. The rapid succession of Conservative prime ministers since 2016 is testament to the uncertainty at the political helm.*”¹⁷ The 44 days of political mayhem under Liz Truss’s government in September-October 2022 was a vivid illustration of this. While this choice might have represented a break with populist one-upmanship, it was above all marked by the defence of a radically ultra-liberal policy and the fantasy of a “global Britain” that was totally at odds with the global interests of British capital.

Sunak’s coming to power, however, signified the attempt to preserve the democratic credibility of state and governmental institutions: “*His government, despite the influence of populism, modified certain aspects of the Northern Ireland Protocol in order to circumvent some of the contradictions of Brexit, and joined the European Horizon project, without being able to overcome the flight of the economy. King Charles was sent to France and Germany as ambassador to show Britain’s remnants of dignity. Finally, the sacking of Suella Braverman and the appointment of Lord Cameron as Foreign Secretary is a further expression of this attempt to limit the growing populist virus within the party, but its future direction and stability remain deeply uncertain, not least because the same virus is an international reality, most notably within the American ruling class.*”¹⁸

16. *International Review* n°170.

17. Resolution on the situation in Great Britain, published internally.

18. *Ibid.*

c) A new left/right divide?

The “Report on the impact of decomposition on the life of the bourgeoisie” stated: “*The third strategy envisaged, the refoundation of the left/right opposition to take the wind out of populism’s sails, does not seem to have been really implemented by the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the past few years have been characterised by an irreversible trend towards the decline of the socialist parties.*” This trend has been confirmed in recent years. While this evolution is being resisted in some countries (Spain and the UK in particular), the irreversible decline of social democracy and, more generally, of traditional government parties, as well as the difficulty in many European countries of structuring new left-wing formations (La France Insoumise in France, Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany) because of the struggles between cliques that these formations are also experiencing, tends to see the development of increasingly fragile coalitions. This is the case in Spain, for example, where the PSOE is relying on opposing forces to stay in power. On one side the chauvinist Catalan right and on the other the far-left SUMAR party, of which Yolanda Diaz is Deputy Prime Minister. This “Frankenstein” government reflects the fragility of the PSOE, which remains the only force capable of managing separatist tendencies within the central state.

d) The formation of populist governments

The arrival in power of populist and far-right parties is a scenario which could become a major element in the political situation of the bourgeoisie in the years to come without, however, engendering the same consequences everywhere. While the years of power of Trump, Bolsonaro and Salvini have seen a sharpening of political instability, there has also been an ability on the part of other parts of the state apparatus to channel or restrain their most irrational and far-fetched aspirations. This was the case, under Trump for example, with the incessant struggle waged by part of the US administration to control the unpredictability of presidential decisions. Large sections of the bourgeoisie, particularly within the very structures of the State, managed to oppose the temptation of a rapprochement or even an alliance with Russia, thus ensuring that the option of the dominant fractions of the bourgeoisie triumphed. As we saw in the case of Italy, with Salvini’s government, it is also possible that the populists could agree to “water down their wine” by abandoning certain measures or scaling down their promises, particularly in the social sphere. This was also demonstrated recently by PVV leader

Geert Wilder’s decision in Holland to renounce taking power when he was unable to form a coalition.

e) The distinction between populism and the extreme right

The possibility of populist parties coming to power, and the reality of such an event as in Italy, highlights the fact that populism and the extreme right cannot be identified. This country is governed by an alliance between the traditional right (Forza Italia founded by Berlusconi), Salvini’s populist Lega and Meloni’s neo-fascist-inspired party, Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy), whose symbol remains the tricolour flame of the former, openly-Mussolinian MSI (Italian Social Movement). There are, of course, important similarities between the Lega and Meloni’s party, in particular the xenophobic rhetoric against immigrants, particularly Muslims, which makes them competitors on the electoral stage. At the same time, the motto of Fratelli d’Italia (FI), “God, Fatherland and Family”, reveals the traditionalist inspiration of this party, which distinguishes it from the Lega. Indeed, the latter, although it may invoke traditional values, is rather anti-clerical and more “anti-system” than the FI. In France we find this difference between the populist far right, represented by Marine Le Pen’s National Rally, and the traditional far right represented by the “Reconquête!” party.¹⁹ It’s no coincidence, moreover, that in the first round of the 2022 presidential elections, Reconquête!’s Éric Zemmour came second (behind Macron, who has become the politician most favoured by the bourgeoisie) in the “posh quarters” of Paris, garnering three times as many votes as Marine Le Pen, whereas the latter completely crushed Zemmour in the “popular” localities. And it’s true that Le Pen’s speeches against Macron’s economic policies, such as the abolition of the Wealth Tax and pension reform, go down very badly with the classic bourgeoisie. In fact, with varying degrees of success in different countries, we are witnessing an attempt by certain sectors of the bourgeoisie to capitalise on fears around the issues of immigration, insecurity and Islamic terrorism, which until now have been the mainstay of populism, to give new life to a far right that is “presentable” from the point of view of the ruling class, with a programme more compatible with its interests. Zemmour has always maintained that his economic programme was the same as that of the

19. Somewhat paradoxically, this party is led by Éric Zemmour, whose name indicates his Sephardic Jewish origins. To overcome this “handicap” in relation to his traditionalist clientele, who still have sympathies for Marshal Pétain, the leader of the collaboration with Nazi Germany, Zemmour did not hesitate to declare that Pétain had saved Jewish lives (which is contradicted by all serious historians).

classical right, represented until now in France by the “Les Républicains” party, heir to the Gaullist party. What he proposed at the time of the 2022 presidential elections was an alliance with this party, with the argument that Marine Le Pen could never win the elections on her own. Zemmour’s policy has so far failed, as the RN has moved to the top of the polls and could win the 2027 presidential elections, which is a major concern for the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, it is a policy that has succeeded in Italy, since Meloni has demonstrated a remarkable ability to pursue a policy in line with bourgeois interests and has come well ahead of Salvini.

Populism is not a political trend promoted by the most far-sighted and responsible sectors of the bourgeoisie and it has already caused damage to the interests of this class (particularly in the UK) but, among the cards available to the ruling class to try to limit this damage, there is precisely this emphasis on a “traditional” far right to compete with or weaken populism.

IV. The impact of the “gangsterisation” of society and its penetration of the State.

Since the end of the 1980s, gangsterism and crime, largely fuelled by drug trafficking, have exploded worldwide. This phenomenon, already highlighted in the “Theses on Decomposition”, is accompanied by incredible corruption within the political apparatus: “*violence and urban crime have exploded in many countries in Latin America and also in the suburbs of some European cities - partly in connection with drug trafficking, but not only this. As regards this traffic and the enormous weight it has in society, including at the economic level, it can be said that this is a continually growing ‘market’ because of the increasing malaise and the despair that affects every layer of the population. Regarding corruption, and all the manipulations that constitute ‘white-collar crime’, many instances have been uncovered in recent years (like those of the ‘Panama papers’, which are just a tiny tip of the iceberg of the gangsterism in which the financial sector more and more has to tread)*”.²⁰

It is important to be able to identify the main effects of this phenomenon on the political life of the bourgeoisie. The increasingly obvious collusion between crime and the political fractions of the state apparatus tends to transform the political game into real gang warfare, sometimes against a backdrop of a trend towards the collapse of political institutions. This is

20. “Report on decomposition today (May 2017)”, *International Review* n°164,

certainly the most acute and unbridled form of the tendency to accentuate the divisions and fragmentation of the bourgeois political apparatus. The political situation in Haiti is certainly the most caricatural example. But many other countries in Central and South America have been particularly affected by this phenomenon for decades. Like the internal war that broke out in broad daylight at the beginning of January between the Ecuadorian state and criminal gangs: *“The current bourgeois faction that controls the state apparatus is directly linked to Ecuador’s most powerful agro-industrial import-export group. Its triumphal entry into the Carondelet Palace began with financial laws that directly benefited this group, with the approval of the PSC and the RC5 (correistas). The result was a country plunged into abject poverty and endemic corruption at all levels of government, penetrated on all sides by the Mexican drug cartels (Jalisco Nueva Generación and Sinaloa) associated with Peruvian and Colombian drug traffickers. The Albanian, Chinese, Russian and Italian mafia are also very present. And a society overwhelmed by national organised crime, the ODGs, linked to the Mexican cartels or the aforementioned mafias.”*

It should also be noted that the headlong rush into settling scores between factions has consequences in terms of heightening tensions between nation states. For example, the storming by the Ecuadorian police of the Mexican embassy in Quito on 5 April to dislodge the former vice-president accused of corruption by the Noboa government was a veritable act of vandalism against the rules of bourgeois propriety, which only contributed to diplomatic instability in this part of the world.

The political system in Russia is also particularly marked by the gangsterisation of political relations. Clientelism, corruption and nepotism are the main cogs in the “Putin system”. This is a factor that must be taken into account when analysing the risks hanging over the future of the Russian Federation: *“from Putin’s political survival to that of the Russian Federation and the latter’s imperialist status, the stakes arising from the defeat in Ukraine are fraught with consequences: as Russia sinks deeper into problems, there is a risk of settling scores, and even of bloody clashes between rival factions”*.²¹ The rebellion of the Wagner group in June 2023, followed by the liquidation of its leader Prigozhin two months later, and the severe repression suffered by the pro-democracy faction (the assassination of Navalny) have fully confirmed the scale of the internal tensions and the fragility of Putin and his inner

circle, who do not hesitate to defend their interests by any means necessary, in the manner of a real mafia boss. The central role played by gangsterism in the Russian political system therefore plays an active part in the risk of the Russian Federation breaking up. In the same way, the armed settling of scores within the former Soviet nomenklatura contributed to the profound destabilisation resulting from the implosion of the Eastern bloc. But after more than three decades of decomposition, the consequences of such a dynamic could lead to a much more chaotic situation. The break-up of the federation into several mini Russias and the spread of nuclear weapons in the hands of uncontrollable warlords would represent a veritable headlong rush into chaos on an international scale.

However, while these manifestations of the ideological and political decomposition of society are particularly advanced in the peripheral zones of capitalism, this trend is also increasingly apparent in the central countries:

- In democracies, while clashes (sometimes violent) between rival factions are nothing new and are generally expressed within the framework of institutions and “respect for order”, they are beginning to take on particularly chaotic and violent forms: *“The assault on the Capitol by Trump supporters on 6 January highlighted the fact that divisions within the ruling class, even in the most powerful country on the planet, are growing deeper and risk degenerating into violent clashes, even civil wars.”*²²
- Corruption and embezzlement are now ravaging the entire body politic, right up to the highest levels of government, as highlighted by the “Panama Papers” and Qatargate scandals (involving MEPs, parliamentary assistants, NGO representatives and trade unionists). This only serves to further discredit the various political fractions, particularly those who present themselves as the most upright, thus giving credence to the populist anti-elite discourse of “They are all rotten”.

In the 19th century, Marx pointed out that the most advanced country of the time, England, indicated the direction in which the other European countries would develop. Today, it is in the least developed countries that we find the most caricatural manifestations of the chaos that is sweeping across the planet and increasingly affecting the most developed countries. The observation made by Marx in his day was an illustration of the fact that the capitalist mode of production was still in its ascend-

ant phase. Today’s observation that chaos is advancing in society is yet another illustration of the historical impasse in which capitalism finds itself, its decadence and its decomposition.

ICC, December 2023

21. “Report on imperialist tensions”, 25th ICC Congress, *International Review* n°170.

22. “Resolution on the international situation”, *International Review* n°170.

