



Belgique - België
PB
2600 Berchem 1-2
BC 9925

International Communist Current

April 2025

International Review

What kind of world are we going to have to face?

Trump 2.0: New steps into capitalist chaos

Three years of war in Ukraine: chaos, massacres and militarism

The dynamics of the class struggle since 2022

The national question according to Bordigist legend

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£2.50 \$3 \$6Can \$7Aus 20Rupees 3Euros 650Yen 50.00PHP 12Rand

périodique semestriel
Supplément à INTERNATIONALISME.FR
Bureau de Depot: B-2600 Berchem 1-2
N° d'agrégation P408982

173

Contents

The great imperialist upheaval What kind of world are we going to have to face?	1
Trump 2.0: New steps into capitalist chaos	4
Three years of war in Ukraine A spiral of chaos, massacres and militarism	8
The dynamic of the class struggle since 2022	12
The national question according to Bordigist legend	20
Ideologies of imperialist war Anti-Semitism, Zionism, Anti-Zionism: All are enemies of the proletariat (part 1)	27
Debate in the proletarian political milieu on the period of the decomposition of capitalism "Counter-theses" or "counter-sense" on decomposition?	33
Who really is Controversies and the individual C. Mcl? The defence of our organisation and the real tradition of the communist left	39
Marxism and ecology Andreas Malm: "Ecological" rhetoric in defence of the capitalist state	45
The "green Trotskyism" of Andreas Malm against the communist perspective	49

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United states, Europe, Russia, China: the great imperialist upheaval

What kind of world are we going to have to face?

The images of Zelensky being humiliated by Trump in the Oval Office of the White House, mocked for his tie-less uniform, asked to say thank you, then ordered to shut up, have raised a wave of outrage across the world.

That relations between the different parts of the ruling class are characterised by domination, oppression and intimidation is nothing new. However, they usually keep their gangster ways behind the scenes, away from the cameras and prying ears, whereas Trump makes a spectacle of them for all to see.

But the reason for the shockwave is actually elsewhere, much deeper than the simple vulgarity displayed in broad daylight. This event has thrown in the face of the world the images of a major historical upheaval, what the media have called "the great reversal of alliances." Behind this abandonment of Ukraine by the United States lies nothing less than a break with Europe and a rapprochement with Russia. The structure of the world since 1945 is being swept away.

The reaction in Europe was immediate. From Paris to London, summits followed one another; an 800 billion euro plan to "rearm Europe" was voted through; France, Germany and the United Kingdom loudly and clearly affirmed the need to develop a war economy in the face of the new Russian threat, now that American military protection seems to have lapsed.

Since then, in every country in the world, there has been a succession of speeches warning of the need to accept new sacrifices, because according to all the bourgeoisies, across all borders, we will have to arm ourselves more to protect the peace (sic!). India, for example, has just announced a major project to develop its military industry in order to face up to Chinese ambitions throughout Asia.

"*Capitalism carries war within it, just as a cloud carries a storm,*" said Jean Jaurès from the podium one evening in July 1914, on the eve of the First World War. This same prospect of war is on everyone's mind today. For the working class, the near future is increasingly frightening. What new catastrophe is approaching? The invasion of Europe by Russia? A military confrontation between the United States and China, or between India and China, or between Israel and Iran? A Third World War?

The role of revolutionary minorities is precisely to succeed in discerning, amid the noise and fury, amid the daily lies, the incessant manipulation and propaganda, the reality of the historical development in progress. Because yes, the future promises to be most difficult for the working class! We must prepare for it. But no, it is not the Third World War that threatens, nor even the invasion of Europe. It is a barbarism that is less frontal and general, more devious and creeping, but just as dangerous and murderous.

On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, heralding the end of the USSR, which was officially recognised on 25 December 1991. To understand the current dynamic, we need to start with this historic event.

The end of the blocs, the explosion of the "every man for himself" mentality, the rise of China

With the collapse of the Eastern bloc, the Western bloc lost its *raison d'être*, and the USA's mortal enemy for more than fifty years, Russia, was considerably weakened. The bourgeoisie of the world's leading power immediately grasped the new historical situation that was opening up: the world divided into two imperialist blocs was over, the discipline that was necessary to maintain the cohesion of each bloc was over, the submission of America's allies to protect themselves from the appetites of the Russian ogre was over. The time had come for fragile alliances, for changing sides depending on the circumstances of each conflict, for the explosion of the "every man for himself" mentality. Europe in particular, which since the end of the

Second World War had been at the centre of the East-West battle, found itself freed from this stranglehold. As for the most solid and ambitious nations, the place of Russia, the number 2, the great adversary of America, was up for grabs.

The American bourgeoisie therefore reacted immediately: "*We find ourselves today at an exceptional and extraordinary moment... a rare opportunity to move towards a historic period of cooperation... a new world order can emerge: a new era, less threatened by terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace.*" These words of US President George H. W. Bush during his address to Congress on 11 September 1990 have remained engraved in our memories. At the same time, Tomahawks launched from American aircraft carriers and Abrams tanks were crushing Iraq in the name of a "new world order", "cooperation", "justice" and "peace".

With this first Gulf War, which caused nearly 500,000 deaths, the United States had a dual objective: to carry out a real demonstration of military force to dampen the growing imperialist ardour of all the

other nations, in particular their former allies in the Western bloc, and to force them all to participate in the intervention in Iraq, to obey the US godfather.

The result? In 1991, war broke out in Yugoslavia, with France, Great Britain and Russia supporting Serbia, the United States choosing Bosnia and Germany Slovenia and Croatia. Germany, which was seeking to find a direct route to the Mediterranean, was already displaying its new ambitions. In 1994, the war in Rwanda broke out, with France on the side of the Hutus and their genocide, and the United States on the side of the Tutsis and their recapture of power.

These five years, 1990-1994, alone summarise the whole imperialist dynamic that was to follow and that we have been experiencing for more than three decades now. The "Anti-terrorist" operation in Afghanistan, the second Gulf War, interventions in Libya, Yemen, Syria... the result is always the same:

- first, a demonstration of American force, whose military power is unrivalled;
- then, endless chaos, an inability to regu-

late and stabilise the defeated region;

- finally, an exacerbation of imperialist tensions at the global level, with each nation increasingly challenging the hegemony that the United States wants to continue to impose.

The United States, the world's leading power, has also become the leading generator of the "new world disorder".

As for the objective of preventing another great power from emerging and challenging them, the United States has been successful up to a point:

- against Russia, by establishing more and more military forces on the lands of former Russian satellites;
- against Japan, by waging a veritable targeted trade war against it and reducing it to economic stagnation for more than thirty-five years. In 1989, Lawrence Summers, then US Secretary of the Treasury, declared: "*Japan represents a greater threat to the United States than the USSR*";
- against Germany, which was allowed to develop its economy but had to restrict its military ambitions.

However, a new power has managed to rise despite everything: China. The "factory of the world", a true global economic powerhouse, which the United States also needs, China's imperialist appetites are becoming increasingly sharp, to the point of claiming to be capable of one day taking the place of the world's leading power.

That is why, as early as 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the adoption by the United States of the "*strategic pivot to Asia*", a vision placing "*Asia at the heart of American policy*", taking the form of a military, economic and diplomatic commitment by the United States with the aim of increasing its presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The following year, Barack Obama confirmed this reorientation of American forces towards Asia under the name of "*rebalancing the world*".

The Chinese response was not long in coming. In 2013, it officially displayed its new global imperialist ambitions. In 2013, President Xi Jinping announced the "project of the century": the construction of a "New Silk Road", a series of maritime and rail links between China, Europe and Africa, passing through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Djibouti and Somaliland. This project encompasses more than 68 countries representing 4.4 billion inhabitants and 40% of the world's GDP!

The war in Ukraine: weaken Russia, target China, coerce Europe

By attempting to invade Ukraine on 22 February 2022, Russia fell into a trap. The United States deliberately pushed Russia into this war by planning to expand the presence of NATO forces on Ukrainian territory, on the Russian border, which they knew would be completely intolerable for the Kremlin. The objective? To drag Russia into a quagmire, a dead-end. No war of occupation since 1945 has been successful, regardless of the invader. The United States knows something about this from the war in Vietnam.

This was a long-planned scheme. One after the other, all the presidents since 1990, Bush senior, Clinton, Bush Junior, Obama, Trump, Biden, have pursued the same goal of establishing NATO in the countries of Eastern Europe.

From 2022 until Trump's return, the United States sufficiently informed and armed Ukraine to ensure that the war would last, that the Russians would be neither vanquished nor victorious, that they would remain there, trapped, sacrificing the "life forces of the nation" at the front and wearing out the entire economic fabric at the rear.

The United States has pulled off a three-pronged masterstroke here. Because it was basically China that was targeted by the manoeuvre, Russia being its main military ally. This war has also meant a halt to the progress of the "New Silk Road". And the United States took the opportunity to weaken Europe, first and foremost Germany, which is heavily dependent on markets to the East and on Russian gas.

At the end of 2024, the American imperialist reorientation towards Asia as a new "pivot point", initiated in 2011, thus began to have a serious impact on the world's equilibrium:

- According to the experts, China was to become the world's leading power in 2020, then 2030, then 2040, now 2050... when they don't simply go back on the advent of this prognosis. All the signals are indeed turning red for China: slowing economic growth, a property crisis, paralysis of the Silk Road construction sites... even the goal of catching up militarily with the United States is only moving further away with a "defence" budget three times lower than its competitor, and this every year!
- Despite this underwhelming performance, China has nonetheless grown in power while Europe, a crucial ally of the

United States against the USSR for more than fifty years, has lost some of its geostrategic importance, becoming above all a fierce economic competitor and a supporter of dissenting, even enemy, countries during armed conflicts. The speech given by the French minister De Villepin at the UN on 14 February 2003, in which he refused to be involved in the military intervention in Iraq, remains symbolic of those European countries that are increasingly standing up to the United States: "*In this temple of the United Nations, we are the guardians of an ideal, we are the guardians of conscience. The heavy responsibility and immense honour that are ours must lead us to prioritise peaceful disarmament. And it is an old country, France, an old continent like mine, Europe, that is telling you this today*". The latest events at the beginning of 2025 definitively sealed the break, a break that will greatly accelerate global chaos.

The Trump acceleration

"*Look, let's be honest, the European Union was designed to piss off the United States*": here, twenty-two years later, in the words of Donald Trump, is the response of the American bourgeoisie to De Villepin and the French bourgeoisie.

The American president is a megalomaniac fool. The propaganda machine is taking advantage of this state of affairs, visible to all, to blame him for all the rot, barbarism and irrationality that are developing today. However, it is no coincidence that a megalomaniac fool has become the head of the world's leading power. Trump is the product of the madness and irrationality that are increasingly infecting the entire global capitalist system. In this respect, his presidency does not break with the policies pursued before him, it prolongs them, accelerates them, takes them to their peak. Trump's policy is just an unmasked caricature of the policy of the entire bourgeoisie to which he belongs.

Has Europe lost its geostrategic importance? Then Trump takes the consequences to the extreme. In his eyes, the old continent is nothing more than an economic competitor, so it's time to throw agreements and alliances in the bin, time to throw the nuclear shield in the bin, and long live customs barriers with extravagant tax increases. One of the aims of the end of American military protection is to force all the countries of Europe to waste part of their economic strength on developing their military strength.

Is China the main enemy to be defeated? So let's make Clinton and Obama's "pivot

point” work to the end: Russia must be wrenched away from China, even if it means sacrificing Ukraine; the Panama Canal must be controlled since China intends to use it for its “New Silk Road”; Greenland must be pre-empted since China has its eye on the Arctic. The North Pole is currently one of the planet’s hot spots: Russia, China, Canada and the United States all aspire to dominate this area. China has also declared its intention to open a “*new polar silk road*”!

Thus, behind Trump’s wildest statements lies the pursuit of the central objectives of the entire American bourgeoisie: to weaken China, to definitively prevent it from ever being able to claim the place of the world’s leading power.

Trump’s approach is simply much more aggressive, chaotic and irrational than that of his predecessors; he is the epitome of the aggressiveness, chaos and irrationality of the current historical period! This can sometimes lead to some success. On 7 February 2025, at the end of his meeting with the American Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the Panamanian President José Raul Mulino announced that he would not extend the cooperation with China. Beijing immediately declared that it “*deeply regretted*” this step. “*China strongly opposes the use of pressure and coercion by the United States to denigrate and undermine cooperation,*” said Lin Jian, spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

But, exceptions aside, Trump’s way of doing things, a product of the world’s chaos, is in turn becoming an active factor and accelerator of that same chaos.

Trump and his clique direct the economic and imperialist policy of the world’s leading power in the same way they manage their business: they look for “great deals” with no long-term plan – they have to pay off, “now and immediately”. The consequences are obviously catastrophic.

By abandoning Ukraine, Trump has told the world: the word of the American state is worthless, you cannot trust us. Moreover, Trump and his clique are not seeking to establish international alliances, but one-off bilateral agreements, valid “right now”. India, South Korea and Australia are now particularly worried and suspicious of their “American friend”. Canada is moving closer to Europe, whose commitments seem more reliable.

Even more seriously, by abandoning Europe, Trump has definitively severed the ties that remained after 1990. The consequences for Europe are not yet foreseeable, but whatever path is taken, it will prove harmful for the United States: either a strengthening of the cohesion of the main

European powers against the United States, with increased trade war and a development of the European armed force, or an even more exacerbated rise of the “every man for himself” within Europe, with a European Union that partially disintegrates, powers that strengthen their national war economy to be able to play their own cards wherever the opportunity arises. The most likely scenario is that the two dynamics will coexist, depending on the conflicts and corners of the globe at stake. But, in all these cases, the United States will face an imperialist world that will be even more hostile and less stable and less controllable.

And all for what? Trump and his clique are not even certain of winning Russia over. In fact, it is impossible. Trump has driven a wedge between China and Russia, who have already been distrusting each other for a long time. China occupies Russian land rich in minerals against the Kremlin’s will. Russia went to war in Ukraine without Beijing’s blessing. This has been the case with all imperialist “alliances of convenience” since 1990: they are fragile and changeable. But Trump will never succeed in making Russia his ally. Putin will try to take everything he can from Trump’s “great deal”, but nothing stable will come out of this “shaking up of alliances”.

Fundamentally, after the successive and constant failures of the American bourgeoisie to impose its order and limit the dynamic of every man for himself, Trump has acknowledged the impossibility of halting this reality by openly declaring the “war of each against all” as the true “strategy” of the new American administration.

After Trump... there is no going back

By abandoning Ukraine and Europe and turning towards Russia, Trump has destroyed the meagre foundations of the international order that had survived the fall of the USSR in 1990. And there will be no going back.

Obviously, given the level of amateurism and incompetence of the Trump clique, the current and future failures, the chaos that will develop at the global level, the foreseeable economic and imperialist setbacks for the United States, the American bourgeoisie will try to react and prepare for the post-Trump era. It is in the best interests of the American bourgeoisie to succeed in erasing the escapades and exaggerations of the Trump clique, to reconnect with the highly effective “soft power”, and to try to restore credibility to its word and its commitments. But in reality, there will be no going back. Because behind this acceleration of events lies the confirmation and manifestation of

the historical impasse that the survival of capitalism represents for society: the next administration may change the form of its policy, not the substance; confidence in the solidity of the American word will not return; the destroyed alliances with Europe will not be re-established, the chaos in Ukraine will not stop, the relationship with Russia will not be pacified.¹

On the contrary, the future is ultimately one of war spreading to the Middle East, probably to Iran, Russia eyeing its neighbouring countries, Moldova for example, and rising tensions in Asia, around Taiwan, between China and India... The future is a global capitalism that is rotting on its feet, wallowing in barbarism, the law of the jungle, the proliferation of warlike conflicts... The future is a war economy that is developing in every country and demands that the working class work harder, work faster, earn less, get less education, receive less healthcare...

Yes, that is the future that capitalism holds in store! The answer can only be class struggle. The threat of the spread of military barbarism can frighten, paralyse and make people want to be “protected” by “their” state. But that same state will mercilessly attack “its own” workers to increase the pace and develop its war economy. This is the path that the class struggle will take in the years to come: the refusal to tighten their belts even further will lead to massive workers’ struggles, and the development of solidarity, awareness and self-organisation.

Since the “*summer of anger*” that erupted in the UK in 2022, this series of strikes that lasted several months in all sectors, the working class worldwide has regained the will to fight, to take to the streets, to come together, to discuss, to struggle together. Only this dynamic can offer humanity another future, one in which capitalism is overthrown, its wars, borders and exploitation brought to an end by the proletarian revolution for communism.

And it is up to the revolutionary minorities, to all those searching for real political clarity, to all those who aspire to a different perspective to this decadent and barbaric system, to come together, to discuss, to make the link between the war, the economic crisis and the attacks on the working class, to point out the need to fight as one, as a class.

Gracchus 24/03/2025

1. Russia is also fully aware that the American bourgeoisie is already preparing for the post-Trump era, and there is a strong likelihood that the next clique in power will be a product of the United States’ historic anti-Russian tradition, making the current pseudo-agreements even more fragile. Russia remains wary of the US.

The consequences of the American election

Trump 2.0: New steps into capitalist chaos

In recent articles written on the first days of Donald Trump's second presidency of the United States, the ICC has already explained that the dangerous chaos and havoc he has unleashed on the world since he took up residence in the White House is not an individual aberration in an otherwise stable system, but the expression of the collapse of the capitalist system as a whole and of its strongest power. The unpredictable gangsterism of Trump's administration reflects a social order in ruins. Moreover, the liberal democratic faction of the US bourgeoisie which is resisting the new presidency tooth and nail is just as much part of this collapse and in no sense a "lesser evil" or alternative solution to the populist MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement that should be supported by the working class.

Whatever political form capitalism takes today, only war, crisis and pauperisation for the working class are on the agenda. The working class has to fight for its class interests against all sections of the ruling class. The resurgence of workers' struggles to defend their wages and conditions as recently occurred at Boeing and the docks of the eastern seaboard of the US, along with the resurgence of combativity in Europe, are the only promise for the future.

In this article, we want to explain more why and how Trump was elected for a second term of office, why it is more extreme and dangerous than the first term, in order to show more clearly the suicidal fate of the bourgeois order that it characterises and the proletarian alternative to it.

Trump's first administration, a summary

At the end of 2022, in the middle of Biden's tenure in the White House, the ICC made this balance sheet of the first Trump presidency:

"The eruption of populism in the world's most powerful country, which was crowned by the triumph of Donald Trump in 2016, brought four years of contradictory and erratic decisions, denigration of international institutions and agreements, intensifying global chaos and leading to a weakening and discrediting of American power and further accelerating its historic decline."

The Biden presidency which followed Trump's first administration was not able to reverse this worsening situation:

"...no matter how much the Biden team proclaims it in their speeches, it's not a question of wishes, it's the characteristics of this final phase of capitalism that determine the tendencies it is obliged to follow, leading inexorably into the abyss if the proletariat cannot put an end to it through world communist revolution."¹

The guiding principle of Trump's first term and his election campaign – "America First" – has continued into his second term. This guiding slogan means that America should only act in

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

its own national interests to the detriment of others, both "allies" and enemies, by using economic, political and military force. To the extent that it can make "deals" – rather than treaties – with other countries (which can in any case be broken at any time according to the "philosophy" behind this slogan) means the US making foreign governments "an offer they can't refuse" – according to the famous line from the gangster film *The Godfather*. As Marco Rubio, Trump's appointment as US secretary of state, has apparently been telling foreign governments: the US is no longer going to be talking to them about global interests and global order, but only about its own interests. "Might is right", however, is not a rallying cry for American leadership.

America First was the recognition by part of the US bourgeoisie that by 2016 the foreign policies it had been following up to then of being the world policeman in order to create a new world order after the collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989 had only led to a series of costly, unpopular and bloody failures.

The new policy reflected a final awareness that the Pax Americana² established after 1945 and which guaranteed the US world hegemony until the fall of the Berlin Wall, could not be re-established in any form. Worse, in Trump's interpretation, the

2. The Pax Americana after World War 2 was never an era of peace but of near permanent imperialist war. This term instead refers to the relative stability of world imperialist conflict, with the US as its biggest power, in the preparation of two blocs for world war prior to 1989.

continuance of the Pax Americana – that is the reliance of its allies on the economic and military protection of the United States – meant that the US was now being "unfairly" taken advantage of by these former members of its imperialist bloc.

Trump's first term: the background

Operation Desert Storm, in 1990, was the massive use of military power by the US in the Persian Gulf aimed at countering the rise of world disorder in geo-politics after the dissolution of the USSR. It was particularly directed at the independent ambitions of its former major allies in Europe.

But only weeks after this horrific massacre, a new bloody conflict broke out in the former Yugoslavia. Germany, acting on its own, recognised the new republic of Slovenia. It was only with the bombing of Belgrade, and the Dayton Accords of 1995, that the US managed to assert its authority in the situation. Desert Storm had stimulated, not lessened the centrifugal tendencies of imperialism. Consequently, Islamic jihadism developed, Israel began to sabotage the Palestinian peace process painstakingly engineered by the US, and the genocide in Rwanda left a million corpses, where the complicit western powers acted for their different interests. The 1990s, despite US efforts, illustrated, not the formation of a new world order but the accentuation of each for himself in foreign policy, and thus the weakening of US leadership.

The US foreign policy of the "Neo-Conservatives" led by George W. Bush, who became president in 2000, led to even more catastrophic failures. After 2001 another massive military operation in the Middle East was launched with the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of the "war on terror". But by 2011, when the US withdrew from Iraq, none of the intended objectives had been achieved. Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction – an invented pretext for the invasion – turned out not to exist. Democracy and peace were not established in Iraq in place of dictatorship. There was no retreat of terrorism: on the contrary Al Qaeda was given a massive stimulus that caused bloody outrages in Western Europe. In the US itself the military adventures, which had been costly both in money and blood, were unpopular. Above all the war

on terror failed to bring the European and other imperialist powers into line behind the US. France and Germany, unlike in 1990, opted out of the US invasions.

However, the return to “multilateralism” in place of the “unilateralism” of the Neo-Cons, during the presidency of Barack Obama (2009-2016) was not successful either in restoring US world leadership. It was in this period that China’s imperialist ambitions exploded, as exemplified by their geostrategic development of the New Silk Road after 2013. France and Britain pursued their own imperialist adventures in Libya, while Russia and Iran took advantage of the US semi-withdrawal from Syrian operations. Russia occupied Crimea and began its aggression in the Donbass region of Ukraine in 2014.

After the failure of the monstrous carnage of the Neo-Cons came the diplomatic failure of Obama’s policy of “cooperation”.

How could the US’s difficulties to maintain its hegemony get worse? The answer came in the form of President Donald Trump.

The consequences of Trump’s first presidency

In his first presidency Trump’s America First policy began to destroy the United States’ reputation as a reliable ally and as a world leader with a dependable policy and moral compass. Moreover, it was during his administration that serious differences emerged within the American ruling class over Trump’s vandalising foreign policy. Crucial divergences appeared in the US bourgeoisie over which imperialist power was an ally and who was an enemy in the USA’s struggle to retain its world supremacy.

Trump reneged on the Trans-Pacific Pact, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Nuclear Treaty with Iran; the US became an outlier on economic and trade policy in the G7 and G20, thereby isolating itself from its main allies on these questions. At the same time the US refusal of direct engagement in the middle east fuelled a free-for-all of regional imperialisms in that region: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel and Russia, Qatar, all tried separately to profit from the military vacuum and mayhem.

Trump’s diplomacy tended to exacerbate these tensions, such as his transfer of the US embassy in Israel to the controversial city of Jerusalem, upsetting his western allies and angering Arab leaders who still saw the US as an “honest broker” in the region.

Nevertheless, in the recognition of China as the most likely contender to usurp US primacy, Trump’s administration accorded with the view of the rest of Washington. The “pivot” to Asia already announced by Obama was to be increased, the global war on terror officially suspended, and a new era of “great power competition” was ushered in according to the National Defence Strategy of February 2018. A vast decades-long programme to update the US nuclear arsenal and to “dominate space” was announced.

However, on the need to reduce the military ambitions and capacities of Russia – and to weaken the potential of the latter to help China’s own global manoeuvres – there appeared a divergence between Trump’s ambiguous policy towards Moscow and that of the rival faction of the US bourgeoisie which had traditionally seen Russia as a historic enemy in regard to its threat to US hegemony in Western Europe.

At the same time, connected to the question of Russian policy, a different attitude toward the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the former centrepiece alliance of the American bloc, emerged, particularly over the treaty’s obligation of all the members of NATO to come to the aid of any of the others who came under military attack (ie the US would protect them from Russian aggression). Trump put this crucial stipulation in doubt. The worrying implications this held for the abandonment of the allies of US in Western Europe was not lost in the chancelleries of London, Paris and Berlin.

These foreign policy differences were to emerge more clearly during the Biden administration which followed the first Trump presidency.

The Biden interregnum: 2020-2024

The replacement of Trump by Joe Biden in the White House supposedly heralded a return to normality in US policy in the sense that it was marked by the attempt to reforge old alliances and create treaties with other countries, to try and repair the damage caused by the reckless adventures of Trump. Biden declared: “America is back”. The announcement of a historic security pact between the US, UK and Australia in the Asia-Pacific in 2021, and the strengthening of the Quad Security Dialogue between the US, India, Japan and Australia, signalled, amongst other measures, the pursuit of creating a cordon sanitaire against the rise of Chinese imperialism in the Far East.

A global democratic crusade against

“revisionist” and “autocratic” powers – Iran, Russia, North Korea and especially China – was invoked by the new administration.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 provided the means for Joe Biden to impose US military authority once more on the recalcitrant NATO powers in Europe, obliging them, particularly Germany, to augment defence budgets and provide support to Ukraine’s armed resistance. It has also helped to exhaust the military and economic power of Russia in a war of attrition, and display US world military superiority in terms of weaponry and logistics that it supplied to the Ukrainian military. Above all the US, by helping turn much of Ukraine into smoking ruins, has demonstrated to China the danger of seeing Russia as a potential ally and the perilous consequences of its own desire to annex territory such as Taiwan.

However, it was apparent to the world that the US bourgeoisie wasn’t entirely behind Biden’s policy towards Russia, as the Republican Party in Congress, still under the heel of Donald Trump, made clear its reluctance to provide the necessary billions of dollars of support to the Ukrainian war effort.

If the support given to Ukraine was a success for the reassertion of leadership by American imperialism, at least in the short term, its involvement in Israel’s war in Gaza after October 2023 tarnished this project. The US became caught between the necessity of supporting its main Israeli ally in the Middle East in the face of Iranian terrorist surrogates, and the reckless determination of Israel to play its own game and renege on a peaceful solution to the Palestinian question, thereby accentuating the military chaos in the region.

The slaughter of tens of thousands of defenceless Palestinians in Gaza, courtesy of US munitions and dollars, completely belied the self-image of US moral righteousness that Biden promoted over the defence of Ukraine.

While the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the defeat of Hezbollah in Lebanon have inflicted a serious blow on the Iranian regime, the avowed enemy of the US, this hasn’t lessened the instability of the region, not least in Syria itself. On the contrary, the US has had to continue to deploy a sizeable part of its navy to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, reinforce its contingents in Iraq and Syria, and contend with the dramatic opposition to US policy by Turkey and the Arab countries.

Above all the threat of further military convulsions in the Middle East means that

the pivot to Asia, the main focus of the US, has been disrupted.

Trump's second term: 2025-

We have described how the problems of navigating the imperialist chaos that developed after 1989 led to divisions within the American ruling class over the policy to be pursued, and charted the growth of the populist policy of America First against a more rational course that tried to preserve the alliances of the past. The re-election of Trump back to power even after the debacle of his first presidency is a sign that these internal divisions have not been mastered by the bourgeoisie and are now returning to seriously affect the ability of the US to pursue a coherent and consistent foreign policy, even to the extent of jeopardising its main concern to block or pre-empt the rise of China.

Added to the dangerous uncertainty of this boomerang effect of political chaos on imperialist policy is the fact that the USA's margin of manoeuvre on the world imperialist stage has appreciably diminished since Trump's first term, and his second term occurs while two major conflicts are raging in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

We won't go into the deeper causes of the political disarray within the American bourgeoisie and its state that Trump's first actions have dramatically demonstrated, this will be explained in a further article.

But in less than a month Trump has indicated that the tendency for his America First policy to unravel the Pax Americana that was the basis for US world supremacy after 1945 is going to accelerate much more rapidly and profoundly than it did in his first term, not least because the new president is intent on overcoming the safeguards that at that time limited his field of action in Washington by appointing his henchmen, whether competent or not, to the heads of state departments.

The main concern of the US bourgeoisie after 1989 – to prevent the end of its world domination in the free-for-all of the post-bloc world – has been turned on its head: the “war of each against all” has become, in effect, the “strategy” of the new administration. A strategy that will be more difficult to reverse by a new more intelligent administration than it was even after Trump's first term.

The aim to take back control of Panama; the proposal to “buy” Greenland; the barbaric proposal to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and turn the latter into a Riviera; all these early pronouncements of the new president are

as much directed against its former allies as its strategic enemies. In the case of the Gaza proposal, which would benefit its ally Israel in the removal of a two-state solution to Palestine, it would only inflame the opposition of other Arab powers plus Turkey and Iran. Britain, France and Germany have already declared against Trump's proposal for Gaza.

But it's the likelihood is that the US under Trump will force a peace deal on Ukraine that would probably cede 20% of its territory to Russia, to which the West European powers are already vehemently opposed, that will further break up the NATO alliance, previously the axis of US international domination. The new president is demanding that the stagnant European economies of NATO should more than double their expenditure on their military forces in order to defend themselves on their own, without the US.

A good deal of the soft power of American imperialism, that is its moral claim to hegemony, is being wiped out almost at a stroke: USAID, the biggest world agency of aid to the “global south”, has been “fed to the wood chipper” by Elon Musk. The US has withdrawn from the World Health Organisation, and has even proposed proceedings against the International Criminal Court for its bias against the US and Israel.

The proposed protectionist trade war of the new US administration would also strike a massive blow at the remaining economic stability of international capitalism that has underpinned the military power of the US, and will undoubtedly rebound on the US economy itself in the form of even higher inflation, financial crises and the reduction of its own trade. The mass deportation of cheap immigrant labour from the United States would have self-defeating negative economic consequences for its economy as well as on social stability.

At the time of writing it is not possible to know whether the avalanche of proposals and decisions by the new president will be enacted or whether they are outlandish bargaining tools which may lead to temporary agreements or reduced concessions. But the direction of the new policy is clear. The very uncertainty of the measures already has the effect of alarming and antagonising former and future potential allies and obliging them to act for themselves and seek support elsewhere. This in itself will open up more possibilities for the main enemies of the US. The proposed peace agreement in Ukraine is already benefiting Russia. The mercantilist trade war is a gift to China which can position itself as a better economic partner than the US.

Nevertheless, despite the long-term self-defeating policy of “America First” the US will not cede military superiority to its main enemy China, which is still far from being able to confront the US directly on equal terms. And the new foreign policy is already creating powerful opposition within the US bourgeoisie itself.

The perspective is then a massive arms race and a further chaotic increase in imperialist tensions around the world, with great power conflicts moving towards the centres of world capitalism as well, further inflaming its global strategic points.

Conclusion: Trump and the social question

Donald Trump's MAGA movement came to power promising the electorate more jobs, higher wages and world peace, in place of the lowering of living standards and the “endless wars” of the Biden administration.

Political populism is not an ideology of mobilising for war as fascism was.

In fact the growth and electoral successes of political populism over the last decade or so, of which Trump is the American expression, is essentially based on the growing failure of the alternation of the older established parties of liberal democracy in government to address the deep unpopularity of the dizzying growth of militarism on the one hand, and the pauperising effects of an irresolvable economic crisis on the living conditions of the mass of the population on the other.

But the populist promises of butter instead of guns have been and will be more and more contradicted by reality, and will come up against a working class which is beginning to rediscover its combativity and identity.

The working class, in contrast to the xenophobic ravings of political populism, has no country, no national interests and is in fact the only international class with common interests across borders and continents. Its struggle to defend its living conditions today, which is international in scope – the present struggles in Belgium provide another confirmation of class resistance in all countries – therefore provides the basis for an alternative pole of attraction to capitalism's suicidal future of imperialist conflict between nations.

But in this class perspective the working class will also have to confront the anti-populist as well as the populist forces of the bourgeoisie which are proposing to the population a return to the democratic form of militarism and pauperisation. The

working class must not get caught up in these false alternatives, nor follow the more radical forces which say liberal democracy is a lesser evil to that of populism. Instead, it must fight on its own class terrain.

The *New York Times*, which is the usually sober mouthpiece of the liberal American bourgeoisie, launched this radical mobilising call to the population to defend the bourgeois democratic state against the autocratic state of Trump in an editorial statement of February 8th 2025:

“Don’t get distracted. Don’t get overwhelmed. Don’t get paralysed and pulled into the chaos that President Trump and his allies are purposely creating with the volume and speed of executive orders; the effort to dismantle the federal government; the performative attacks on immigrants, transgender people, and the very concept of diversity itself: the demands that other countries accept Americans as their new overlords: and the dizzying sense that the White House could do or say anything at any moment. All of this is intended to keep the country on its back heel so President Trump can blaze ahead in his drive for maximum executive power; so no one can stop the audacious, ill-conceived and frequently illegal agenda being advanced by his administration. For goodness sake, don’t tune out.”³

This is only a confirmation that the whole bourgeoisie is using its own serious divisions to divide the working class into choosing one form of capitalist war and crisis against another in order to make it forget its own class interests.

The working class must not be pulled into the internal or external wars of the ruling class, but fight for itself.

Como

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

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

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

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3. In 2003, the *New York Times*, with a reputation for objective reporting, nevertheless repeated the lie that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction as the pretext for the US invasion of Iraq.

Three years of war in Ukraine

A spiral of chaos, massacres and militarism

The war in Ukraine is today the clearest expression of global imperialist chaos, involving at various levels, the great imperialist powers, the countries of Western Europe and others such as North Korea and Iran. Many bourgeois experts, as well as all the groups in the proletarian political milieu except for the ICC, see this situation as a step on the road to World War III. In their view we are currently witnessing the coalescence of two rival imperialist blocs centred on the two most powerful world players: the United States and China. In contrast to this analysis, the ICC considers that the situation expresses the inability of the two great world powers to impose themselves at the head of two disciplined imperialist blocs. The global leadership of the greatest power today, the United States, is increasingly contested, while China has not been able to aggregate even the beginnings of an imperialist bloc. Moreover, the United States is weakened politically by the growing divisions between the Republicans and Democrats – with the Republican leader quickly confirming, before and after his re-election, his ineptitude not only as a commander on the world stage but as an organiser of even the country's most basic affairs. An example of the “subtlety” of his character is his threat to annex Greenland even though the United States already exerts effective control of the territory through its military base in the north.

The fact that the proletariat in its largest concentrations is neither defeated nor ready to be sent off for a Third World War does not contradict, as is clearly demonstrated by the situation in Ukraine and elsewhere, the reality of smaller wars involving even central countries of capitalism.

A product of the decomposition of capitalism, the present global chaos carries with it serious threats to the survival of humanity. Indeed, the gangrene of militarism and war is evident across the world today, from the Baltic Sea to the Red, and from East Asia to the Sahel. The Cold War nightmare of nuclear annihilation is revived in Moscow's threats of nuclear escalation and the possibility of Western troops being sent to the Ukrainian front. We do not face the threat of a Third World War, but of the proliferation of multiple wars intensifying in an uncontrolled manner, in Ukraine and throughout the world. Three years after the beginning of Russia's “special operation” in Ukraine, a decisive conclusion seems as far away as ever – with only a bloody and destructive stalemate, governed by an unrelenting scorched earth policy, prevailing.

A war of decomposition which can only bring death and destruction to the belligerents

During the global expansion of capitalism in the 19th century war could be a means of consolidating capitalist nations, as was the case for Germany during the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, or of contributing by force to the expansion of the world market, as in the case of the colonial wars which opened up new markets for the most developed nations and thus promoted the development of productive forces. In

the 20th century, these wars gave way to colossal imperialist confrontations for the redivision of the world, with the First World War in 1914 marking the entry of capitalism into its phase of decadence. In decadence, permanent war between the various imperialist rivals has lost all economic rationality, becoming capitalism's way of life. The horror and destruction of the First World War was repeated and amplified in the Second, with each rival imperialism seeking to secure their global geostrategic position through alliances behind one or another imperialist leader: “*Faced with a total economic impasse, with the failure of the most brutal economic ‘remedies’, the only choice open to the bourgeoisie is that of a forward flight with other means – themselves increasingly illusory – which can only be military means.*”¹ Such has been the evolution of war over the last two centuries.

But with the fall of the USSR the discipline of the imperialist blocs established after the last world war has been broken. We are now witnessing a rivalry of each against all, with each power seeking to assert their interests at the expense of all others, whatever the cost. Endless wars are being waged (Libya, Syria, Sahel, Ukraine, Middle East), bringing only massacres and economic devastation and ecological destruction. The current massacre in Gaza, a city now in ruins and with much of its population exterminated, is a blatant example of this, as is the war in Ukraine. A scorched earth policy prevails and “*Après moi le déluge.*”²

1. “War, militarism and imperialist blocs in the decadence of capitalism”, Part 2, *International Review* n° 53.

2. Although the origin of this expression is uncertain, the phrase is associated with Louis XV who, aware

of the mediocre political legacy he was leaving to his successor, did not care, so that the phrase is interpreted as “whatever happens, even if it's the end of the world, I don't care”.

Putin launched his “special operation” in Ukraine in 2022 – after occupying Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014 – in an attempt to preserve Russia's status as a global imperialist power against the encroachment of NATO to its very doorstep, with Ukrainian integration threatened next, following Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1999 and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 2004.

In order to entice Russia into a war that could bring its already fragile economy and military power to its knees, thus neutralising its imperialist pretensions as a potential ally of China – the United States' main global adversary – the Biden administration had made it clear that there would be no possibility of American troops being deployed to defend Ukrainian land. In his farewell speech on January 13th to the State Department, Joe Biden gave himself a pat on the back for this trap set for Russia: “*compared to four years ago [...] our adversaries and competitors are weaker [...] Iran, Russia, China and North Korea are now collaborating; this more a sign of weakness than strength.*”³

And indeed, Russia's position has been considerably weakened by the war – a blatant refutation of the outlandish theories according to which the protagonists of the war can all benefit from possible “win-win” effects: unrealistic imperialist expansion, a better geostrategic position, economic gains, control of energy sources... none of this can be found in the smoking ruins of eastern Ukraine for either party.

On the borders of the former USSR, there are other signs of Russia's loss of influence over its “satellites”. In Georgia, which has been a candidate for admission to the European Union since 2022, the victory of the pro-Russian Georgian Dream party (sic) was denounced as a fraud and triggered a Georgiamaidan (modelled on the Ukrainian Euromaidan in 2014) against Russia's attempt to regain influence in the country. Of similar significance are the demonstrations against Russian investments in the Georgian breakaway region of Abkhazia, culminating in the storming of the region's parliament.⁴ These retreats

3. Extract from *Le Monde*, 15 January 2025.

4. “*Even long-time Russian satellites have become a headache for Putin. Take the small but spectacular case of Abkhazia, the breakaway region of Georgia:*

in the Caucasus region are compounded by Armenia's withdrawal from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in favour of an agreement with rival Azerbaijan – which has recently been cooled by the “collateral damage” of the shooting down of a civilian airliner by Russian missiles.⁵

But the weakening of Russia's geostrategic position has also led to an expansion of imperialist war thousands of kilometres away from Ukraine, in Syria. Moscow was, along with Hezbollah and Iran, the main supporter of the terrorist Assad regime which, in return, supported Russian intervention in Africa⁶ and allowed the establishment of air and naval bases in Syria – granting important access to the Mediterranean. But Russia was forced to abandon its support for the Assad regime – in Trump's words “because the Russians were too weak and too overwhelmed to help the regime in Syria because ‘they are too busy with Ukraine’”.⁷ Such a decline in the authority of the imperialist godfather, even if Russia can maintain its military bases in Syria or negotiate new relations with Libya, will certainly have an impact on the Kremlin's credibility with the African states it is trying to win over.

Russia is currently spending around 145 billion dollars on defence, the highest figure since the collapse of the USSR. In 2025 this expenditure is expected to increase by 25% to 6% of GDP. War already accounts for a third of the Russian state budget. Putin boasts about his arsenal and missiles – challenging the United States with the launch of a new hypersonic missile, the “Orech-nik” – and never misses an opportunity to

*in November, faced with a plan that would have given Russia even greater influence over their economy, Abkhazians stormed their parliament and brought down their government.” “The Cold War Putin Wants”, Andrei Kolesnikov, in *Foreign Affairs* 23 January 2025.*

5. “Armenia, once Russia's ‘strategic partner’ in the Caucasus – a country that was under Moscow's protection and strongly dependent on Russia in several economic sectors – has been forsaken in the ashes of its recent war with Azerbaijan: in the fall of 2023, Russia could do little more than stand out of the way, as well-armed Azerbaijani forces seized the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and, seemingly overnight, expelled more than 100,000 Armenian Karabakhis. Now, Armenia is concluding a Charter of Strategic Partnership with the United States and seeking to join the European Union.” “The Cold War Putin Wants, Andrei Kolesnikov”, in *Foreign Affairs* 23 January 2025.

6. “Russia provided [...] material and diplomatic support that enabled military officers to seize power by force in Mali in 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022, and Niger in 2023 [...] it also sends weapons to Sudan, prolonging the country's civil war and the resulting humanitarian crisis, and has provided support to the Houthi militias in Yemen”. “Putin's Point of No Return”, Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Michael Kofman, in *Foreign Affairs*, 18 December 2024.

7. “America Needs a Maximum Pressure Strategy in Ukraine”, Alina Polyakova, in *Foreign Affairs*, 31 December 2024.

remind people of his stockpile of nuclear weapons, which has led to speculation that he could use them as a deterrent by dropping an atomic bomb in the Black Sea. Such threats reflect the embarrassments of Russian conventional military power. It is estimated that the Kremlin has already used 50% of its military capacity in the war in Ukraine without having achieved any of its objectives. Furthermore, “most of the equipment Russia is sending to the front comes from Cold War arsenals, which, although large, have been considerably reduced.”⁸ And much of this equipment requires Western technology.

One of Russia's main problems is recruiting cannon fodder from the population, a difficulty Ukraine is facing as well for that matter. Reports indicate a daily loss of 1,500 soldiers on the front line for the Russian army. Putin has even had to call on more than 10,000 North Korean soldiers. While in Moscow and other major Russian cities the war initially went unnoticed, their inhabitants now live in fear of drone strikes and forced conscription.

Russia's economic situation

The war in Ukraine has certainly led to an increase in production and low unemployment rates. But the war economy is consuming the resources of the entire country and already amounts to twice what is allocated for social spending. However, insofar as the purpose of war production is destruction, i.e. the sterilisation of capital that cannot be reinvested or reused, the apparent economic advantages do not pull up the economy as a whole, but rather plunge it further into crisis.

In fact, for this year, growth forecasts are barely 0.5 to 1.5%, close to recession, leaving the population facing bleak economic prospects: “The civil economy is faltering. The construction sector is a case in point: due to falling demand and soaring costs (the price of building materials rose by 64% between 2021 and 2024), the pace of new housing construction has slowed considerably. Other sectors in difficulty include freight transport, exacerbated by the slowdown in the rail network; road transport, with rising fuel prices and a shortage of drivers; mineral extraction; and agriculture, once the pride of Mr Putin's government. Overall, exports are no longer a source of growth. Domestic consumption continues, but the outlook is clouded by rising prices. Officially, inflation in Russia in 2024 stood at 9.52%.”⁹

8. “Ukraine's Security Now Depends on Europe”, Elie Tenenbaum and Leo Litra, *Foreign Affairs*, 3 December 2024

9. “95% of all foreign components found in Russian weapons on the Ukrainian battlefield come from

And none of this can be compensated for by any supposed economic gain from the occupation of eastern Ukraine. First of all, the country has no great wealth to offer. The “crown jewels” of the Ukrainian economy – notably electricity production, agriculture, rare earth deposits and tourism – have been destroyed by the war: “Even if the war ended tomorrow, it would take years to repair the damage and return to pre-war levels”,¹⁰ say the thermal power plant engineers themselves. The bombing of nuclear power stations nearly caused a catastrophe more devastating than Chernobyl and demonstrated the precarious state of the plants. As for the soil, when it is not directly littered with mines or flooded by the destruction of dams, it is highly polluted¹¹ – with the same being true of the Black Sea.

A destructive war that can only lead to ruin for the contending parties, and massacres for the population

Despite the prospect of a truce announced by the new Trump administration, the war can only continue and worsen. Between the 2014 occupation of Crimea and the 2022 launch of the Russian invasion, there have been hundreds of negotiations and ceasefire agreements without any break in the spiral of irrational destruction. Russia itself is threatening to collapse in the long term. Moreover, for Putin, ending the war without having won it would mean his own end and a country plunged into chaos, just as continuing it means only more ruin and death. The same applies for Zelensky and the Ukrainian ruling class. Faced with the threat of the country being divided between Russia and Poland/Hungary, the war is for them a necessity of survival, even while its continuation means the desertification and depopulation of the country.

In Ukraine the war has had devastating consequences,¹² leading to an exhausted economy weighed down with heavy military spending. It survives almost entirely thanks to Western financial and military aid. A dependency paid for with increasing hardship for a demoralised and exhausted population (there have been more than 100,000 desertions according to Zelensky, with as many as 400,000 according to Trump) which is asked to make more and more sacrifices every year. In April

*Western countries”, “The Russian Economy Remains the Putin's Greatest Weakness”, Theodore Bunzel and Elina Ribakova, *Foreign Affairs*, 9 December 2024.*

10. See the articles in *International Review* n°s 171 and 172.

11. See the article in *International Review* n° 172.

12. See “Report on imperialist tensions”, *International Review* n° 170.

2024 the Ukrainian army lowered the age for forced conscription from 27 to 25 and when Zelensky appealed to the “solidarity” of Western democracies to better arm his troops, they demanded (statements by Rutte, NATO Secretary General, or US Secretary of State Blinken) that he lower the conscription age to 18. Blood for steel!

But the implications of this war go beyond the two immediate belligerents.

The war in Ukraine is stimulating militarism and chaos in the countries of the European Union

The ultimate motivation for the Ukrainian trap, as we have seen, lies in the confrontation between the United States and China. But it has also created complications for the European “allies” of the United States. With a major military conflict on their doorstep, NATO countries were temporarily drawn behind the American godfather – but also into infighting amongst themselves.

Germany first and foremost, reluctantly drawn into a common front with the Americans, has suffered the full brunt of the war even without being a direct belligerent. It has been forced to rebuild its diplomacy after decades of “Ostpolitik” (opening up to the East) not only with Russia but also with Hungary, Slovakia and others who it pampered economically in its imperialist expansion following German reunification in 1990, and which today support Putin’s regime.¹³ The war in Ukraine has had disastrous consequences for the German economy, with a rise in energy supply costs weakening its industrial competitiveness, deepening its recession, triggering inflation and exacerbating social discontent. But above all, Germany has been burdened by the direct costs of the war. Germany took the lion’s share of the financial aid provided by the European institutions to the Zelensky regime – making the second largest contribution in terms of military aid.¹⁴ And it did so reluctantly, as evidenced by the tensions within, and the eventual collapse of, the coalition government when Chancellor Scholz abandoned his plan to reduce military aid from €7.5 billion to €4 billion by 2025.

And despite all this waste in a war that is a veritable abyss, the fact remains that Germany is unable to strengthen its imperialist position. Indeed, while the conflict in Ukraine has reinforced its image as a major economic power (it is still the world’s fourth largest economy), it remains a real

military dwarf. The German bourgeoisie is struggling to react to this situation. Just three days after Russian troops entered Ukraine in February 2022, Chancellor Scholz announced a special €100 billion fund for defence spending in parliament, in what the politicians themselves called “the turning point”. Since then, he has embarked on a frantic race to develop Germany’s own armaments industry and draw up strategic plans that would enable German troops “not to limit themselves to national defence, but to be operational [...] in any scenario, in any part of the world.”¹⁵

The strengthening of German militarism is a clear expression of the development of “every man for himself” – one of the main characteristics of capitalist decomposition – following the dislocation of the frameworks which had maintained discipline following the Second World War. Faced with the war in Ukraine, Germany and France are apparently on the same side but ultimately have contradictory interests. Even Macron, who tried at the beginning of the war to maintain a special channel of communication with Putin, chose to be among the first to offer the possibility of using Ukrainian missiles on Russian territory, and to send French soldiers to the frontline in the event of a “ceasefire”. This is what Macron proposed to Zelensky and Trump at the recent summit under the blessed domes of Notre-Dame. Along with the UK, the Nordic and Baltic countries, France is among the most intransigent on the conditions to be imposed on Putin for “peace”.

This rise in militarism is affecting every country, from the smallest to the largest, and it will be accelerated by the intensification of imperialist chaos. Trump’s call for NATO countries to increase their defence budgets to 5% of GDP is hardly original – in fact, they have already increased defence spending significantly since the Wales summit in 2014.¹⁶ The NATO Secretary General has stated that “*They think strong defence is not the way to peace. Well, they are wrong.*”¹⁷ And the next NATO summit, to be held in The Hague in June, is expected to raise the target to 3%.

The “danger” of the Russian bear, which has shown all its clumsiness and weakness in the war against Ukraine, is inspiring increased arms expenditure amongst its neighbours, even while a re-

cent Greenpeace study shows that NATO countries, excluding the United States,¹⁸ already spend, between them, almost ten times more on defence than Russia. The trigger for the arms race is precisely the fact that NATO is no longer what it used to be. And this is leading the major powers to be caught in the crossfire: either give in to Trump’s pressure (by increasing the contribution to the NATO budget), or bear the “security” expenses alone. The result: more economic crisis, more conflict, more militarism and more chaos.

The same trend towards fragmentation that can be observed on the imperialist level can also be seen within many states, with the emergence of powerful populist political formations which act against the interests of national capital as a whole. We saw it in Great Britain with Brexit, we see it in Germany with the AfD, and we see it at its peak in the United States with the election of Trump.

And now... Trump

As we have explained in our press, the recently re-elected American president is not an anomaly, but an expression of the historical period:¹⁹ the final stage of decadence, that of capitalist decomposition, characterised by the global tendency towards fragmentation and “every man for himself” within the capitalist class. The expression of this tendency towards dislocation is seen in the decline of American leadership, a consequence of the disappearance of the discipline of the imperialist blocs that had “ordered” the world following the Second World War.

Faced with the decline of its hegemony, the United States has attempted to react²⁰ with the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now, as we can see, indirectly with the war in Ukraine. But these attempts to “reorganise” the world (in the interests of the United States, of course) have resulted only in more chaos, more indiscipline, more conflict and more bloodshed. By trying to put out the

18. Christopher Steinmetz, Herbert Wulf: “Wann ist genug genug? Ein Vergleich der militärischen Potenziale der Nato und Russlands”. Published by Greenpeace. See also “Think big and do big.” Quoted in *Le Temps de la mentalité de guerre*.

19. See “Trump’s triumph in the United States: A giant step forward in the decomposition of capitalism!”, ICCOnline, November 2024, where we explain why he is also an active factor in the accentuation of this self-destructive process.

20. “*Our primary objective is to prevent the emergence of a new rival*” (Extract from a secret 1992 document of the US Department of Defence attributed to Paul Wolfowitz – neocon Under Secretary of Defence from 2001 to 2005 – published by the *New York Times* and of course denied by all administration officials). In “La géopolitique de Donald Trump”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2025.

13. Ibid.

14. By February 2024, the United States had provided 43 billion euros and Germany 10 billion (twice as much as Great Britain and almost four times as much as France).

15. Speech by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte on 12 December to the heads of the NATO Military Committee.

16. The very “pacifist” Spanish government has increased its military budget by 67% over the last decade.

17. “‘To prevent war, NATO must spend more’: A conversation with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte.” carnegieendowment.org 12.12.2024.

fires of protest from its rivals, the United States has in fact become the primary and most prolific of the pyromaniacs. This has not prevented the United States from losing its authority, as evidenced by the recent situation in the Middle East, where powers such as Israel or Turkey (the latter also being one of NATO's most powerful members) are playing their own cards in Palestine and Syria.

Trump is not of a different nature to Biden and Obama. His core strategic objective is the same: to prevent the rise of China, the main challenger to American hegemony.²¹ Where there are divisions within the American bourgeoisie is on how to handle the war in Ukraine. Biden chose to invest a lot of resources in economically and militarily exhausting Russia, thus depriving China of a potential strategic ally, both in terms of military capacity and geographical extension. On the other hand, Trump does not see the mutual collapse of Russia and Ukraine as strengthening the position of the United States in the world, but rather as a source of destabilisation that diverts American economic and military resources from the main confrontation with China.

That is why he boasted for months that he would end the war in Ukraine the day after his inauguration. Of course, he never went into specifics on how he would go about it. But what is clear is that any peace plan would in reality only plant the seeds for new and more deadly wars. Even an immediate "freeze" of the conflict would be perceived by the belligerents as an unacceptable humiliation. Russia would have to give up part of Donbass and Odessa. Ukraine would have to accept the ruin of its economy and the loss of territories, without any compensation and with no guarantees that hostilities would not soon resume.

More than a desire for peace, it is the imperialist interests in each nation that prevail. Russia refuses to accept any plan involving Ukrainian integration into NATO. Zelensky, for his part, is calling for a "peacekeeping force" of 200,000 men on the line of contact. But recent experiences of "peacekeeping forces" in the Sahel countries (where France, the United States and Spain ended up giving way to the pressure of the guerrillas armed by the Russians) or in Lebanon (where UNIFIL simply looked the other way in the face of the Israeli invasion), show precisely that the mythology of "blue helmets" as guarantors of peace agreements belongs to a past of discipline and "order" in international relations which has been rendered obsolete by the advance of capitalist decomposition.

21. See "Report on imperialist tensions", *International Review* n° 170.

In reality, what the United States is planning to do is to drag its NATO allies, and especially the European countries, into the Ukrainian quagmire²² under the protection, in the most gangster sense of the term, of the technological resources and authority of the US army. The current wars offer no perspective of the establishment of strong coalitions behind one or another belligerent which could make it possible to avoid the prospect of new conflicts. On the contrary, they are wars of irreconcilable positions that generate new conflicts, new scenarios of chaos and massacre.

Capitalism is incapable of stopping war. Only world revolution offers an alternative for humanity

The scenario towards which we are headed is neither one of peace nor World War III. The future that capitalism offers us is generalised chaos, the proliferation of tensions and conflicts on every continent. Militarism and war are increasingly encroaching on all spheres of social life – from trade wars of economic blackmail, to disinformation warfare in cyberspace, to devastation which is being wrought upon the natural world, and above all to the increasing attacks on the living conditions of the population, especially the proletariat in the large concentrations of Europe and America, in order to feed the war machine. When the illustrious Mark Rutte was asked where he intended to find the billions of euros needed to increase military spending, his answer could not have been more arrogant and explicit: "*The aim is to prepare the population for cuts to pensions, healthcare and social systems in order to increase the defence budget to 3% of the GDP of each country.*"²³

The main victim of this whirlwind of

22. "*The European coalition's military deployment would require a major land component of at least four or five multinational combat brigades combined under a permanent command structure. The troops would be stationed in eastern Ukraine and would need to be combat-ready, mobile and adaptable to Ukrainian conditions. A strong air component including combat air patrols, airborne radar to detect aircraft or missiles, ground-based air defences and rapid reaction capabilities would be needed to prevent Russian bombing and air raids. Some of these systems could be operated from air bases outside Ukraine. Finally, a maritime component could help secure overseas lines of communication, but under the Montreux Convention, which governs passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, Turkey would first have to allow a limited number of Western warships into the Black Sea.*" ("Ukraine's security now depends on Europe", Elie Tenenbaum and Leo Litra in *Foreign Affairs*, 3 December 2024). In other words, Russia's occupation of Donbas would ultimately have led to an occupation by European countries... By NATO.

23. "The time of the war mentality" on <https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/fr/news/detail/9801>.

chaos, wars, militarism, environmental disasters and disease is the global working class. As the main supplier of cannon fodder for the armies of the countries directly at war, but also as the main victim of the sacrifices, austerity and misery demanded by the maintenance of militarism. In the article we published on the second anniversary of the war in Ukraine,²⁴ we emphasised: "*The bourgeoisie has demanded enormous sacrifices to fuel the war machine in Ukraine. In the face of the crisis and despite the propaganda, the proletariat rose up against the economic consequences of this conflict, against inflation and austerity. Admittedly, the working class still finds it difficult to make the link between militarism and the economic crisis, but it has indeed refused to make sacrifices: in the United Kingdom with a year of mobilisations, in France against pension reform, in the United States against inflation and job insecurity.*"

This climate of resistance in the face of the progressive deterioration of living conditions continues to express itself, as we have seen recently in the strikes in Canada, the United States, Italy and more recently in Belgium,²⁵ where resistance to cuts was expressed even before the implementation of the new austerity plans. Of course, this break with the passivity of previous years does not imply that the proletariat as a whole has become aware of the link between the deterioration of its living conditions and war, or of its ability to prevent the ruin towards which capitalism is inexorably drawing humanity.

It is also true that, at the level of the numerically very small but politically very important minorities, reflection is developing on the prospects that capitalism can offer and on the development of a revolutionary alternative by the proletariat. We have already seen this in – despite all its limitations – the Prague Week of Action.²⁶ But we also see it, for example, in the frank and fruitful debates that are taking place in our public meetings, which are seeing growing levels of participation. It is with the weapons of its struggle, its unity and its consciousness that the proletariat can bring down capitalism. Today, we are certainly witnessing capitalism move further along its path towards destruction – but we can also see a slow and difficult development towards that other future, that of revolution.

Hic Rhodes/Valerio. 30.01.2025

24. See "After Ukraine, the Middle East: capitalism's only future is barbarism and chaos!", *World Revolution* n° 399.

25. See "Prague Action Week: Some lessons, and some replies to slander", ICOnline.

26. See "An international debate to understand the global situation and prepare for the future", ICOnline.

The historical roots of the “rupture” in the dynamics of the class struggle since 2022

The ICC maintains that the wave of strikes in the UK in 2022 marked the beginning of a “rupture” or break with several decades of resignation and apathy and a growing loss of class identity. It was the first of a number of working class movements around the world, primarily in response to worsening living standards and working conditions.¹

This analysis is based on two factors developed respectively in the following two parts:

- the subterranean maturation of class consciousness;
- the fact that the proletariat remains undefeated, namely, that it has not suffered a major defeat, comparable to the one it experienced with the failure of the revolutionary wave of 1917-23.

In a third part we will show that the present dynamic of the class struggle, while having as a principal basis the unleashing of economic attacks by the bourgeoisie, is also fuelled by the struggle itself. Here we draw support from an article by Lenin on the strikes which shook Russia at the end of the 19th century.

The question of “subterranean maturation”

Crucial to our analysis of a new phase in the international class struggle are two fundamental observations:

- This new phase was not merely a reaction to immediate attacks on workers’ conditions, one that could be measured in terms of the number of strikes and struggles at a particular moment, but has a more profound historical dimension. It is the fruit of a long process of the “subterranean maturation” of class consciousness which has been moving forward despite the enormous pressures exerted by the accelerating decomposition of capitalist society.
- This rupture, radiating outwards from the oldest centres of world capitalism, is a confirmation that the principal bastions of the proletariat remain historically undefeated since the initial revival of the class struggle in 1968, and retain the potential to advance from economic defensive struggles to a political and practical critique of the entire capitalist order.

These arguments have met with a rather widespread scepticism in the proletarian political camp. If we take the example of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), although they initially acknowledged and welcomed some of the struggles that came to the surface after 2022, we have criticised the fact that they failed to see the international and historic significance of this movement,² and more recently, seem to

have either forgotten about it (as evidenced in the lack of any published balance sheet of the movement) or have written it off as just another flash in the pan – as we noted in some of their recent public meetings. Meanwhile, a parasitic website dedicated to “research”, *Controverses*, has devoted a full article³ to refuting our notion of the rupture, thus providing a “theoretical” justification for the scepticism of others.

It is noteworthy that the author of this article has now lined up with the majority of those who are (or merely claim to be) part of the left communist tradition, and now dismisses the very concept of subterranean maturation. Not only that: in an article on the main developments in the class struggle in the last 200 years,⁴ he embraces the idea that we are still living in the counter-revolution which descended on the working class with the defeat of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave. In this view, what the ICC insists was the historical reawakening of the world proletariat after 1968 and the end of the counter-revolution, was at best a mere “parenthesis” in a global chronicle of defeat.

This view is broadly shared by the various Bordigist groups and the ICT, whose forerunners saw little more in the events of May-June 68 in France or the “Hot Autumn” in Italy the year after than a rash of student unrest.

In the next two articles, rather than entering into detail about the struggles of the last two years, we want to focus on two key theoretical planks for understanding our notion of the rupture: first, the reality of the

subterranean maturation of consciousness, and secondly the undefeated nature of the world proletariat.

The marxist basis of the concept of subterranean maturation

Let’s briefly recall the circumstances in which the ICC first took up the question of subterranean maturation in its own ranks. In 1984, in response to an analysis of the class struggle which revealed a serious concession to the idea that class consciousness can only develop through the open, massive struggle of the workers, and in particular a text which explicitly rejected the notion of subterranean maturation, our comrade Marc Chirik wrote a text whose arguments were affirmed by the majority of the organisation, with the exception of the group which was eventually to desert the ICC at its 6th Congress and form the “External Fraction of the ICC” (its descendants are now part of *Internationalist Perspective*).⁵ Marc pointed out that such a view tends towards councilism because it sees consciousness not as an active factor in the struggle but purely as something determined by objective circumstances – a form of vulgar materialism; and it thus severely underestimated the role of minorities who are able to deepen class consciousness even during phases where the extent of class consciousness across the proletariat may have diminished. This councilist approach evidently has little use for an organisation of revolutionaries which is able, because it is based on the historic acquisitions of the class struggle, to steer its course through phases of retreat or defeat in the wider

1. See in particular “The return of the combativity of the world proletariat”, *International Review* n° 69 and “After the rupture in the class struggle, the necessity for politicisation”, *International Review* n° 171.

2. “The ICT’s ambiguities about the historical significance of the strike wave in the UK”, *World Revolution* n° 396.

3. “ICC : A new ‘Historic Rupture’ in the Class Struggle since 2022?”

4. “1825-2025 - Two centuries of class struggle”.

5. See our article “The ‘External Fraction’ of the ICC” in *International Review* n° 45.

class movement; but it also dismisses the more general tendency within the class to reflect on its experience, to discuss, to pose questions about the major themes of the dominant ideology, and so on. Such a process may indeed be called “subterranean” because it takes place in restricted circles of the class or even inside the minds of individual workers who may give voice to all kinds of contradictory ideas, but it is no less a reality for all that. As Marx wrote in *Capital*,⁶ “*All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided*”: it is in fact a specific task of the marxist minority to see beyond appearances and try to discern the deeper developments going on within their class.