This crisis is going to be the most serious in the whole period of decadence

For the ICC, “*The crisis that has already been unfolding over decades is going to become the most serious of the whole period of decadence, and its historic import will go beyond even the first crisis of this epoch, the crisis which began in 1929. Ripening after more than 100 years of capitalist decadence, with an economy ravaged by the military sector, weakened by the impact of the destruction of the environment, profoundly altered in its mechanisms of reproduction by debt and state manipulation, prey to the pandemic, increasingly suffering from all the other effects of decomposition, it is an illusion to think that in these conditions there will be any easy or durable recovery of the world economy.*”¹

The proletarian political milieu, for its part, underestimates the depth of the crisis: for the PCI (International Communist Party), which concentrates essentially on its financial aspects, the current crisis seems to be no more than a replay of the 1929 crisis. As for the ICT (International Communist Tendency), while empirically it can see certain phenomena of its aggravation, its economist approach, based solely on the downward trend in the rate of profit, obscures the extent of the decline of the capitalist system and the seriousness of the crisis. By continuing to conceive of the crisis as the sequence of cycles typical of the ascendant phase of capitalism, it fails to understand the forms it takes in decadence, or really its consequences and the resulting stakes for the proletariat. Above all, it sees Capital “... *generating wars as a means of pursuing the process of accumulation and extortion of surplus-value which is the basis of its existence*”.²

This report bases its assessment of the current severity of the economic crisis on the achievements of marxism and the elements of its evolution since the late 1960s, as set out in various ICC publications.

The crisis is one of overproduction

A. The impasse of the crisis of overproduction is based on capitalist social relations which are too narrow for the extended reproduction of capital³ and on the limits to solvent extra-capitalist markets

The crisis that resurfaced in 1967 and is still raging today is a crisis of overproduction. At its root is a fundamental cause, the principal contradiction of capitalism from its very beginnings, which has become a definitive obstacle once the productive forces reached a certain level of development: capitalist production does not automatically create the markets necessary for its growth. Capital produces more commodities than can be absorbed by the capitalist relations of production: part of the realisation of its profits, that which is destined to extend the reproduction of capital (i.e. neither consumed by the bourgeois class nor by

the proletarian class) must be realised outside these relations, in extra-capitalist markets. Historically, capitalism found the solvent outlets necessary for its expansion first among the peasants and artisans of the capitalist countries, then compensated for its inability to create its own outlets by extending globally and creating the world market.

*“But by generalising its relations of production across the whole planet and by unifying the world market, capitalism reached a point where the outlets which allowed it to grow so powerfully in the nineteenth century became saturated. Moreover, the growing difficulty encountered by capital in finding a market for the realisation of surplus value accentuates the fall in the rate of profit, which results from the constant widening of the ratio between the value of the means of production and the value of the labour power which sets them in motion. From being a mere tendency, the fall in the rate of profit has become more and more concrete; this has become an added fetter on the process of capitalist accumulation and thus on the operation of the entire system”.*⁴ *“It thus becomes clearer that the two contradictions traced by Marx do not exclude each other but are two sides of one overall process of*

value production. This ultimately makes it possible for the ‘two’ theories of crisis to become one.”⁵

On a more immediate level, the open crisis of the late 1960s put an end to two decades of prosperity based on the resumption of the exploitation of extra-capitalist markets (which had slowed down during and between the two world wars) and on the modernisation of the productive apparatus (Fordist methods, introduction of information technology, etc.). The return of the crisis once again opened the way to the historical alternative of world war or generalised class confrontation leading to proletarian revolution.

B. What criteria should be used to assess the seriousness of the crisis?

Faced with the resurgence of the crisis in the 1970s, the organisation retained three criteria to attest to the seriousness of the crisis: the development of state capitalism, the growing impasse of overproduction, and the preparation for war with the development of the war economy.

B1. The development of state capitalism

As an expression of the contradiction between global socialisation and the national basis of the social relations of capitalist production, the universal tendency towards the strengthening of the capitalist state, in all spheres of social life, fundamentally reflects the definitive unsuitability of capitalist social relations for the development achieved by the productive forces. The state is the only force capable of:

- curbing the antagonisms within the ruling class with a view to imposing the unity essential to defend the national capital;
- organising and fully developing on a national scale the cheating of the law of value, to restrict its field of application in order to slow down the disintegration of the national economy faced with the insurmountable contradictions of capitalism;
- placing the economy at the service of war and organising national capital with a view to preparing for imperialist war;
- strengthening, by means of its repressive forces and an ever-heavier bureaucracy, the internal cohesion of

1. “Resolution on the International Situation” (2021), *International Review* n°167.

2. “The Fall in the Average Rate of Profit - the Crisis and its Consequences”, (ICT website, “The Internationalists”, November 2009).

3. Capitalism cannot constitute the market needed to sell its production, which is why it has always had to sell the surplus to extra-capitalist markets, either within the countries dominated by capitalist relations of production or outside them.

4. ICC Platform, section on “The Decadence of Capitalism”.

5. “Marxism and Crisis Theories”, *International Review* n°13, 1978.

a society threatened with dislocation by the growing decomposition of its economic foundations;

- imposing, by means of omnipresent violence, the maintenance of a social structure increasingly incapable of automatically governing human relations – relations which are less and less accepted and more and more an absurdity from the point of view of the very survival of society.

B2. The growing impasse of overproduction

There is no solution to overproduction within capitalism; all the policies implemented to mitigate its effects are doomed to failure, and capitalism is constantly confronted with this insurmountable fundamental contradiction. In essence, this contradiction can only be eliminated by the abolition of wage-labour and exploitation. At most, the bourgeoisie can only try to mitigate the violence of the crisis by slowing it down.

The “*present situation clearly illustrates what the ICC has always said about the nature of the crisis: that we are dealing with a general crisis of overproduction which in the capitalist metropolises takes the form of an overproduction of commodities, capital and labour power.*”⁶

This impasse is expressed in the development of inflation, which is fed by the burden of unproductive costs mobilised by the need to maintain a minimum of cohesion in a disintegrating society (state capitalism) and the sterilisation of capital represented by the war economy and arms production. Inflation, which is also fuelled by cheating the law of value (debt, money creation, etc.), is a permanent feature of the decadence of capitalism, and becomes even more important in times of war. An enormous mass of capital, which can no longer be invested profitably, then feeds speculation.

“*The whole period of decadence shows that the overproduction crisis implies a displacement of production towards the war economy. To consider this an ‘economic solution’, even a momentary one, would be a serious mistake. The roots of this mistake lie in an inability to understand that the overproduction crisis is a process of self-destruction. Militarism is the expression of this process of self-destruction which is the result of the revolt of the productive process against production relations.*”⁷

6. “Resolution on the crisis”, *International Review* n°26, 1981.

7. “Conditions for the revolution: Crisis of overproduction, state capitalism, and the war economy”, *International Review* n°31, 1982.

B3. Preparing for war and building the war economy

“*In the decadent phase of imperialism, capitalism can only direct the contradictions of its system towards one outcome: war. Humanity can escape from such an alternative only through proletarian revolution.*”⁸ Indeed, as the economic crisis is prolonged and deepened, it intensifies inter-imperialist antagonisms. For capital, there is only one “solution” to its historical crisis: imperialist war. So, the sooner the various palliatives prove their futility, the more deliberately each imperialist bloc must prepare for a violent repartition of the world market.

B4. Reinforcement of the exploitation of the proletariat

The establishment of a war economy implies the development of production (particularly armaments production) which cannot be usefully employed to increase the value of capital, i.e. which cannot be integrated into the production of new commodities. In this sense, it implies a sterilisation of capital, which must be compensated for by an increase in the surplus value extracted. This compensation is basically achieved by reinforcing the exploitation of the working class.

Balance sheet of the 1970s and 80s: the eruption of decomposition

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, capitalism reached an impasse: in the Western bloc, the overproduction of goods was reflected in the fall in industrial production, which peaked, particularly in the USA, where recessions brought steel production back to its 1967 level. In the Eastern bloc, there was a shortage of capital, underdevelopment and backwardness of industrial production, and a complete lack of competitiveness of capital on the world market.⁹ The myth that the so-called “socialist” countries could escape the general crisis of the system collapsed definitively in the 1980s. Many of the poorest, so-called “Third World countries”, had already collapsed by the mid-1970s.

In the American bloc, the economic crisis accelerated the trend towards a strengthening of state capitalism. Not only were measures of Keynesian stimulus on the scale of those taken after the 1929 crisis no longer feasible, but the subsequent stimulus policies also failed. One recession

8. “Crises and cycles in the economy of dying capitalism - Part 1”; *Bilan* n°10, August-September 1934, republished in *International Review* n°102, 2000.

9. Read “The capitalist crisis in the Eastern Bloc”, *International Review* n°23, 1980.

followed another, becoming deeper and deeper.

Each bloc escalated its preparations for a third world holocaust, notably through a considerable increase in arms spending to support inter-imperialist competition. War preparations were also intensifying in terms of the political strengthening of the blocs with a view to imperialist confrontation (but also to confronting the working class).

But for Capital, “*While they have made it possible to strengthen the imperialist supremacy of the USA, the arms orders have not saved American industry. On the contrary. Between 1980 and 1987, the role on the world market played by the three key industrial sectors – machine-tools, automobiles and computer technology – has declined respectively from 12.7 to 9%, 11.5 to 9.4% and 31 to 22%. Arms production reproduces neither labour power nor new machinery. It represents a destruction of capital, of wealth, an unproductive puncture which deflates the competitiveness of the national economy. The two bloc leaders who emerged after Yalta have both seen their economies become less competitive than those of their allies. This is the result of the expenditure they have had to devote to the strengthening of their military power, which is the guarantee of their position as imperialist leaders and, in the last instance, of their economic strength.*”¹⁰

A. The collapse of Stalinism – the consequences of decomposition

At the turn of the 1980s, as the two fundamental and antagonistic classes of society confronted each other without succeeding in imposing their own decisive response, the contradictions and manifestations of moribund capitalism did not disappear with time. Instead, they were maintained, accumulated and deepened, culminating in the phase of generalised decomposition of the capitalist system which completes and crowns three quarters of a century of agony of a mode of production condemned by history.

The eruption of decomposition resulted in an unprecedented phenomenon: the collapse of an entire bloc outside the conditions of world war or proletarian revolution.

“*Overall, this collapse is a consequence of the capitalist world economic crisis; nor should we forget to take account in our analyses of the specificities of the Stalinist regimes as a result of their origins (see our “Theses on the economic and political crisis in the USSR and the Eastern bloc countries” in *International Review* n°60). However, we cannot fully understand this unprecedented*

10. “The crisis of state capitalism: The world economy sinks into chaos”, *International Review* n°61, 1990.

*collapse from within of an entire imperialist bloc, in the absence of either world war or revolution, without incorporating into the analytical framework this other unprecedented element: society's entry into the phase of decomposition that we can see today. The extreme centralisation and complete statification of the economy, the confusion between the economic and political apparatus, the permanent and large-scale cheating with the law of value, the mobilisation of all economic resources around war production, all characteristic of the Stalinist regimes, were well adapted to a context of imperialist war (these regimes emerged victorious from World War II). But they have been brutally confronted with their own limitations as the bourgeoisie has been compelled for years to confront a continually worsening economic crisis without being able to unleash this same imperialist war."*¹¹

B. The crisis of state capitalism and its significance

*"After decades of state capitalist policies carried out under the whip of the imperialist blocs, the current process of the dissolution of the alliances which have hitherto divided up the planet represents, to a certain extent, a victory for the market, a brutal adaptation of imperialist rivalries to economic realities. It symbolises the inability of state capitalist measures to short-circuit ad eternam the remorseless laws of the capitalist market. This failure, which goes well beyond the limits of the former Russian bloc, expresses the incapacity of the world bourgeoisie to deal with the chronic crisis of overproduction, with the catastrophic crisis of capital. It shows the growing ineffectiveness of the statist measures which have for decades been employed more and more massively, on the scale of the blocs, and which since the 1930s have been presented as a panacea to the insurmountable contradictions of capitalism as expressed in its market."*¹²

*"The absence of any perspective (other than day-to-day stop-gap measures to prop up the economy) around which it could mobilise as a class, and at the same time the fact that the proletariat does not yet threaten its own survival, creates within the ruling class, and especially within its political apparatus, a growing tendency towards indiscipline and an attitude of 'every man for himself'. This phenomenon in particular allows us to explain the collapse of Stalinism and the entire Eastern imperialist bloc."*¹³

11. "Theses on Decomposition", *International Review* n°62, 1990 and *International Review* n°107, 2001.