When the ICC published documents relating to this internal debate, the Communist Workers Organisation welcomed what it perceived as an attempt by the ICC to settle accounts with the councilist residues which still had a weight within the organisation.⁷ But in the substantive issued raised by the debate, it actually sided, somewhat ironically, with the councilist view, since they too rejected the notion of subterranean maturation as non-marxist, as a form of “political Jungianism”.⁸ We say ironically because at that stage the CWO had embraced a version of class consciousness being brought to the class from the “outside” by “the party”, constituted by elements of the bourgeois intelligentsia – the idealist thesis of Kautsky which Lenin adopted in *What is to be Done* but later admitted “*bent the stick too far*” in a polemic with the proto-councilists of his day, the Economist trend in Russia. But the irony dissipates when we consider that vulgar materialism and idealism can often exist side by side.⁹ For both councilists and the CWO in their article, once the open struggles dies down, the class is no more than a mass of atomised individuals. The only difference is that for the CWO, this sterile cycle could only be broken through the intervention of the party.

In our reply,¹⁰ we insisted that the no-

6. *Capital* Volume 3, part VII, chapter 48.

7. In *Workers Voice* n° 20, second series.

8. This was in response to our citing of Rosa Luxemburg’s insistence that “*the unconscious precedes the conscious*” in the development of the class movement, which is actually an application of the marxist formula that being determines consciousness. But this formula can be abused if it does not grasp the dialectical relation between the two: not only is being a process of becoming, in which consciousness evolves out of the unconscious, but consciousness also becomes an active factor in evolutionary and historical advance.

9. Since that time the CWO has ceased defending the Kautskyist thesis, but it is has never openly clarified why it has changed its position.

10. “Reply to the CWO: On the subterranean maturation of consciousness”, *International Review* n° 43.

tion of the subterranean maturation of consciousness was not an innovation of the ICC, but is a direct descendant of Marx’s notion of the revolution as the Old Mole which burrows under the surface for long periods only to burst to the surface in certain given conditions. And in particular we cited a very lucid passage on this process from Trotsky in his masterly study of precisely this process, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, where he wrote: “*In a revolution we look first of all at the direct interference of the masses in the destinies of society. We seek to uncover behind the events changes in the collective consciousness... This can seem puzzling only to one who looks upon the insurrection of the masses as ‘spontaneous’ – that is, as a herd-mutiny artificially made use of by leaders. In reality the mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection, if it were, the masses would always be in revolt... The immediate causes of the events of a revolution are changes in the state of mind of the conflicting classes... Changes in the collective consciousness have naturally a semi-concealed character. Only when they have attained a certain degree of intensity do the new moods and ideas break to the surface in the form of mass activities.*”

By the same token, the international wave of struggles that began in May 1968 in France did not come from nowhere (even if it initially surprised the bourgeoisie who had started to think that the working class had become “embourgeoisified” by the “consumer society”). It was the fruit of a long process of disengagement from bourgeois institutions and ideological themes (such as trade unions and the so-called workers’ parties, the myths of democracy and “real socialism” in the east, etc), accompanied by worsening material conditions (the first signs of a new open economic crisis). This process had also expressed itself here and there in strike movements like the wildcats in the USA and Western Europe in the mid-60s.

The same goes for the rupture of 2022, which also came in the wake of a number of strikes in the US, France, etc, many of which had been interrupted by the Covid lock-down. But what happened after 2022 revealed more clearly what had been gestating within the working class for some years:

– The widespread slogan “*enough is enough*” expressed a long-nurtured feeling that all the promises doled out in the period that followed the “financial crisis” of 2008 – promises that a period of “austerity” was needed before prosperity could be resumed – had proved to be lies, and that it was high time workers began

raising their own demands. It was all the more significant in that the movement in Britain emerged after decades of stagnation and resignation that followed the defeats of the 1980s, in particular the defeat of the miners in 1985.

- The slogans “*we are all in the same boat*” and “*the working class is back*” expressed a tendency for the working class to regain a sense of itself as a class with its own collective existence and distinct interests, despite decades of atomisation imposed by the general decomposition of capitalist society, assisted by the deliberate dismantling of many traditional centres of working class militancy (mines, steel, etc). In the struggles in France against “pension reforms”, and elsewhere, frequent references to the movement in Britain which had “kicked off” the class revival testified to the stirrings of an awareness that this class identity does not stop at national borders, despite the enormous weight of nationalism and populism.
- Again in the movement in France, the slogan “*You give us 64,¹¹ we’ll give you 68*” expressed a definite memory of the significance of the mass strikes of 68 (a phenomenon we had previously noted in the student assemblies in the anti-CPE movement of 2006, where there was a powerful desire to learn from what happened in 68).
- Just as the process of subterranean maturation prior to 1968 was to give birth to a new generation of politicised elements attempting to rediscover the real history of the revolutionary movement (and thus to the recovery of the tradition of the communist left), so in the current period we are seeing the international development of minorities tending towards internationalist and communist positions. The fact that the majority of these elements and their efforts to come together have been engendered less by the immediate class struggle than by the question of war is evidence that the current class movements express something more than concerns about deteriorating living standards. We have noted the importance of the fact that the struggles of the rupture broke out precisely at a moment when the workers of western Europe were being asked to accept living costs and wage freezes in the name of supporting the “defence of Ukraine” against the tyrant Putin. And again, some minorities within the demonstrations against the pension reforms in France were explicit about rejecting sacrifices in the name of building up a war economy.

11. i.e. the proposed new retirement age.

– A further sign of the process of maturation can also be seen in the efforts of the bourgeoisie’s political apparatus to radicalise the messages addressed to the working class. The success of Trumpism in the USA can in large part be attributed to its capacity to take advantage of real concerns of the US working class about rising prices and the effect of military spending on living conditions. And on the opposite wing of the political spectrum we have seen the appointment of more radical union leaders, as in Britain, and a definite move to the left on the part of the Trotskyists, with

groups like Revolution Permanente in France or the Revolutionary Communist Party in Britain shifting their focus from identity politics to talking about communism, internationalism and the necessity for the proletarian revolution – the aim being above all to “mop up” young elements who are asking serious questions about the direction that capitalist society is taken.

We could continue with these examples. They will no doubt be countered by arguments which seek to prove that the working class has actually forgotten more than it

learned from the wave of struggles after 1968 – notably, as demonstrated by the fact that there has been little attempt to challenge the union control of the current strikes and to develop forms of self-organisation. But for us, the broad tendencies initiated by the “break” of 2022 are only at their beginning. Their historic potential can only be understood by seeing them as the first fruits of a long process of germination. We will return to this in the second part of the article.

Amos, January 15, 2025.

The background of an undefeated proletariat

In the first part of this article, our aim was to show that the current revival of class struggle, the “break” or “rupture” with decades of retreat, is not only a response to the dramatic aggravation of the world economic crisis, but has deeper roots in the process we call “the subterranean maturation of consciousness”, a semi-concealed process of reflection, discussion, disillusionment with false promises which breaks out to the surface at certain key moments. The second element which supports the idea that we are witnessing a profound development within the world proletariat is the idea – which, like the notion of subterranean maturation, is more or less unique to the ICC – that the main battalions of the working class have not suffered a historical defeat comparable to the one it experienced with the failure of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave. And this despite the growing difficulties posed to the class in the terminal phase of capitalist decadence, the phase of decomposition.

Our rejection of what is without doubt a central plank of the dominant ideology – according to which, any idea that working class can offer a historic alternative to capitalism is totally obsolete and discredited – is based on the marxist method, and in particular the method developed by the Italian and French Communist Left during the 1930s and 40s. In 1933, the year that Nazism came to power in Germany, the Italian Left in exile began publishing its review *Bilan* – so named because it understood that its central task was to carry out a serious “balance sheet” of the defeat of the revolutionary wave and the victory of the counter-revolution. This meant questioning the erroneous assumptions that had led to the opportunist degeneration of the Communist Parties, and developing the programmatic and organisational bases for the new parties that would arise in a pre-revolutionary situation. The tasks of the hour were thus the tasks of a fraction, in opposition to the current around Trotsky which was perpetually looking to the formation of a new International on the same opportunist foundations that had led to the demise of the Third International. And part of the quest to develop the programme of the future on the foundations of the lessons of the past, meant *not to betray* fundamental internationalist principles faced with the enormous pressures of the counter-revolution, which now had a free hand to march the working class towards a new world war. It was thus able to resist the call to line up

behind the “anti-fascist” wing of the ruling class in the war in Spain (1936-39) and to reject calls to support “oppressed nations” in the imperialist conflicts in China, Ethiopia, and elsewhere; conflicts which, like the war in Spain, were so many stepping stones to the new world war.

The Italian Communist Left was not invulnerable to the pressure of the dominant ideology. Towards the end of the 30s, it was gripped by the revisionist theory of the war economy, which argued that the conflicts which were in fact laying the ground work for a new imperialist carve-up were instead aimed at preventing the danger of a new revolutionary outbreak. This false argument resulted in the total disorientation of the majority of the Italian Fraction when the imperialist war actually broke out; while towards the end of the war, without any serious reflection on the global situation of proletariat, the revival of class movements in Italy led to a rush to proclaim a new party in Italy alone (the Partito Comunista Internazionale), and this on a deeply opportunist basis that brought together very heterogeneous elements without a clear process of programmatic clarification.

Faced with this slide into opportunism, the comrades who were to form the Gauche Communiste de France were able to understand that the counter-revolution still held sway – above all after the bourgeoisie had shown its ability to crush the pockets

of proletarian resistance which appeared at the end of the war; and thus the GCF severely criticised the opportunist mistakes of the PCInt (ambiguities about the partisan groups in Italy, participation in bourgeois elections, etc). For the GCF, the question of whether the proletariat was still suffering from a profound defeat, or whether it was recovering its class autonomy in massive struggles, was a decisive element in the way they grasped their role.

The end of the counter-revolution

The “tradition” of the GCF – which broke up in 1952, the same year as the PCInt split into its “Bordigist” and “Damenist” wings – was taken up by the group Internacionalismo in Venezuela, animated by Mark Chirik, who had fought against revisionism in the Italian Fraction and had been a founder member of the GCF. Already in 1967, perceiving the first signs of a return of the open economic crisis, and of a certain number of workers’ struggles in various countries, Internacionalismo predicted a new period of class struggles: the end of the counter-revolution and the opening of a new historic course.¹ And their prediction was soon confirmed by

1. Initially the ICC defined this new historic course as a course towards revolution, but by the middle of the 1980s it had adopted the formula “course towards massive class confrontations” since there could be no automatic trajectory towards a revolutionary outcome of the capitalist crisis.

the events of May-June 1968 in France, followed by a whole series of massive class movements around the world, movements which demonstrated a tendency to break from the established organs of control over the class (left parties and unions) and also revealed a definite political dimension which nourished the appearance of a new generation of young people seeking for class positions and showed the potential for the regroupment of revolutionary forces on an international scale.

This *rupture* with the counter-revolution was no mere flash in the pan. It created an underlying historical situation which has not been erased, even if it has passed through various stages and many difficulties. Between 1968 and 1989, we saw three major international waves of class struggle in which some significant advances were made at the level of understanding the methods of struggle, illustrated in particular by the mass strikes in Poland in 1980, which gave rise to independent forms of class organisation at the level of an entire country. And the impact of these movements was not only felt through open and massive struggles but through the increased social weight of the proletariat in the relationship between the classes. In contrast to the 1930s, this balance of forces in the eighties acted as barrier to the preparations for a third world war, which had been put back on the agenda by the return of the open economic crisis and the existence of ready-formed imperialist blocs disputing for global hegemony.

The impact of decomposition

But if the ruling class found the road to world war blocked, this didn't mean that the bourgeoisie was no longer on the offensive, that it had been disarmed in the face of the working class. The 1980s saw a realignment of bourgeois political forces, characterised by governments of the right launching brutal attacks on workers' jobs and wages, while the left in opposition was there to channel, control and derail the reactions to these attacks by the working class. This capitalist counter-offensive inflicted a number of important defeats on sectors of the working class in the main capitalist centres, perhaps most notably the miners in Britain: the crushing of their resistance to the more or less complete closure of the coal industry served to open the door to a wider policy of de-industrialisation and "relocation" which broke up some of the main centres of working class militancy. Still the class struggle continued in the period 1983-88, in particular with important movements in Belgium, France and Italy in 1986-7, and there was no head-on defeat of the key battalions of the proletariat such as we

had seen in the 1920s and 30s. But neither were the struggles of the 80s able to rise to the political level demanded by the gravity of the world situation, and thus we arrived at the "stalemate" which precipitated the process of capitalist decomposition. The collapse of the eastern bloc in 1989-91 marked a whole new phase in decadence, bringing with it enormous difficulties for the class. The deafening ideological campaigns about the victory of capitalism and the so-called death of communism, the atomisation and despair that were severely exacerbated by the decomposition of society, and the bourgeoisie's conscious dismantling of traditional industrial centres with the aim of breaking these old hubs of workers' resistance - all this combined to erode the class identity of the proletariat, its sense of being a distinct force in society with its own interests to defend.

In this new phase of the decadence of capitalism, the notion of a historic course was no longer valid, even if the ICC took a long time to fully grasp this.² But already in our "Theses on Decomposition" in 1990 we had understood that the advancing putrefaction of capitalism could overwhelm the proletariat even without a frontal defeat, since the continuation of its defensive struggles, which had barred the road to world war, was not sufficient to halt the threat of the destruction of humanity through a combination of local wars, ecological disasters and the break-up of social bonds.

Although the decades that followed the collapse of the eastern bloc can be described as one of retreat by the working class, this did not mean a complete disappearance of the class struggle. Thus, for example, we saw a new generation of proletarians engage in significant movements like the struggle against the CPE in France in 2006 and the Indignados movement in Spain 2011. But although these struggles gave rise to genuine forms of self-organisation (general assemblies) and acted as a focus for serious debate about the future of society, their fundamental weakness was that a majority of those involved in them didn't see themselves as part of the working class but rather as "citizens" fighting for their rights, and thus vulnerable to various "democratic" political mystifications.

This underlines the significance of the new rupture of 2022, which began with the widespread strikes in Britain, since it heralds the return of the class as a class, i.e. the beginnings of a recovery of class identity. Some argue that these strikes were actually a step back from previous movements such as the Indignados, since they have shown little sign of giving rise to

2. "Report on the question of the historic course", *International Review* n° 164.

general assemblies or directly stimulating political debate about wider issues. But this is to ignore the fact that after so many years of passivity, "the first victory of the struggle is the struggle itself": the fact that the proletariat is not lying down in the face of a continuing erosion of its conditions, and begins once again to see itself as a class. The "Theses on Decomposition" insisted that, rather than the more direct expressions of decomposition such as climate change or the gangsterisation of society, it would be the deepening of the economic crisis that provided the best conditions for the revival of class combats; the movements we have seen since 2022 have already confirmed this, and we are heading for a situation in which the economic crisis will be the worst in capitalism's history, exacerbated not only by the central economic contradictions of capital (overproduction and the falling rate of profit) but also by the growth of militarism, the spread of ecological catastrophes and the increasingly irrational policies of the ruling class.

In particular, the increasingly overt attempt to impose a war economy in the central countries of capitalism will be a vital issue in the politicisation of workers' resistance. This has already been presaged by two important developments: first, the fact that the 2022 breakthrough took place precisely at a point in which the outbreak of the war in Ukraine was accompanied by big campaigns about the need to support Ukraine and to prepare for sacrifices in order to resist future Russian aggression; second, the development of minorities politicised by the threat of war and looking for an internationalist response. These reactions on the question of war do not come from out of the blue: they are further evidence that the new phase of the class struggle draws its historic strength from the reality of an undefeated proletariat.

We repeat: the danger of decomposition overwhelming the proletariat has not gone away, and indeed grows as the "whirlwind effect" of interacting capitalist disasters gains pace, piling destruction upon destruction. But the struggles after 2022 show that the class can still respond and that there are two poles in the situation, a kind of race against time³ between the acceleration of decomposition and the development of the class struggle onto a higher level; a development in which all the questions raised by decomposition can be integrated

3. This idea of the "two poles" should not be confused with the idea of a "parallel course between world war and world revolution" which some groups of the proletarian political milieu have defended, since as *Bilan* explained a course towards world war demands a defeated proletariat and thus excludes the possibility of world revolution. For a polemic with *Battaglia Comunista* on this question, see "The Historic Course" in *International Review* n° 18.

into a communist project which can offer a way out of economic crisis, perpetual war, the destruction of nature and the rotting of

social life. The more clearly revolutionary organisations of today understand what is at stake in the present world situation, the

more effectively they will be able to play their role of elaborating this perspective for the future.

Amos

On strikes (V.I. Lenin)

At the end of 1899, Lenin wrote an article entitled “On Strikes”, relating to the strikes that were developing at the time in Russia.¹ Although more than a century has passed since this article was written, making it inevitable that some of the ideas it contains are outdated or redundant due to historical development, others not only retain their full validity but are also of definite interest considering the potential dynamic of the class struggle in the current period. This is particularly the case for the part of the article that replies to the question “What is the role of strikes?” which we are reproducing below.

Why is this text by Lenin of interest in the current period?

The strikes of the late 1890s mentioned by Lenin were part of a dynamic of struggle in Russia and Europe that would lead to the mass strike of 1905 in Russia with the emergence of the soviets. For Russia alone, the following are recorded particularly for this period: *the general strike of the textile workers of Saint Petersburg in 1896 and 1897; the Batoum strike in the Caucasus in March 1902; the massive general strike in December 1904 in the Caucasus, in Baku.*

Lenin’s text highlights the following characteristics of these struggles, which can largely be transposed politically to the current period:

- it is the workers who produce or set in motion the means of production that are indispensable to the life of society, which gives the strike a means of pressure against the bosses;
- strikes are a necessity, not only as a means of defending the living conditions of the working class, but also as a time to challenge an exploitative society;
- strikes teach workers to unite;
- the struggle for demands, through collective action, allows the working class to become aware of its strength, gives it confidence in its collective action and, therefore, the ability to make the bourgeoisie back down;
- strikes have a moral influence on all workers who “*cease to be slaves*”;
- despite the privations, sacrifices and repression, the struggle itself is the first victory of the strike because it gains self-esteem and the esteem of one’s comrades-in-arms; it thus prepares for

battles, no longer only against a boss, but against the class of bosses for another society, socialism;

- the struggle to defend the immediate interests of the working class contributes powerfully to the politicisation of the workers by making them aware that the capitalist class as a whole is the enemy of the working class as a whole, and that the latter can only rely on its collective strength;
- moving from isolated strikes to the struggle of the working class as a whole leads to an awareness of the need for the emancipation of all workers;
- in this movement, which is increasingly a political struggle, the need for a working-class party is emerging.

Today, more than twelve decades after the 1890s, the working class must once again go through the school of struggle for the basic defence of its living conditions, whereas in the past it had “historic” experiences of struggle during the first world revolutionary wave of 1917-23.

The problem is that the defeat of this revolutionary wave was followed by a global counter-revolution, lasting almost half a century, which momentarily erased the memory of the achievements of its historical experience among the masses.

Subsequently, initiated by the eruption of massive strikes and the great mobilisations of 1968 in France, a new dynamic of international class struggle ended this period of counter-revolution, thus opening the way for class confrontations. But 20 years later, the new dynamic eventually came up against the limits imposed by the working class’s difficulties in further politicising its struggle. Neither of the two antagonistic classes was then in a position to impose its solution to the crisis of capitalism: world war for the bourgeoisie, revolution for the proletariat. This resulted in a stalemate between the classes and the onset of the phase of decomposition of

capitalism, involving increased difficulties for the proletariat.²

However, the proletariat did not suffer a decisive defeat, and faced with ever more massive economic attacks, it finally emerged from its previous quasi-passivity to revive the development of its struggles in the main industrialised countries, the first expression of which was the wave of struggles in the United Kingdom in the summer of 2022. Thus, “*These struggles are not simply a reaction to immediate attacks on working conditions but have a deeper historical dimension. They are the result of a long process of ‘underground maturation’ of class consciousness that has progressed despite the enormous pressures exerted by the accelerated decomposition of capitalist society.*”³

It is precisely in this new situation, where the working class must reconnect with its methods of struggle, that the lessons learnt by Lenin, more than 120 years ago, constitute valuable indicators for the working class today.⁴ They come to hammer home the point that **the main gain of**

2. Immediately after the collapse of the Eastern bloc, the ICC drew attention to the perspective of increased difficulties for the class struggle, both as a consequence of the worsening of the decomposition caused by this historic event and also due to the ideological campaigns of the bourgeoisie exploiting the lie identifying the collapse of Stalinism with the collapse of communism. On this subject, read our article “Collapse of the Eastern Bloc: New difficulties for the proletariat”, *International Review* n° 60.

3. “The historical roots of the ‘rupture’ in the dynamic of the class struggle since 2022 (Part I)”, published in this issue of the *Review*.

4. As we pointed out earlier, some characterisations have become redundant. This is true of the way in which the text considers civil servants as servants of the capitalist class, which is no longer applicable to today where civil servants are salaried employees, the majority of whom are exploited by the capitalist class. Only some of the State’s civil servants are directly caught up in the defence of capitalist order, particularly within the forces of repression. Similarly, to designate the class enemy, the text often uses the expression “the bosses’ class”. Since the first revolutionary wave, while the working class still has to deal with bosses in many sectors, the fact remains that it is the capitalist state that is the main defender of the interests of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

1. Unfortunately, this article was not published for the first time until 1924 in *Proletarskaya Revolyutsia* n° 8-9. The full version of the article is available online at marxists.org.

the struggle is the struggle itself, which is of the utmost importance in a situation where it is by pushing the struggle to its extremes in defence of its living conditions that the proletariat will be able to develop its consciousness of the necessity to overthrow the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Indeed, “*we are heading for a situation in which the economic crisis will be the most serious in the history of capitalism, exacerbated not only by the central economic contradictions of capital (overproduction and falling rates of profit), but also by the growth of militarism, the spread of ecologi-*

cal disasters and the increasingly irrational policies of the ruling class.”⁵

What is the role of strikes (or walkouts) in the struggle of the working class? (extract from Lenin’s article “On strikes”)

To answer this question, we must first take a closer look at the strikes. The wages of a worker are determined, as we have seen, by an agreement between the employer and the worker, and if, under these circumstances, the individual worker is completely powerless, it is obvious that workers must fight jointly for their demands, that they are compelled to organise strikes either to prevent the employers from reducing wages or to obtain higher wages. It is a fact that in every country with a capitalist system there are strikes of workers. Everywhere, in all the European countries and in America, the workers feel themselves powerless when they are disunited; they can only offer resistance to the employers jointly, either by striking or threatening to strike. As capitalism develops, as big factories are more rapidly opened, as the petty capitalists are more and more ousted by the big capitalists, the more urgent becomes the need for the joint resistance of the workers, because unemployment increases, competition sharpens between the capitalists who strive to produce their wares at the cheapest rate (to do which they have to pay the workers as little as possible), and the fluctuations of industry become more pronounced and crises⁶ more violent. When industry prospers, the factory owners make big profits but do not think of sharing them with the workers; but when a crisis breaks out, the factory owners try to push the losses on to the workers. The necessity for strikes in capitalist society has been recognised to such an extent by everybody in the European countries that the law in those countries does not forbid the organisation of strikes; only in Russia barbarous laws against strikes still remain in force (we shall speak on another occasion of these laws and their application).

However, strikes, which arise out of the

very nature of capitalist society, signify the beginning of the working-class struggle against that system of society. When the rich capitalists are confronted by individual, propertyless workers, this signifies the utter enslavement of the workers. But when those propertyless workers unite, the situation changes. There is no wealth that can be of benefit to the capitalists if they cannot find workers willing to apply their labour-power to the instruments and materials belonging to the capitalists and produce new wealth. As long as workers have to deal with capitalists on an individual basis they remain veritable slaves who must work continuously to profit another in order to obtain a crust of bread, who must forever remain docile and inarticulate hired servants. But when the workers state their demands jointly and refuse to submit to the money-bags, they cease to be slaves, they become human beings, they begin to demand that their labour should not only serve to enrich a handful of idlers, but should also enable those who work to live like human beings. The slaves begin to put forward the demand to become masters, not to work and live as the landlords and capitalists want them to, but as the working people themselves want to. Strikes, therefore, always instil fear into the capitalists, because they begin to undermine their supremacy. “*All wheels will stop, if your strong arm wills it,*” a German workers’ song says of the working class. And so it is in reality: the factories, the landlords’ land, the machines, the railways, etc., etc., are all like wheels in a giant machine – the machine that extracts various products, transforms them as required and delivers them to their destination.

The whole of this machine is set in motion by *the worker* who tills the soil, extracts ores, makes commodities in the factories, builds houses, workshops, and railways. When the workers refuse to work, the entire machine threatens to stop. Every strike reminds the capitalists that it is the workers and not they who are the real masters, the workers who are more and more loudly proclaiming their rights. Every strike reminds the workers that their position is not hopeless, that they are not alone. See what a tremendous effect strikes

have both on the strikers themselves and on the workers at neighbouring or nearby factories or at factories in the same industry. In normal, peaceful times the worker does his job without a murmur, does not contradict the employer, and does not discuss his condition. In times of strikes he states his demands in a loud voice, he reminds the employers of all their abuses, he claims his rights, he does not think of himself and his wages alone, he thinks of all his workmates who have downed tools together with him and who stand up for the workers’ cause, fearing no privations. Every strike means many privations for the working people, terrible privations that can be compared only to the calamities of war – hungry families, loss of wages, often arrests, banishment from the towns where they have their homes and their employment.

Despite all these sufferings, the workers despise those who desert their fellow workers and make deals with the employers. Despite all these sufferings, brought on by strikes, the workers of neighbouring factories gain renewed courage when they see that their comrades have engaged themselves in struggle. “*People who endure so much hardship to break the resistance of one single bourgeois will also know how to break the power of the whole bourgeoisie,*”⁷ said one great teacher of socialism, Engels, speaking of the strikes of the English workers. It is often enough for one factory to strike, for strikes to begin immediately in a large number of factories. **What a great moral influence strikes have, how they affect workers who see that their comrades have ceased to be slaves and, if only for the time being, have become people on an equal footing with the rich!**

Every strike brings thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the worker’s mind, thoughts of the struggle of the entire working class for emancipation from the oppression of capital. It has often happened that before a big strike the workers of a certain factory or a certain branch of industry or of a certain town knew hardly anything and scarcely ever thought about socialism; but after the strike, study circles and as-

5. “The historical roots of the ‘rupture’ in the dynamic of the class struggle since 2022 (Part I).”

6. “*We shall deal elsewhere in greater detail with crises in industry and their significance for the workers. Here we would simply point out that business has been very good for Russian industry in recent years, it has been ‘prospering’, but that now (at the end of 1899) there are already clear signs that this ‘prosperity’ will end in a crisis: difficulties in selling goods, bankruptcies of factory owners, the ruin of small business owners, and terrible hardship for the workers (unemployment, reduced wages, etc.)*”. (Note by Lenin).

7. F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

sociations become much more widespread among them and more and more workers become socialists.

A strike teaches workers to understand what the strength of the employers and what the strength of the workers is based on; it teaches them not to think of their own employer alone and not of their own immediate workmates alone but of all the employers, the whole class of capitalists and the whole class of workers. When a factory owner who has amassed millions from the toil of several generations of workers refuses to grant a modest increase in wages or even tries to reduce wages to a still lower level and, if the workers offer resistance, throws thousands of hungry families out into the street, it becomes quite clear to the workers that the capitalist class as a whole is the enemy of the whole working class and that the workers can depend only on themselves and their united action. It often happens that a factory owner does his best to deceive the workers, to pose as a benefactor, and conceal his exploitation of the workers by some petty sops or lying promises. A strike always demolishes this deception at one blow by showing the workers that their "benefactor" is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

A strike, moreover, opens the eyes of the workers to the nature, not only of the capitalists, but of the government and the laws as well. Just as the factory owners try to pose as benefactors of the workers, the government officials and their lackeys try to assure the workers that the tsar and the tsarist government are equally solicitous of both the factory owners and the workers, as justice requires. The worker does not know the laws, he has no contact with government officials, especially with those in the higher posts, and, as a consequence, often believes all this. Then comes a strike. The public prosecutor, the factory inspector, the police, and frequently troops, appear at the factory. The workers learn that they have violated the law: the employers are permitted by law to assemble and openly discuss ways of reducing workers' wages, but workers are declared criminals if they come to a joint agreement!

Workers are driven out of their homes; the police close the shops from which the workers might obtain food on credit; an effort is made to incite the soldiers against the workers even when the workers conduct themselves quietly and peacefully. Soldiers are even ordered to fire on the workers and when they kill unarmed workers by shooting the fleeing crowd in the back, the Tsar himself sends the troops an expression of his gratitude (in this way the Tsar thanked the troops who had killed striking workers in Yaroslavl in 1895). It becomes clear to

every worker that the Tsarist government is his worst enemy, since it defends the capitalists and binds the workers hand and foot. The workers begin to understand that laws are made in the interests of the rich alone; that government officials protect those interests; that the working people are gagged and not allowed to make known their needs; that the working class must win for itself the right to strike, the right to publish workers' newspapers, the right to participate in a national assembly that enacts laws and supervises their fulfilment. The government itself knows full well that strikes open the eyes of the workers and for this reason it has such a fear of strikes and does everything to stop them as quickly as possible.

One German Minister of the Interior,⁸ one who was notorious for the persistent persecution of socialists and class-conscious workers, not without reason, stated before the people's representatives: "*Behind every strike lurks the hydra of revolution.*" Every strike strengthens and develops in the workers the understanding that the government is their enemy and that the working class must prepare itself to struggle against the government for the people's rights.

Strikes, therefore, teach the workers to unite; they show them that they can struggle against the capitalists only when they are united; strikes teach the workers to think of the struggle of the whole working class against the whole class of factory owners and against the arbitrary, police government. This is the reason that socialists call strikes "a school of war", a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people, of all who labour, from the yoke of government officials and from the yoke of capital. "A school of war" is, however, not war itself. When strikes are widespread among the workers, some of the workers (including some socialists) begin to believe that the working class can confine itself to strikes, strike funds, or strike associations alone; that by strikes alone the working class can achieve a considerable improvement in its conditions or even its emancipation. When they see what power there is in a united working class and even in small strikes, some think that the working class has only to organise a general strike throughout the whole country for the workers to get everything they want from the capitalists and the government. This idea was also expressed by the workers of other countries when the working-class movement was in its early stages and the workers were still very inexperienced. It is a mistaken idea.