12. "The crisis of state capitalism: the world economy sinks into chaos", *International Review* n°61, 1990.

13. "Theses on Decomposition".

The ICC recognised that the Western-style model of state capitalism, integrating private capital into a state structure and under its control, is far more efficient, more flexible, more suitable, with a more developed sense of responsibility for the management of the national economy, more mystifying because it is more masked, and above all, it controls an economy and a market that are far more powerful than those of the countries of Eastern Europe. But we also pointed out that the bankruptcy of the Eastern bloc, after that of the "third world", heralded the future bankruptcy of capitalism in its most developed areas. *"The spectacle which the USSR and its satellites are offering us today, of a complete rout within the state apparatus itself, and the ruling class' loss of control over its own political strategy is in reality only the caricature (due to the specificities of the Stalinist regimes) of a much more general phenomenon affecting the whole world ruling class, and which is specific to the phase of decomposition."*¹⁴

In the following period, it was also confirmed that vast parts of the world, such as Africa, were economically marginalised on the world market. Despite the prospect of World War 3 receding, militarism continued unabated, and the ravages of war plunged ever larger areas into chaos at the direct instigation of the major powers, led by the USA with its catastrophic interventions in Iraq (1991 and 2001) and Afghanistan (2003).

Globalisation, 1989-2008

A. Globalisation: an attempt to maintain the profitability of capital

However, in the chaotic context of this new historical situation of decomposition, and in a capitalist world profoundly altered by the effects of its decadence, the disappearance of the blocs nevertheless offered an opportunity which was seized, particularly by the major powers led by the USA (as the sole remaining superpower in both economic and military terms), to prolong the survival of the capitalist system.

The attempts made through globalisation to limit the impact of capitalism's contradiction between the social and global nature of production and the private nature of the appropriation of surplus value by competing capitalist nations were fundamentally based on:

- **The better exploitation of already existing markets**, due to the disappearance of their competitors, swept away by the crisis which underlay of the collapse of the Eastern bloc countries, even if

14. Ibid.

these markets were far from being the El Dorado presented at the time by the bourgeois campaigns.

- In addition, above all, **the exploitation of the remaining extra-capitalist markets** in a world where the disappearance of the blocs meant the disappearance of the main barriers to their access as long as they were under the tutelage of the enemy. However, not all markets are necessarily solvent, i.e. able to pay for the goods available for sale.
- **State action**. We no longer see the bloc leader, in the name of the necessary unity of the bloc, imposing the measures to be put in place by each national capital, but the economic and political power of the United States still enables it to blackmail each state into accepting the new rules of the game, on pain of being deprived of the financial windfall necessary for survival in the capitalist arena. States have been the main instruments for organising globalisation, playing a decisive role through their intervention in establishing regulations favouring maximum profitability, defining attractive tax policies, etc.
- **The extension on a global scale of the cheating of the law of value** by generalising the measures and mechanisms which had begun to be developed under the aegis of the USA within the framework of the Western bloc in the last decade of its existence. This was aimed at combating – by means of a demand artificially financed by debt – the consequences of the narrowness of the markets, which can only affect the profitability of Capital.

The new international organisation of production and trade imposed by the world's leading power essentially took two forms: the free movement of capital and the free movement of labour. These two provisions are closely linked to the fight against the downward trend in the rate of profit, in the context of a shortage of solvent markets:

- a) **It is this law which provides the explanation for the export of capital, which appears as one of the specific features of decadent capitalism:** *"the export of capital", says Marx, 'is not caused by the impossibility of employing it at home, but by the possibility of placing it abroad at a higher rate of profit'. Lenin confirms this idea (in his Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism), saying that 'the need to export capital results from the capitalism's excessive maturity in certain countries, where advantageous investments [our emphasis] are in short supply,"*¹⁵ At the

15. "Crises and cycles in the economy of dying

same time, it had the effect of destroying the industrial apparatus of the central countries, as soon as there was the possibility of relocating it elsewhere in the world on more profitable terms.

The race for productivity, designed to compensate for the downward trend in the rate of profit by increasing the amount of profit made, also intensified.

b) The question of the commodity “labour power” (the living labour from whose exploitation capitalism extracts its surplus value) has played a central role. The disappearance of the blocs allowed the search for available labour power, which could be exploited more profitably, and also favoured the extension of capitalist class relations to areas hitherto outside the field of capitalist production. As a result of the proletarianisation of huge masses of small producers separated from their means of production, the number of wage earners worldwide rose to a total of 1.9 billion workers and employees in 1980, and exceeded 3 billion in 1995. The increasingly drastic exploitation of the labour power of the working class (through the direct or indirect reduction of wages, the intensification of work or the extension of working hours) in all parts of the world in competition with each other, as well as the integration of new labour forces into the capitalist social relations of production, enabled the major powers, for a time, to better achieve expanded accumulation by exporting capital to zones of relocation. Freed from the imperialist corset dividing the world into blocs, capitalism extended its relations of production to the whole planet, right up to its final limits.

On the other hand, the struggle for survival and the unbridled quest for maximum profit have also led to even more devastating and destructive exploitation of the other basis of capitalist wealth: nature. The plundering and predation of nature caused by the need to drive down the price of raw materials has reached such heights that the “Great Acceleration” of environmental destruction produced by decaying capitalism, especially since the Second World War, has been gathering even more momentum since capitalism entered its final phase of decomposition.

Literally every means of maximising profit for the ruling class has been deployed:

- The mechanisms of financial capital, occupying a key position, have the logic of draining an increasingly considerable part of the wealth created worldwide

capitalism - Part 1”; *Bilan* n°10, August-September 1934, republished in *International Review* n°102, 2000.

towards the ruling class in the central countries.

- The policy of spoliation, particularly of the other producing classes (petty bourgeoisie), a typical phenomenon of decadence, takes on a new extension and becomes more general “the necessity for finance capital to seek a super-profit, not from the production of surplus value, but by despoiling both the consumers (by raising commodity prices above their value), and the small producers (by appropriating a part of their labour). Super-profit thus represents an indirect tax raised on the circulation of commodities. Capitalism tends to become parasitic in the absolute sense of the term.”¹⁶
- Speculation, driven by official institutions and governments, is taking on new scope and significance: it is fueling indebtedness at all levels of the economy by putting ever more exuberant quantities of fictitious capital into circulation (reaching 10 times world GDP in 2007¹⁷), trapped in “bubbles” which have the “good fortune” of making government debt disappear from the accounts, masking inflation and blurring its negative effects.
- The gangsterisation of the economy; fraud, illegal trade, trafficking, counterfeiting, etc. are taking on an unprecedented scope and dimension with the corruption of sectors of the State, or even at the instigation of States (such as Serbia, North Korea, etc).

B. The emergence of China

It was the unprecedented circumstances of the disappearance of the imperialist blocs that made China’s emergence possible: “*The stages of China’s rise are inseparable from the history of the imperialist blocs and their disappearance in 1989: the position of the communist left affirming the ‘impossibility of any emergence of new industrialised nations’ in the period of decadence and the condemnation of states ‘which failed to succeed in their ‘industrial take-off’ before the First World War to stagnate in underdevelopment, or to preserve a chronic backwardness compared to the countries that hold the upper hand’ was valid in the period from 1914 to 1989. It was the straitjacket of the organisation of the world into two opposing imperialist blocs (permanent between 1945 and 1989) in preparation for the world war that prevented any major disruption of*

16. “Crises and cycles in the economy of dying capitalism, part 2”, *Bilan* n°11, October-November 1934, republished in *International Review* n°103, 2000.

17. *La Mondialisation*, p 107, by Carroué, Collet, Ruiz. Ed Bréal, 2006.

the hierarchy between powers. China’s rise began with American aid rewarding its imperialist shift to the United States in 1972. It continued decisively after the disappearance of the blocs in 1989. China appears to be the main beneficiary of ‘globalisation’ following its accession to the WTO in 2001 when it became the world’s workshop and the recipient of Western relocations and investments, finally becoming the world’s second largest economic power. It took the unprecedented circumstances of the historical period of decomposition to allow China to rise, without which it would not have happened.

“China’s power bears all the stigma of terminal capitalism: it is based on the over-exploitation of the proletarian labour force, the unbridled development of the war economy through the national programme of ‘military-civil fusion’ and is accompanied by the catastrophic destruction of the environment, while national cohesion is based on the police control of the masses subjected to the political education of the One Party and the fierce repression of the populations of Uighur Muslims and Tibet. In fact, China is only a giant metastasis of the generalised militaristic cancer of the entire capitalist system: its military production is developing at a frenetic pace, its defence budget has increased six-fold in 20 years and has been ranked second in the world since 2010”.¹⁸

C. The 2008 crisis

The period 1989-2008 was marked by a series of difficulties which demonstrate that globalisation, despite the spectacular upheavals in the hierarchy between economic powers, has not put an end to the tendency towards overproduction and the stagnation of capitalism as evidenced by:

- weaker growth;
- the under-employment or destruction of huge quantities of productive bases;
- the enormous quantity of surplus labour (estimated at between a third and a half of the world’s total workforce), unemployed or underemployed, which capitalism is incapable of integrating into production, condemned to languish in the informal sector or on the margins of the capitalist economy;
- major instability and the inability to avert crises: the crisis in the European monetary system in 1993, the Mexican crisis in 1994, the Asian crisis in 1997-98, the crisis in Argentina in 2001, the bursting of the Internet bubble in 2002...

18. “Resolution on the international situation (2019): Imperialist conflicts, life of the bourgeoisie, economic crisis “, point 11, *International Review* n°164, 2020

with a permanent and growing risk of the implosion of the international financial system (even if, for two decades, capitalism managed to limit crises to certain parts of the world, at the cost of exorbitantly increasing costs and damage to the system);

- the lack of remission of the cancer of militarism, which has continued to suck the lifeblood out of global production, affecting the main parts of the world in different ways: European countries managed to cut their military spending by around half compared to 1989 levels; China did not engage in any conflicts during this period, reserving its economic strength for its emergence as the world's second largest power; but long and costly wars (Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.) waged by US imperialism have helped to weaken its economy in relation to its rivals.

In fact, this period was merely an interlude that allowed the capitalist system to preserve its economy somewhat from the effects of its decomposition.

Thus, the worsening of the real state of the economy and the revenge of the law of value led to the financial crisis of 2008, the most serious financial crisis since the Great Depression of 1929. It erupted in the USA, at the heart of global capitalism, and spread to the rest of the world. The weakening of the dynamics of globalisation, reducing the scope for broad-based accumulation, the burden of military spending and imperialist intervention, and the impasse of overproduction are causing the gigantic Ponzi pyramid of international financial scaffolding based on unlimited general indebtedness of the US state to implode and shatter, with speculation serving as a substitute for global growth to keep the capitalist system alive.

The gigantic, historically unprecedented rescue plans implemented by the central banks of the major powers, and China's role as a driving force, succeeded in stabilising the system and stemming the liquidity crisis, but not in really reviving the economy. The year 2008 marks a turning point in the history of the sinking of the capitalist mode of production into its historic crisis.

D. The end of the last extra-capitalist markets?

This violent explosion of the crisis, which concluded more than two decades of over-exploitation on a global scale, sparing no zone of influence in the world, no market – including extra-capitalist markets – confirms that the capitalist system is now even more completely locked into the situation where the universal hegemony of class relations makes extended reproduction in-

creasingly difficult. Once the world market had been constituted and divided among the powers, the mere trend towards this end had meant the entry of capitalism into its phase of decadence, as Rosa Luxemburg pointed out;

“Thus capitalism expands because of its mutual relationship with non-capitalist social strata and countries, accumulating at their expense and at the same time pushing them aside to take their place. The more capitalist countries participate in this hunting for accumulation areas, the rarer the non-capitalist places still open to the expansion of capital become and the tougher the competition; its raids turn into a chain of economic and political catastrophes: world crises, wars, revolution.