8. The Prussian Minister of the Interior was von Puttkamer.

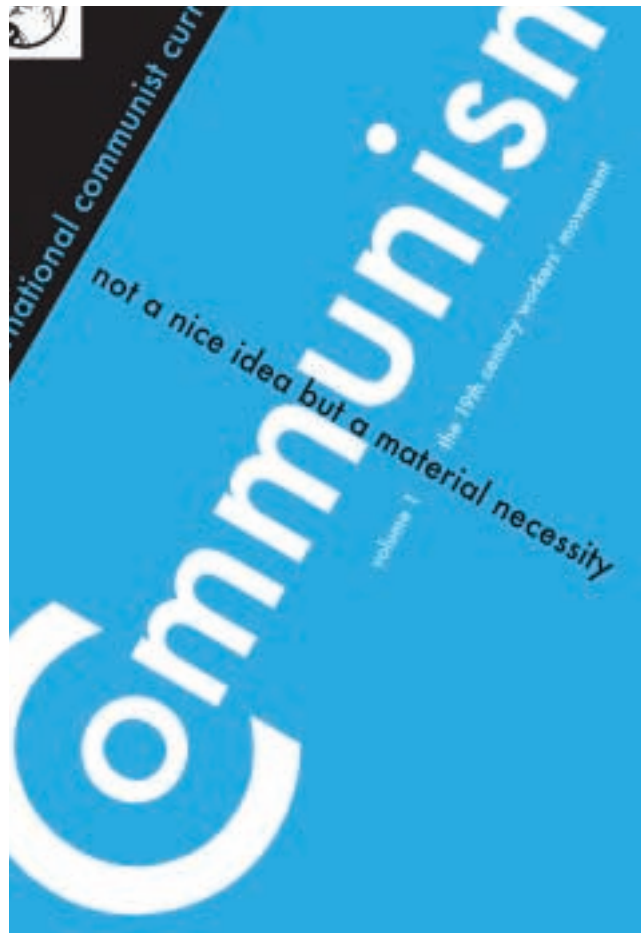
Strikes are one of the ways in which the working class struggles for its emancipation, but they are not the only way; and **if the workers do not turn their attention to other means of conducting the struggle, they will slow down the growth and the successes of the working class.** It is true that funds are needed to maintain the workers during strikes, if strikes are to be successful. Such workers' funds (usually funds of workers in separate branches of industry, separate trades or workshops) are maintained in all countries; but here in Russia this is especially difficult, because the police keep track of them, seize the money, and arrest the workers. The workers, of course, are able to hide from the police; naturally, the organisation of such funds is valuable, and we do not want to advise workers against setting them up. But it must not be supposed that workers' funds, when prohibited by law, will attract large numbers of contributors, and so long as the membership in such organisations is small, workers' funds will not prove of great use. Furthermore, even in those countries where workers' unions exist openly and have huge funds at their disposal, the working class can still not confine itself to strikes as a means of struggle. All that is necessary is a hitch in the affairs of industry (a crisis, such as the one that is approaching in Russia today) and **the factory owners will even deliberately cause strikes, because it is to their advantage to cease work for a time and to deplete the workers' funds.**

The workers, therefore, cannot, under any circumstances, confine themselves to strike actions and strike associations. Secondly, strikes can only be successful where workers are sufficiently class-conscious, where they are able to select an opportune moment for striking, where they know how to put forward their demands, and where they have connections with socialists and are able to procure leaflets and pamphlets through them. There are still very few such workers in Russia, and every effort must be exerted to increase their number in order to make the working-class cause known to the masses of workers and to acquaint them with socialism and the working-class struggle. This is a task that the socialists and class-conscious workers must undertake jointly by organising a socialist working-class party for this purpose. **Thirdly, strikes, as we have seen, show the workers that the government is their enemy and that a struggle against the government must be carried on. Actually, it is strikes that have gradually taught the working class of all countries to struggle against the governments for workers' rights and for the rights of the people as a whole. As we have said, only a socialist workers' party can carry on this strug-**

gle by spreading among the workers a true conception of the government and of the working-class cause. On another occasion we shall discuss specifically how strikes are conducted in Russia and how class-conscious workers should avail themselves of them.

Here we must point out that strikes are, as we said above, “a school of war” and not the war itself, that strikes are only one means of struggle, only one aspect of the working-class movement. From isolated strikes the workers can and must go over, as indeed they are actually doing in all countries, to a struggle of the entire working class for the emancipation of all who labour. When all class-conscious workers become socialists, i.e., when they strive for this emancipation, when they unite throughout the whole country in order to spread socialism among the workers, in order to teach the workers all the means of struggle against their enemies, when they build up a socialist workers’ party that struggles for the emancipation of the people as a whole from the yoke of government and for the emancipation of all working people from the yoke of capital, only then will the working class become an integral part of that great movement of the workers of all countries that unites all workers and raises the red banner inscribed with the words: “Workers of all countries, unite!”

ICC Publications



Since 1990 and the collapse of the communist bloc - in reality a form of state capitalism - the International Communist Current has been publishing a series of articles in its theoretical journal, the *International Review*, around the theme "Communism is not a nice idea, but a material necessity". The first volume of the series, which has now been published in book form, begins with "primitive" communism and goes on to explore the conception of communism in the writings of Marx, Engels and other revolutionaries during the 19th century. The second volume of the series deals with the period from the mass strikes of 1905 to the end of the first great revolutionary wave that followed the First World War. A third volume is now underway.

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Controversy in the Proletarian Political Milieu

The national question according to Bordigist legend

Preamble

On 29 August 1953 (remember this date) in Trieste, Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970) presented a report to the inter-regional meeting of his group, which had just split from the Internationalist Communist Party (PCIste) and was temporarily retaining the same name. The minutes of this meeting, which would later be published under the title *Facteurs de race et de nation dans la théorie marxiste (Factors of race and nation in marxist theory)*, include an enthusiastic passage about the Congress of the Peoples of the East, which was held in Baku in September 1920, shortly after the Second Congress of the Communist International: “It was the president of the Proletarian International, Zinoviev (whose appearance was, however, anything but warlike), who read the final manifesto of the Congress; and the coloured men responded to his call with a single cry, brandishing their swords and sabres. The Communist International invites the peoples of the East to overthrow the Western oppressors by force of arms; it cries out to them: ‘Brothers! We call you to holy war, to holy war first of all against English imperialism!’”¹

Seven years later, on 12 November 1960, a new general meeting of the same political group, which had now taken the name International Communist Party (ICP), opened in Bologna, a meeting that fully confirmed this orientation on colonial movements. The minutes of this meeting, pompously entitled “*The incandescent awakening of coloured peoples in the Marxist vision*”, read as follows: “From a Marxist perspective, colonial movements occupy a position other than that of passive, mechanical agents of proletarian recovery. Depending on the historical period and the concrete balance of forces, proletarian strategy can allow the proletariat of the metropolises to take the initiative in the worldwide movement right from the start of the crisis, or it can allow the action of the masses in the ‘backward’ countries to launch the agitation of the proletariat in the ‘developed countries’. But, in both

cases, what is important is the link that must be made, and this is where the difficulty lies.”²

After a first congress, which had represented a huge step forward, the second congress of the Communist International was marked by a series of programmatic regressions. The Congress of the Peoples of the East confirmed the opportunist drift into which the International had entered. Isolated following the failure of the first attempt at revolution in Germany, surrounded by White armies supported by strong contingents from all the most developed bourgeois nations, the Russian Revolution was in a dangerous situation. The Russian proletariat needed a lifeline. What Lenin initially saw as confusion over the national question, which had given rise to a whole debate within the workers’ movement – in particular with Rosa Luxemburg – became a strong opportunist stance among the Bolsheviks in 1920, caused by the isolation of the Russian revolution. It is the nature of opportunism to look for a shortcut, an illusory solution to a fundamental political problem. From this point of view, the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku, with its call for a “holy war”, is the symbol of a worsening of the process of degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

Subsequent events proved the catastrophic nature of support for national liberation struggles. In Finland, Turkey, Ukraine, China, the Baltic countries and the Caucasus, everywhere the Bolsheviks’ calls for national self-determination led to the fostering of nationalism, the strengthening of the local bourgeoisie and the massacre of communist minorities.³

As we can see, this position was taken up by the Bordigist current when it was founded in the 1950s. The search for a shortcut here is a product of impatience, one of the main factors of opportunism. In the midst of a period of counter-revolution – we were in a period of reconstruction after

the Second World War – the Bordigists believed they could find a trigger for the world proletarian revolution in the armed struggles on the periphery of capitalism. They confused decolonisation and the resulting confrontations between the two imperialist blocs of East and West with the national bourgeois revolutions of the period of capitalism’s ascendancy. They then plunged into the worst ambiguities, such as the defence of democratic rights, and the worst aberrations, such as the apology for the massacres perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, considered a manifestation of “Jacobin radicalism”, or like their participation in the Stalinist and Trotskyist choirs of the Mandel variant to salute Che Guevara, the living symbol of the “*democratic anti-imperialist revolution*”, cowardly murdered by “*Yankee imperialism and its pro-American lackeys.*”⁴

Blinded by opportunism, awaiting this difficult “transition”, the Bordigists purely and simply ignored the historical revival of the class struggle at the end of the 1960s and continued to focus on the so-called anti-imperialist struggles. Consequentially, they failed to realise that all their militant recruits from the peripheral countries were in fact adhering to the nationalist positions of Maoism. This powder keg exploded in 1982 and reduced the PCIInt from being the main force numerically of the Communist Left internationally to a tiny nucleus of a few militants.

Why the ICP’s position is divisive within the working class

The ICP made a brief response to our article dealing with the catastrophic application of the Bordigist position on national liberation struggles to the dramatic situation existing in Palestine; an article that appeared in *Révolution Internationale* n° 501 (May-August 2024).⁵ Indeed, we read in *Le Prolétaire* n° 553 (May-July 2024) that “the ICC [defends a] bookish conception of a pure revolution pitting only bourgeois and proletarians”. It is quite true that we try to remain faithful to marxist principles and

1. Bordiga’s study, *Factors of Race and Nation in Marxist Theory* was published in 1979 by the ICP and is available on their website. The quote can be found on page 165.

2. This report was published in *Il Programma Comunista*, n°s 1, 2 and 3 (1961) and then in *Le Fil du temps*, n° 12 (1975). The quote comes from the latter magazine, p. 216.

3. See our historical study of the phenomenon in the *International Review* n°s 66, 68 and 69 (1991-1992), “Balance sheet of 70 year of ‘national liberation’ struggles”

4. *Programme Communiste*, n° 75 (1977), p. 51.

5. “War in the Middle East: The obsolete theoretical framework of the Bordigist groups”, ICConline, January 2024.

to all the works in which these principles are defended by communist militants. It is also true that we defend the fundamental framework of the confrontation between the two historical classes of society, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, on which the future of humanity depends. We have just seen that this is not quite the case with the Bordigists, for whom the world is no longer essentially divided into classes but into colours, from which an “incandescent awakening” is expected.

Wearing the coloured and distorting glasses of national oppression, the ICP is fascinated by the desperate revolt of the Palestinians crushed for decades by imperialism. It believes it can find a subversive force, an example for workers’ struggles around the world, or even a path to proletarianisation for the mass of the jobless, reduced to misery by a capitalism that has become senile. In doing so, it loses sight of the basic internationalist position of the communists who call for the fraternisation of the workers enlisted in the imperialist war. It rejects the only means of achieving this fraternisation, this union of Israeli and Palestinian proletarians: the break with the prison of nationalism. It even encourages this nationalism by demanding the “Right to self-determination”: “*Calling for the union of Palestinian and Israeli (Jewish) proletarians under these conditions without taking into account the national oppression of the former can only sound like an empty phrase: this union will never be possible as long as Israeli proletarians do not disassociate themselves from the national oppression exercised in their name by ‘their’ state, as long as they do not recognise the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.*”

The result of this strategy of the ICP is not the radicalisation of the struggle or the unity of the proletariat, but rather their division. All over the world, the bourgeoisie is taking advantage of this windfall and is eager to widen the division between proletarians who declare themselves pro-Palestinian and those who declare themselves anti-Palestinian, to exacerbate the nationalism that feeds on each other, in a context where the global working class does not yet have the strength to directly oppose today’s regional imperialist wars but rather suffers their negative impact with a feeling of astonishment, powerlessness and fatalism.

The damage caused by this policy among politicised elements, particularly those from peripheral countries, has been enormous. For example, at a ICP meeting in the 1980s, one of its supporters responded to our intervention defending the principle of internationalism: “*If we are given weapons,*

it would be very stupid to refuse them!” This clearly shows a terrible ignorance of the nature of imperialism, which can only lead to disaster. And this was the case in the face of all the major events of the post-war period. In 1949 in China and in 1962 in Algeria,⁶ the policy of the ICP encouraged the enlisting of inexperienced proletarians into the armed struggle behind a faction of the local bourgeoisie which, in order to crush its rival factions, was forced to ally itself with one or other of the bourgeoisies of the major Western or Soviet countries. All these military conflicts and guerrilla wars, by their imperialist nature, led to the crushing of the young proletariat in these regions.

Immediately after the Second World War, particularly during decolonisation, the leaders of the two imperialist blocs, the USSR⁷ and the United States, claiming never to have colonised any country, were intent on imposing their order after dividing the world between them, while the United States assigned the role of policeman in their former colonies to their second-string players. To break this bloody spiral, only the expansion of the struggle of the proletariat of the central countries was able to weaken the pressure of imperialism on the proletariat of the peripheral countries. With the return of the economic crisis at the end of the 1960s, imperialist competition between the two blocs became even more bloody. The disappearance of the two blocs did not put an end to this imperialist competition between nations large and small; on the contrary, it took an even more barbaric turn, with the implementation of a scorched earth policy and the systematic massacre of the civilian population everywhere. The communists, for their part, must prepare the ground for the future union of the proletarians of the whole world by calling for a break with imperialist war and with nationalism, as Lenin did in the face of the social-chauvinists in 1914.

It is quite true that the ICP does not have a “*bookish conception of revolution*”, but it does in the sense that it wipes its feet on the works of marxism. For example, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which reads: “*The workers have no country. One cannot take from them what they have not got.*”

We have engaged in numerous polemics with the ICP, on a theoretical level by examining the marxist approach to the

national question,⁸ or on a historical level by dissecting the lessons of proletarian defeats.⁹ In this article, we propose to examine how the trajectory of the ICP explains how it allowed itself to be trapped by a position on the national question that has become obsolete. The trap was set in two stages: in 1943 and 1944-1945 with the opportunist formation of the Partito Comunista Internazionale¹⁰ from which the ICP emerged, and in 1952 with the liquidation of the legacy of the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left during the constitution of the ICP

1943, break with the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy

Bordiga took the first step towards abandoning the work of the fraction by withdrawing from political life when the Left had just lost the leadership of the Communist Party of Italy. At the end of 1926, after having seen his house ransacked by the fascists, he was arrested and sentenced to three years of exile, first in Ustica and then in Ponza. There are some traces of his political activity in prison, when he spoke out with a minority of communist prisoners against the anti-Trotsky campaign. In March 1930, he was expelled by the Stalinist leadership of the CP, which had taken refuge in Paris. He then withdrew from political life to devote himself to his profession as an architectural engineer. He declared in a conversation in 1936: “*I am happy to live outside the petty and insignificant events of militant politics, news in brief, everyday events. None of this interests me.*”¹¹ He did not reappear until 1944, more than 15 years later, in southern Italy, in a Fraction of Italian socialists and communists.

In doing so, he severed ties with other left-wing militants who, hunted down by the police of Mussolini and Stalin, mostly went into exile, mainly in France and Belgium.¹² They were determined to continue

8. See in particular our pamphlet *Nation or Class*.

9. See the following issues of *International Review*: n° 32 (1983), “The International Communist Party (Communist Programme) at a turning point in its history”; n° 64 (1991), “The proletarian political milieu faced with the Gulf War”; n° 72 (1993), “How not to understand the development of chaos and imperialist conflicts”; n°s 77 and 78, “The rejection of the notion of decadence leads to the demobilisation of the proletariat faced with war”.

10. The first issue of *Prometeo* was published in November 1943. Thanks to the strike movement, the Party developed rapidly in working-class circles and by the end of 1944 it had formed several federations, the most important of which were in Turin, Milan and Parma. It published a programme outline that same year. It held a first conference of the whole Party in Turin in December 1945 and January 1946.

11. *The Italian Communist Left*, ICC book.

12. For this part, we summarise certain passages from our article “The origins of the ICC and the IBRP”.

6. All these new nations, far from being the expression of an expanding capitalism, were a pure product of imperialism. They immediately reveal their true nature by crushing their own proletarians and declaring war on their neighbours.

7. Even today, Russia still invokes its anti-colonial policy with African countries.

the fight against the opportunistic drift of the Communist International. In 1928, they formed the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy. Their great strength was to clarify and explore two essential questions: the retreat and defeat of the revolutionary wave, that is to say the opening of a period of counter-revolution that paved the way for a new world war, and the nature of the tasks of revolutionary organisations in such a situation, that is to say the work of a fraction as Marx and Lenin had carried out against opportunism in other unfavourable periods for the workers' movement.

The main task of the Fraction was to draw lessons from the revolutionary wave of the 1920s, to determine which positions had been validated by historical experience and which had been mistakes or had lost their validity with the evolution of capitalism. Unlike Trotsky's Left Opposition, which fully supported the first four congresses of the CI, the Italian Left rejected some of the positions adopted at the 3rd and 4th congresses, particularly the tactic of the "United Front". If the party, after the break-up of the International, continued on its degenerating course and ended up moving over to the side of the bourgeoisie, this did not mean that the situation was ripe for the emergence of a new party. The Fraction had to continue its work to create the conditions for the future party, and this could only re-emerge under two conditions: that the Fraction had completed its work of assessment by drawing up a new programmatic framework corresponding to the new situation, and that a situation would arise not only of a break with the counter-revolution, but of a new period leading towards revolution, as had already been established in the *Theses of Rome* (1922).¹³

Throughout this period, the Fraction carried out a remarkable programme of work and, together with a number of Dutch left-wing communists, it was the only organisation that maintained an uncompromising class position in the face of the Spanish Civil War, which had been a dress rehearsal for the Second world war. However, the weight of the counter-revolution grew heavier with time and the Fraction itself entered a period of degeneration. Under the leadership of Vercesi, its main theoretician and organiser, it began to develop a new theory according to which local wars no longer represented preparations for a new world slaughter but were intended to prevent, through the massacre of workers, the growing proletarian threat.

published in *International Review* n°s 90 and 91 (1997). Part one: "The Italian Fraction and the French Communist Left"; part two: "The formation of the Partito Comunista Internazionalista".

13. *Defence of the Continuity of the Communist Programme*, Editions Programme Communiste, 1972, pp. 43 and 44.

The world was therefore, for Vercesi, on the eve of a new revolutionary wave. Despite the struggle of a minority against this new orientation, the Fraction found itself completely disoriented at the outbreak of the Second World War. It was in total disarray, apart from the minority that managed to reconstitute the Fraction in 1941, mainly in Marseilles.

When major workers' strikes broke out in northern Italy in 1942-43,¹⁴ leading to the fall of Mussolini, the reconstituted Fraction believed that, in accordance with its long-standing position, "the course of the transformation of the Fraction into a party in Italy is open" (Conference of August 1943). However, at the Conference of May 1945, having learnt of the constitution in Italy of the Partito Comunista Internazionalista with the prestigious figures of Onorato Damen and Amadeo Bordiga, the Fraction decided on its own dissolution and the individual entry of its members into the PCIste. It was the final blow. The weakened Fraction collapsed despite the warnings of Marc Chirik,¹⁵ who asked the Fraction to first verify the programmatic basis of this new party, about which it had no documentation.

The formation of the PCIste in 1943 was justified by the resurgence of class struggles in Northern Italy and was based on the mistaken idea that these were the first of a new revolutionary wave that would emerge from the war as was the case during the First World War. As soon as it became clear that this prospect would not materialise, the PCInt should have retreated to work as a Fraction, continuing the work of the Italian Left in exile and preparing to work against the tide in the hostile environment of counter-revolution.¹⁶ However, the PCInt did the complete opposite and embarked on an opportunist shift, recruiting from

14. Among them were the last internationalist militants who had been expelled in 1934 from the PCI for betraying the cause of the proletariat. They included Onorato Damen in particular and others who continued their clandestine militant activity in Mussolini's prisons.

15. Marc Chirik (1907-1990), a militant of the Italian Fraction, was one of the founders of the Noyau Français de la Gauche Communiste (NFGC) in 1942, which became the Fraction Française de la Gauche Communiste (FFGC) in 1944 and then the Gauche Communiste de France (GCF) in 1945. He was also one of the founders of the Internazionalismo group in 1964, the Révolution Internationale group in 1968 and the International Communist Current in 1975.

16. After the end of the social unrest in Italy and the loss of half of the militants, the possibility of resuming the work of a fraction was raised at the second PCIste congress in 1948. However, Damen cut short any discussion by taking up the classic Trotskyist position: the death of the old party immediately created the conditions for the emergence of the new. See the article in *Internazionalisme* (GCF) n° 36 (1948), "The second congress of the Internationalist Communist Party", republished in *International Review* n° 36, (1984).

Trotskyite and Stalinist circles, without being too particular, to justify, against all odds, the formation of the party. Everything was done to adapt to the growing illusions of a declining working class.

For example, the PCInt had been very clear from the start about the resistance as a moment in the imperialist war and as a nationalist trap. But it soon moved towards the work of agitation aimed at partisan groups with the illusion of transforming them "into organs of proletarian self-defence, ready to intervene in the revolutionary struggle for power" (Manifesto distributed in June 1944). It even went so far as to take part in the elections in 1946, after having previously considered itself a member of the Abstentionist Fraction. This opportunist policy of the PCInt is even more blatant with regard to the groups in the south of Italy. The "Fraction of the left of the communists and socialists" formed in Naples around Bordiga and Pistone practised entryism into the Stalinist PCI until the beginning of 1945, and was particularly vague on the question of the political nature of the USSR. The PCInt opened its doors to it, blinded by the presence of Bordiga, as well as to elements of the POC (Parti ouvrier communiste) which had for a time constituted the Italian section of the Trotskyist Fourth International. All this without verification, without in-depth discussion with these elements, without critical examination.

The PCInt had in its ranks a number of militants from the Fraction who had returned to Italy at the beginning of the war. It had therefore been influenced by the Fraction's positions, as the first issues of *Prometeo* show. But at the Turin Conference at the end of 1945, the PCInt adopted the draft programme that Bordiga – who was still not a member of the party – had just sent to it, a programme that totally ignored these positions. This was symbolic of the break with the organisational framework developed by the Fraction in exile. Maintaining party work in a counter-revolutionary period meant opening the doors wide to opportunism, it meant making lucidity impossible when the dominant ideology penetrated the organisation. This is the common point that unites on the one hand the Damen current and, on the other hand, the Bordigism that would emerge a few years later.

1952, a break with the programmatic framework formulated by the Left Fraction

Such a disparate gathering could not last. The split occurred as early as 1952, a split that marked the birth of the Bordigist current. After having been one of the initiators

of the break with the framework of the work of Fraction, Bordiga took a further step, that of breaking with the programmatic framework itself formulated by the Fraction of the Italian Left in exile. In the new party, which soon took the name of International Communist Party (ICP), the three years 1951, 1952 and 1953 were years of revisionist fever. The aim is clear: “*It was no longer just a question of reconnecting the scattered threads of a Marxist opposition to Stalinism, but of rebuilding it from scratch, starting again, on all fronts, from zero.*”¹⁷ That is to say, by sweeping away all the contributions of the three Internationals and the Communist Left of the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore:

1. Bordiga first of all began by rejecting the theory of decadence defended by the Third International. Capitalism was constantly expanding and it became possible to discover some youthful capitalisms here and there.
2. Bordiga discovered that the proletariat is incapable of developing its consciousness before the seizure of power. Until then, it is only within the party that consciousness is an active factor, which he called “turning praxis on its head”. It was to throw in the bin yet another fundamental work of Marxism, Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*.¹⁸
3. Of course, the negation of consciousness within the proletariat made it possible to transfer to the party – and only to the party – the revolutionary tasks incumbent upon the mass of the proletariat organised in the workers’ councils. According to this substitutionist vision, the Party organises and technically directs the entire class. It is monolithic, unique and hierarchical, like a pyramid with the party’s central committee at the top.¹⁹
4. Together with the Party, the State became the revolutionary organ par excellence of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It bases its power on red terror.²⁰ On these two issues, Bordiga

scuttled two of the main advances made by the Left Fraction of the PCI. It was not only the continuity with the programmatic work of the Left that was broken, but the entire continuity of the marxist movement. It was a rejection of the method of analysing the main experiences of the proletariat as inaugurated by Marx and Engels, for example at the time of the Paris Commune, which had enabled them to conclude: “*The least that can be said is that the state is an evil inherited by the victorious proletariat after its struggle for class supremacy whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once, as much as possible until such a time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state onto the scrap heap.*”²¹

5. To cap it all, Bordiga decreed the invariance of marxism at a meeting in Milan in September 1952 (a fateful year for the PCI!). While the communist programme and the marxist theory that underpins it are a cumulative process, learning lessons from revolutions and counter-revolutions, with the proletariat gaining experience and the communists deepening their theoretical understanding of them, Bordiga turns it into a dead dogma, a catechism. This is how Bordiga claims to fight against revisionists and modernisers, by donning both costumes himself, that of the revisionist and that of the priest: “*Although the theoretical heritage of the revolutionary working class is no longer a revelation, a myth, an idealistic ideology as was the case for previous classes, but a positive ‘science’, it nevertheless needs a stable formulation of its principles and rules of action, which plays the role and has the decisive effectiveness that dogmas, catechisms, tables, constitutions, guidebooks such as the Vedas, the Talmud, the Bible, the Koran or the Declaration of Human Rights have had in the past.*”²²

Once this work of systematically destroying the heritage of the working class was completed,²³ the ICP was forced to

bitterly note that the ICC remains today the sole heir to the programmatic positions developed by the Italian Fraction in the 1930s. It was forced to recognise this publicly in an article devoted – very belatedly – to the history of the “Left Fraction Abroad”, as it calls it, and even goes so far as to recognise a break in the theoretical continuity of the Italian Left: “*On the question of war, on the question of the global crisis of capitalism, on the colonial question, on all these issues, the Fraction from 1935 onwards began to move towards positions which, we are sorry to say, are those professed today by the International Communist Current. [...] We must indeed say openly, without the slightest intention of suing the comrades – as is part of our tradition – that the Party that was born in 1952 does not relate to the theoretical heritage of the Fraction.*”²⁴

An orphan of the workers’ movement and caught up in an idealistic, even mystical, spiral, the PCI attempted to restore a kind of political continuity based on individual continuity, i.e. on the concept of the “brilliant leader”, a concept already criticised by the Gauche Communiste de France (GCF) in 1947.²⁵ This idealistic concept is still in force in today’s ICP as the following illustration shows. In the same article that we have just quoted, it explains learnedly to us the causes of the split of 1952. In order to constitute the true Party, the “brilliant leader” had to finish reflecting: “*In that period, which in Italy was the year 1952 – it is of course possible to wonder whether it could have come about in 1950 rather than in 1952, but in reality it is of no importance – the reconstitution of the party was possible, because then*

internationalist position in the face of imperialist war. The demand for self-determination for the Palestinian nation is indeed a considerable weakness, but it is of a different nature to the leftist position (Trotskyists, Maoists, some anarchists) which calls for a “Workers’ and Peasants’ Republic of the Middle East” for the Palestinians. Let us remember that opportunism is a disease within the workers’ movement, which is constantly confronted with the danger of the penetration of the dominant ideology within it. It is only in exceptional historical periods (war, revolution) that opportunism passes into the camp of the bourgeoisie, even before the betrayal of the party. In this case, it is generally the majority of the leadership that contributes, in collaboration with the other forces of bourgeois democracy, to the transformation of the party into a force at the service of capitalism. We are certain that for the moment the bourgeoisie, even if it keeps a close eye on all revolutionary groups, has no intention of putting the PCI at its service, the panoply of bourgeois groups claiming to be part of the proletarian revolution (leftism) being sufficiently varied as it is today.

24. “Éléments de l’histoire de la Fraction de gauche à l’étranger (de 1928 à 1935)” in *Programme Communiste*, n°s 97 (September 2000), 98 (March 2003), 100 (December 2009) and 104 (March 2017).

25. “Against the concept of the ‘brilliant leader’”, *Internationalisme* n° 25, August 1947, published in *International Review* n° 33 (1983).

17. “La portée de la scission de 1952 dans le Partito comunista internazionalista”, *Programme communiste* n° 93 (March 1993), p. 64.

18. The “reversal of praxis” is explained in *Programme Communiste* n° 56 (1972). A diagram of constantly expanding capitalism can also be found on p. 58.

19. The diagram of this pyramid can be found in *Programme Communiste* n° 63 (1974), p. 35. It is a report of a party meeting on 1st September 1951 in Naples.

20. The demand for “red terror” is once again a sign of the confusion between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution among the Bordigists. As for the role of the state in the revolution, apart from organising the armed struggle against the resistance of the fallen class, it turns out not to play any dynamic revolutionary

role, already in the bourgeois revolution, as shown in our study, “State and the dictatorship of the proletariat” in *International Review* n° 11 (1977).

21. F. Engels, Introduction to *The Civil War in France*, Paris, Éditions sociales, 1969, p. 25.

22. “L’‘invariance’ historique du marxisme”, *Programme communiste* n° 53-54 (1971-1972), p. 3.

23. Profoundly marked by opportunism, the ICP nevertheless remains one of the currents of the Communist Left, that is to say a proletarian political group, because it generally maintains an

and only then was it possible to take stock. Amadeo [Bordiga] himself could not have accomplished this work ten years earlier. We were able to show that in Amadeo's thinking some things were not yet clear in 1945, but had become so by 1952."²⁶

The Communist Left and the national question

But let us return to our starting point, the national question, by explaining the method of the Communist Left. Through this quote from *Bilan*, the organ of the Italian Fraction, we can easily measure the gulf that separates it from the ossified method of the Bordigist current:

“Our era is dominated by a past of revolutionary growth and by the dark defeats that the proletariat has just suffered throughout the world. Marxist thought, which gravitates around these two axes, finds it difficult to reject useless trappings and outdated formulas, to free itself from the ‘hold of the dead’, in order to progress in the elaboration of the new material necessary for the battles of tomorrow. The revolutionary ebb rather determines a reduction of thought, a return to images of a past ‘where we have conquered’; and thus the proletariat, the class of the future, is transformed into a class without hope that consoles its weakness with declamations, a mysticism of empty formulas, while the grip of capitalist repression tightens ever more.

*“It must be proclaimed once again that the essence of Marxism is not the adulation of proletarian leaders or formulas, but a living and constantly progressing exploration, just as capitalist society progresses ever further in the direction of imprisoning the revolt of the forces of production. Not to complete the doctrinal contribution of the earlier phases of the proletarian struggle is to render the workers powerless in the face of the new weapons of capitalism. But this contribution is certainly not given by the sum of contingent positions, of isolated phrases, of all the writings and speeches of those whose genius expressed the degree reached by the consciousness of the masses in a given historical period, but rather by the substance of their work which was fertilised by the painful experience of the workers. If in each historical period the proletariat climbs a new rung, if this progression is recorded in the fundamental writings of our masters, it is no less true that the sum of the hypotheses, diagrams and probabilities put forward in the face of still embryonic problems **must be subjected to the most***

26. “Éléments de l’histoire de la Fraction de gauche à l’étranger (de 1928 à 1935)”, *Programme communiste* n° 104 (2017), p. 49.

severe criticism by those who, seeing these same phenomena unfold, can build theories not on the ‘probable’ but on the cement of new experiences. Moreover, each period has its limitations, a kind of domain of hypotheses which, to be valid, must still be verified by events. But even when social phenomena present themselves before our eyes, Marxists sometimes want to borrow arguments for their interventions from the old arsenal of historical facts.