*“But by this process capital prepares its own destruction in two ways. As it approaches the point where humanity only consists of capitalists and proletarians, further accumulation will become impossible. At the same time, the absolute and undivided rule of capital aggravates class struggle throughout the world and the international economic and political anarchy to such an extent that, long before the last consequences of economic development, it must lead to the rebellion of the international proletariat against the existence of the rule of capital”.*¹⁹

The impossibility of a world dominated by capitalist relations

Many of the phenomena already existing in decadence take on a qualitatively new dimension in the period of decomposition, in particular because of the impossibility of capital to offer a perspective: *“the bourgeoisie is totally incapable of mobilising society's different components, including within the ruling class, around any common objective other than a step by step, but doomed, resistance to the advancing crisis (...). This is why today's situation of open crisis is radically different from its predecessor of the 1930's.”*²⁰

As long as each nation has been able to benefit from globalisation, capitalism has generally managed to preserve the capitalist economy from the effects of decomposition. In particular, “every man for himself” has been contained and the law of the strongest tolerated without question. The situation was quite different after 2008, when the “opportunities” of globalisation closed: the even more obvious inability of the ruling class to overcome the crisis in its mode of production led to an explosion of every man for himself, in relations between

nations (with the gradual return of protectionism and the unilateral questioning by the two main powers of multilateralism and the institutions of globalisation) and within each nation.

A. The “whirlwind” effect of decomposition, an unprecedented factor in the worsening of the economic crisis

The 2020s have seen the effects of decomposition take on a new scale and significance that are powerfully destructive for the capitalist economy. They were ushered in by the global pandemic of Covid 19, a pure product of decomposition which brought the world economy to a standstill, necessitating massive state intervention and spiralling debt. The pandemic was soon followed by the return of war to Europe in Ukraine in 2022, the shockwaves of which continue to shake the capitalist world. Consecrated by the pandemic, the development of every man for himself on an unprecedented scale and the abandonment of any form of cooperation between nations are undermining the entire capitalist system, thus running counter to the lessons drawn from the 1929 crisis regarding the need for relative cooperation between the major nations.

The effects of decomposition are not only accelerating, they are also returning like a boomerang to express themselves most forcefully at the very heart of capitalism, as the combined effects of the economic crisis, the ecological/climate crisis and the imperialist war accumulate, interacting and multiplying their effects to produce a devastating spiral with incalculable consequences for capitalism, hitting and destabilising the capitalist economy and its infrastructure of production ever more severely. While each of the factors fuelling this “whirlwind” effect of decomposition risks the collapse of states, their combined effects far exceed the mere sum of each of them taken in isolation.

The global disruption of the water cycle is a case in point. As a consequence of global warming attributable to the capitalist system, extreme and long-lasting droughts are the cause of mega-fires; they lead to the desertification of entire areas of the globe, making them uninhabitable, and often giving them over to war. They force populations to migrate; they were one of the causes of the collapse of the Arab states in the Middle East after 2010.²¹ Productivity and even the practice of agriculture have been destabilised in the United States,

21 On this subject, read Jean-Michel Valantin, *Geopolitics of a disordered planet*, Seuil, 2017, pp.240 to 249, chapters: “The ‘Arab Spring’: political crisis, geographical crisis”; “Extreme weather events and political crises”; “Climate, agrarian crisis and civil war: the case of Syria”.

19. R. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital, An Anti-critique*.

20. “Theses on Decomposition”

China and Europe. Extreme rainfall and flooding are irreparably ruining entire regions or even states (Pakistan), destroying vital infrastructure and disrupting industrial production. Rising sea levels are threatening 10% of the world's population, as well as conurbations and coastal industrial infrastructure in central countries. Access to water is becoming a crucial strategic issue, leading to tensions and clashes between states over its control.

As the unleashing of militarism in Ukraine shows, war (as a deliberate decision by the ruling class) is the decisive accelerator of chaos and economic crisis, among the various factors in the "whirlwind effect": increased famine worldwide, disruption of supply chains, shortages, destruction of the Ukrainian economy, environmental destruction, etc.

Decomposition also affects the way in which the ruling class tries to deal with the impasse in its system.

B. Decomposition fuels the headlong rush into militarism

The outbreak of war in Ukraine represents an "epochal change" for capitalism and the central countries: war, with its increasingly irrational character, where each side ruins and weakens itself, is no longer a distant prospect. It is drawing ever closer to the centres of world capitalism and involves most of the major powers. It continues to have profound negative repercussions on the world economic situation and is disrupting all relations between capitalist nations.

While chaos continues to spread in its wake (with the conflict between Israel and Hamas), all states are now preparing for "high-intensity" war: each national capital is reorganising its national economy in order to strengthen its military industry and guarantee its strategic independence. Military budgets are rising fast everywhere, catching up with and even exceeding the proportion of national wealth devoted to armaments at the height of the confrontation between the blocs.

The general sharpening of imperialist tensions, and within them the major conflict between China and the USA, is having profound repercussions on the economic stability of the capitalist system. A tendency towards fragmentation of the world market is developing as a result of the United States' desire to torpedo China's industrial power (which is the basis for the rise of China's military power and desire for global expansion) and to involve its allies in decoupling the Western economies from China by promoting "friend-shoring". The economic decisions taken by the major powers are increasingly determined by stra-

tegic considerations that follow imperialist fault lines and lead to major disruptions in global supply and demand.

C. Decomposition aggravates the crisis of state capitalism in the core countries

The mechanisms of state capitalism and its effectiveness are tending to seize up. The seriousness of the deadlock in capitalism and the need to build a war economy are fuelling confrontations within each national bourgeoisie, while the effects of decomposition on the bourgeoisie and society are expressed in the tendency for the ruling class to lose control of its political game. The tendency towards instability and political chaos within the ruling class, as witnessed by the American and British bourgeoisie, affects the coherence, long-term vision and continuity of the defence of the global interests of national capital. The coming to power of irresponsible populist factions (with programmes that are unrealistic for their national capital) weakens the economy and the measures imposed by capitalism since 1945 to avoid the uncontrolled contagion of the economic crisis.

If Western state capitalism has been able to survive its Stalinist rival, it is in the way that an organism with a stronger constitution resists the same disease for longer. Even if the bourgeoisie can still rely on more responsible factions with a greater sense of the state, capitalism today displays tendencies similar to those that caused the downfall of Stalinist state capitalism. In the case of Chinese state capitalism, marked by Stalinist backwardness despite the hybridisation of its economy with the private sector, and rife with tensions within the ruling class, the stiffening of the state apparatus is a sign of weakness and the promise of future instability.

Debt, the main palliative to the historic crisis of capitalism, is not only losing its effectiveness: the weight of debt is condemning capitalism to ever more devastating convulsions. By increasingly restricting the possibility of cheating the laws of capitalism, it reduces the room for manoeuvre of each capital to support and revive the national economy. The role of "payer of last resort" taken on by governments since 2008 is weakening currencies, while debt servicing is severely restricting governments' ability to invest.

D. The impasse of even more implacable overproduction

The picture painted by the capitalist system confirms Rosa Luxemburg's predictions: capitalism will not experience a purely economic collapse, but will descend into chaos and convulsions:

- The almost complete absence of extra-capitalist markets now alters the conditions under which the main capitalist states must achieve expanded accumulation: increasingly, as a condition of their own survival, this can only be achieved at the direct expense of rivals of the same rank, by weakening their economies. The prediction made by the ICC in the 1970s of a capitalist world that could only survive by reducing itself to a small number of powers still capable of achieving a minimum of accumulation is increasingly becoming a reality.
- The deadlock of overproduction, combined with the anarchy inherent in capitalist production and the increasing destruction of ecosystems, is beginning to cause more and more shortages or disruptions (medicines, agriculture, etc.) because of the inability to generate enough profit to produce them.
- As an expression of this impasse, inflation, instigated by the return of war, is making a spectacular reappearance, destabilising the economy and depriving it of the long-term vision it needs.
- The frantic search for new sites to relocate capital (e.g. in Africa, the Middle East) and to exploit cheaper labour is coming up against the Dantean conditions of chaos and underdevelopment; an obstacle for the Western powers as it is for the Chinese Silk Roads project, which is collapsing.
- Nor does India offer a viable long-term alternative that could play a role equivalent to China's in the 1990s and 2000s; the circumstances that made the "miracle of China's emergence" possible are no longer present, and such a prospect is now impossible.
- The enormous costs of tackling the ecological crisis and decarbonising the economy far outstrip Capital's ability to make the required level of investment. Many eco-projects are simply being abandoned because the cost of credit is killing their profitability, both in Europe and the United States.
- Despite the considerable slowdown in the development of the productive forces, capitalism is still able to make some advances, for example in medicine, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, etc. But these advances, deeply perverted by the use made of them by capital, are turning against the working class and humanity. AI, for example, apart from the risk of destroying thousands of jobs with no way of freeing up the workforce to find work elsewhere, is seen by governments as a tool for controlling the population or destabilising

their imperialist rivals, and above all as a weapon of war and a tool for destruction (for example, Israel, which boasts of waging the first AI war, sees it as the “key to modern survival”). Some of its developers have warned that AI poses a risk of the extinction of humanity, on a par with other risks, such as pandemics and nuclear war.

- The massive shortage of labour in many Western countries is the result of the anarchy of capitalism, generating both overcapacity and shortages, but also of trends towards demographic crisis, towards the collapse in population renewal, which is affecting Western countries and China. Ageing populations in the most developed countries are reducing the working-age population to such a level that every country has to resort to immigration. The massive shortage of labour also reflects the growing inability of education systems to provide the market with a workforce that is sufficiently trained for the level of technical skills required in production, while many sectors are being deserted because of the conditions of exploitation and remuneration that prevail.

United States, Europe, China: the heart of world capitalism hit by the convulsions of the crisis and the effects of decomposition

The 25th Congress of the ICC clearly identified the implications of this historic situation for the major nations:

“Not only has the capacity of the main capitalist powers to cooperate in order to hold back the impact of the economic crisis more or less disappeared, but, faced with the deterioration of its economy and the deepening of the global crisis, and in order to preserve its position as the world’s leading power, the USA has increasingly been deliberately aiming to weaken its competitors. This is an open break with a large part of the rules adopted by states since the crisis of 1929. It opens the way to a terra incognita more and more dominated by chaos and unpredictable consequences.

“The USA, convinced that preserving its leadership against the rise of China depends to a large extent on the power of its economy, which the war has placed in a position of strength at the political and military level, is also on the offensive against its rivals at the economic level. This offensive operates in a number of directions. The US is the big winner of the ‘gas war’ launched against Russia to the detriment of the European states who have been forced to end Russian gas imports.

Having achieved self-sufficiency in oil and gas thanks to a long-term energy policy begun under Obama, the war has confirmed America’s supremacy in the strategic sphere of energy. It has put its rivals on the defensive at this level: Europe has had to accept its dependence on America’s liquefied natural gas; China, which is greatly dependent on imported hydrocarbons, has been made more fragile given that the US is now in a position to control China’s supply routes. The US now has an unprecedented capacity to put pressure on the rest of the world at this level.

“Profiting from the central role of the dollar in the world economy, from being the world’s leading economic power, the various monetary, financial and industrial initiatives (from Trump’s economic recovery plans to Biden’s massive subsidies to products ‘made in the USA’, the Inflation Reduction Act, etc) have increased the ‘resilience’ of the US economy, and this is attracting the investment of capital and industrial relocations towards American territory. The US is limiting the impact of the current world slow-down on its economy and is pushing the worst effects of inflation and recession onto the rest of the world.

“In addition, in order to guarantee its decisive technological advantage, the US is also aiming to ensure the relocation to the US, or the international control of, strategic technologies (semiconductors) from which it aims to exclude China, while threatening sanctions against any rival to its monopoly.

“The USA’s drive to preserve its economic power has the consequence of weakening the capitalist system as a whole. The exclusion of Russia from international trade, the offensive against China and the uncoupling of their two economies, in short the declared will of the USA to reconfigure world economic relations to its advantage, marks a turning point: the US is proving to be a factor in the destabilisation of world capitalism and the extension of chaos at the economic level.