“But Marxism is not a bible, it is a dialectical method; its strength lies in its dynamism, in its permanent tendency towards an elevation of the formulations acquired by the proletariat marching towards revolution. When revolutionary turmoil ruthlessly sweeps away reminiscences, when it brings about profound contrasts between proletarian positions and the course of events, the marxist does not implore history to adopt its outdated formulas, to regress: he understands that positions of principle previously elaborated must be taken further, that the past must be left to the dead. And it is Marx rejecting his 1848 formulas on the progressive role of the bourgeoisie, it is Lenin trampling underfoot, in October 1917, his September hypotheses on the peaceful course of the revolution, on the expropriation with buyout of the banks; both to go well beyond these positions: to face the real tasks of their time. [...]

“As far as we are concerned, we will have no fear of demonstrating that Lenin’s formulation, with regard to the problem of national minorities, has been overtaken by events and that his position applied in the post-war period has proved to be in contradiction with the fundamental elements that its author had given it: to help the world revolution to blossom.

“From a general point of view, Lenin was perfectly right during the war to highlight the need to weaken the main capitalist states by all means, as their fall would certainly have accelerated the course of the world revolution. Supporting the oppressed peoples meant, for him, determining movements of bourgeois revolt from which the workers could have benefited. All this would have been perfect on one condition: that the overall situation of capitalism, the era of imperialism, still allowed for progressive national wars, common struggles of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As for the second aspect of the problem raised by Lenin, the right of self-determination of peoples, the Russian revolution proved that if the proletarian revolution does not coincide with its proclamation, it represents only a means of channelling revolutionary effervescence, a weapon of repression that all imperialisms

knew how to wield in 1919, from Wilson to the representatives of French, Italian and English imperialism.”²⁷

The limits of the self-criticism of 1989

Throughout the process that led to the formation of the ICC in 1975, it was essential to take up the legacy of the Communist Left that had been abandoned as a result of the organic break. It was the ICC’s main task to re-establish this political continuity after the break in the link between successive communist organisations. Thanks to the militant action and comments of the French Communist Left and Internacionalismo, and the revival of the class at the end of the 1960s, it became possible to synthesise the contributions of the different currents of the Communist Left into a coherent whole based on the framework of decadence. In this work, the contribution of the Italian Left was central and, as we have seen above, the ICP recognises with an honesty that does it credit that the main lessons of the revolutionary wave and the counter-revolution elaborated by the Fraction that published *Bilan* in French are defended today by the ICC. On the other hand, the ICP is very timidly trying to learn the lessons of its internal crisis caused by this opportunist position defended on the national question.

Starting with *Prolétaire* n° 401 of May-June 1989, i.e. 7 years after its devastating internal crisis, the ICP recognises that *“the complexity of the situation and the evolution of the Palestinian Resistance caused a certain amount of uncertainty and false positions within the party; This was the case, for example, with the hope that the nuclei of the future proletarian vanguard in the region would emerge from organisations on the left of the PLO. The crisis that struck the party from the early 1980s onwards was triggered precisely by the ‘Palestinian question’.*” Among these false positions, it cites the demand for a *“mini-Palestinian state that would be a ghetto for Palestinian proletarians”* and goes so far as to proclaim – what sacrilege! – *“Palestine will not win; it is the proletarian revolution that will win!”*

But we soon have to face the facts, the limits of this self-criticism quickly become apparent. We learn, for example, that *“the factor of Arab nationalism’ has since the Second World War exhausted all potential for historical progress in the vast area stretching from the Middle East to the Atlantic and covering North Africa”*. This means that the PCInt remains a prisoner of

27. “Le problème des minorités nationales”, *Bilan* n° 14 (December 1934-January 1935).

its theory of geo-historical areas, that is to say, of the idea that there are areas here and there in the world where capitalism is still in its infancy, despite the work of R. Luxemburg and Lenin on imperialism showing the completion of the world market since 1914. From that moment on, capitalism has been in a senile state throughout the world and the task of the proletariat is the same everywhere: to destroy capitalism and establish new relations of production. This is where this ambiguity about geo-historical areas leads, reintroducing national interests into the struggle of the proletariat: “According to Marxism, the correct approach, especially for areas where the bourgeois revolution is no longer on the agenda (where there can therefore no longer be dual revolutions), **but where the national question has not been resolved, is to include the latter and the national struggle in the revolutionary class struggle.** The objective of the revolutionary class struggle is to conquer political power, not to establish a national state, but the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the instrument of the international proletarian revolution.” The moral of the story: the revolutionary class struggle can be waged by incorporating the national question into its method and objectives, which means necessarily making concessions to the national question!

The grand statements about “the international proletarian revolution” cannot save the ICP’s position on the national question. In order to remain coherent, it is constantly obliged to reintroduce the struggle for democratic rights and the demand for national self-determination. In doing so, it provokes a chauvinistic defensive reaction among Israeli proletarians while stunning Palestinian proletarians with speeches tinged with nationalism (opportunism again): “To break with their bourgeoisie, Jewish Israeli proletarians must disassociate themselves from the national oppression of the Palestinians. There is no worse misfortune for a people than to subjugate another, said Marx about English oppression of Ireland. To escape their situation, which is unfortunate from the point of view of the class struggle, Israeli Jewish proletarians will have to take up the dual ground of the struggle against discrimination against Palestinian and Arab proletarians in their living and working conditions (i.e. against the professionalism of the Israeli state), and the defence of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, i.e. the right of all Palestinians to establish their state in Palestine.”²⁸

28. All these quotations are taken from the ICP pamphlet, *Le marxisme et la question palestinienne*.

Thus the ICP still does not see that our period is not the same as Marx’s. It will never be able to clarify its problem until it recognises that in the era of imperialism (or capitalist decadence) the old bourgeois democratic programme was buried along with the national programme, that the nation can no longer serve as a framework for the development of the productive forces. As Rosa Luxemburg said: “*Certainly, the national phrase has remained, but its real content and function have been transformed into their opposite. It now only serves to mask imperialist aspirations as best it can, unless it is used as a battle cry in imperialist conflicts, the only and ultimate ideological means of winning over the masses and getting them to play their role as cannon fodder in imperialist wars.*”²⁹

When the proletariat embarks on a new course towards revolution, it will still be confronted for some time with the pitfalls of democratism and nationalism. At that point, the presence of a Communist Party, which will have long since proven its clarity of programme on these two questions, will be decisive in orienting the proletariat towards insurrection. But the political framework at the basis of the PCInt platform is obsolete on the national question and on many other points. The reason for this is to be found in the break made in the continuity of the work of the Communist Left of Italy. Having broken this continuity with the past, the PCInt is no longer in a position to build the future, that is to say to contribute to the formation of the future world party, a party that is non-sectarian, non-hierarchical, non-monolithic, non-substitutionist, but a leading party, not in the sense of a technical leadership of the class but of a political leadership, of an orientation militantly defended within the class, an orientation based on the final communist goal and on a complete analysis of the historical situation.

The significance of the variations on the national question among the Bordigist groups

The PCI, whose positions we have just examined, is only one of the expressions of the current Bordigist diaspora. After the explosion of 1982, the few surviving French militants approached those in Italy who published *Il Comunista* to reconstitute a new PCI claiming to continue the work of the previous one. It would be tedious to count the number of PCIs scattered across several continents, all claiming to be followers of Bordigism as developed from 1952 onwards. We will only men-

29. R. Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet*, “Invasion and class struggle”.

tion the other branch that had remained in Italy around Bruno Maffi (1909-2003) and which publishes *Il Programma Comunista* in Italian and the *Cahiers Internationalistes* in French.

Among all these groups, including their splits and their exclusions, several have questioned the validity of the original position of the PCI concerning the national question which seems to be invalidated by the facts. They then rediscovered that “the workers have no country” and that the task of the proletariat was the same everywhere, to overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize power. But the reasons for this change of position had to be explained. All the PCIs then had a ready-made answer up their sleeve: “The end of the cycle of anti-colonial bourgeois revolutions in Asia and Africa”, as proclaimed in a leaflet from September 2024 by the Madrid group *El Comunista*.

But this proclamation changed nothing in substance. We saw what happened to the self-criticism of 1989. The struggle against national oppression was an untouchable dogma. There had already been a long series of general meetings of the PCI at the end of the 1970s which was to establish “The end of the bourgeois revolutionary phase in the ‘Third World’,” as was announced by the title of the article in *Programme communiste* n° 83 (1980). This was the premise of the false self-criticism of 1989, as there is no questioning of fundamental aspects such as the so-called bourgeois nature of the Chinese “revolution” of 1949 and the Algerian “revolution” of 1962, nor of the alleged “double revolution” of 1917 in Russia. This article asserts that the end of bourgeois revolutions came in 1975, that is to say 61 years after the real beginning of the period of capitalism’s decline, as was emphasised by the First Congress of the Communist International. This change in the historical situation was said to be due to the withdrawal of the Americans from Vietnam and the end of the revolutionary period of the Chinese bourgeoisie, which, as we know, preferred to ally itself with the “great American Satan”. A hell of a discovery when you consider that the Chinese Maoist bourgeoisie had long been the spearhead of the Stalinist counter-revolution!

The attitude of the PCInt is reminiscent of the strategy of the most skilful bourgeois factions in history: “Change everything so that nothing changes.” Judge for yourself: “It is now a question of broadly identifying the phase in which the proletariat, which already links the realisation of these reforms, which are more favourable to the masses, to its own revolution, finds itself practically alone in advancing history and

thus becomes the heir to the bourgeois tasks not yet realised.”³⁰ Chased out the door, the bourgeois revolution comes back in through the window. This is why the *Cahiers Internationalistes* can calmly assert once again that the expropriation of Palestinian peasants since the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 evokes the period of primitive accumulation of capitalism: “The history of this dispossession resembles that of the English peasants of which Marx spoke: ‘the history of this dispossession is written in the annals of humanity in letters of fire and blood’”.

The introduction of the theory of geo-historical areas by the PCI is in total contradiction with marxism. For the latter, reality must be approached in its entirety, in its totality. And it is from this totality that its different parts can be analysed. The same is true of the capitalist mode of production. Starting from the point of view of total capital is the dialectical method that Marx claimed a thousand times in his work. Let’s take just one example from *Theories of Surplus Value*: “It is only foreign trade, the transformation of the market into a world market, that turns money into world money and abstract labour into social labour. Abstract wealth, value, money – and hence abstract labour – develop to the extent that concrete labour evolves in the direction of a totality of different modes of labour that encompasses the world market. Capitalist production is based on value, that is to say on the development as social labour of the labour contained in the product. But this only takes place on the basis of foreign trade and the world market. It is therefore both the condition and the result of capitalist production”.³¹

A real clarification of the national question, which gives the PCInt so much trouble, means that the following questions in particular should be addressed:

- The emergence of a highly developed capitalism is one of the material conditions indispensable to the realisation of communism. But, first of all, its own specific contradictions make it impossible to extend such a capitalist development to the whole world. Furthermore, capitalism remains an economy of scarcity because it is a paralysed system due to the wage relationship and competition. It creates the seeds of communism, but not communism itself. In this way, the economic measures that the proletariat can take will have to be oriented towards communism but will remain limited, at first, until the international power of the

workers' councils is assured. This is all the more so since the decomposition of capitalism will have led to much destruction, including during the revolutionary civil war. This limitation is inevitable, both in developed countries and in countries on the periphery of capitalism, and has nothing to do with bourgeois demands as the PCInt claims.

- Marx and Engels were the first to challenge the notion of “permanent revolution” defended in the Address of the Central Committee of the Communist League of March 1850.³² It is 1848 and no longer 1789, the proletarian threat has completely cooled the revolutionary pretensions of the bourgeoisie. The hypothesis of the “permanent revolution”,³³ also proved to be wrong, and that of the “dual revolution” invented by the Bordigists a caricature.³⁴ As the magazine *Bilan* quoted above shows, the Italian Fraction had perfectly understood that the historical tasks of one class cannot be assumed by another class, but the Bordigists did not.
- There are no anti-imperialist struggles, as the Maoists claim, there are only inter-imperialist conflicts. The anti-colonial struggles ended with decolonisation. Colonial subjugation has been transformed into imperialist subjugation, which the most developed bourgeois powers impose on weaker countries in their bloody competition for control of the planet's strategic zones. All this in a context where imperialism, militarisation, state capitalism, chaos and war have become the way of life for all nations, large or small.
- The tasks of the proletariat are now the

32. See the Prefaces to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the Preface to Marx's book, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, in which Engels explains why “history has proved us and all who thought similarly wrong”. The clearest explanation, that the historical tasks of one class cannot be assumed by another class, is given by Marx in *Revelations concerning the communist trial in Cologne* (Basel, 1853)

33. “When Lenin wrote the April Theses in 1917, he rejected all outdated notions of a stage halfway between proletarian revolution and bourgeois revolution, all vestiges of purely national conceptions of revolutionary change. In fact, the Theses rendered the ambiguous concept of permanent revolution superfluous and affirmed that the revolution of the working class is communist and international, or it is nothing.” (“Communism is not a nice idea but a material necessity – The revolutions of 1848: the communist perspective becomes clearer”. *International Review* n° 73.

34. It did not correspond at all to Lenin's vision, for whom “The whole of this revolution (of 1917) can only be conceived as a link in the chain of proletarian socialist revolutions provoked by the imperialist war” (Preface to *The State and Revolution*, 1917.). Also read: “The Russian Revolution and the Bordigist Current: Serious Errors...”, “October 1917: The Greatest Revolutionary Experience of the Working Class”, *International Review* n° 131.

30. “La fin de la phase révolutionnaire bourgeoise dans le ‘Tiers Monde’”, *Programme communiste* n° 83 (1980), p. 40.

31. K. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. III, Paris, Éditions sociales, 1976, p. 297.

same everywhere: to take power and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat through its struggle as a class, its international unification and the generalisation of the revolution. This dynamic, in which the World Communist Party is called upon to play a decisive role, relies on the ability of the proletariat to draw behind it, or neutralise if necessary, the non-exploiting social strata – the mass of the unemployed, the poor peasantry and small businesses – a process that is only achievable under the leadership of the most experienced working class, that of old Europe.

To this end, the communists must everywhere fly the flag of class autonomy and proletarian internationalism, that is to say unmask the hideous face of chauvinism beneath the rhetoric of national oppression.

A. Elberg

Anti-Semitism, Zionism, Anti-Zionism: all are enemies of the proletariat (part 1)

Preface

Since October 7 2023, the barbarism of war in the Middle East has descended to unprecedented levels. Before this date, there had been numerous attacks by nationalist terrorists against the population of Israel, but nothing compares to the ferocity and scale of the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas on October 7. And while the Israeli armed forces have in the past carried out numerous brutal reprisals against the population of Gaza, nothing compares to the systematic destruction of homes, hospitals, schools and other vital infrastructure throughout Gaza, and to the horrifying numbers of dead and wounded resulting from Israel's campaign of revenge for October 7 – a campaign which is more and more openly assuming the form of the ethnic cleansing of the whole area, a project now overtly supported by the Trump administration in the US. And not only has the conflict between Israel and Hamas spread to the decimation of Hizbollah in Lebanon, to attacks on the Houthis in Yemen and military operations against Iran itself, the region is also convulsed by parallel conflicts which seem no less intractable: between the Turks and Kurds in Syria, for example, or between Saudi Arabia and Iran and its Houthi agents for control of Yemen. The Middle East, one of the main cradles of civilisation, has emerged as a harbinger of its future destruction.

In the article “Spiral of atrocities in the Middle East: the terrifying reality of decomposing capitalism” in *International Review* n°171, we provided a historical overview of the “Israel-Palestine” conflict against the background of the wider imperialist struggles for control of the Middle East. In the two articles that follow, we will focus on the ideological justifications that are used by the warring imperialist camps

to justify this “spiral of atrocities”. Thus, the state of Israel never ceases to appeal to the memory of previous waves of anti-Jewish persecutions, and above all the Nazi Holocaust, in order to present the Zionist colonisation of Palestine as a legitimate movement of national liberation, and above all to justify its murderous offensives as being no more than the defence of the Jewish people against a future Holocaust.

Meanwhile, Palestinian nationalism and its leftist supporters portray the October 7 massacre of Israeli and other civilians as a legitimate act of resistance against decades of oppression and displacement that go back to the foundation of the Israeli state. And in its slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”, Palestinian nationalism offers a sinister mirror image of the demand of the Zionist right for the establishment of a greater Israel: in the dark utopia envisioned by the first slogan, the land will be free of Jews, while the project of a Greater Israel is to be achieved by the mass displacement of the Arab populations of Gaza and the West Bank.

These ideologies are not merely passive reflections of the “material” needs of war: they actively serve to mobilise the populations of the region, and across the world, behind the different belligerent camps. Their analysis and demystification is thus a necessary task for those who raise the standard of internationalist opposition to all imperialist wars. And our intention is to produce further contributions that expose the roots of other ideologies that play a similar role in the region, such as Islamism and Kurdish nationalism.

Part One: Anti-Semitism and the origins of Zionism

The bourgeois revolution against feudalism in the Europe of the late 18th and early 19th century generally took the form of struggles for national unification or independence against the petty kingdoms and larger empires dominated by decaying monarchies and aristocracies. The demand for national self-determination (for example for Poland against the Tsarist empire) could thus contain a clearly progressive element which was strongly supported by Marx and Engels, for example in the *Communist Manifesto*. Not because they saw this demand as the concretisation of an abstract “right” of all national or ethnic groups, but because it could accelerate the political changes required for the development of bourgeois relations of production in a period when capitalism had not yet completed its historical mission. However, in the wake of the Paris Commune of 1871,

the first example of the seizure of power by the proletariat, Marx had already begun to question whether there could be any more truly national wars, at least in the centres of the world capitalist system. This was because the ruling classes of Prussia and France had shown that, faced with the proletarian revolution, national bourgeoisies were ready to sink their differences in order to stifle the danger from the exploited class, and so used the “defence of the nation” as a pretext for crushing the proletariat. By the time of the First World War, marking capitalism's entry into its epoch of decline, Rosa Luxemburg, writing in the Junius Pamphlet, had concluded that national liberation struggles had completely lost any progressive content, entangled as they were in the machinations of competing imperialist powers. Not only that: the small nations had themselves become imperialist,

and the “oppressed” nation of yesterday had become the oppressors of even smaller nations, subjecting them to the same policies of plunder, expulsion and massacre that they themselves had experienced. The history of Zionism has entirely confirmed Rosa Luxemburg's analysis. It had become a significant national movement in response to the “return” of anti-Semitism in the latter part of the 19th century; and thus, no less than this new wave of anti-Semitism, it was essentially a product of a capitalist society that was already approaching its decadence. As we shall show in the articles that follow, it has demonstrated again and again that it is a “false Messiah”,¹ which

1. *Zionism, False Messiah* is the title of a book by Nathan Weinstock first published in 1969. It contains a very detailed history of Zionism and amply demonstrates the reality of the title. But it is also written from a Trotskyist starting point which provides a sophisticated argument in favour of

like all nationalisms has not only always acted as a player in wider imperialist games, but has consistently instrumentalised the horrific oppression and slaughter of Jewish populations in Europe and the Middle East to justify the expulsion and massacre of the “native” population of Palestine.

But Luxemburg’s rejection of all forms of nationalism is equally confirmed by the history of the various expressions of “anti-Zionism”. Whether it wears the green flag of Jihadism or the red flag of capitalism’s left wing, this supposedly “anti-imperialist” ideology is equally as reactionary as Zionism itself, serving to dragoon its followers into the war-fronts of capital, behind other imperialist powers which have no solution to the terrible plight of the Palestinian population. We will return to this in the second part of the article.

The resurgence of anti-Semitism in western Europe in the late 19th century

The *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, n° 19, May 9, 1890 published the following letter by Engels, originally written to a member of the German Social Democratic Party, Isidor Ehrenfreund. It was part of a more general recognition by the marxist wing of the workers’ movement that it was necessary to combat the rise of anti-Semitism, which was having an impact on the working class, and even parts of its political avant-garde, the Social Democratic Parties.²

“But whether you might not be doing more harm than good with your anti-Semitism is something I would ask you to consider. For anti-Semitism betokens a retarded culture, which is why it is found only in Prussia and Austria, and in Russia too. Anyone dabbling in anti-Semitism, either in England or in America, would simply be ridiculed, while in Paris the only impression created by M. Drumont’s writings – wittier by far than those of the German anti-Semites – was that of a somewhat ineffectual flash in the pan.

“Moreover, now that he is standing for the Municipal Council he has actually had

“anti-imperialist” national struggles. We will return to this in the second article. Ironically, Weinstock has renounced his earlier views and now describes himself as a Zionist, as the *Jewish Chronicle* gleefully points out: “Meet the Trotskyist anti-Zionist who saw the errors of his ways”, *Jewish Chronicle* 4 December 2014.

2. In his book *The Socialist Response to Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge 2007), Lars Fischer provides a good deal of material demonstrating that even the most able leaders of the German Social Democratic Party – including Bebel, Kautsky, Liebknecht and Mehring – displayed a certain level of confusion on this issue. Interestingly, he singles out Rosa Luxemburg for maintaining the clearest and most intransigent position on the rise of Jew-hatred and its anti-proletarian role.

to declare himself an opponent of Christian no less than of Jewish capital. And M. Drumont would be read even were he to take the opposite view.

“In Prussia it is the lesser nobility, the Junkers with an income of 10,000 marks and outgoings of 20,000, and hence subject to usury, who indulge in anti-Semitism, while both in Prussia and Austria a vociferous chorus is provided by those whom competition from big capital has ruined – the petty bourgeoisie, skilled craftsmen and small shop-keepers. But in as much as capital, whether Semitic or Aryan, circumcised or baptised, is destroying these classes of society which are reactionary through and through, it is only doing what pertains to its office, and doing it well; it is helping to impel the retarded Prussians and Austrians forward until they eventually attain the present-day level at which all the old social distinctions resolve themselves in the one great antithesis – capitalists and wage-labourers. Only in places where this has not yet happened, where there is no strong capitalist class and hence no strong class of wage-labourers, where capital is not yet strong enough to gain control of national production as a whole, so that its activities are mainly confined to the Stock Exchange – in other words, where production is still in the hands of the farmers, landowners, craftsmen and such like classes surviving from the Middle Ages – there, and there alone, is capital mainly Jewish, and there alone is anti-Semitism rife.

“In North America not a single Jew is to be found among the millionaires whose wealth can, in some cases, scarcely be expressed in terms of four paltry marks, gulden or francs and, by comparison with these Americans, the Rothschilds are veritable paupers. And even in England, Rothschild is a man of modest means when set, for example, against the Duke of Westminster. Even in our own Rhineland from which, with the help of the French, we drove the aristocracy 95 years ago and where we have established modern industry, one may look in vain for Jews.

“Hence anti-Semitism is merely the reaction of declining medieval social strata against a modern society consisting essentially of capitalists and wage-labourers, so that all it serves are reactionary ends under a purportedly socialist cloak; it is a degenerate form of feudal socialism and we can have nothing to do with that. The very fact of its existence in a region is proof that there is not yet enough capital there. Capital and wage-labour are today indivisible. The stronger capital and hence the wage-earning class becomes, the closer will be the demise of capitalist domination. So what I would wish for us Germans,

amongst whom I also count the Viennese, is that the capitalist economy should develop at a truly spanking pace rather than slowly decline into stagnation.

“In addition, the anti-Semite presents the facts in an entirely false light. He doesn’t even know the Jews he decries, otherwise he would be aware that, thanks to anti-Semitism in eastern Europe, and to the Spanish Inquisition in Turkey, there are here in England and in America thousands upon thousands of Jewish proletarians; and it is precisely, these Jewish workers who are the worst exploited and the most poverty-stricken. In England during the past twelve months we have had three strikes by Jewish workers. Are we then expected to engage in anti-Semitism in our struggle against capital?”

*“Furthermore, we are far too deeply indebted to the Jews. Leaving aside Heine and Börne, Marx was a full-blooded Jew; Lassalle was a Jew. Many of our best people are Jews. My friend Victor Adler, who is now atoning in a Viennese prison for his devotion to the cause of the proletariat, Eduard Bernstein, editor of the **London Sozialdemokrat**, Paul Singer, one of our best men in the Reichstag – people whom I am proud to call my friends, and all of them Jewish! After all, I myself was dubbed a Jew by the Gartenlaube and, indeed, if given the choice, I’d as lief be a Jew as a ‘Herr von’!”*

This was not the first time that the workers’ movement, and above all its petty bourgeois fringes, had been infected by what August Bebel once termed “the socialism of imbeciles” – essentially, the diversion of an embryonic anti-capitalism into the scapegoating of Jews, and in particular of “Jewish finance”, seen as the unique source of the miseries engendered by capitalist society. Proudhon’s anti-Semitism was vicious and overt,³ and that of Bakunin was not far behind. And indeed, even Marx and Engels themselves were not entirely immune from the disease. Marx’s *On the Jewish Question* in 1843 was written explicitly in favour of political emancipation for the Jews in Germany against the sophistries of Bruno Bauer, while also pointing to the limitations of a purely political emancipation within the

3. For example: “We must demand [the Jews’] expulsion from France, except for those married to French women; the religion must be proscribed because the Jew is the enemy of humanity, one must return this race to Asia or exterminate it. Heine, (Alexandre) Weill and others are only spies; Rothschild, (Adolph) Crémieux, Marx, (Achille) Fould are evil, unpredictable, envious beings who hate us”. Dreyfus, François-Georges. 1981. “Antisemitismus in der Dritten Franzö Republik.” In Bernd Marin and Ernst Schulin, eds., *Die Juden als Minderh der Geschichte*. München: DTV

boundaries of bourgeois society.⁴ And yet at the same time the essay contained some concessions to anti-Semitic motifs which have been used by the enemies of marxism ever since; and the private correspondence of Marx and Engels, especially on the subject of Ferdinand Lassalle, contain a number of “jokes” about his Jewishness (and even his “negroid” features) which can – at best – only inspire a feeling of embarrassment. And in some of his earlier public writings Engels seems more or less unconscious of some of the anti-Semitic slurs in publications with which he was collaborating actively.⁵ We will take up some of the issues posed by these scars in a future article.

However, by the time Engels wrote the letter to Ehrenfreund, his understanding of the whole question had been through a fundamental evolution. There were a number of factors behind this evolution, some of them reflected in the letter.

First, Engels had been through a series of political battles, in the period of the First International and after, in which opponents of the marxist current had not hesitated to use anti-Semitic attacks against Marx himself – Bakunin in particular, who located Marx’s “authoritarianism” in the observation that he was both a Jew and German.⁶ And in Germany, Eugene Dühring, whose purported “alternative system” to the marxist theoretical framework prompted Engels’ famous polemic *Anti-Dühring*, expressed a profound hatred of the Jews, which in later writings anticipated the Nazis by calling for their literal extermination.⁷ Thus Engels was able to see that the “socialism of imbeciles” was more than a product of stupidity or of theoretical error – it was a weapon against the revolutionary current he was seeking to develop. Thus, he ends the letter with a clear expression of solidarity against the racist attacks published in the anti-Semitic press on the many revolutionaries who had come from a Jewish background.

At the same time, as Engels explains in the letter, the late 19th century had seen the emergence of a Jewish proletariat in the cities of western Europe “*thanks to anti-Semitism in eastern Europe*”. In other words, the growing impoverishment of Jews in the Russian Empire, and the growing resort to pogroms by a decaying Tsarist

regime, had driven hundreds of thousands of Jews to seek refuge in western Europe and the USA, the majority of them coming with little but the clothes on their backs, and having no alternative but to join the ranks of the proletariat, especially in the garment industries. This influx was, like today’s “flood” of refugees towards the west, a key element in the rise of racist parties, but for Engels there was not a moment’s hesitation about supporting the struggles of these immigrant proletarians, who, as the letter said, had shown their militant spirit in a series of strikes (and we could add, through a rather high level of politicisation). Indeed Engels, in association with Marx’s daughter Eleanor, had gained first-hand experience of the strike movements of Jewish workers in the East End of London. It was thus perfectly evident that revolutionaries could under no circumstances “*engage in anti-Semitism in our struggle against capital*”.

The main weakness of the letter is the idea that anti-Semitism was essentially linked to the persistence of feudal relations and that the further development of capitalism would undermine its foundations, and even make it laughable.

Of course, it was true that anti-Semitism had deep roots in pre-capitalist social formations. It stretched at least as far back as ancient Greece and Rome, fuelled by the persistent tendency of the population of Israel to rebel against the political and religious dikats of the Greek and Roman empires. And it played an even more important role in feudalism. The central ideology of feudal Europe, Catholic Christianity, was based on the stigmatisation of the Jews as the killers of Christ, an accursed people forever scheming to bring misfortunes on the Christians – whether through the poisoning of wells, the spreading of plague, or the sacrifice of Christian children in their Passover rituals. The development of the myth of the world Jewish conspiracy, which was given wings after the publication of the Okhrana forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the early years of the 20th century, undoubtedly had its roots in these dark mediaeval mythologies.

Moreover, at the material level, this persistent hatred of the Jews must be understood in connection to the economic role imposed on Jews in the feudal system, above all as usurers – a practice formally forbidden to Christians. While this role made them useful adjuncts of the feudal monarchs (who often presented themselves as “protectors of the Jews”), it also exposed them to periodic massacres which conveniently brought with them the wiping out of kingly or aristocratic debts – and eventually, to expulsion from many western

European countries as the slow emergence of capitalism produced a “native” financial elite which needed to eliminate competition from Jewish finance.⁸

It was also true that the main audience for anti-Semitism were the remnants of classes doomed by the advance of capital – the declining aristocracy, the petty bourgeoisie and so on. These were to a large extent the strata being appealed to by the new breed of anti-Semitic demagogues – Dühring and Marr in Germany (the latter credited with the invention of the term anti-Semitism – as a badge to be worn with pride), Drumont in France, Karl Lueger who became the mayor of Vienna, in 1897, etc. And finally, Engels was right in pointing out that the advance of the bourgeois revolution in Europe had, earlier on in the century, brought with it a certain advance in the political emancipation of the Jews. But Engels’ view that the “*capitalist economy should develop at a truly spanking pace*” and thus consign to the dustbin of history all the decaying feudal remnants, and with them all forms of “feudal socialism” such as anti-Semitism, underestimated the degree to which capital was rushing towards its own period of decay. Indeed, this is already hinted at in the letter, where Engels says that the stronger capitalism becomes, the “*closer will be the demise of capitalist domination*”. And in other writings Engels had developed the most profound insights into the shape this demise would take:

- At the economic level, the very conquest of the globe and the drive to integrate all its pre-capitalist regions into the orbit of capitalist social relations would open the floodgates of world overproduction, and this perspective was already being outlined by the end of the ten-year cycle of “boom and bust” and the onset of the “long depression” of the 1880s. It should be added that the impact of the depression also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitic agitation in Europe, which often focused on blaming the “Jewish money kings” for the economic ills now becoming apparent.⁹
- At the military level, Engels was well aware that this conquest of the globe, the hunt for colonies, would not be a peaceful process, and in one of his most remarkable predictions foresaw

4. See “160 years on: Marx and the Jewish question”, *International Review* n° 114.

5. See for example Mario Kessler, “Engels’ position on anti-Semitism in the context of contemporary socialist discussions”, *Science & Society*, Vol. 62, n° 1, Spring 1998, 127-144, for some examples, as well as some questionable statements by Engels himself about Jews in his writings about the national question.

6. For example, in “To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain”, 1872., available on the libcom website.

7. See Kessler, op cit.

8. This didn’t exclude the fact that later on, especially following the political “emancipation” of European Jews as a result of the bourgeois revolution, a real Jewish bourgeoisie arose in Europe, particularly in the field of finance. The Rothschilds are the most obvious example of this.