“Europe has been hit especially hard by the war which has deprived it of its main strength: its stability. European capitals are suffering from the unprecedented destabilisation of their ‘economic model’ and run a real risk of deindustrialisation and delocalisation towards the American or Asian zones under the blows of the ‘gas war’ and American protectionism.

“Germany in particular is an explosive concentration of all the contradictions of this unprecedented situation. The end of Russian gas supplies places Germany in a situation of economic and strategic

fragility, threatening its competitive edge and the whole of its industry. The end of multilateralism, from which German capital benefited more than any other nation (also sparing it from the burden of military expenses), is more directly affecting its economic power, which is dependent on exports. It also runs the risk of becoming dependent on the US for its energy supplies, while the latter pushes its ‘allies’ to join in the economic/strategic war against China and to renounce their Chinese markets. Because this is such a vital outlet for German capital, this is facing Germany with a huge dilemma, one which is shared by other European powers at a time when the EU is itself under threat from the tendency of its member states to put their national interests above those of the Union.

“As for China, although two years ago it was presented as the big winner of the Covid crisis, it is one of the most characteristic expressions of the ‘whirlwind’ effect. Already suffering from economic slowdown, it is now facing major turbulence.

“Since the end of 2019, the pandemic, the repeated lockdowns and the tsunami of infections that followed the abandonment of the ‘Zero Covid’ policy continue to paralyse the Chinese economy.

“China is caught up in the global dynamic of the crisis, with its financial system threatened by the bursting of the property bubble. The decline of its Russian partner and the disruption of the ‘Silk Roads’ towards Europe by armed conflict or the prevailing chaos are causing considerable damage. The powerful pressure of the US further increases its economic difficulties. And faced with its economic, health, ecological and social problems, the congenital weakness of its Stalinist state structure is a major handicap.

“Far from being able to play the role of locomotive for the world economy, China is a ticking time bomb whose destabilisation holds unpredictable consequences for world capitalism.”²²

Russia seems to be showing a certain resilience to the sanctions designed to bleed its economy dry. Paradoxically, it has been able to benefit from the backwardness of its economy (already evident before 1989 and typical of decadence), based above all on the extraction and export of raw materials, particularly hydrocarbons, and to take advantage of the “every man for himself” mentality in relations between nations to sell them to China, or via India, in order to mitigate some of the effects of the sanctions. However, this fragile

22. “Resolution on the International Situation of the 25th ICC Congress”, *International Review* n°170, 2023.

and temporary “asset” will not be able to withstand the gradual strangulation of its industrial capacities forever.

Many countries are on the verge of bankruptcy, unable to honour their debts because of rising interest rates, and victims of capital flight to the United States. The expansion of the BRICS from five to eleven members (including Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) represents an attempt to emancipate themselves from the United States and escape the strangulation of their economies. The introduction of a common currency or the use of China’s currency as an alternative to the dollar is unlikely to happen because of the many differences between these countries, particularly as regards their relationship with the Chinese state.

The three main parts of capitalism are sinking into stagflation, with no hope of a real rebound in the capitalist economy; there is the risk of a plunge into recession, which the EU and possibly China are already on the brink of, while the United States is seeking to escape at the expense of its rivals.

The situation of the working class

*“The capitalist crisis affects the very foundations of this society. Inflation, insecurity, unemployment, hellish pace and working conditions that destroy workers’ health, unaffordable housing... all testify to an unstoppable degradation of working class life and, although the bourgeoisie tries to create all imaginable divisions, granting ‘more privileged’ conditions to certain categories of workers, what we see in its entirety is, on the one hand, what is possibly going to be the WORST CRISIS in the history of capitalism, and, on the other hand, the concrete reality of the ABSOLUTE PAUPERISATION of the working class in the central countries, fully confirming the accuracy of the prediction which Marx made concerning the historical perspective of capitalism and which the economists and other ideologues of the bourgeoisie have so much mocked.”*²³

After decades of downward pressure on the price of labour power, labour’s share of the wealth created has fallen steadily throughout the world since the late 1970s. Real wages have regressed to pre-1980 levels. A large proportion of the working class now lives below the poverty line or just on the edge of it.

The bourgeoisie boasts that it has man-

23. “Capitalism leads to the destruction of humanity... Only the world revolution of the proletariat can put an end to it”, *International Review* n°169, 2023.

aged to curb inflation, but in terms of workers’ purchasing power, every proletarian has to pay much more for fuel, food and repayment of their loans, while their wages have been cut by “progressing” well below the rate of inflation, meaning the most basic needs can’t be met.

The extraction of relative surplus value goes increasingly hand in hand with the extraction of absolute surplus value, the intensification of work going hand in hand with the lengthening of the working day and the duration of the time of exploitation in the life of each proletarian.

The conditions of exploitation even tend more and more to exceed the physiological limits of proletarians by literally killing workers at work.

Some American states have tried to force employees to work during heatwaves, causing deaths and accidents to soar. In Korea, where death on the job is a widespread phenomenon (as in the rest of South-East Asia), the state’s desire to increase the working week from 52 to 69 hours was thwarted by the response of the class.

Every year, accidents at work cause a hecatomb: officially, almost two million workers are killed worldwide, with 270 million injured or maimed.

In many sectors of production, the overworked workforce suffers such accelerated nervous and musculoskeletal wear and tear that they are discarded and join the cohorts of unemployable proletarians well before the legal retirement date.

Finally, situations of virtual slavery of the workforce (particularly in the agricultural sectors of developed countries), debt bondage or forced labour (for example in the industrial fishing sector in China) are commonplace, especially among migrant workers.

With the crisis set to worsen, the economic attacks on the working and unemployed classes are bound to continue.

But enough is enough! Over the last two years, the working class has begun to fight back by taking up the struggle in all the strongholds of the global economy. This historic return to class struggle, after several decades of proletarian passivity, confirms the importance in marxist theory of the role of the crisis and defensive struggles for the future of the workers’ struggle: *“...the economic attacks (falling real wages, layoffs, increasing productivity, etc) resulting directly from the crisis hit the proletariat (i.e. the class that produces surplus value and confronts capitalism on this terrain) directly and specifically; unlike social decomposition which essentially effects*

*the superstructure, the economic crisis directly attacks the foundations on which this superstructure rests; in this sense, it lays bare all the barbarity that is battering on society, thus allowing the proletariat to become aware of the need to change the system radically, rather than trying to improve certain aspects of it.”*²⁴

ICC December 2023

24. “Theses on Decomposition”, point 17.

The two teats that suckle the communisers: Denial of the revolutionary proletariat, denial of the dictatorship of the proletariat

"How can a class, acting as a class, as it is in capitalist society, achieve the abolition of classes, and therefore of capitalism?" For some, there is only one possible solution to this apparent paradox: "It is not a question of the proletariat triumphing, liberating itself, liberating labour, extending its condition... but of abolishing what it is."¹ The self-negation of the proletariat" is the credo of the modernist current that emerged at the end of the 1960s and is also known as the ultra-left current. One might be tempted to say, with Engels, "what these gentlemen lack is dialectic". How can we eliminate the phase of affirmation of the proletariat during the revolutionary period, and retain only its phase of negation when, as a result of the action of the proletariat itself, classes disappear in the course of the transition from capitalism to communism? Do these two phases not together form a unity and an interrelationship? In other words, how can we separate the culmination, the abolition of classes, from the whole process leading up to it, in this case the constitution of the proletariat as a class and then as a ruling class? Is there not unity between the goal and the means? But it's not just dialectics that these gentlemen lack, as we shall see in this historical review. We will discover that the modernists reject the emancipation of the proletariat - "It is not a question of the proletariat liberating itself" - which is precisely the only means available to humanity to free itself from this stultifying class society. Modernist ideology is bourgeois socialism, which proclaims that the nature of the working class within capitalism is not revolutionary. We will also discover that, in the words of Marx and Engels, "bourgeois socialism only reaches its proper expression when it becomes a mere figure of speech".² This was the source from which the Communisers drew their inspiration.

The ravages of petty bourgeois ideology and the emergence of modernism

The modernist current emerged during the historical revival of the class struggle at the end of the 1960s. May 1968 in France, the Hot Autumn of 1969 in Italy, the struggles of 1970 in Poland... on every continent, the proletariat launched massive struggles and asserted itself forcefully, breaking with decades of apathy marked by a few short-lived flare-ups. The initial period of intense struggle, covering the years 1970-1980 after the flamboyant '68, cannot be understood without taking into account a number of difficulties faced by the proletariat and its revolutionary minorities. First of all, there was the student agitation which had begun a few years before the workers' revival and which, from Berkeley to the Sorbonne, expressed the weight of the petty bourgeoisie in the movement. Unlike today, the students came overwhelmingly from the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. While

the proletarian giant was still asleep, the first signs of the economic crisis made the petty bourgeois very worried about their future. Fever gripped universities around the world, fuelled by the massacres of the Vietnam War and a stifling conservative society. Portraits of Guevara, Castro, Mao and Ho Chi Minh appeared in demonstrations, even though these figures had absolutely nothing to do with the workers' movement.³ In the petty bourgeoisie, a class with no historical future and totally trapped in the present, talk of revolution concealed a fleeting revolt, a protesting attitude totally alien to the proletarian struggle.

The second major difficulty was the break in the continuity which had previously linked the various successive political organisations in the course of the history of the workers' movement. The counter-revolution which had just ended had been so violent and so long (1923-1968, 45 years!) that it had succeeded in destroying this continuity. The Italian Communist Left, which in the 1930s, through the journals

Prometeo, *Bilan* and *Octobre*, continued the critical and militant work begun in the 1920s against the degeneration of the Third International, entered into crisis and disappeared during the Second World War, followed in the early 1950s by the disappearance of the Gauche Communiste de France (GCF), which had tried to preserve the lessons and principles of that period. The tradition of communist militancy seemed to have been swallowed up in the sands of oblivion.⁴

Finally, the tendency towards state capitalism, a feature of the decadence of capitalism, had known no respite since the Second World War and was making bourgeois democracy ever more totalitarian. This tendency expressed the bourgeoisie's need for increasing state intervention to deal with the permanent economic crisis and maintain social peace while the working class faced a sharp increase in exploitation. The bourgeoisie kept alive all the proletarian organisations that had betrayed it (unions and parties) and put them at the service of capitalism in the form of bodies whose role was to supervise the proletariat. In such a situation, the history of the workers' movement became Hebrew for most young people waking up to political life. The betrayal of Social Democracy in 1914 (through the Sacred Union) or of the Bolshevik party in 1924 (with the proclamation of "socialism in one country") was not seen as the result of a slow historical process of the penetration of opportunism within a proletarian organisation, with a relentless fight by left-wing minorities to try to preserve it, but as a fatality sealed from the outset for any political organisation. In the atmosphere of the 1970s, when libertarian ideas were fashionable, anyone who defended the need for revolutionary organisation was seen as an apprentice bureaucrat, or even a Stalinist.

1. Roland Simon, *Histoire critique de l'ultra-gauche*, Marseille, éd. Senonevero, 2009, p. 19

2. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Chapter III, "Socialist and Communist Literature, 2. Conservative and Bourgeois Socialism"

3. Of these four disciples of Stalin, only two, Mao and Ho Chi Minh, belonged to the workers' movement in their youth before being drawn into opportunism and treason under the banner of "socialism in one country".

4. The German-Dutch Communist Left also disappeared through a councilist degeneration that often led to leftism. Several current political groups originate from the Italian Left. Most of them belong to the proletarian political milieu, but they have contested the main positions acquired by the Italian Communist Left from its birth at the Bologna Congress in 1912 until the self-dissolution of the Italian Fraction in May 1945.

These three characteristics of the period, and the difficulties they created, explain why the process of politicising workers' struggles was unable to succeed during the 1970s and 1980s, at a time when the revolutionary class had re-emerged on the scene, was once again talking about revolution and seeking to reappropriate its history. The weight of the dominant ideology was bound to affect this new generation of inexperienced proletarians, as well as the politicised elements from different classes, in particular the ideology promoted by the various leftist sects (official anarchism, Trotskyism, Maoism) whose influence was suddenly increased by the massive support of the petty bourgeoisie. Greatly impressed by the awakening of the proletarian giant, they believed in its divine status, then quickly turned away, disappointed that it had not kept its promise of the immediate advent of a world of enjoyment and bliss. The deleterious weight of workerism and immediatism was the consequence.

Modernism is a typical product of this period. As the conditions for the explosion of May '68 were maturing, the artists in the Situationist International (SI), who confused bohemia with revolution, were calling for a revolution in everyday life. At the same time, Jacques Camatte and his friends were leaving Amadeo Bordiga's International Communist Party (*Communist Programme, Le Proletaire*), whose sclerosis seemed to symbolise the impotence of the Communist Left and the failure of the "old workers' movement", a term which the modernists took over from the councilist current. They all called for a new revolutionary theory adapted to the new reality. In short: we had to be "modern". They believed that workers' struggles against the effects of capitalist exploitation were either the expression of a definitive integration into bourgeois society (which they called "consumer society"), or a revolt against work, and they believed in the emergence of a new workers' movement: "*The rise in power and above all the change in content of class struggles at the end of the 1960s closed the cycle opened in 1918-1919 by the victory of the counter-revolution in Russia and Germany. At the same time, this new course of struggles threw into crisis the programme-theory of the proletariat and all its problematics. It was no longer a question of knowing whether revolution was a matter for the Councils or the Party, or whether the proletariat was capable of emancipating itself. With the multiplication of ghetto riots and wildcat strikes, with the revolt against labour and the commodity, the return of the proletariat to the forefront of the historical stage paradoxically marked the end of its affirmation.*"⁵

5. François Danel, preface to the anthology, *Rupture*

Our press of the time contained numerous polemics against the modernist current, in particular to demonstrate that, despite the evolution of capitalism, the working class remained the revolutionary class, and that by focusing on the most obvious manifestations of social alienation the modernists remained blind to the "*sources that give them birth and nourish them.*"⁶

It should be noted that several modernist groups, such as the Situationist International (René Riesel) and Le Mouvement communiste (Gilles Dauvé), took part in conferences organised by Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières (ICO) in the early 1970s, which were essential forums for discussion and political clarification at the time. The ICO conferences were also attended by councilist groups, elements of the anarchist milieu such as Daniel Guérin (OCL) or Daniel Cohn-Bendit (whom Raymond Marcellin, the Minister of the Interior, had expelled from France), Christian Lagant (Noir et Rouge), and elements of the Communist Left such as Marc Chirik (from Révolution Internationale), Paul Mattick (from the German Communist Left), Cajo Brendel (from the Dutch Communist Left). In this atmosphere of incessant and passionate political discussion, a number of modernists joined the Communist Left (along with most of the councilist elements), mostly because they were convinced by the arguments on the proletarian nature of October 1917.

Some of the modernist elements had in fact recognised themselves in the proletarian political milieu. This does not mean, however, that modernist theory can be described as communist, let alone marxist. Rather, the various groups and individuals of this current belonged to the swamp, that intermediate zone which brings together all those who oscillate between the camp of the proletariat and that of the bourgeoisie, who are constantly on the way to one camp or the other. Those modernist elements who joined the Communist Left could only do so by breaking with modernism, not because of it. Indeed, as we have shown in previous articles in this series, modernist theory is bourgeois in nature and has its roots in the Frankfurt School, a group of academics at the Institute for Social Research who, in the 1950s, believed they had identified a crisis in marxism and solved the problem by burying it. Some of them, like Marcuse, concluded that the proletariat had been definitively integrated into consumer society, thereby losing its

dans la théorie de la révolution. Textes 1965-1975, published by Éditions Entremonde in 2018, p. 9.

6. See in particular the article against the situationists in *Révolution internationale* old series n°2 in February 1969: "Comprendre Mai". Reprinted in English as "Understanding May", *International Review* n° 74.

revolutionary class nature. Modernism also has roots in the group Socialisme ou Barbarie (SouB), which failed to complete its break with Trotskyism and ended up rejecting Marxism.⁷

Gilles Dauvé is a good example of the sterility of the modernism that emerged in the 1960s. Strongly influenced by SouB, he set about criticising the thesis that was to lead this group to its perdition: this consisted in replacing the opposition between the ruling class and the exploited class by the opposition between the rulers and the ruled, which for SouB was the first step towards abandoning marxism. But in his critique of this thesis, which was based on self-management and enterprise socialism, Dauvé only managed to take the opposite view by advocating the immediate negation of capitalist relations of production. This was tantamount to remaining on the same ground as SouB: "*On the contrary, we believe that the destruction of capitalism must not be envisaged from the point of view of management alone, but from the point of view of the necessity/possibility of the demise of exchange, of the commodity, of the law of value, of wage-labour. It's not enough just to manage the economy, we have to turn it upside down; simply managing it is not enough to turn it upside down*"⁸. To answer simply with the necessity for the immediate abolition of value was to make a mockery of the world, when what was at stake was to demonstrate that, because of its place in the capitalist mode of production, the proletariat is driven by necessity and by its consciousness to transform its struggles against the effects of exploitation into struggles against the causes of exploitation; that is to say, it is capable, in the course of the process of mass strike and revolution, of transforming itself and society from top to bottom.

Communisers in the putrid swamp of nihilism

N° 84 of *Information et Correspondance Ouvrières* appeared in August 1969 with a report and documents from the ICO Conference held in Brussels in June 1969. It contained two essential texts: one was written by Marc Chirik, "Luttes et organisations de classe", and would be reprinted in *Révolution Internationale* old series n° 3 (December 1969) under the title "Sur l'organisation". It represented a decisive

7. See "Communism is on the agenda of history: Castoriadis, Munis and the problem of breaking with Trotskyism, parts one and two, in *International Review* n°s 161 and 162. See also "Critique of the so-called 'Communisers': Parts 3.1 and 3.2: "Jacques Camatte - from Bordigism to the negation of the proletariat", *International Review* n° 171.

8. Jean Barrot (Gille Dauvé), *Communisme et question russe*, Paris, La Tête de Feuilles, 1972, p. 23.

stage in the strengthening of the current of the Communist Left, which was to result in 1972 in the unification in France of three groups under the name *Révolution Internationale*. The other significant text is by Gilles Dauvé, “*Sur l’idéologie ultra-gauche*”, which undertakes a critique of the modernist current which had also developed during the May events. It contains this significant passage: “*The Bolshevik bureaucracy had taken control of the economy: the ultra-leftists want the masses to control it. Once again, the ultra-left remained on the terrain of Leninism, content to give a different answer to the same question.*”⁹

This was a sign that a new current was emerging within modernism. It remained faithful to the self-negation of the proletariat and still considered Marx a “revolutionary reformist”, since he advocated the reduction of working hours and the use of labour vouchers. But he felt that Marx had taken a decisive step forward with the notion of the real domination of capital over labour which, according to Dauvé, explains why the proletariat no longer has the means to assert itself in a revolutionary manner.¹⁰ He also took over from Marx the irresistible tendency towards communism. This retained its nature as a movement within capitalism, but for Dauvé it lost its second meaning as the final goal of the struggle for proletarian emancipation. This tendency was seen solely as a process of dissolution of capitalism, and it took on its baptismal name, “communisation”. At a time when the SI had just dissolved (1972), this new current began to develop under the impetus of Jacques Camatte, Gilles Dauvé, Michel Bérard and Roland Simon (*Intervention Communiste* then *Théorie Communiste*), who broke with the *Cahiers du Communisme de Conseils* when the latter joined *Révolution Internationale*.

The communisers, or followers of communisation, were in the process of cutting the last threads linking them at that time to the historical revival of the class struggle. They began by adopting the name of the “ultra-left current”. This terminology, the product of the confusion of the time, tried to lump together all those who distanced themselves from leftism, but it had the advantage for the communisers of making credible a kind of continuity/overcoming

9. Quoted in *Rupture dans la théorie de la révolution*, op. cit, p. 212.

10. This argument falls piteously on deaf ears, since the real domination of capital over labour, which Marx explained, is a revolution in the technical process of labour which became widespread at the beginning of the 19th century and which communisers confuse with the appearance of state capitalism in 1914 under the pressure of imperialist war. But the aim was also to cast a veil of confusion over the subversive theory of the decadence of capitalism adopted by the Communist International at its first Congress.

of the Communist Left. The lessons they drew from this first stage in the historical revival of the class struggle centred on the rejection of “labour”: “*Revolution meant a revolution of labour, socialism or communism meant a society of labour. And that’s what the critique of labour by a minority but dynamic fringe of proletarians rendered obsolete in the 1960s and 1970s.*”¹¹

Indeed, the class conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is often presented, in the history of the workers’ movement, as a conflict between labour and capital. What the petty-bourgeoisie has trouble understanding is that the proletariat is the representative of labour, which is both alienated labour and exploitation, but also the labour that played a central role in the emergence of humanity. The proletariat is precisely the class of labour because, in order to emancipate itself, it has no other means than to abolish wage-labour, and it cannot do so without radically transforming labour; in other words, moving from class societies to a classless society, from societies of scarcity based on economics to a society of abundance where “*the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.*”¹² The modernists observe that the proletariat has taken capital as its enemy and they conclude, in the manner of Proudhon, that if it recognises capital as such, it is compromising itself with it and therefore remaining in bourgeois society, and limiting itself to the demand to manage it. Such is the anarchist sleight of hand used by the modernists.

The communisers entered a new phase of development when the initial modernist current entered a crisis at the end of the 1980s. At that time, there was a general dispersal of the modernist movement as a result of petty bourgeois disillusionment. Some opted for radical ecology or practised primitivism, others went off to herd sheep in the Larzac,¹³ or stood for election on an ecological ticket, while others like Raoul Vaneigem¹⁴ were convinced that the “life instinct” would bring down capitalism. There were those (represented by the Krisis group and Anselme Jappe today) who claimed that, in *Capital*, class struggle was only a

11. Gilles Dauvé, *De la crise à la communisation*, Paris, ed. Entremonde, 2017, p. 21.

12. *Communist Manifesto*.

13. This was the case of René Riesel, the situationist leader of May 68, who for a time led the *Confédération Paysanne* with José Bové.

14. Vaneigem, also a situationist leader in May 68, makes no secret of his friendship with Robert Ménard, the far-right mayor of Béziers in France. The latter is certainly the inspiration for this bravura piece: “*I do not condemn (and by what right?) the hodgepodge of analyses, debates and expert reports castigating capitalism.*” Raoul Vaneigem, *Du Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations à la nouvelle insurrection mondiale*, Le Cherche midi, 2023, p. 13.

secondary option for Marx and that it was capitalism itself that would spontaneously lead to communism, and others who compromised themselves in negationism and support for Faurisson,¹⁵ then rallied to the *Gilets Jaunes* and systematically extolled the subversive character of the riots.

The communisers tried to react, especially as Camatte, for his part, abandoned all reference to the proletariat and invented his theory of the universal class, which presented humanity itself as the revolutionary subject. While the term communism has two meanings, that of a new mode of production free of classes, national frontiers and the State, and that of a process at work within capitalism itself, “*the abolition of existing conditions*”, which accounts for the increasingly violent clash between the productive forces and the relations of production, both in the economic sphere and in that of the class struggle, they mutilated it and claimed their new invention, one-legged but so modern, “*communisation, the abolition of capital without a phase of transition*”.