9. See our article “Decadence of capitalism (vi): The theory of capitalist decline and the struggle against revisionism”, *International Review* n° 141, 2010. The involvement of certain Jewish bankers in the stock market crash that precipitated the depression provided fuel for this demagogy.

that inter-imperialist competition would ultimately lead to a devastating European war.¹⁰ Imperialism also provided a more “modern” form of racism, using a deformed Darwinism to justify the domination of the “White Race” over the “lesser breeds”, among whom the Jews were seen as a particularly malevolent force.

- At the level of the organisation of capital, Engels could already see that the state was assuming a central role in the management of the national economies, a tendency which was to reach its full fruition in the period of capitalist decline.¹¹

Thus far from consigning anti-Semitism to the dustbin of history, the further development of world capital, its accelerating race towards an era of historic crisis, would give a new lease of life to anti-Jewish racism and persecution, above all in the wake of the defeat of the proletarian revolutions of 1917-23.

Thus,

- In the 1905 revolution in Russia – already a harbinger of the approaching epoch of proletarian revolution – the pogrom was adopted by the Tsarist regime as a direct method of crushing the revolution and creating divisions within the working class. This counter-revolutionary strategy was used on an even bigger scale by the White armies in Russia as a weapon against the revolution. Hence the intransigent opposition of Lenin and the Bolsheviks to any form of anti-Semitism, poison for the workers’ struggle. In Germany, defeat in World War One was explained by the legend of the “stab in the back” by a cabal of marxists and Jews, giving a major impetus to the growth of fascist groups and parties, above all Hitler’s National Socialist Workers’ Party. Needless to say, these gangs were intimately linked to the military formations which, at the behest of the Social Democratic government, had carried out the brutal repression of workers’ revolts in Berlin, Munich, and elsewhere. In other European countries during the 1920s, such as Poland and Hungary, the defeat of the revolution was consolidated by anti-Semitic legislation which prefigured what was to come in Germany under the Nazis.
- The world economic crisis of the 1930s, the product of impersonal capitalist contradictions that are rarely visible and hard to comprehend, was also exploited to the hilt by the fascist and Nazi parties to offer a “simpler” explanation, with

an easily identifiable scapegoat: the rich Jewish financier, allied with the bloody-handed Bolshevik in a sinister conspiracy against Aryan civilisation.

In the full glare of these horrifying developments, a young member of the Trotskyist movement, Avram Leon, trying in Nazi-occupied Belgium to develop a few insights by Marx into a historical understanding of the Jewish Question,¹² was to conclude that this was a question that decadent capitalism would be totally unable to solve. This was no less true of the so-called “socialist” regimes in the USSR and its bloc. Under Stalin’s reign, anti-Semitic campaigns were often used to settle scores within the bureaucracy and provide a scapegoat for the miseries of the Stalinist system. The “doctor’s plot” of 1953 is particularly notorious, with its echoes of the old story of Jews as secret poisoners. Meanwhile the Stalinist version of “Jewish self-determination” took the form of the “autonomous region” of Birobidzhan in Siberia, which Trotsky rightly labelled a “bureaucratic farce”. These persecutions, often under the banner of “anti-Zionism”, continued in the post-Stalin period, leading to mass emigration of Russian Jews to Israel.

If the upsurge of modern anti-Semitism, and the reinvention of utterly reactionary mythologies inherited from feudalism, was a sign of capitalism’s approaching senility, the same is true of modern Zionism, which emerged in the 1890s as a direct reaction to the anti-Jewish tide.

Dreyfus, Herzl, and the evolution of Zionism

As we pointed out in the introduction to this article, Zionism was the product of a more general development of nationalism in the 19th century, the ideological reflection of the rising bourgeoisie and its replacement of feudal fragmentation by more unified nation states. The unification of Italy and emancipation from Austrian hegemony was one of the heroic achievements of this period which had a definite impact on the first theoreticians of Zionism (Moses Hess for example – see below). But the Jews did not conform to the main trends in bourgeois nationalism, since they lacked a unified territory and even a common language. This was one of the factors which prevented Zionism from having a mass appeal until it was driven forward by the rising anti-Semitism of the late 19th century.

12. Avram Leon: *The Jewish Question - A Marxist Interpretation* (1946). Available on the marxists.org website. See also “160 years on: Marx and the Jewish question”, *International Review* n° 114.

Zionist ideology also drew on the long-standing “peculiarities” of the Jewish populations, whose separate existence was structured both by the specific economic role carried out by Jews in the feudal economy but also by powerful political and ideological factors: on the one hand, the state-enforced ghettoisation of the Jews and their exclusion from key areas of feudal society; on the other hand, the Jews’ own view of themselves as the “Chosen People”, who could only be a “light unto the nations” by remaining distinct from them, at least until the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God on Earth; these ideas were framed, of course, by the mythology of exile and promised return to Zion which permeates the Biblical background to Jewish history.

For centuries, however, while many orthodox Jews from the “Diaspora” made individual pilgrimages to the land of Israel, the main teaching of the rabbis was that the rebuilding of the Temple and the formation of a Jewish state could only be achieved through the coming of the Messiah. Some orthodox Jewish sects, such as Neturei Karta, still hold to such ideas today and are fiercely anti-Zionist, even those living in Israel.

The development of secularism in the course of the 19th century made it possible for a non-religious form of the “Return” to gain adherence among the Jewish populations. But the dominant result of the decline of orthodox Judaism and its replacement by more modern ideologies such as liberalism and rationalism was that the Jews in the advanced capitalist countries had begun losing their unique characteristics and assimilating into bourgeois society. Some marxists, notably Kautsky,¹³ even saw in the process of assimilation the possibility of solving the problem of anti-Semitism within the confines of capitalism.¹⁴ However, the revival of anti-Semitism in the latter part of the century was to call such assumptions into question and at the same give a decisive push to the capacity of

13. See in particular “Are the Jews a Race?”, available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/jewsrace/index.htm> [8]

14. In the 1930s Trotsky gave an interview in which he said that “During my youth I rather leaned toward the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective. Decaying capitalism has everywhere swung over to an exacerbated nationalism, one part of which is anti-Semitism. The Jewish question has loomed largest in the most highly developed capitalist country of Europe, in Germany.” Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/jewish.htm>. Given his more general political framework, this led Trotsky to argue that only socialism could offer any real “national self-determination” to the Jews (and the Arabs for that matter).

10. Ibid.

11. In *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.

modern political Zionism to offer another alternative to the persecution of the Jews and the realisation of the national aspirations of the Jewish bourgeoisie.

The title of “founding father” of this brand of Zionism is usually given to Theodor Herzl, who convened the first Zionist Congress in 1897. But there had been precursors. In 1882, Leon Pinsker, a Jewish doctor living in Odessa in the Russian Empire had published *Self-Emancipation. A Warning Addressed to His Brethren. By a Russian Jew*, advocating Jewish emigration to Palestine. Pinsker had been an assimilationist until his belief in the possibility of Jews finding safety and dignity in “gentile” society was shattered by witnessing a brutal pogrom in Odessa in 1881.

Perhaps more curious was the evolution of Moses Hess, who in the early 1840s had been a comrade of Marx and Engels and indeed played a significant role in their own transition from radical democracy to communism, and in their recognition of the revolutionary character of the proletariat. But by the time the *Communist Manifesto* was produced their paths had diverged, and Marx and Engels were placing Hess among the “German” or “True” Socialists. Certainly, by the 1860s, Hess had embarked on a very different direction. Again, probably influenced by the first signs of anti-Semitic reaction against the formal emancipation of the Jews in Germany, Hess turned more and more to the idea that national and even racial conflicts were of no less importance than class struggle as social determinants, and in his book *Rome and Jerusalem, the Last National Question* (1862) he advocated an early form of Zionism which dreamed of establishing a Jewish socialist commonwealth in Palestine. Significantly, Hess had already understood that such a project would need the backing of one of the world’s great powers, and for him this task would fall to Republican France.

Like Pinsker, Herzl was a more or less assimilated Jew, a lawyer from Austria who had witnessed first-hand the new dawn of Judeophobia and the election of Karl Lueger as mayor of the city. But it was probably the Dreyfus Affair in France which had the biggest impact on Herzl, convincing him that there could be no solution to the persecution of the Jews until they had their own state. In 1894, Republican France, where the revolution had granted civil rights to Jews, was the scene of a trumped-up trial for treason of a Jewish officer, Alfred Dreyfus, who was sentenced to life imprisonment and banished to the Devil’s Island penal colony in French Guyana, where he spent the next five years in very harsh conditions. Subsequent evidence that Dreyfus had

been framed was suppressed by the army, and the affair produced a sharp split in French society, pitting the Catholic right, the army and the followers of Drumont against the Dreyfusards, whose leading figures included Emile Zola and Georges Clemenceau. Eventually (but not until 1906) Dreyfus was exonerated, but the divisions within the French bourgeoisie did not disappear, returning to the surface with the rise of fascism in the 1930s and in the Pétainist “National Revolution” after France fell to Nazi Germany in 1941.

Herzl’s Zionism was entirely secular, even if it drew on the ancient Biblical motifs of exile and return to the Promised Land, which as the majority of Zionists recognised, had much more ideological power than other potential “homelands” under discussion at the time (Uganda, South America, Australia, etc).

Above all, Herzl understood the need to sell his utopia to the rich and powerful of the day. Thus, he went cap in hand not only to the Jewish bourgeoisie, some of whom had already been financing Jewish emigration to Palestine and elsewhere, but also to rulers such as the Ottoman Sultan and the German Kaiser; in 1903 he even had an audience with the notoriously anti-Semitic Interior Minister Plehve in Russia, who had been involved in provoking the horrific Kishinev pogrom that same year. Plehve told Herzl that the Zionists could operate freely in Russia as long as they stuck to encouraging Jews to leave for Palestine. After all, had not the Tsar’s minister Pobedonostsev stated that the aim of his government with regard to the Jews was that “*One third will die out, one third will leave the country and one third will be completely dissolved in the surrounding population*”? And here were the Zionists offering to put the “leaving the country” clause into effect... This mutuality of interests between Zionism and the most extreme forms of anti-Semitism was thus woven into the movement from its inception and would re-occur throughout its history. And Herzl was categorical in his belief that fighting anti-Semitism was a waste of time – not least because, at some level, he considered that the anti-Semites were right in seeing Jews as an alien body in their midst.¹⁵

15. This outlook is even more explicit in a statement by the German political Zionist Jacob Klatzkin, who wrote, “*If we do not admit the rightfulness of anti-Semitism, we deny the rightfulness of our own nationalism. If our own people is deserving and willing to live its own national life, then it is an alien body thrust into the nations among whom it lives, an alien body that insists on its own distinctive identity... It is right, therefore, that they should fight against us for their national integrity*” (quoted in Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators: A Reappraisal*, London 1983).

“*In Paris, then, I gained a freer attitude towards anti-Semitism, which I now begin to understand historically and to make allowances for. Above all I recognise the emptiness and futility of efforts to ‘combat anti-Semitism.*”¹⁶

Thus, from the beginning:

- Anti-Semitism was a central factor in the rise and development of a significant Zionist movement, but it was based on the belief that it was impossible to overcome Jew-hatred until the Jews had their own state, or at least their own “national homeland”.
- Zionism therefore proposed not to focus its energies on fighting anti-Semitism in the “Diaspora”, and even advocated cooperation with its main proponents.
- From the beginning, the Zionist project required the support of the dominant imperialist powers, as would become even clearer in 1917 when Britain issued the Balfour Declaration. This was a prefiguration of what was to become the reality of all national movements in the epoch of capitalism’s decadence: they could only advance by tying themselves to one or other of the imperialist powers that dominate the planet in this epoch.

The quest for backing by the imperialist powers was entirely logical in that Zionism was born in the period when imperialism was still very much engaged in the acquisition of new colonies in the peripheral regions of the globe, and it saw itself as an attempt to create a colony in an area that was either declared uninhabited (the “land without people for a people without land” slogan of dubious origin) or inhabited by backward¹⁷ tribes who could only benefit from a new civilising mission by a more advanced western population. Herzl himself wrote a kind of utopian novel called *Alt-Neuland*, in which the Palestinian landowners sell some of their land to Jews, invest in modern agricultural machinery and thus raise the living standards of the Palestinian peasants. Problem solved!

“Workers of Zion”: the impossible fusion of marxism and Zionism

Herzl’s political Zionism was clearly a bourgeois phenomenon, an expression of nationalism at a time when capitalism was approaching its era of decline and

16. *Diaries*, Vol. 1 p 6, May-June 1895.

17. There were some exceptions in the Zionist movement to this paternalistic attitude. Asher Ginsberg, better known through his pen-name Ahad Ha’am, was in fact very critical of this “colonising” attitude towards the local inhabitants, and rather than a Jewish state proposed a kind of network of local communities both Jewish and Arab. In sum, a kind of anarchist utopia.

thus the progressive character of national movements was coming to an end. And yet, particularly in Russia, other forms of Jewish separatism were penetrating the workers' movement during the same period, in the shape of Bundism on the one hand, and "Socialist Zionism" on the other. This was a consequence of the material and ideological segregation of the Jewish working class under Tsarism.

*"The structure of the Jewish working class corresponded to a weak organic composition of capital inside the Pale of Settlement, which implied a concentration in the final stages of production. The cultural specificities of the Jewish proletariat, linked in the first place to its religion and language, were reinforced by structural separation from the Russian proletariat. The concentration of Jewish workers in a kind of socio-economic ghetto was the material origin of the birth of a specific Jewish workers movement."*¹⁸

The Bund – General Jewish Labour Bund in Russia and Poland – was founded in 1897 as an explicitly socialist party and played a significant role in the development of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, of which it saw itself as a part. It rejected religious and Zionist ideology and stood for a form of "national cultural autonomy" for the Jewish masses within Russia and Poland, as part of a wider socialist programme. It also aimed to be the sole representative of Jewish workers in Russia, and it was this aspect of its politics which was most severely criticised by Lenin, since it implied a federalist vision, a kind of "party within the party" that would undermine the effort to build a centralised revolutionary organisation across the Empire.¹⁹ This divergence led to a split at the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903, although it was not the end of cooperation and even attempts at reunification in the years that followed. The Bund's workers were often at the forefront of the 1905 revolution in Russia. But the capacity of Jewish and non-Jewish workers to unite in the soviets and fight alongside each other – including in the defence of Jewish districts against pogroms – already pointed beyond all forms of separatism and towards the future unification of the entire proletariat, both in their general, unitary organisations and their political vanguard.

As regards "Socialist Zionism", we have already mentioned the views of Moses Hess. Within Russia, there was

18. Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question, The History of a Debate, 1843-1943*, English edition 1994, p 96

19. See in particular Lenin, "The position of the Bund in the Party", *Iskra* n° 51, 22 October 1903, available on Marxist Internet Archive. See also "1903-4: the birth of Bolshevism", *International Review* n° 116.

the group around Nachman Syrkin, the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party, whose positions were close to those of the Socialist Revolutionaries. Syrkin was one of the first advocates of collective settlements – the kibbutzim – in Palestine. But it was the Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) group around Ber Borochov which made the attempt to justify Zionism using marxist theoretical concepts. According to Borochov, the Jewish question could only be resolved once the Jewish populations of the globe had a "normal" class structure, doing away with the "inverted pyramid" in which the intermediate strata had a preponderant weight; and this could only be achieved through the "conquest of labour" in Palestine. This project was to be embodied in the idea of "Jewish Labour Only" in the new agricultural and industrial settlements, which, unlike other forms of colonialism, would not be directly founded on the exploitation of the native workforce. Thus, eventually, a Jewish proletariat would confront a Jewish bourgeoisie and be ready to move on to the socialist revolution in Palestine. This was in essence a form of Menshevism, a "theory of stages" in which every nation first had to go through a bourgeois phase in order to lay down the conditions for a proletarian revolution – when in reality the world was fast approaching a new epoch in which the only revolution on the agenda of history was the world-wide, proletarian revolution, even if numerous regions had not yet entered the bourgeois stage of development. Furthermore, the policy of Jewish Labour Only became, in reality, the springboard of a new form of colonialism in which the native population was to be progressively expropriated and expelled. And in fact, when Borochov considered the existing Arab population of Palestine at all, he displayed the same colonialist attitude as the mainstream Zionists. "*The natives of Palestine will assimilate economically and culturally with whoever brings order into the country and undertakes the development of the forces of production of Palestine*".²⁰

Borochovism was thus a complete dead-end, and this was expressed in the eventual fate of Poale Zion. Although its left wing had demonstrated its proletarian character in 1914-20, opposing the imperialist war and supporting the workers' revolution in Russia, and even applying, unsuccessfully, to join the Comintern in its early years, the reality of life in Palestine led to irreconcilable divisions, with the majority of the left breaking from Zionism and forming the Palestine Communist Party in 1923.²¹

20. Borochov, "On the Question of Zion and Territory, 1905", quoted in *The Other Israel, The Radical Case against Zionism*, edited by Arie Bober 1972.

21. This took place after a complex process of division and reunification, essentially around the attitude to

The right wing (which included the future Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion) went towards social democracy and was to play a leading role in the management of the proto-state Yishuv before 1948, and the State of Israel after the "War of Independence".

In the early 70s, Borochovism, having more or less disappeared, enjoyed a kind of revival – as an instrument of Israeli state propaganda. Faced with a new generation of Jewish youth in the west who were critical of Israel's policies, above all after the 1967 war and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the left Zionist parties which had their ancestral origins in Poale Zion put their energies into winning over these young Jews lured by the anti-Zionism of the "New Left", with the bait being the assurance that you can be a marxist and Zionist at the same time, and that Zionism was a national liberation movement as equally valid as the Vietnamese or Palestinian liberation movements.

In this part of the article, we have argued quite the opposite: that Zionism, born in a period in which "national liberation" was becoming increasingly impossible, could not avoid attaching itself to the dominant imperialist powers of the day. In the second part, we will show not only that its whole history was marked by this reality, but also that it inevitably spawned its own imperialist projects. But we will also argue, in contrast to the left wing of capital which presents Zionism as some kind of unique evil, that this was to be the fate of all nationalist projects in the epoch of capitalist decadence, and that the anti-Zionist nationalisms which it also engendered have been no exception to this general rule.

Amos, February 2025

Zionism and Arab nationalism, and was to be followed by further splits around the same issues later on. It is worth noting here that the adoption of the position of the Comintern on the national question – rejection of Zionism in favour of support for nascent Arab nationalism – did not signify a move towards genuine internationalism. As we recount in our article about our comrade Marc Chirik ("Marc, Part 1: From the Revolution of October 1917 to World War II", *International Review* n° 65): Marc, whose family had fled to Palestine to avoid the pogroms being stirred up against the proletarian revolution in Russia, helped, at the age of 12, to form the youth section of the CP in Palestine – but was soon expelled for his opposition to nationalism in all its forms...

Debate in the proletarian political milieu
on the period of the decomposition of capitalism

“Counter-theses” or “counter-sense” on decomposition?

For over 35 years now, the ICC has put forward an analysis of the present period in the life of capitalism that we have described as “*the final phase of the period of decadence*”, the period “*when decomposition becomes a factor, if not the decisive factor, in the evolution of society*”. This analysis, to which we have devoted numerous articles and congress reports, has met with outright hostility from the proletarian political milieu, without this hostility being based on a serious refutation of our arguments. Most of the time, this analysis was dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders and a tone of mockery.

In this sense, the “Counter-Theses on Decomposition” written by Tibor, a comrade belonging to the Communist Left, are to be commended. Indeed, the comrade has produced a real effort to argue his disagreements with the ICC’s analysis addressing many of the arguments put forward in our Theses.¹

Admittedly, the comrade also allowed himself to be dragged along by the approach of many of our detractors, pronouncing categorical judgements about our analyses that were poorly argued. For example, he declared our Theses to be nothing less than “*dangerous*”; for him, the “*non-dialectical analysis*” of decomposition represents a real drift, an “*obvious dead end*” that “*disarms the proletariat*”. These “*inconsistent*” elucidations are the result of a “*visibly defective analytical method*”: “*this ICC theory suffers from four main pitfalls: its schematic dogmatism, its revisionism, its idealism and its impressionism*”. It would therefore be “*of the utmost importance for the proletariat to reject, on the basis of scientific examination, and not on the basis of a priori or prejudice, the erroneous position that decomposition is a new historical phase.*”² ...Here we are, ready for anything!

That said, comrade Tibor, unlike those who have so far been content to brush aside the theory of decomposition with a lazy wave of the hand,³ attempts, beyond

1. “These on Decomposition”. These Theses were written in May 1990 and published in *International Review* n° 62 (then republished in *International Review* n° 107). We invite our readers to read this text carefully, to get a clearer idea of it and better assess the validity of Comrade Tibor’s criticisms

2. It should also be pointed out that, in the very second paragraph of his text, Tibor declares our theory to be “*obviously erroneous*”. We might then ask why the comrade feels obliged to summon up numerous arguments to reject our theory “*as a result of a scientific examination*”. If our error is “*obvious*”, why bother demonstrating it? The Moon and Sun are “*obvious*” in the sky, and it would never occur to anyone in their right mind to engage in lengthy speeches to demonstrate the existence of these stars. That said, we welcome Tibor’s desire to make what is already visible even more visible.

3. The whole swamp of those who hold the ICC in contempt, starting with the IGCL thugs, have pounced

his somewhat peremptory assessments, to clarify his divergences by confronting them with the ICC’s positions. It is, in fact, the responsibility of all revolutionaries, especially those organisations that claim to defend the historic interests of the working class, to clarify the conditions of its struggle and to criticise analyses they deem erroneous. The proletariat and its vanguard minorities need a global framework for understanding the situation, without which they are doomed to be buffeted by events and unable to play their role as a compass for the working class.

Throughout his text, the comrade has drawn on numerous documents from the workers’ movement and the Marxist approach: “*One of the necessities of dialectics is to consider observed phenomena as a whole, as subject to permanent interaction. Rather than isolating a phenomenon to observe it in the abstract, the dialectical method implies understanding it through its relations with other phenomena, and refuses to abstract it from the environment in which it evolves*”. Here, too, we must salute his willingness to anchor his criticism and reflection not in vague prejudices, but in the history of the workers’ movement.

In turn, we shall examine the arguments and method of these “Counter-Theses”, and

on this text like frogs at the foot of the Holy Scriptures, finding in it material to denigrate the ICC once again. No doubt this parasitic little milieu will swear by the fact that they are only interested in clarifying and analysing the situation: we will be able to judge the value of their pious wishes by the mere fact that they have accepted these “Counter-Theses” without the slightest criticism or additional argument. We’ve seen more serious approaches, but these people are no closer to mounting a serious attack on the ICC. But the *Controversies* magazine is able to present Tibor’s text with an avalanche of tables and graphs. We’ll come back to this in a later article.

see whether they contribute, as they set out to do, “*to the clarification of the main political problems of our time*”.

Is the analysis of decomposition in continuity with marxism?

Comrade Tibor says it loud and clear: the analysis of decomposition is “*revisionist*”. “*This theory is used [by the ICC] to break with the essential facts of revolutionary Marxism*”. Does the ICC’s “*visibly flawed*” analysis really represent a revisionist innovation?

Before answering this question, it’s worth noting that comrade Tibor gives us a lesson in semantics. He considers that the terms “*decadence*”, “*obsolescence*” or “*decay*” of capitalism “*should only be used as synonyms for one and the same reality*”, and that “*decomposition*” is nothing other than “*another synonym for capitalist decline*”.

We won’t be so arrogant as to reproduce here the dictionary definitions of these terms, to show that they are not identical, but since the comrade wants to lead us into this territory, we must make one clarification: the terms *decadence*, *decline* and *obsolescence* can indeed be considered close, but those of *decomposition* and *rotting*, which are also close, are far removed from the former and relate rather to notions of *disintegration* or *putrefaction*. For this reason, our 1990 theses make a clear distinction between the terms *decay* and *decomposition*: “*...it would be wrong to identify decay and decomposition. If we cannot conceive of the existence of the decomposition phase outside the period of decadence, we can perfectly well account for the existence of decadence without the latter manifesting itself through the appearance of a decomposition phase.*”

But beyond these linguistic clarifications, what about our “*revisionism*”?

For Tibor, the “*dislocation of the social body, the rotting of its economic, political and ideological structures, etc. [...], these elements have never before been described by anyone as phenomena of decomposition*”. Well, comrade, that statement is wrong!

Before he became a “renegade”, Karl Kautsky described certain phenomena of the decadence of the Roman Empire as “*decomposition*”. He said: “*the age in which Christianity arose was a time of utter decomposition of traditional forms of production and government. Correspondingly, there was a total breakdown of traditional ways of thinking.*”⁴ And he didn’t confine himself to this mode of production, since he developed the same idea towards feudalism and its decline: “*A similar individual search and groping for new ways of thinking and new social organisations marked the age of liberalism that followed the breakup of feudal organisations without putting new social organisations at once in their stead.*”

Engels himself speaks of decomposition, distinguishing the period of the decadence of the feudal system from the phenomena of decomposition within it: “*So it was that feudalism all over Western Europe was in full decline during the fifteenth century. Everywhere cities, with their anti-feudal interests [...] had, through money, in part established their social – and here and there even their political – ascendancy over the feudal lords. Even in the countryside [...] the old feudal ties began to decompose under the influence of money.*”

We put the question to Comrade Tibor: does he think that Kautsky (when he was a Marxist) and Engels were merely “*playing with words*”, as he accuses the ICC of doing?

The decadence of modes of production has never been a mechanical process, with no qualitative evolution: the increasing disintegration of the imperial state, repeated *coups d’état*, increasingly uncontrollable epidemics, the gradual abandonment of the empire’s borders, the plundering campaigns of the Germanic tribes, and all that Kautsky refers to as the decomposition of “*traditional forms of production and the state [and] of thought*”, are indeed phenomena of the decay of the organisational forms of slave society, and of the fact that the decadence of a mode of production, like its ascendancy, undergoes an evolution and several phases. Better still, he very explicitly identified the decomposition of feudalism with the period when “*liberalism [...] had not yet had time to set up another mode of organisation*”, thus signifying the possibility of a momentary stalemate in the social situation.

Of course, the revolutionaries of the past couldn’t clearly distinguish between the period of decadence and the phenomena of decomposition, because they couldn’t yet see that the accumulation and aggrava-

4. Kautsky, *The Foundations of Christianity* (1908).

tion of these phenomena would lead to a specific and ultimate phase of capitalism’s decadence, the phase of decomposition. Above all, unlike capitalism, in which the revolutionary class cannot transform society without first overthrowing the political domination of the bourgeoisie, the development of new relations of production within them prevented the decomposition of the old forms of organisation from becoming a central factor in the social situation. Under feudal domination, for example, the bourgeoisie offered a new perspective and economic dynamism: the development of capitalist social relations thus prevented the disintegration of feudalism from permeating all parts of society and dragging it towards the abyss.

From this point of view, to speak of a “phase of decomposition” rather than “phenomena of decomposition” is indeed a “novelty”. But is this a mortal sin from the point of view of marxism?

Marxism is a method, a scientific approach and, as such, can never be fixed in an unchanging dogma. The entire political struggle of Marx and Engels bears witness to their constant concern to develop, enrich and even revise positions that proved insufficient or outdated in the face of an ever-changing reality. Thus, the experience of the Paris Commune profoundly changed their vision of revolution and the seizure of power, just as the revolution of 1848 had enabled them to understand that the objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism had not yet been met.

It was also on the basis of this living method that revolutionaries like Lenin and Luxemburg were able to identify the entry of capitalism into a new period of its life, that of its decadence. They placed at the heart of their analysis the notion of imperialism, which had become the permanent way of life of capitalism, even though this concept had not been theorised by either Marx or Engels.

From the 1920s onwards, the Communist Left, drawing on the methods of Marx, Lenin and Luxemburg, also worked critically on the new problems posed by the Russian Revolution and the period of decadence: the dictatorship of the proletariat, the state in the period of transition, trade unions, the national question... On the surface, the positions developed by the Communist Left contradicted those of Marx and Engels. But the lessons learned by the Communist Left, while constituting “*novelties*” never expressed “*by anyone before*”, represent a precious heritage fully in keeping with the tradition of marxism.

If the comrade is looking for genuinely “revisionist” innovations, we invite him to

make the implacable critique, “*following a scientific examination*”, of “*the invariance of Marxism since 1848*”, a theory elaborated by Bordiga, taken up by the Bordigist current (like the ICC, belonging to the Communist Left) and which permeates his “counter-theses” from top to bottom. Contrary to the sclerotic vision of “*invariance*”, marxism is not a “finished art” whose exegesis revolutionaries need only perform in the manner of theologians.

A confused vision of decadence

The theoretical framework of decomposition is entirely based on the marxist approach. The prospect of capitalism’s inner disintegration, at the heart of the theory of decadence, is one of the “novelties” outlined by the First Congress of the Communist International (CI), which identified the system’s entry into its period of decadence: “*A new epoch is born! The epoch of the dissolution of capitalism, of its inner disintegration. The epoch of the communist revolution of the proletariat.*” The “socialism or barbarism” alternative was explicit: “*Human culture has been destroyed and humanity is threatened with complete annihilation. [...]. The final outcome of the capitalist mode of production is chaos. This chaos can only be overcome by the productive and most numerous class – the working class.*” In its Manifesto, the CI goes on to state: “*At the present time this impoverishment, no longer only of a social but also of a physiological and biological kind, rises before us in all its shocking reality.*” It was equally clear that the “inner collapse” was not a conjunctural phenomenon linked to the world war, but a permanent, irreversible tendency of decadent capitalism: “*Is all toiling mankind to become the bond slaves of victorious world cliques who [are] everywhere and always shackling the proletariat – with the sole object of maintaining their own rule? Or shall the working class of Europe and of the advanced countries in other parts of the world take in hand the disrupted and ruined economy in order to assure its regeneration upon socialist principles?*”. World history has since fully confirmed this decisive turning point in the life of capitalist society, and in particular the barbarity represented by the Second World War. The now permanent crisis of the global economy, the endless spiral of military convulsions, the uncontrollable collapse of ecosystems... Capitalism today offers the image of a world without perspective, of an interminable agony of destruction, misery and barbarism.

Tibor rightly recognises the need to look at history dynamically, not photographically, even reproaching us for a “*lack of*

dialectical understanding of what a dynamic of putrefaction is". He also supports the theory of decadence and the reality of its evolution: "*Capitalism is a system that is rotting on its feet, and it is doing so more rapidly and pronouncedly as this period of decadence drags on*".

But, despite his good intentions, the principles of dialectical materialism that he accuses the ICC of failing to apply are constantly overlooked in his text. The profoundly historical vision of the CI, far from a "*catastrophism*" with "*psychological roots*", is, in fact, light-years away from the comrade's vapid demonstrations when he asserts that "*there is no such thing as a permanent crisis of the capitalist economy*". He writes that "*capitalism, by the very logic of accumulation, cannot therefore experience a phase of definitive economic decline*", and goes on to assert that "*there is no such thing as a final crisis*", that "*through the recurrent devaluation of constant capital in the context of crises, capitalism is able to survive its crises*", or even that "*capitalism, by its cyclical nature, experiences successively periods of prosperity followed by periods of crisis, potentially eternally*".

And on what does the comrade base these assertions? On texts by Marx describing the capitalist economy in its ascendant period! As if nothing ever changed, as if social and economic conditions were forever fixed and "*potentially eternally*", as he puts it, as if changing circumstances didn't require marxists to question their now obsolete analyses. And it's the ICC "*that sins*" through "*its schematic dogmatism*" and "*its revisionism*"?

Is decadence merely a succession of "*potentially eternally*" cyclical crises, typical of the 19th century, or does it represent the insurmountable historical crisis of capitalism, as predicted by the Third International? Reading Tibor's somewhat contradictory writings, we are entitled to wonder what, exactly, is his vision of decadence?