The communisers then tried to demonstrate that it was the historical situation itself that had changed. The real domination of capital, globalisation and industrial restructuring had supposedly ruined everything that remained for the proletariat to assert itself. The proletariat remained “potentially” revolutionary, but it was necessary above all to insist on the idea that this potentiality only became a reality through its self-negation. “*With the objective of the liberation of labour as a proletarian reappropriation of the productive forces and the movement of value, the very idea of a positively revolutionary nature of the proletariat entered into crisis – and situationist neo-councilism with it. The SI, while putting a non-programmatic content into the forms of the programme – the abolition without transition of wage-labour and exchange, and therefore of classes and the state – retained these forms: the objective and subjective conditions of revolution, the development of ‘technical means’ and the search for consciousness by the proletariat, redefined as the almost universal class of all those dispossessed of*

15. In the early 1990s, there was a whole campaign in France mounted by remnants of the “ultra-left” around Faurisson’s “revelations” about the supposed non-existence of Nazi death camps, a campaign largely recuperated by the far right. By bringing back into fashion the outdated theses of the anti-Semite Faurisson, the “negationist ultra-left” has, even at the time and in the same way as Le Pen, served well the bourgeois propaganda of the left aimed at getting the workers behind the defence of the democratic state in the name of the “return of the fascist peril”. On this subject, read our article “*Le marais de ‘l’ultra-gauche’ au service des campagnes de la bourgeoisie*” in our pamphlet in French, *Fascisme et démocratie, deux expressions de la dictature du capital*.

the use of their lives.”¹⁶ It was a matter of life and death: to survive and to try to divert a few young people in search of revolutionary coherence, it was necessary to reaffirm the existence of a revolutionary proletariat and proclaim loud and clear the need for communism, for a revolution leading to a world insurrection capable of destroying the state. This is how we arrive at Gilles Dauvé’s peak of hypocrisy: “*The heart and body of capitalism, the proletariat is also the possible vector of communism.*”¹⁷

The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the bourgeoisie’s intense ideological campaign on the bankruptcy of communism gave rise to a new upsurge in the communisation movement. Under the shock of this campaign, the proletariat suffered a decline in its consciousness and fighting spirit. It had not previously waged a decisive struggle, so it was not defeated, but it was confronted with the loss of its class identity. For the communisers, this was confirmation of their theses: the proletariat had to abandon without remorse its class identity, its nature as an exploited class and its struggles for demands, in order to plunge immediately into revolutionary self-negation. The so-called new workers’ movement had to break with what they call programmatism, a term which in fact designates the means and the process leading to the final goal.

In other words, it was a vertiginous step backwards, a return to the situation that preceded the work of the First International, which, against the anarchists, had reminded us that every class struggle is a political struggle and that the emancipation of the proletariat requires the seizure of political power on an international scale, the only lever at its disposal to succeed in dissolving the economic categories of capitalism. The communisers could unashamedly affirm: “*With the liquidation of politics by capital which has achieved real domination of society, the anarchist critique of politics can be integrated into communist theory: the self-negation of the proletariat will at the same time be the destruction of all political rackets, united in the capitalist counter-revolution*”.¹⁸

The pitiful result of all this fuss is very simple. The communisers had only one idea in mind, to correct Marx with the help of Bakunin, who had first proclaimed the creative virtues of destruction, and who advocated a socialism without transition. “*We shall persist,*” said Bakunin, “*in refusing to associate ourselves with any political movement which does not have as its immediate and direct aim the*

complete emancipation of the workers.”¹⁹ What is this “immediate and direct aim” if not the self-negation of the proletariat and the abandonment of the concept of the transition to communism?

Communisers against the dictatorship of the proletariat

We have seen that the communisers are inspired by anarchist nihilism, that, like Bakunin in his time, they have gone to war against all forms of revolutionary organisation, which they present as a racket, that they seek to destroy all reference to the programme, principles, traditions, historical continuity, theory, consciousness and revolutionary perspective of the proletariat. In short, contrary to the childish naivety of the modernists of the 1970s, the communisers today are extremely dangerous for the struggle of the proletariat. They reflect bourgeois society in decomposition and live with it. This is a society where, for the ruling class, all that remains is to manage crisis situations from day to day, to wave the stick of state violence, where the past and the future have disappeared, where thought goes round in circles, chanting a general mistrust of any scientific or political approach. Among the communisers, immediatism has been pushed to the limit, to the point of caricature. For these gentlemen, communism is not “*a new mode of production, but the production of the immediacy of relations between singular individuals, the abolition without transition of capital and all its classes, including the proletariat*”, so we must reject the “*Leninist or councillist realisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.*”²⁰

In contrast to this mumbo-jumbo, the rigour of marxism, as a living theory of the proletariat, is a breath of fresh air. Drawing on his in-depth knowledge of bourgeois revolutions, Greek and Roman antiquity,²¹ and the historical role of the proletariat, Marx forged the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which represents a fundamental theoretical achievement: “*I do not deserve the credit for having discovered the existence of classes in modern society, nor the struggle between them. [...] My originality has consisted in: 1. demonstrating that the existence of classes is linked only to specific historical phases*

in the development of production; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3. that this dictatorship itself represents only a transition towards the abolition of all classes and towards a classless society.”²²

The wording itself did not appear for the first time until 1850 in the *Class struggles in France*, but it was already present as a thread in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. After a long period in which the proletariat had mainly mobilised in the struggle for reforms, the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat reappeared where the class conflict had become most acute, in Poland and Russia, where the revolution of 1905 heralded the great revolutionary struggles of capitalist decadence. The Second Congress of the Russian Social democratic Labour Party adopted a programme drafted by Plekhanov and Lenin which, for the first time in the history of social democratic parties, included this principle. The dictatorship of the proletariat has nothing to do with the various forms of bourgeois totalitarianism found in Russia, China, the United States or France. Above all, it means that a period of transition between capitalism and communism is necessary, for two reasons.

The first is that, for the first time in history, the revolutionary class is also the exploited class. Unlike the revolutionary bourgeoisie, the proletariat has no economic power on which it can rely to gradually build the elements of communist society within capitalism. It can only begin this work outside capitalism. The act of seizing political power is therefore not, as it is for the bourgeoisie, the crowning achievement of a growing economic power within the old society, but the starting point for the proletariat to profoundly modify the organisational forms of social production. Insurrection is therefore the first stage, not the last, of the social transformation that the proletariat is called upon to accomplish. It must first break the political framework of the old society.

The second fundamental reason is that the exhaustion of the conditions of the old society does not necessarily and automatically mean the maturation and completion of the conditions of the new society. Through the increase in the productivity of labour, the concentration and centralisation of capital, and the international socialisation of production, capitalism creates the premises for communism, but not communism itself. In other words, the decline of the old society is not automatically the maturation of the new, but only the condition for that maturation. Quoting Engels’

19. Quoted in B. Nicolaïevski, O. Mænchen-Helfen, *La vie de Karl Marx*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 336.

20. *Rupture dans la théorie de la révolution*, op. cit., pp. 10 and 22.

21. In ancient times, the Roman republic, faced with a deep internal crisis, gave itself the option of temporarily entrusting power to a tyrant. Under the law of *dictatore creando*, the Roman Senate could partially relinquish power for a period not exceeding six months.

22. Karl Marx, Letter of 5 March 1852 to Joseph Weydemeyer.

16. *Rupture dans la théorie de la révolution*, op. cit., p. 9.

17. *De la crise à la communisation*, op. cit. p. 116.

18. *Rupture dans la théorie de la révolution*, op. cit. p. 13.

Anti-Dühring, the Italian Communist Left wrote in its review *Bilan*: “It is clear that the ultimate development of capitalism does not correspond to a ‘full blossoming of the productive forces’ in the sense that they would be capable of meeting all human needs, but to a situation in which the survival of class antagonisms not only halts the whole development of society but leads to its regression.”²³

Without anything to fall back on, without property, the proletariat has only the political lever at its disposal to transform the world. As historical experience shows, it is capable of doing so thanks to its consciousness and its unity, two gigantic forces materialised by its mass organisation, the workers’ councils, and its vanguard, the world communist party. But in order to create a society of abundance, the first condition of human emancipation, it must break down not only the political framework of the old society but also the bourgeois relations of production which impede a new upsurge of productive forces finally freed from the ravages of capitalist industry.

“Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.”²⁴ The principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat reminds us that the only force capable of bringing this work to a successful conclusion is a homogeneous historical class at the heart of the contradictions of capitalism: the class of wage-labour. Through its revolutionary practice, the proletariat reveals itself as the last exploited class in human history. “If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.”

23. This is an article by Mitchell in the series “The Problems of the Transition Period” published in *Bilan* n° 28 (February-March 1936) and republished in the *International Review* n° 128 (first quarter 2007).

24. A forthcoming article in this series will address the question of the economic policy implemented by the dictatorship of the proletariat to bring about the dissolution of all the economic categories of capitalism.

On the other hand, the dictatorship of the proletariat is the extension and culmination of the struggle between the two fundamental classes of society. By taking power, the proletariat asserts that there is no other way, no possible compromise, to get rid of class antagonisms. This revolutionary period is marked by a frank and brutal alternative: it will be either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat has no need to conceal its aims and clearly states to the world that “political power, properly speaking, is the organised power of one class for the oppression of another”;²⁵ and it has a duty to say this loud and clear in order to lead the whole of humanity towards mastery of its own social forces, breaking with the blind forces of the past.

The conquest of power and the dictatorship of the proletariat remain at the heart of the communist programme. This is the result reached by the scientific theory of marxism: “Even when a society has succeeded in discovering the trail of the natural law which presides over its movement - and the final aim of this work is to unveil the economic law of the movement of modern society - it can neither leapfrog nor abolish by decree the phases of its natural development, but it can shorten the period of gestation, and soften the pangs of childbirth.”²⁶

When the emergence of workers’ councils has created a situation of dual power, the situation can only be resolved by the seizure of power by the proletariat and the demolition of the bourgeois state. The insurrection is the moment of this denouement. The conquest of power has become the absolute priority on which all the forces of the proletariat are concentrated. To try to control or organise production and distribution would be illusory and a dangerous waste of energy as long as this power is not in the hands of the proletariat. It would also be catastrophic to try to force the process by prematurely calling for the conquest of power when the necessary conditions have not been met. Against Gramsci, the Italian Left wrote in its organ *Il Soviet* in June 1919: “One cannot consider the practical implementation of the socialist programme without always bearing in mind the barrier which clearly separates us in time: the realisation of a precondition, namely the conquest of all political power by the working class. This problem precedes the other, and the process of its resolution is still far from being specified and defined. The concrete study

25. The last three quotations come from the *Communist Manifesto*, Chapter II: “Proletarians and Communists”.

26. K. Marx, *Preface to Capital*, 1867, La Pléiade I, p. 550.

of vital socialist achievements could well lead some people to envisage them outside the atmosphere of proletarian dictatorship which nurtures them, to believe them compatible with the present institutions, and thus to slide towards reformism.”²⁷

All these principles resulting from historical experience and theoretical work, as we have seen, make no sense to communisers. Every question raised by the revolutionary perspective is answered metaphysically. Let’s see how they present, for example, the contradiction between vital needs and the transformation of social relations: “In 1999-2001, some Argentinian piqueteros undertook productions for which the product was not the only objective. A community piquetero bakery made bread, and the act of production was also an element in changing interpersonal relations: absence of hierarchy, practice of consensus, collective self-training... For each participant, ‘the other as such [had] become a need for him’” [Marx].²⁸ The trap of interclassism that was strangling Argentine workers at the time was further aggravated by the state’s supervision of the unemployed with the help of Peronist and leftist organisations.²⁹ The complexity of the communisers with these organs of the bourgeois state provided further confirmation of the bourgeois nature of modernist ideology.

Historical experience: Hebrew for the communisers

The two moments in history when the proletariat was able to seize power, the Paris Commune in 1871 and October 1917 in Russia, provided valuable lessons and made it possible to correct and enrich the proletariat’s revolutionary programme. First of all, they fully confirmed what marxist theory had been developing since its birth in the late 1840s. The birth of a new mode of production can only take place through violence, through the brutal confrontation of historical classes. In this process, the superstructure represented by political power and the state played an essential role. They are the instruments through which people make history, and make possible the emergence of a new society that has remained imprisoned in the flanks of the old one.