Without going as far as the clarity of Rosa Luxemburg's analysis, does this comrade, who claims the legacy of Lenin, even agree with the Platform of the Third International?

Let's not beat around the bush: the comrade, while acknowledging the reality of decadence, clearly doesn't understand its foundations, any more than he understands the evolution of history in general. In fact, the comrade fails to perceive the qualitative difference between the cyclical crises of capitalism's ascendancy and the chronic, permanent crisis of overproduction of decadence.

Worse still, his arguments also call

into question the material basis for the proletariat's seizure of power, and hence the possibility of overthrowing capitalism. On what material basis, in a system capable of prospering "*eternally*", could the proletariat develop its revolutionary struggle? A mystery... In this respect, it's hardly surprising that, since the publication of his text, Tibor has turned his back on the theory of decadence, becoming a militant in a Bordigist organisation that rejects this analysis outright. "*Invariance*", which is an aberrant distortion of marxism, has led Bordigists to reject the notion of decadence, even though this concept is present from the very origins of historical materialism. It is, moreover, these same "*innovations*" that today lead this current to reject the concept of the decomposition of capitalism.

An approach typical of vulgar materialism

In addition to its "*schematic dogmatism*" and "*revisionism*", the ICC is said to be plagued by two other sins: "*its idealism and impressionism*". Tibor justifies this condemnation with his master argument, the one that structures his "*Counter-Theses*": "*All the 'essential characteristics of decomposition' put forward by the ICC in its seventh thesis are either false, or in no way novel and constitutive of a new period*". And the comrade goes on to list at length the "*material facts*" and "*empirical evidence*" that are hardly "*more convincing*" to demonstrate that wars, famines, slums, corruption and plane crashes existed long before the period of decomposition, sometimes even worse... It obviously hasn't occurred to Tibor that his astounding revelations are not so, and that perhaps, through his "*Counter-Theses*", he is above all demonstrating a profound misunderstanding of both the framework of decomposition and the marxist method.

The "*Counter-Theses*" quite rightly assert that "*One of the necessities of dialectics is to consider observed phenomena as a whole, as subject to permanent interaction. Rather than isolating a phenomenon in order to observe it in abstracto, the dialectical method involves understanding it through its relations with other phenomena, and refuses to abstract it from the environment in which it evolves*". For him, the history of capitalism is merely a succession of "*different economic phases*": "*In its progressive phase, capitalism successively adopted the forms of mercantilism, manufacture, Manchester capitalism and trustified capitalism. In its phase of decline, it successively adopted the forms of trustified capitalism and state capitalism (first of the Keynesian type, then of*

the neo-liberal type)". In this sense, it's worth pointing out that, in the comrade's eyes, state capitalism is reduced to a mere "*economic phase*", far removed from the dominant trend of decadent capitalism embracing all aspects of social life, far beyond the economic sphere alone. But Tibor cannot conceive of this, convinced as he is that the "*dialectical method*" consists in reducing everything to the "*economic underpinnings of the contradictions of modern capitalism*".

Contrary to this schematic vision, Engels explained in his letter to Joseph Bloch (September 21-22, 1890) that "*according to the Materialist Conception of History, the factor which is in the last instance decisive in history is the production and reproduction of actual life. More than this neither Marx nor myself ever claimed. If now someone has distorted the meaning in such a way that the economic factor is the only decisive one, this man has changed the above proposition into an abstract, absurd phrase which says nothing. The economic situation is the base, but the different parts of the structure – the political forms of the class struggle and its results, [...] forms of law and even the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political theories, juridical, philosophical, religious opinions, and their further development into dogmatic systems – all this exercises also its influence on the development of the historical struggles and in cases determines their form. It is under the mutual influence of all these factors that, rejecting the infinitesimal number of accidental occurrences (that is, things and happenings whose intimate sense is so far removed and of so little probability that we can consider them non-existent, and can ignore them), that the economical movement is ultimately carried out. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of any simple equation.*"

In this context, the criticism we levelled at the Bordigist current in our last "*Report on Decomposition*"⁵ also applies to Comrade Tibor's text, which forgot along the way the pillar of the Marxist approach, namely the dialectical evolution of human societies according to the unity of opposites: "*For marxism the superstructure of social formations, that is their political, juridical and ideological organisation, arises on the basis of the given economic infrastructure and is determined by the latter. This much the epigones [of Bordiga] have understood. However the fact that this superstructure can act as cause – if not the principle one – as well as effect, is lost on them. Engels, towards the end of his life had to insist on this very point in*

5. *International Review* n° 170 (2023).

a series of letters in the 1890s addressing the vulgar materialism of the epigones of the time. His correspondence is absolutely essential reading for those who deny today that the decomposition of the capitalist superstructure can have a catastrophic effect on the economic fundamentals of the system."

In fact, Tibor projects onto our analysis of decomposition his own schematic approach typical of vulgar materialism: as he views the history of capitalism through the filter of a narrow economism, in the form of eternal production cycles that would only increase in size, of catastrophes whose evolution would only ever be quantitative and from which all social life would mechanically flow, he perceives our framework of decomposition completely distorted in terms of the accumulation of empirical phenomena. And in his logic, it's enough to note that these phenomena existed before the decomposition phase to invalidate its foundations.

Moreover, Tibor's analysis never explains what change in the period of decadence could have produced the major, unprecedented event represented by the implosion of the Eastern bloc. For him, *"claiming that it is decomposition that explains the fall of the Eastern Bloc, we must show here the greatest bad faith or the greatest ignorance of history. If the Soviet bloc imploded, because of its contradictions, it was as a result of the strategy pursued by the American ruling class, which consisted in pushing its weaker adversary into a militaristic headlong rush that could only exhaust this colossus with feet of clay"*. But where did the ICC deny that American pressure was not a decisive factor in the collapse of the "Soviet" bloc? On the other hand, Tibor completely misses the central question: how do you explain a bloc collapsing of its own accord for the first time in the history of decadence? According to the comrade, it's a simple accident of history.

The comrade's less-than-rigorous approach leads him to utter such enormities as: *"The fact that decomposition may have arisen on a non-economic basis should be enough to call into question such an analysis. Even though decadence arises on an immediately economic basis, monopolies, financial capitalism, capitalist unification of the world, productive forces having reached the limit of their historical progressivism ... we must wait several decades for decomposition to take an economic form. Here we recognise an empiricist and impressionist method far removed from Marxism, putting itself at the mercy of events rather than analysing the economic underpinnings of the con-*

traditions of modern capitalism". Since the "Theses on Decomposition" no ICC text has defended such an idea! In issue n° 61 of the *International Review*, we even wrote: *"the prime cause behind the bloc's decomposition is the utter economic and political bankruptcy of its dominant power faced with the inexorable aggravation of the world capitalist crisis"*. But Tibor sees an anomaly in our recent analyses of the *"eruption of the effects of decomposition on the economic level"*. The dialectical edge of the "Counter-Theses" are clearly somewhat blunted, unable as they are to conceive that decomposition can arise on the basis of the economic contradictions of capitalism while feeding these same contradictions...

This distortion of the ICC's positions under the weight of his own vulgar materialistic vision is confirmed in the confusion maintained by the "Counter-Theses" between "phenomena of decomposition" and "phase of decomposition", two related but quite distinct elements. The ICC has not been sufficiently blinded by its *"schematic dogmatism"* to ignore the fact the Second World War has, until now, generated destruction beyond comparison with the conflicts of the period of decomposition, nor that corruption has been eating away at the bourgeoisie for centuries, nor that the Spanish flu and even the Black Death were more deadly than the Covid-19 pandemic! Nor have we claimed that *"the essential characteristics of decomposition"* arose with the phase of decomposition. But just as the phenomenon of imperialism existed at the end of the period of ascendancy before becoming the way of life of decadent capitalism, so too did the phenomena of decomposition exist before the phase of decomposition.

And since the proletariat has still not abolished capitalism, the elements of decomposition, whose existence Tibor at least partially acknowledges, have only accumulated and amplified on all levels of social life: the economy, on the one hand, but also political life, morality, culture and so on. This process is not unique to the phase of decomposition, as witnessed by the irrational madness of Nazism during the Second World War and the cold cynicism of the Allies in justifying the systematic destruction of Germany and Japan when these countries were already defeated. This is what the Gauche Communiste de France described in 1947: *"The bourgeoisie is faced with its own decomposition and its own manifestations. Every solution it tries to bring about precipitates the clash of contradictions, it always tries to cover up the slightest evil, it patches up here, and stops a leak there, all the while knowing that*

*the storm is gaining more force."*⁶ What we mean by "phase of decomposition" is not the sudden appearance of the phenomena of putrefaction following the collapse of the Eastern bloc, nor their mere accumulation, but the entry of capitalism into a new and final phase of its decadence, in which decomposition has become a central factor in the evolution of society.

Our understanding of this final phase in the life of capitalism is based not so much on the very real accumulation of phenomena as on a historical analysis of the balance of forces between the two fundamental classes of society.⁷ At no point does comrade Tibor raise the problem of the absence of perspective, which lies at the heart of our analysis of decomposition, as if it were at best secondary, at worst totally inconsistent.

However, if in a class society, individuals are not necessarily aware of the conditions that determine their existence, this does not mean that society can function without a perspective to guide it. From this point of view, although the Second World War represented a pinnacle of barbarism, the bourgeoisie and its states, through the logic of the imperialist blocs, nevertheless framed society with an iron fist, mobilising the working class in bloody confrontation and the perspective of reconstruction. Even in the 1930s, there was the prospect of world war, catastrophic though it was, to mobilise society.

On the other hand, since the opening of the phase of decomposition, barbarism has had nothing "organised" about it: indiscipline, anarchy and "every man for himself" dominate international relations, political life and the whole of social existence, getting worse all the time. It was this approach, and not a phenomenological (or "impressionist" one as the comrade calls it), that enabled the ICC to identify, through the break-up of the Eastern bloc, the end of the policy of blocs that had hitherto structured imperialist relations, making capitalism's march towards a new world conflict highly improbable.

This same approach enabled us to analyse how the collapse of Stalinism would deal a huge blow to class-consciousness and the revolutionary perspective, without the class having been defeated.

6. "Instabilité et décadence capitaliste", *Internationalisme* (1947), in *International Review* n° 23.

7. We would remind the comrade that *"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"*, not of economic forces whose puppets the social classes are. We recommend reading Marx and Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, a work of great clarity on this issue.

It is because neither of the two fundamental classes is, for the moment, in a position to provide its decisive response to the crisis of capitalism (war or revolution) that the phenomena of decomposition have become central to the evolution of the situation, have acquired a dynamic of their own, feeding off each other in a growing and uncontrollable way.

The framework of decomposition is based, to sum it up in one formula, on an elementary principle of dialectics that the "Counter-theses" ignore: "*the transformation of quantity into quality*". Likewise, against the impasses of narrow economism, our analysis takes into account the determining character of subjective factors as a material force, which, far from being a "*non-dialectical analysis*", constitutes a truly materialist approach. In his *Anti-Dühring*, Engels criticised reasoning that focuses solely on the economic dimension of capitalism's crisis, totally ignoring its political and historical dimensions. Tibor never ceases to invoke the "dialectic", but has he understood its meaning and implications? Nothing is less certain.

Who "disarms the proletariat"?

Tibor's strongest criticism of our analysis is that it is not only wrong, but also "*dangerous*", in that it disarms the proletariat. And he continues: "*It's interesting to see how the ICC underestimates the danger of world war. It is presented as easily preventable by proletarian action*". What does the ICC actually say? In thesis 11, we write: "*'communist revolution or the destruction of humanity' was the formulation imposed after World War II by the appearance of nuclear weapons. Today, with the disappearance of the Eastern bloc, this terrifying prospect remains entirely valid. But today, we have to clarify the fact that the destruction of humanity may come about as a result of either imperialist world war, or the decomposition of society*". In International Review n° 61 (1990), we state: "*Even if world war is no longer a threat to humanity at present, and perhaps for good, it may be replaced by the decomposition of society. This is all the more true in that, while the outbreak of world war requires the proletariat's adherence to the bourgeoisie's ideals, which is hardly on the agenda for its decisive battalions, decomposition has no need at all of this adherence to destroy humanity*". Current events tragically confirm this analysis, as we recently pointed out in a leaflet on the war in Gaza: "*Capitalism is war. Since 1914, it has practically never stopped, affecting one part of the world and then another. The historical period before us will see this deadly dynamic spread and*

amplify, with increasingly unfathomable barbarity".

We could multiply the examples *ad infinitum*, as each of our publications and public meetings warns with the utmost constancy of the major danger represented by the deepening military chaos that could end up annihilating humanity if the proletariat doesn't overthrow capitalism soon enough. Tibor, on the other hand, does not perceive this danger; he sees threats only in a hypothetical and distant world war. And even when the ICC points out that a third world war could result in the end of the human race (because of nuclear weapons, among other things), Tibor sees it as fertile ground for revolution, as was the case in 1917. Worse still, with his vision of "eternal" capitalism, he even opens the door to the idea that a new world war could represent a "solution to the crisis" by triggering a new cycle of accumulation! Nothing changes, nothing evolves, just apply the patterns of the past.

That the working class could be unable to defend the revolutionary perspective while not allowing itself to be drawn into world war seems inconceivable to the comrade. The passage from the "Counter Theses" on class struggle in the 1970s-1980s is very confused,⁸ but it does at least seem to recognise that the early 1970s marked a development in the struggle, before a setback from 1975 onwards. It will not have escaped the comrade's notice that, even during what he calls this "*parenthesis on a historical scale*", the working class was never able to develop its revolutionary struggle. And yet, during this same period, the American bourgeoisie found itself confronted with a refusal to embrace the Vietnam War, pacifist demonstrations, totally demotivated troops and so on. The working class did not revolt on its class terrain, but the bourgeoisie was never able to fully mobilise society for the war, to the point of having to humiliatingly withdraw its troops from Vietnam. The headlong rush to war has continued ever since: Star Wars, the USSR's war in Afghanistan, two wars in Iraq, then a new occupation, this time by the US, of Afghanistan, and so on. Far from the highway to war that characterised the 1930s, several decades of conflict never led to a global conflagration. Why not? The "counter-theses" fail to perceive this reality and the very concrete, materialist impact

8. We note some questionable formulations, such as: "*The inability of the latter to break radically with the period of counter-revolution and to impose its alternative, the communist revolution, has led to the fact that capitalism, in order to put an end to the deep crisis of the 1970s, did not need to have recourse to the ultimate, but extremely costly and risky, solution of world war*". Does this mean that the bourgeoisie would unleash world wars to confront the revolutionary proletariat?

of the balance of forces between classes and the question of perspective.

Tibor would also like to see a supposed underestimation of the danger of war in that "*the rest of the thesis is devoted to proving the impossibility of a reconstitution of the blocs*". Here again, the comrade is, to say the least, approximate. The ICC never spoke of the impossibility of imperialist blocs in the phase of decomposition, nor that the historical context of their formation was behind us. On the contrary, we have shown that growing counter-tendencies stand in the way of their reformation. In the "Theses on Decomposition", we write that "*the formation of a new economic, political and military structure regrouping these different states presupposes a discipline amongst them, which the phenomenon of decomposition will make more and more problematic*".

This has been confirmed by the evolution of the world situation: more than three decades of unstable alliances and growing chaos have so far confirmed the "*extremely peremptory*" assertions of the ICC. The comrade even agrees that today there are no constituted blocs. So why is he insinuating what the ICC doesn't say? Because, although "idealism" and "abstraction" are repugnant to him, the comrade speculates on the future: the formation of new blocs could occur, world war could arise... The marxist method is not made up of laboratory speculations testing in a test-tube what is theoretically possible and what is not! Revolutionaries are responsible for the political orientation of their class, and to do this they base their analyses on present reality and the dynamics it contains. The current dynamic of "every man for himself" is stronger than ever, and has acquired a new quality, despite the religious dogma of "invariance". And what this dynamic tells us is the growing inability of the bourgeoisie to reconstitute a new world "order" in disciplined imperialist blocs. The historic divorce between the United States and its "allies" that we've been witnessing since Donald Trump took office is a spectacular illustration of this. Current conflicts in the Middle East also bear staggering witness to this: confrontations of unprecedented savagery are spreading across the region in a scorched-earth logic that precludes, for all belligerents, any hope of re-establishing order in the region. War today therefore takes the form of a multiplication of uncontrollable and extremely chaotic conflicts, rather than an "organised" conflict between two rival blocs. But this in no way invalidates the threat, admittedly more difficult to discern, that these conflicts pose to humanity.

In the very first pages of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx wrote: “*Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes*”. What could “*the common ruin of the contending classes*” mean today? Nothing other than the end of humanity if the proletariat is no longer able to defend its revolutionary alternative. Without the affirmation of such a perspective, the completion of the process of decomposition can only lead, in the long term, to the generalisation of conflicts and the destruction of the social fabric, not to mention the technological and climatic risks. This is why the proletariat needs a living, militant marxist method, not its sclerotic, non-historical, “invariant” avatar.

If we have entitled this response to Comrade Tibor “‘Counter-theses’ or ‘counter-sense’ on decomposition?” it’s because his refutation of the ICC analysis is fundamentally based on misinterpretation:

- misinterpretation of words when he considers the terms decomposition and decadence to be “synonyms”;
- misinterpretation of what the ICC is really saying, as we have shown, with supporting quotes;
- misinterpretation of the marxist method.

In particular, the comrade lays claim to the dialectical method, and we welcome this concern. Although he manifests a certain vulgar materialist vision opposed by Engels in his time, he presents us with a certain number of elements of dialectics with which we are in complete agreement. The problem is that when it comes to moving from theory to practice, he forgets what he’s written before. He stresses the eminently dynamic nature of capitalism’s life, its perpetual change, but a large part of his demonstration can be summed up by the phrase “*there’s nothing new under the sun*”. He takes into account both the existence of several phases in the decadence of capitalism, and the fact that it is constantly worsening on all fronts, but he refuses to draw the consequence: for him, this worsening is merely quantitative, cannot lead to a new quality: the entry of the decadence of capitalism into a phase “*where decomposition becomes a decisive, if not the decisive factor in social evolution*”, as stated in our 1990 Theses.

We know Comrade Tibor and his honesty well enough to believe that these misinter-

pretations do not stem from a deliberate desire to falsify our analyses or marxism. This is why we encourage the comrade, without wishing to offend him, to change his glasses when reading our documents or the classics of marxism.

Tibor’s “Counter-Theses” can be read on the ICC’s website.

EG, March 2025

The difference between the vacuity of a presumptuous blogger and the solidity of an organisation rooted in the tradition of the workers' movement

In the jungle of internet sites that pride themselves on defending the positions and tradition of marxism, there is one, Controversies,¹ which recently devoted an entire PDF pamphlet of over 60 pages to a 360-degree attack on our organisation.² The accusations are extremely varied, covering virtually everything from political positions to internal functioning and behaviour towards other groups. One of them, particularly defamatory, puts forward the idea of a “*secret conspiracy on the part of the ICC designed to sabotage the proletarian political milieu and anything that might overshadow it.*” In other words, C. Mcl – the pseudonym of the pamphlet’s author – presents himself as the defender of the Communist Left and its founding values in the face of alleged attacks by the ICC.

A pamphlet full of unfounded accusations against the ICC

Before responding to the accusations, we feel it necessary to introduce the author, who is none other than a former member of our organisation, C. Mcl. Since leaving in 2008, he has distinguished himself via his blog Controversies by a clearly hostile attitude of systematic denigration of the ICC, notably through the publication in 2010 of the article “It’s midnight in the Communist Left”, which presents a “fanciful”, totally negative assessment of the contributions of the historic Communist Left, the proletarian political current formed in reaction to the degeneration of the Communist International and the betrayal of the Communist Parties in the 1930s. According to the same assessment, the Communist Left experience was a complete failure, and the contributions of *Bilan* and other expressions of this current³ were useless. So, after fraudulently burying the history and tradition of the Communist Left under a heap of lies in a previous article, C. Mcl, again fraudulently, now presents himself as the defender of the Communist Left, with a tract based, as always, on lies and mystifications. Either C. Mcl is completely unaware of his contradictions, or, like others before him, he has adopted the motto: “the bigger the lie, the more likely it is to get through!”

In fact, C. Mcl’s approach is not original,

1. Controversies. Web address: www.leftcommunism.org.

2. “ICC: The idealist pole of the Communist Left”, *Cahier Thématique* n°3.

3. Read “The Communist Left and the continuity of marxism”, ICCOnline, 1998.

as others before him have engaged in an enterprise of demolition or distortion of the values and contribution of the Communist Left. Thus, for example, it is reminiscent in content and purpose of the one carried out by another “illustrious” figure, Mr. Gaizka, who invented, in the service of his personal aims, a Spanish Communist Left⁴ of which he was the heir and defender. In both cases, there is this shared objective: to gain acceptance in the camp of the Communist Left by means of a Trojan horse, like the fake Spanish Communist Left⁵ or through the “political disqualification” of the ICC, within a common project to negate the Communist Left itself.

As we shall also see below, Controversies’ aim with this first pamphlet (a second is in progress) goes far beyond a simple polemic, insofar as the ICC’s behaviour is said to evoke “*mafia-like gangsterism,*” so that our “*conceptions and practices must be denounced and firmly banished,*” and that:

– “*it is high time, once and for all, to put an end to the internal struggles provoked daily in the proletarian political milieu by the ICC’s actions against it.*”

– “*Yes, for the first time within the Communist Left, we are confronted with a secret conspiracy on the part of the ICC designed to sabotage the proletarian political milieu and anything that might overshadow it.*”⁶

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

5. “Who is who in ‘Nuevo Curso’?”, ICCOnline, January 2020.

6. “The idealist pole...”, *ibid*, pages 61 and 63. It is

This conclusion of Controversies takes up one by one, against our organisation, the infamies that the ICC has already denounced in the parasitic milieu, drawing on the political approach of the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association against the practices of Bakunin and his followers.⁷

We cannot – nor do we wish to – respond to all the nonsense in this pamphlet. We will therefore deliberately focus on two themes:

- a) The way in which the ICC’s characterisation of the current historical phase of the decomposition of capitalism within the period of decadence is rubbished and discarded;
- b) The accusation that our organisation is discrediting and destroying the Communist Left.

Why is C. Mcl targeting these two issues?

1) The “**decadence of capitalism**” constitutes the backbone of our political platform, giving it a unique coherence in the proletarian political milieu. To demolish decadence, or even to relativise its importance, is not only to attack the ICC but the entire tradition of the Communist Left, because it weakens the foundations of primary political positions in this period of capitalist decadence:

- the criticism of trade unions as inevitably serving the state;
- the critique of national liberation as in

important to note that in these last two passages, C. Mcl repeats, almost word for word, quotations from Engels’ text “The General Council to all members of the International”, a warning against Bakunin’s Alliance. C. Mcl, who has renounced the concept of parasitism, who has publicly apologised to all the other denigrators of the Communist Left and the ICC for having himself shared the ICC’s analysis of the danger of parasitism, now takes the liberty of repeating Engels’ words of accusation against the first expressions of parasitism in the workers’ movement represented by Bakunin and the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy.

7. Read our article “Questions of Organisation, Part 3: The Hague Congress of 1872: The Struggle against Political Parasitism”, *International Review* n° 87.

no way at the service of class struggle, but as a fatal obstacle to it.

To reject the concept of the decadence of capitalism and its worsening in the phase of decomposition is to rob ourselves of an understanding of the present historical period, which is different from the ascendant phase of which Marx was a contemporary.

2. Similarly, when it comes to the party, the conception of its role and its construction cannot be posed without taking into account the specific historical period in question in the life of capitalism. And reference to the Communist Left, cut off from the historical period, becomes a sterile abstraction from which no lessons can be drawn. This fundamental current of the workers' movement thus ceases to be a source of orientation and inspiration, becoming a gimmick in the hands of academicism and blogging sites like Controversies.

For a certain audience and its mentors, discrediting and destroying the Communist Left is such an obvious necessity that there's no need to justify it. This is the philosophy behind C. Mcl's article, with its slanderous attacks and accusations.

Mr. C. Mcl's strange approach to analysing the historical period

The characterisation of the present historical period as one of the decadence of capitalism is not an invention of the ICC, but a conclusion reached by the Third International. As it states in its "Manifesto", the Communist International came into being at a time when capitalism had clearly demonstrated its obsolescence. Humanity was now entering "*the era of wars and revolutions*". The Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), another important component of today's Communist Left, also defends the analysis of the decadence of capitalism, but in our view incoherently. As for the Bordigists, if today they are rather unconvinced by this approach due to an erroneous defense of the invariance⁸ of Marxism, it should be remembered that Bordiga himself was its defender in 1921.⁹

1. In the face of C. Mcl's "critiques", what are the arguments in favour of the analysis of decadence?

8. We speak of a mistaken defense because there are indeed principles that remain invariant in marxism, but the "second Bordiga", the one who returned to politics at the end of the Second World War by taking part in the founding of the Internationalist Communist Party in 1943-45, made invariance a rule for every position, pushing the party towards the positions of the time of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848.

9. "Rejecting the notion of Decadence, Part 1", *International Review* n°77.

These appear in a series of articles we produced in the late 1980s, precisely in response to critical positions that denied the analysis of the decadence of capitalism. Here are a few particularly significant passages:

- "... when revolutionaries have the task of demonstrating the capitalist mode of production's historical bankruptcy and socialism's necessity and immediacy, there are political groups picking over the 'fantastic growth rates of the reconstruction period', abandoning the marxist conception of succeeding modes of production by rejecting the notion of decadence, and straining themselves to prove that '...capitalism grows endlessly, beyond all limits'. It is hardly surprising that with this kind of foundation, and without any coherent analysis of the period, these groups defend a perspective that is unfavourable for the working class, and essentially academic as far as the activity of revolutionary minorities is concerned."¹⁰

And to continue:

- "However, like previous modes of production, capitalism also has its period of decadence which began in this century's second decade, and which is characterised by the brake imposed on the development of the productive forces by its now outdated fundamental social law of production – wage labour – which is eventually expressed in a lack of solvent markets relative to the needs of accumulation."¹¹

Adding that:

- "The decadence of a mode of production cannot be measured simply in the light of statistics. The phenomenon can only be grasped through a whole series of quantitative, but also qualitative and superstructural aspects: our critics pretend not to know this, so as to avoid having to say anything about it, being happy enough to brandish the figures whose value we have just demonstrated."¹²

Finally, we recall the arguments developed in response to the EFICC,¹³ which at the time challenged the idea that the development of state capitalism was closely linked to the decadence of capitalism:

- "For EFICC this is no longer true. It is the transition from formal to real domination that explains the development of state capitalism. If this were the case, we

should statistically observe a continuous progression of the state's share of the economy, since this shift in domination takes place over an entire period and, what's more, this progression should begin during the ascending phase. This is clearly not the case. The statistics we have published show a clear break in 1914. In the ascendant phase, the state's share of the economy is LOW and CONSTANT (hovering around 12%), whereas it rises during the decadence to reach an average today of around 50% of GNP. This confirms our thesis of the indissoluble link between the development of state capitalism and decadence, and categorically invalidates that of EFICC."¹⁴

In these same articles, for example, the assessment was as follows:

- "At the end of this series of articles, you'd have to be as blind as our critics not to see the break in capitalism's way of life brought about by the First World War. All the long-term statistical series published in the article demonstrate this rupture: world industrial production, world trade, prices, state intervention, terms of trade and armaments. Only the analysis of decadence and its explanation by the global saturation of markets makes it possible to understand this rupture."¹⁵

These are just some of the arguments we can provide, taking them from three of our articles written at the time by a staunch defender of the analysis of capitalism's decadence. But, if we look up who the author of these articles is, we have the incredible surprise of discovering that all three are signed by C. Mcl who actually wrote them when he was still a militant in our organisation. It therefore seems to us that Mr. C. Mcl, before lashing out at the organisation in which he was active for 33 years, from 1975 to 2008, without ever questioning either decadence or the analysis of the new phase of decomposition, should first take responsibility for himself and respond to his own contradictions.

2. How is it possible that C. Mcl, in revising his analysis of decadence, could have reached such opposing conclusions?

Why, when he "revises" his earlier conclusions published in the *International Review* of the ICC, does C. Mcl base himself on a different set of data? And above all, how does he justify such a change in the data in question, when they are supposed to reflect the same reality? C. Mcl doesn't feel the need to justify this. Worse still, he does

10. "Understanding the Decadence of Capitalism, Part 4", *International Review* n°54.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. External Fraction of the ICC.

14. "Understanding the Decadence of Capitalism, Part 6", *International Review* n°56, footnote 5.

15. Ibid, footnote 6.

not cite the source of the new data now used, contenting himself with an insolent and provocative tone to accompany the presentation of his new results and conclusions, remaining as silent as a tomb about his new sources.

Intrigued by the mystery thus maintained by C. Mcl, we carried out a few searches and finally discovered that his latest publications on this theme are based entirely on data from an English website, World in Data, based in Oxford and funded by Bill Gates.¹⁶ This site sets out to highlight the positive aspects of capitalism, which is supposed to solve world poverty. But this company's findings are far from definitive, since there are numerous sites and blogs on the web pointing out that these statistics are completely distorted. In other words, C. Mcl and Controversies are allying themselves with Bill Gates by using unreliable statistics to "artificially" promote the longevity of capitalism and bury the thesis of its decadence.

3. What method does C. Mcl use to develop his analyses of the historical situation?

In his animated attempt to demonstrate "the total political bankruptcy of our organisation", C. Mcl and his blog Controversies know no limits and have acquired a certain expertise in the art of confusing our positions by distorting and falsifying them. But, as this apparently isn't enough, C. Mcl does the same to the positions of Marx and Engels.

On page 13 of his booklet, for example, C. Mcl challenges our analysis that the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing bourgeois propaganda about the defeat of communism, the disappearance of the working class and the end of history, have led to a collapse of fighting spirit and a decline in class consciousness. We quote C. Mcl:

• "...the ICC's recognition of a post-1989 ebb in struggles is totally erroneous for three good reasons:

"a) Firstly, because this decline dates back to 1974-75, i.e. fifteen years earlier.

"b) Secondly, it's impossible for the cause of the downturn to lie in the collapse of the Eastern bloc, since the downturn was already at its lowest point in 1989 (graph 4.1).

c) "Finally, the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall had no influence on the intensity of social conflict (graph 4.1). At most, we can detect a cyclical micro-crisis

16. <https://ourworldindata.org>. "Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems"

... but this is recovered in the following two years. On the other hand, this collapse has an impact on consciousness as an additional factor in the disorientation and loss of class identity".

Let's unpack this quote from C. Mcl:

• Firstly, it suggests that, for the ICC, **the problem of setbacks is characterised in terms of strike days**. It can then, by means of an ad-hoc statistic on the number of strikes, invalidate the idea of a decline from the 1990s onwards. This can be misleading for those unfamiliar with our analysis of the decline in working-class consciousness.

• Secondly, he pretends that the ICC essentially understands the decline as a question of diminished working-class combativeness, not of consciousness. This is false, as evidenced by this passage from our "Theses on the economic and political crisis in the eastern countries" (*International Review* n° 60), written at the beginning of October 1989, i.e. more than a month before the start of the disintegration of the USSR: "An event of this magnitude will reverberate, and has already begun to reverberate, on the consciousness of the working class, and all the more so as it concerns an ideology and a political system presented for more than half a century by all sectors of the bourgeoisie as 'socialist' and 'working-class' ... We must therefore expect a momentary decline in proletarian consciousness, the manifestations of which can already be seen - particularly with the return in force of the trade unions. While the relentless and increasingly brutal attacks that capitalism will inevitably unleash on the workers will force them to lead the fight, this will not initially result in a greater capacity for the class to advance in its awareness. In particular, reformist ideology will weigh heavily on the struggles of the coming period, greatly favouring the action of the unions."