Once in power, the proletariat organises itself so as not to lose that power and to stimulate revolutionary agitation in other

27. Republished in *Programme Communiste* n° 72, December 1976, p. 39.

28. *De la crise à la communisation*, op. cit, p. 125.

29. See the articles written by the comrades of the Nucleo Comunista Internacional “Argentina: the mystification of the ‘piquetero’ movement”, *International Review* n° 119.

parts of the world. To do this, it begins by dissolving the standing army and the police force and taking over the monopoly of arms. It destroys the bourgeois state, whose bureaucracy and forces of repression have become unfit for revolutionary tasks. And when a new state reappears in the revolutionary period as an inevitable phenomenon because the antagonistic classes and interests have not disappeared, it must take control of this state in order to turn it against the former ruling class and intervene in the economic field. In his notes on a text by Bakunin, Marx describes this revolutionary situation: “*It implies that as long as the other classes, above all the capitalist class, still exist, and as long as the proletariat is still fighting against it (for when the proletariat obtains control of the government its enemies and the old organisation of society will not yet have disappeared), it must use forcible means, that is to say, governmental means; as long as it remains a class itself, and the economic conditions which give rise to the class struggle and the existence of classes have not vanished they must be removed or transformed by force, and the process of transforming them must be accelerated by force.*”³⁰

As long as the international power of the workers’ councils is not assured, it is certain that the first economic, administrative and legal measures introduced by the semi-state of the transitional period will seem quite insufficient, as the *Communist Manifesto* already emphasises. The priority is to block the road to counter-revolution, to draw into the movement the middle classes and the unemployed throughout the world. It is impossible to predict how long this stage of the revolution will take, but we do know that it will impose heavy sacrifices on the proletariat. Throughout this time, the need to ensure the functioning of society inevitably implies the persistence of exchange relations with the small peasantry.

With a remarkable spirit of synthesis, Lenin sums up the entire historical trajectory that makes the victory of the proletariat possible: “*The utopians tried to ‘discover’ the political forms under which the socialist reorganisation of society should take place. The anarchists avoided the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of contemporary social democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as a limit that could not be crossed, and they bowed down to this ‘model’, labelling as anarchism any attempt to break these forms.*”³¹ The communisers, for their part, pulverise the process of transition from

one society to another by totally sidestepping its source: the constitution of the proletariat as a ruling class capable both of ensuring its power over society and of safeguarding its political autonomy and its communist goal.

Despite the limits imposed by the situation at the outset, the proletariat can only win if it steers society towards communism from the outset. It must seize every opportunity to attack the separation between town and country, between industry and agriculture, to attack the capitalist division of labour and all commodified forms, and to redirect all production towards the satisfaction of human needs. Among the first measures to be taken, on which the revolutionary dynamic will depend, we can indicate the following:

- “*The immediate socialisation of the major capitalist concentrations and the main centres of productive activity.*”
- “*The planning of production and distribution - the criteria of production must be the maximum satisfaction of needs and no longer accumulation.*”
- “*A massive reduction in the working day.*”
- “*A substantial increase in the standard of living.*”
- “*An attempt to abolish wage-based remuneration and its monetary form.*”
- “*A socialisation of consumption and the satisfaction of needs (transport, leisure, meals, etc.).*”
- “*The relationship between the collectivised sectors and the still individual sectors of production, particularly in the countryside, should tend towards collective exchange organised through cooperatives, thus abolishing the market and individual exchange.*”³²

An experience as important as October 1917 was bound to have many lessons to teach us, both positive and negative. In particular, concerning the degeneration and failure of the revolution. It was stifled by international isolation, in particular because of the failure of the revolution in Germany. It had to hold out in anticipation of new revolutionary attempts in the central countries of capitalism, while resisting the assaults of the White armies and the coalition of developed countries whose troops landed on Russian territory. This isolation very quickly led to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the rise of opportunism within the Bolshevik party. One of the factors in the degeneration of

the revolution was the collusion between proletarian power and the new state created by the revolution.³³ Marx, as his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* shows, seemed to have solved the problem once and for all: “*Between capitalist society and communist society lies the period of revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. To this period also corresponds a phase of political transition, in which the state can be nothing other than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.*”

However, the marxist theory of the state had already given us a glimpse of the problem. In his 1891 postscript to *The Civil War in France*, Engels wrote: “*In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap*”

The Russian Revolution demonstrated that the state, far from being a simple “machine” that could change function by changing hands, was above all a product of all the class societies of the past and carried within it every possible form of oppression. None of the revolutionaries of the time had imagined that the bourgeois counter-revolution would emerge victoriously from the very heart of the state, from a state that was nonetheless described as proletarian, and that it would be capable of reconstituting a new Russian bourgeois class ex nihilo by relying on the bureaucracy and its political expression, the Stalinist faction.

The Italian Communist Left made a fundamental contribution to this question in its extremely valuable assessment of the 1930s.³⁴ The Gauche Communiste de France (GCF) in the 1940s-50s, followed by the International Communist Current, are the only ones to take up, within the current of the Communist Left today, this solid political framework which will enable us to confront tomorrow the complex problems of the period of transition. Let us allow Marc Chirik to sum up these principles: “*The transitional society is still a society divided into classes and so there will necessarily arise within it that institution peculiar to all societies divided into classes: the STATE. With all*

33. We are leaving aside here another important factor in the degeneration, substitutionism, i.e. the exercise of power by the party, which led to the destruction of the Russian workers’ councils.

34. See our book *The Italian Communist Left*.

30. “Notes on Bakunin’s book *Statehood and anarchy*.” - Karl Marx, on libcom.org.

31. Lenin, *State and Revolution*.

32. “Communism is on the Agenda of History - Marc Chirik and the Transitional State”; *International Review* n° 168.

the limitations and precautionary measures with which we will surround this institution (functionaries will be elected and revocable, their consumption will be equal to that of a worker; a unification will exist between the legislative and executive functions, etc.), and which make this state into a 'semi-state', we must never lose sight of the state's historic anti-socialist, and therefore anti-proletarian and essentially conservative, nature. The state remains the guardian of the status quo.

"We recognise the inevitability of this institution which the proletariat will have to utilise as a necessary evil in order to: break the resistance of the waning capitalist class and preserve a united administrative, and political framework in this period when society is still rent by antagonistic interests.

"But we categorically reject the idea of making this state the standard-bearer of communism. By its own nature ('bourgeois nature in its essence' – Marx), it is essentially an organ for the conservation of the status quo and a restraint on communism. Thus, the state can neither be identified with communism nor with the proletariat which is the bearer of communism. The proletariat is by definition the most dynamic class in history since it carries out the suppression of all classes including itself. This is why, while utilising the state, the proletariat expresses its dictatorship not through the state, but over the state. This is also why the proletariat can under no circumstances allow this institution (the state) to intervene by violence within the class, nor to be the arbiter of the discussions and activities of the class organs - the councils and the revolutionary party".³⁵

For their part, the communisers, because they have cut the proletariat off from its programme, i.e. from its historical experience and its revolutionary perspective, are incapable of drawing lessons from history. They can offer no revolutionary orientation, only disillusionment, fog and night, disastrous adventures and, finally, defeat. By holding out the prospect of the immediate advent of communism, they play the same destructive role as Bakunin, that parasite of the workers' movement: *"Like the early Christians, who took heaven as they imagined it as the model for their organisation, so we are to take Mr. Bakunin's heaven of the future society as a model, and are to pray and hope instead of fighting. And the people who preach this nonsense pretend to be the only true revolutionaries!"³⁶*

35. "Problems of the period of transition", in *International Review* n°1 and on our website as "Basic Texts 4: Problems of the period of transition" (April 1975).

36. Engels, "The Sonvillier Congress and the International", available on Wikirouge.net.

Adepts of the speculative method, they totally ignore the dialectical method. They are incapable of correctly posing contradictions, of understanding how they can be overcome, and very often invent contradictions that have nothing to do with reality. For example, the so-called contradiction between the working class and the proletariat, that is to say, according to the modernists, between the exploited class which contributes solely to the reproduction of capital and the revolutionary class produced by their imagination. Here's where this leads us in relation to the German Revolution of 1918-1919: *"The crushing of the German Revolution by social democracy overturns many conceptions [...]. A whole concept collapsed for these revolutionaries: it was the organised workers' movement itself that faced them as the main counter-revolutionary force, that held the State, that organised the Freikorps... But what's more, at the first Congress of the German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, it was the SPD that had the majority!"³⁷*

Here we can clearly see the state of mind of the petty bourgeois protestors of 1968, who thought they saw in the PCF a first step towards class consciousness, instead of seeing in it the expression of state capitalism, which allowed the bourgeoisie to penetrate the proletariat - thanks to the unions, the left-wing parties and the leftists - in order to control it and try to prevent, precisely, any awakening of consciousness, any general movement. In the same way, Social Democracy, which had just crossed over into the bourgeois camp by supporting the imperialist war, is presented here as an emanation of the proletariat. But for 56 years, water has flowed under the bridge. Such an assertion has now become criminal because it perpetuates the confusion between the revolutionary class and the class enemy disguised as a false socialism, a confusion which the proletariat of the time found so hard to shake off and which led it to the massacres of the First World War. The communisers did not stop there, however, and also took part in the gigantic state ideological campaign which tried to pass off Stalinism as communism and confused Stalin with Lenin. This is their small contribution to the efforts of the bourgeoisie to prevent the working class from regaining its class identity and its revolutionary perspective after the setback of the 1990s.

By resuming its struggles of resistance for immediate demands since 2022, the proletariat has once again contradicted the expectations of the communisers. These struggles form the material basis which

37. *Histoire critique de l'ultragauche*, op. cit. p. 29.

will enable the proletariat to recover its class identity, to resist the unleashing of regional imperialist wars, to develop its consciousness and to recover its revolutionary perspective. In contrast, the proletariat that runs through the minds of the petty bourgeois of 1968, is imaginary and fantastical, and has nothing to do with the real historical process. Thanks to his revolutionary method and convictions, Marx had already denounced in advance these pretentious idealists and their pompous rhetoric: *"Confronted with the initial outbreak of the Silesian revolt no man who thinks or loves the truth could regard the duty to play schoolmaster to the event as his primary task. On the contrary, his duty would rather be to study it to discover its specific character. Of course, this requires scientific understanding and a certain love of mankind, while the other procedure needs only a ready-made phraseology saturated in an overweening love of oneself."³⁸*

Avrom Elberg

38. "Critical Notes on the Article: 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian'." Karl Marx, *Vorwärts!*, n° 63, August 7 1844

Continued from page 25

Manifesto of the Communist Left, 1944

Workers and soldiers of all countries!

You alone can stop this terrible massacre unprecedented in history.

Workers! In all countries stop the production destined to kill your brothers, your wives, your children.

Soldiers! Cease fire, throw down your weapons!

Fraternise beyond the artificial frontiers of capitalism. Unite on the international class front.

LONG LIVE THE FRATERNISATION OF ALL THE EXPLOITED!

DOWN WITH THE IMPERIALIST WAR!

LONG LIVE THE WORLD COMMUNIST REVOLUTION!

ICC Pamphlet



The Dutch communist left is one of the major components of the revolutionary current which broke away from the degenerating Communist International in the 1920s. Well before Trotsky's Left Opposition, and in a more profound way, the communist left had been able to expose the opportunist dangers which threatened the International and its parties and which eventually led to their demise. In the struggle for the intransigent defence of revolutionary principles, this current, represented in particular by the KAPD in Germany, the KAPN in Holland, and the left of the Communist Party of Italy animated by Bordiga, came out against the International's policies on questions like participation in elections and trade unions, the formation of 'united fronts' with social democracy, and support for national liberation struggles. It was against the positions of the communist left that Lenin wrote his pamphlet *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, and this text drew a response in *Reply to Lenin*, written by one of the main figures of the Dutch left, Herman Gorter.

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

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Report on imperialist tensions

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

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How can the proletariat overthrow capitalism?

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Only the world revolution of the proletariat can put an end to it

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

The significance of the summer of anger in Britain

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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

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

Critique of the so-called "Communisers" part III

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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