Obviously, we can't speak of error, exaggeration or even bias when we see the way C. Mcl's attempt to undermine the ICC's credibility by resorting to such easily verifiable untruths, since the ICC was in fact the only organisation in the proletarian milieu to point out that the collapse of the Eastern bloc meant greater difficulties for the proletariat. This was simply a blatant lie.

But nothing stops C. Mcl in his quest for the craziest means to serve his designs of demolition, especially when it comes to the phase of capitalism's decomposition. Boldly, he calls on the *Communist Manifesto* to come to his aid by invoking

this passage relating (according to him) to the decomposition within the societies of the past, resulting in the destruction of the two classes in struggle: "Free man and slave, patrician and plebeian, baron and serf, sworn master and journeyman, in a word oppressors and oppressed, in constant opposition, waged an uninterrupted war; sometimes open, sometimes concealed, a war which always ended either in a revolutionary transformation of the whole society, or in the mutual ruin of the contending classes." (Emphasis in the original text).

Since the *Manifesto* does not mention the possibility of a phase of social decomposition under capitalism, as it does for earlier societies, C. Mcl concedes that such a phenomenon may exist under capitalism, but only to a very limited extent. The explanation is very interesting: "... if such a 'blockage' of the balance of power between classes can exist for a few years in capitalism, it is inconceivable in the medium and long term because the imperatives required by the accumulation of capital leave no room for this possibility under penalty of... economic blockage this time!" (emphasis added)

C. Mcl shamelessly avoids the legitimate explanation for Marx's failure to speak of the decomposition of capitalism. This rests not, as C. Mcl says, in the fact that it could only be a temporary phenomenon, but in the obvious fact that this was impossible for him, as it was for every marxist, no matter how profound, for the following two reasons:

- on the one hand, 140 years separate the writing of the *Manifesto* of 1848 and the opening of the phase of decomposition;
- on the other hand, the phase of decomposition was not an obligatory phase within decadence, but the product at a given moment of it, of the inability of the two antagonistic classes to bring their own solution to the crisis.

This anecdote brings us to the subject of C. Mcl's ability to bring reality into his schemes, even when it is too far removed from them. We do not know if he has thus succeeded in fooling his "followers," if indeed he has any.

Is the ICC discrediting and destroying the Communist Left?

This is what C. Mcl defends, developing his indictment along three lines:

- the internal debate within the ICC;
- the ICC's anti-war policy;

- the ICC's policy towards the proletarian political milieu (PPM), accusing our organisation of a drift into Bordigist-style monolithism.

1. On our internal debates and reporting to the outside world

To support the comical thesis of ICC's bordigo-monolithic drift, C. Mcl begins by attempting to ridicule our method of debate:

“*The starting point for a debate is first and foremost the framework shared by the organisation, adopted and specified by the various reports of its international congresses'... in other words, the perimeter of a debate in the ICC is strictly limited to being able to quibble over the dots and commas of framework texts and resolutions. Apart from that, any contribution calling this framework into question or posing another framework is rejected, as it can only be 'An insidious way of casting doubt on the organisation's analysis [...] a fallacious mode of argumentation'.*”

The problem is that C. Mcl, having abandoned the ICC, has also completely abandoned the marxist scientific method, which dictates that any step towards truth must be accomplished through the most profound critique of the past, of previous positions. This is the meaning of defining, as the starting point for analysis, the common framework formulated by the organisation. Without this approach, any development would end in chaos and be completely unproductive.

C. Mcl also criticises us for not sufficiently developing our internal debate, for publishing very few texts expressing our differences to the outside world, and for postponing the publication of these texts indefinitely. What C. Mcl fails to mention in this respect is that:

- since the beginning of its existence, the organisation has been equipped with highly effective tools for internal debate, such as internal bulletins, which C. Mcl has misused to write this misleading pamphlet;
- the ICC publishes a political report after each of its congresses, in which all the critical elements developed within the organisation are reported;
- the publication of divergent texts outside the organisation is intended, where appropriate, to make known to the working class elements of internal debate which may be of interest to it; this publication does not therefore respond to a right of militants, but to the political need of the organisation to present its elements of debate to the working class with the

greatest clarity;

- from our birth as an organisation to the present day, contributions to debate have been published externally, including those written by C. Mcl, on the occasion of the debate on the meaning of the “30 Glorious Years”.

Contrary to the accusations levelled against us by C. Mcl, we are an organisation which, with conviction and responsibility, communicates problems, divergences and – when they arise – crisis situations to the outside world, but in a political way that is understandable and capable of stimulating our readers. On the other hand, it's clear that those who follow our internal life for the sole purpose of spying through the keyhole, believing themselves to be watching a reality show, may be disappointed that not everything is reported to the outside world. We don't regret this at all.

2. Is the joint declaration an ICC bluff?

C. Mcl's second anti-ICC indictment concerns our “Appeal to the groups of the Communist Left” for a Joint Declaration¹⁷ against the war in Ukraine. In addition to complaining about the limited number of groups to which we sent our appeals,¹⁸ C. Mcl elaborates a whole theory according to which our appeal was a complete failure because:

- the Korean ICP, after adhering to the Joint Declaration, distanced itself from it by opting for the NWBCW (No War but the Class War) initiative;
- the Istituto Onorato Damen (IOD) demonstrated its lack of adherence to the Joint Declaration by not endorsing the Appeal that followed;
- Internationalist Voice (IV) itself had no value, being in fact no more than a Swedish sub-section of the ICC.

For C. Mcl, the aim was to show that the Joint Declaration initiative was nothing but a bluff, and that it had brought together no group other than the ICC itself: “... *what a flop! So what's left of the ICC's political milieu? Its only hidden section-bis in Sweden: Internationalist Voice! This is the reason for the ICC's current diatribe: isolated and lonely, all that's left is a scorched-earth policy aimed at destroying everything that's being done outside the ICC in the revolutionary milieu.*”¹⁹

17. “Joint statement of groups of the international communist left about the war in Ukraine”, *International Review* n°168.

18. C. Mcl would certainly claim (no kidding!) to be - like other parasites - an expression of the Communist Left.

19. “ICC: The idealist pole of the Communist Left”, page 60.

Once again, the attitude of Controversies is the opposite of the responsible and militant attitude which should be that of groups of the Communist Left in the face of war: rather than criticising other groups for their refusal to join (Bordigists and Damenists) and the hesitations of those who had initially joined (ICP and IOD), it lambasts the ICC for trying to build a common response to the whole of the Communist Left!!!!

3. Is the ICC pursuing a hidden policy of destroying the PPM?

The latest line of attack against the ICC is the accusation of wanting to destroy the Proletarian Political Milieu (PPM), the grievance against us appearing to be our oft-expressed position, particularly towards the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT) (but also towards the Bordigists) that they are not up to the responsibilities required by the current historical situation because of their visceral opportunism (of which sectarianism is an expression, particularly as far as the Bordigists are concerned): “... *the ICC's policy towards its dissidents, the ICT and the proletarian political milieu is unprecedented and totally alien to the workers' movement, more akin to that pursued by Bakunin to 'discredit' and 'wipe out' the IWA [International Workingmen's Association]. It shames the Communist Left and must be denounced and banished.*”²⁰

In support of his accusations, C. Mcl exhibits a series of quotations stolen from our internal documents and presented in a light that completely distorts their context and target, such as:

- “*It is necessary for the organisation [the ICC] to be as clear and homogeneous as possible about the aim of our policy towards the IBRP [ICT]: what is important is to discredit ... the IBRP... so that it disappears politically. If this policy leads to its physical disappearance, so much the better.*”²¹

This accusation of wanting to destroy other groups of the PPM, of “*sabotaging the proletarian political milieu and anything that might overshadow it*”, is not new and is very reminiscent of the one we've already had to refute against another Argentine character we've reported in our press under the name of Citizen B, who, in 2004, took the trouble to write an entire “*Declaracion del Círculo de Comunistas Internacionalistas: contra la nauseabunda metodología de la Corriente Comunista Internacional*”²² and numerous other articles

20. *Ibid*, p.53.

21. *Ibid*, p.44.

22. Declaration by the Circle of Internationalist Communists: “Against the nauseating methodology of the International Communist Current”.

containing a series of extremely serious accusations against the ICC.

This dishonest slander was unfortunately supported at the time by the group known today as the ICT, then, called the IBRP, (International Bureau International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party). The declaration and all the other articles expressing accusations invented by the self-proclaimed group led by citizen B were regularly published on the IBRP website, and our protests and warnings to the IBRP itself, about the lies contained in these articles and the danger represented by citizen B went unheeded. That is until an ICC delegation went to Argentina and met the group on whose behalf Citizen B had written the various articles of denunciation and which was completely unaware that it had been so ignominiously used. It was only after we had published a statement from this group denying and denouncing Citizen B's actions that the IBRP had to backtrack on the articles against us which it had published and which, one after the other, discreetly disappeared from the site, albeit without any explanation from the IBRP – now ICT.

It was therefore on the basis of this unforgivable behaviour that our organisation took the responsibility of sending an "Open letter to the militants of the IBRP" (December 2004) in which we stated the following: "... we have always thought that it was in the interests of the working class to preserve an organisation like the IBRP. You do not have the same analysis as regards our own organisation as, having stated in your meeting with the IFICC in March 2002 that 'if we come to the conclusion that the ICC has become 'invalid' as an organisation, our aim would be to do all that is possible to push for its disappearance' (IFICC Bulletin n°9), you have now in fact done all that is possible to attain this end ...

"Comrades, We tell you frankly: if the IBRP persists in its policy of using lies, slander and, worse still, of 'allowing' these to be used and abetting them by remaining silent when faced with the intrigues of grouplets, such as the 'Circulo' and the IFICC, of which they are the trade mark and *raison d'être*, then it will have demonstrated that it too has become an obstacle to the development of consciousness in the proletariat. It will have become an obstacle, not so much because of the damage that it can do to our organisation (recent events have shown that we are able to defend ourselves, even if you think that 'the ICC is in the process of disintegration'), but because of the damage and the dishonour that this kind of behaviour can inflict on the memory of the Italian Communist Left

and thus on its invaluable contribution. In fact, in this case it would be preferable if the IBRP disappeared and 'our aim would be to do all that is possible to push for its disappearance' as you so excellently put it. It is of course clear that to attain this end, we would use only weapons belonging to the working class and it goes without saying that we would never permit the use of lies or slander."

This is our true position, which C. Mcl has so maliciously tried to falsify, by obscuring the entire history that underlies it.

What is truly disgraceful is the totally immoral behaviour of C. Mcl, steeped in petty-bourgeois ideology, which unleashes the vilest accusations against an organisation like ours that seeks to keep alive the values of the Communist Left and the workers' movement in general, against opportunistic excesses and alliances with the various snitches and parasites circulating in the political milieu. In different circumstances, our organisation has often taken the responsibility of warning other organisations of the numerous pitfalls to which they are prey, but we have never failed to express our revolutionary solidarity with them and our recognition of their belonging to the political lineage we have in common. Our aim is not to destroy other organisations, but to prevent them from destroying themselves by becoming enemies of the working class.

What are Controversies and the individual C. Mcl?

To conclude this article, we might ask: exactly who is this individual who has launched such a virulent attack on our organisation? As previously mentioned, C. Mcl is a former ICC militant who also had the audacity to present himself²³ in the same pamphlet:

"As a militant in the International Communist Current since 1975, I owe it my training, but also the legacy of its political and organisational inconsistencies. Outside its ranks in the fall of 2008, it took me several years to make a critical assessment of it, the first elements of which I present here."

As he reports, C. Mcl had been a member of our organisation for no less than 33 years, during which time he never questioned any of the key points of our platform! Until 2008, i.e. for most of his political life, he endorsed and defended the ICC's positions on decadence, decomposition, policy towards the proletarian political milieu,

23. "ICC: The idealist pole of the Communist Left" page 5.

denunciation of parasitism, etc., and was a member of the ICC's international central organ. But after 2008, why did he change his mind? A brief reminder is in order.

After the first years of the 21st century, the organisation realised that, while the framework for analysing the historical period of capitalism's decline remained valid, certain aspects needed to be clarified. In particular, the economic development of countries like China needed to be explained.²⁴

On the other hand, the argument used in our pamphlet on decadence that the global economic recovery of capitalism after the Second World War was due to the reconstruction process, a position shared by all other groups in the political milieu, was no longer convincing, as it contradicted the framework of analysis of the capitalist mode of production that we defend. This led to a debate within the organisation, with the participation of former militant C. Mcl and which saw the production of five articles of debate published to the outside in the International Review (n°s 136, 138, 141) under the title "ICC internal debate on economics". Prior to the opening of this debate in the press, C. Mcl had been appointed to update our pamphlet on decadence, but when in the debate he began to develop positions in contradiction with the foundations of our platform and marxism, while defending the idea that they were perfectly compatible,²⁵ it was not possible to leave it to this comrade to update a new pamphlet on decadence.

This decision by the organisation was probably never fully accepted by C. Mcl. The man who considered himself the expert on the subject, out of wounded pride, began to protest, making it a personal matter and developing an increasingly hostile attitude. He began to accuse the organisation of all possible evils and no longer even respected its rules of functioning. In the end, C. Mcl left the organisation without continuing to defend his differences. As can be seen

24. The question of China seems to be a subject of particular interest to C. Mcl, on which he dwells at length in his pamphlet. But contrary to what C. Mcl would have us believe, the ICC has not hesitated, once again, to criticise its own delays and errors in previous analyses. In updating the "Theses on decomposition" at the 22nd Congress, we begin by reiterating the importance, after 20 years, of reviewing what we have written, and have made a correction concerning China, about which we have admitted we were mistaken.

25. Indeed, they represented a challenge to the marxist analysis of the contradictions of capitalism, overproduction in particular. Indeed, for this comrade, Keynesian measures such as wage increases were a means of relieving overproduction, which is true in itself, but he deliberately failed to mention that such measures were at the same time a waste of accumulated surplus value, and therefore a brake on accumulation, intolerable in the medium and long term for the bourgeoisie.

once again, it's not the ICC that's obstructing debate, but rather behaviours within it that are totally alien to revolutionary militancy.

Once out of the organisation, C. Mcl went completely off the rails politically. The position he had developed on economics led him to finally reject the marxist position, adopting an economist approach and associating himself with academic elements, such as Jacques Gouverneur, with whom he wrote a book *Capitalisme et crises économiques*, in which he rejects the catastrophic vision of marxism.

Another example is given by an obituary²⁶ published in *Controversies* and signed by Philippe Bourrinet,²⁷ another element also furiously hostile to the ICC. The obituary is devoted to a certain Lafif Lakhdar, "Arab intellectual, writer, philosopher and rationalist, activist in Algeria, the Middle East and France. Nicknamed the 'Arab Spinoza'. Died in Paris on July 26, 2013". Naturally, the expectation of those about to read an obituary on a site subtitled "Forum for the Internationalist Communist Left", is to learn of the existence of a revolutionary militant who participated in Communist Left organisations, or at least in proletarian and non-counter-revolutionary groups. Instead, we learn from the same obituary that:

- a) "along with other Marxist or Marxist-leaning intellectuals, he was – like Michel Raptis (Pablo) – one of Ben Bella's advisors.
- b) "In October 2004, he and several liberal Arab writers co-directed a Manifesto published on the Internet (www.elaph.com; www.mettransparent.com) calling on the UN to create an international tribunal to prosecute terrorists, organisations or institutions inciting terrorism.
- c) "With philosopher Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010), he has been involved since 2009 in UNESCO's Aladin program, an 'educational and cultural program' launched under the patronage of UNESCO, Jacques Chirac and Simone Veil".²⁸

In short, who was this obituary for? Someone who served the Algerian president, who sent a letter-manifesto to the UN, that "den of brigands" (as Lenin put it), to put all terrorists on trial, and who was finally stuffed by UNESCO into a programme promoted by Chirac!!!! As we can see, it's easy to understand where the

suicidal choice to declare the Communist Left dead actually leads: to absolute nothingness, if not to the enemy camp.

We have no problem with C. Mcl wanting to be an academic. What we cannot tolerate, however, is that someone who likes to play the marxologist, and who has clearly abandoned all reference to the tradition of the Communist Left and even to marxism, should accuse others of destroying the Communist Left when he himself has participated in its destruction by claiming, among other things, that it was "midnight in the Communist Left"; that someone like him, who has knowingly manipulated quotations from the ICC, the Marx-Engels *Communist Manifesto*, Rosa Luxemburg and the *Gauche Communiste de France* (cf. § 2. 3) can allow himself to turn the same accusation against the ICC;²⁹ that an individual who is only a blogger should try to present himself as something serious and solid, with an organisation called "Controversies" which is only a front site, and be able to challenge the history, structure and militant activity of an organisation like ours, but also of all the other groups of the Communist Left which, however weak and guilty of opportunism they may be, are nonetheless a reality in the proletarian camp, and not a buffoonery like *Controversies*.

Ezechiele, 20 November, 2024

26. *Controversies*. "Lafif Lakhdar".

27. To find out more about this element, we recommend reading the article "Doctor Bourrinet, fraud and self-proclaimed historian" ICConline, February 2015.

28. Extract from the obituary.

29. "That the ICC should come to the point of having to falsify its own texts, and even those of Rosa Luxemburg, to mask the inconsistencies of its analyses, speaks volumes about its theoretical and moral decay." "ICC: The idealist pole of the Communist Left" page 17.

Andreas Malm: “Ecological” rhetoric in defence of the capitalist state

Faced with the gravity of the climate crisis and its consequences, more and more voices are being raised to incriminate the capitalist system, a clear indication that the mystification according to which it is Man – the human species in general – that is at the origin of the crisis is no longer enough to counteract and sterilise the reflection underway within the proletariat on this issue. In the manufacture and permanent adaptation of bourgeois ideology, the nebulous academic-university catch-all term the Anthropocene is now succeeded by the fog of a new title – the Capitalocene. In particular, the theories of Andreas Malm¹ (a lecturer in human geography at the University of Lund in Sweden and a member of the Trotskyist organisation the Fourth International – Unified Secretariat) occupy a privileged place in it and are being promoted with great publicity and wide international repercussions.²

Noting that “no amount of rhetoric will ever move the ruling classes to action”, in his book *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* (2021, Verso Books), “Andreas Malm calls on the [environmental] movement to move beyond pacifism and take violent action not against people but against the infrastructure of fossil fuel capitalism”. His “key idea, summarised in *L’Anthropocène contre l’histoire* (2017): it is not humanity that has become a geological force - that is the meaning of the word ‘anthropocene’ coined by the Dutch Nobel Prize winner in chemistry Paul Crutzen in 2002 - but the economy and fossil capitalism that were born in England with James Watt’s steam engine, hence Andreas Malm’s preference for the word ‘Capitalocene’. The Swede seeks to reconcile marxism and environmentalism. (...) he links ecology to marxism, often discredited in environmentalist circles for its productivism: he justifies the transition to violent action in a galaxy dominated by pacifism; and he does not deny the State as an ally in the ecological transition within a kind of war communism that he theorised in ‘Corona, climate, chronic emergency: War communism in the twenty-first century’ (2020)”.³

1. Since the 1990s, Andreas Malm has been “engaged in a sustained struggle against the colonisation of Palestine, against Islamophobia in Europe and against ‘American imperialism’” (...) He wrote for the newspaper of a Swedish trade union, *Arbetaren*, from 2002 to 2009. From 2010, he writes for the newspaper *Internationalen*, the weekly of the Trotskyist party, the Swedish Socialist Party, which is part of the Fourth International - Unified Secretariat, and of which he is a member. He contributes to the American radical left-wing magazine *Jacobin*. He has been involved in the International Solidarity Movement in Sweden from the outset. He participates in civil disobedience groups against climate change.” (Wikipedia).

2. This article was written in French, using the French translations of Malm’s work. When the article was translated into English the quotations from his works

Alternately denounced as “public enemy no. 1”⁴ or praised as a “fundamental thinker” and “one of the most original on the subject of climate change”, he is seen as the “new guru of radical ecologists”. Bourgeois propaganda has not hesitated to declare him the “Lenin of ecology”, no less!

Yet there is a striking contrast in the way in which the “Lenin of ecology” is treated by the ruling class: whereas Lenin – and with him the revolutionaries of the past to whom Malm is compared or to whom he refers, have been vilified, slandered, censured, forced into exile, pursued by the police of all possible variants of the different political regimes of capitalism, bourgeois democracy first and foremost – Malm is well known, his books have been translated into more than a dozen languages and are readily available to a wide readership. For those who don’t read books, they have been relayed by a major Hollywood production (featuring a group of young people who decide to blow up an oil pipeline in Texas), *How to blow up a pipeline*, widely distributed worldwide. How can we explain this worldwide publicity offered by the ruling class to its supposed enemy, to anyone who claims to be fighting its system? What is the reason for this solicitude for Malm on the part of the ruling class?

The answers to these questions, and the

were retranslated into English, as a result there may be some minor differences between them and the original English passages. The titles are given in their English versions wherever possible.

3. *Le Monde*, 21 April 2023.

4. Malm was cited as the main inspiration behind “Soulèvements de la Terre”, “advocating direct action and justifying extreme actions up to and including confrontation with the forces of law and order”, in the decree issued by the French government in an attempt to dissolve the movement.

secret of this bourgeois enthusiasm for Malm, can be found in Malm’s own writings (from 2009 onwards in his book *Fossil Capital*), summarised and condensed in a few sentences that could almost pass unnoticed under the heap of his writings, but which reveal and unmask the quintessence of his approach: for him, climate change “tightens the screws on marxists like everyone else. Any argument along the lines of ‘one solution We note some questionable formulations, such as: “The inability of the latter to break radically with the period of counter-revolution and to impose its alternative, the communist revolution, has led to the fact that capitalism, in order to put an end to the deep crisis of the 1970s, did not need to have recourse to the ultimate, but extremely costly and risky, solution of world war”. Does this mean that the bourgeoisie would unleash world wars to confront the revolutionary proletariat? revolution’ or, less succinctly, ‘socialist property relations are necessary to combat climate change’ is now indefensible. The experience of the last two centuries shows that socialism is an appallingly difficult condition to achieve; any proposal to build it on a global scale before 2020 and then start cutting emissions would be not only laughable, but irresponsible. (...) If the temporality of climate change obliges revolutionaries to a little pragmatism, it obliges others to start thinking about revolutionary measures.”⁵

The fight for communism would therefore no longer be relevant, but outdated, rendered obsolete by the climate emergency. With this crude sleight of hand, Malm is simply defending and theorising the very vulgar “we’re all in the same boat”, dear to bourgeois ideology and at the heart of the mystification of national unity and peace between the classes! By denying the validity of the perspective of proletarian revolution and communism, which he regards as inappropriate and incapable of providing a solution to the problems facing humanity in the current historical situation (including the question of ecological devastation), Malm, on his knees, proclaims his allegiance to the ruling class.

His visceral and avowed anti-socialism is the measure of the validity of his “marxism”: detached from the fight for

5. Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital, The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, Verso, 2016, p. 383.

communism, references to Marx, Trotsky or Lenin are nothing more than a collection of empty formulas full of amalgams and falsifications! The bourgeoisie was quick to see the advantage it could draw from Malm's "marxism", emasculated of its revolutionary purpose! This is what has earned him the recognition and solicitude of the ruling class, as well as the pride of place it reserves for him in its official campaigns!

A thoroughly bourgeois method

Faced with the threat of global warming, which he identifies as the No. 1 political priority for humanity, Malm claims, with the help of a whole theory (Fossil Capital) which has the colour and appearance of historical materialism and the pretence of updating and advancing marxism, to hold THE solution for tackling its "motor", which can be reduced to the following simple assertion: to combat global warming we need to eliminate once and for all the greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for it. This means taking the radical step of eradicating the fossil fuel sector from capitalist production and "shutting down this activity for good."⁶ And the problem will be solved!

This "decarbonise everything" approach to saving the planet's ecology has been denounced by some ecologists and scientists (even though they themselves are unable to provide real alternatives) as an aberration, "an example of contemporary narrow-mindedness, which leads to the oft-repeated error (...) of systematically underestimating the multiplicity of interactions that characterise natural and social systems."⁷ Malm's own position has been criticised: "We could dismantle all the oil pipelines, all the coal mines and all the SUVs" and discover that we are still doomed to extinction "because we would still have to tackle 'soil degradation, freshwater depletion, ocean dysbiosis, habitat destruction, pesticides and other synthetic chemicals', each problem being 'comparable in scale and severity to climate collapse'. We are not dealing here with fossil capital alone, but with 'all capital'.⁸

As a good bourgeois ideologue on ecology, Malm completely embodies the typically capitalist approach of tackling

6. Andreas Malm, *Corona, climate, chronic emergency War communism in the twenty-first century*, Verso, 2020. Quotation from page 158 of the French translation *La Chauve-souris et le Capital*, Editions La Fabrique, 2020.

7. H el ene Torjman, *La croissance verte contre la nature*, Editions la D ecouverte, 2021, p247.

8. *Socialalter* n o 59 "Sabotage: on se soul eve et on casse?" (August-September 2023) In this interview Malm discusses the criticisms levelled at him by Guardian journalist George Monbiot.

each problem arising in capitalist society separately from the others (by proposing a supposed "solution" for each one) and treating them independently of what lies at their root: the capitalist system as a whole and its historical crisis. This approach and method are far removed from historical materialism and have nothing to do with Marxism.

At a time when humanity and the world proletariat are faced with the accelerating decomposition of the capitalist system, when the combined effects of the economic crisis, the ecological/climate crisis and imperialist war are adding up, interacting and multiplying in a devastating spiral, and when among these different factors, war (as a deliberate decision by the ruling class) forms the decisive accelerating element in the aggravation of chaos and economic crisis, all this is concealed by Malm!⁹

There is no trace in his writings of the economic crisis of capitalism, or of the catastrophic repercussions on society and the environment of the organisation of the whole of society with a view to the permanent preparation for war since the entry of the capitalist system into decadence. And yet the return of "high-intensity" warfare between states is in itself (and there are many other fundamental reasons why Capital is unable to find a solution to the ecological crisis) a powerful reason for abandoning "ecological transition" measures and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed: "No war without oil. Without oil, it is impossible to wage war (...) Giving up the possibility of obtaining supplies of abundant and inexpensive oil is quite simply tantamount to disarmament. Transport technologies (which do not require oil, hydrogen and electricity) are totally unsuited to armies. Battery-powered electric tanks pose so many technical and logistical problems that they have to be regarded as impossible, as does everything that runs on land (armoured vehicles, artillery, engineering vehicles, light all-terrain vehicles, trucks). The internal combustion

9. Faced with the current imperialist war in the Middle East and on the key question of internationalism, Malm signs his allegiance to the camp of capitalism, by choosing the defence of one bourgeois camp (in favour of Palestinian imperialism) against another: "During a conference at Stockholm University in December 2023 on Palestinian resistance, Malm celebrated 'the heroic armed resistance in Gaza'. He thus expressed his 'astonishment' and his 'tears of joy' following the Hamas attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023" (English Wikipedia entry). Malm "sees behind this attack 'the Palestinian resistance', even claims that it is 'fundamentally an act of liberation' (...) and has made it known that he is delighted with Hamas' retaliation. 'I consume these videos like a drug. I inject them into my veins. I share them with my closest comrades', he said. (*Journal du Dimanche*, 10.04.2024) This abject support for the atrocities of Hamas shows the extent to which Malm's politics are not only alien to the interests of the proletariat but also the enemy of the proletariat.

engine and its fuel are so efficient and flexible that it would be suicidal to replace them."¹⁰

Keen to convince us that there is a solution to the climate crisis within capitalism, Malm proposes a ten-point "ecological transition programme": "1) impose a moratorium on all new coal, oil or natural gas extraction facilities 2) close all power stations powered by these fuels 3) produce 100% of electricity from non-fossil sources, mainly wind and solar power 4) put an end to the development of air, sea and land transport; convert land and sea transport to electricity and wind power; ration air transport to ensure fair distribution until it can be totally replaced by other means of transport 5) develop public transport networks at all levels, from metros to inter-continental high-speed trains 6) limit the transport of food by boat and plane and systematically promote local supplies 7) put an end to the destruction of tropical forests and launch major reforestation programmes 8) insulate old buildings and require new ones to produce their own energy without emitting carbon dioxide. 9) dismantle the meat industry and direct human protein needs towards plant sources 10) direct public investment towards the development of the most efficient renewable and sustainable energy technologies, and carbon dioxide elimination technologies."¹¹

Everything that Malm has the nerve to present as the equivalent of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, destined to take over from it and succeed it, is absolutely indistinguishable from what Western governments defend (in words) and claim to want to implement!

Malm is simply posing as a defender (but a "critical" defender!) of the decarbonisation measures taken by Western governments. He is thus following in the footsteps of the IPCC, which a decade ago¹² ushered in a new phase in policies to combat global warming by presenting the use of geoengineering¹³ as inevitable. For the IPCC, the bourgeois states and governments, it is now a matter of relying on high-tech "innovation" to "compensate" for the catastrophic effects on nature of capitalism and its contradictions.¹⁴ "While Andreas

10. *Conflicts* n o 42.

11. Andreas Malm, *L'anthropoc ene contre l'histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, p.203.

12. In its fifth report in 2014.

13. Geoengineering is the set of techniques designed to manipulate and modify the Earth's climate and environment.

14. The all-out use of new technologies is seen as a dangerous and worrying dead end by the most lucid scientists: "(...) This model stems from the same vision and the same socio-economic structures put in place at the end of the 18th century, those of an industrial capitalism dominated by a frenetic quest for resources and yield, where technical progress is the means to

Malm criticises geoengineering, he does not discredit it completely, believing that it will be difficult to do without certain tools capable of capturing carbon.”¹⁵ These tools are often described as “negative emission technologies”, i.e. “the euphemism used to designate geoengineering techniques for eliminating carbon dioxide without frightening people.”¹⁶ While “waiting for better” (and he may be waiting a long time), Malm, an emergency doctor, supports the “means at hand”, the increasing recourse to the magic potions of the bourgeois state and its mad doctors to “cure the Planet”, which only exponentially worsen the situation instead of alleviating it, and generate new calamities with increasingly unpredictable and destructive consequences for humankind, the working class and the natural environment on which society depends.

For Malm, the state of emergency justifies state capitalism.

According to Malm, given the urgency of the situation in terms of global warming, and the fact that we can no longer count on the proletariat’s capacity to equip itself with revolutionary organs to challenge the capitalist order, we have to make do with what we have on hand to put out the fire. As a resolute opponent of communism, for him it is the capitalist state, state decisions and political action on the terrain of the state which form the alpha and omega of his political vision and limit his horizon. In his view, unless we are demonstrating “ir-responsibility as delirious as it is criminal”, we must recognise the need to “abandon the classical programme of demolishing the state (...) - one aspect of Leninism among others which seem to merit an obituary”¹⁷

these ends. This mode of production has brought us to where we are today. It is therefore pointless to expect it to provide solutions to the ongoing destruction of nature. On the contrary (...) the instrumentalisation of life and living processes is only deepening, becoming more sophisticated and extending to new areas, helped by the power of scientific and technical tools in a perverse and counter-productive dynamic. Industrial agriculture is polluting the air, soil and water; destroying the peasantry and ecosystems, and its purpose is no longer to feed human beings but to manufacture petrol and chemicals. What are we doing about it? We’re speeding things up, doing everything we can to further increase crop productivity and yields by genetically manipulating plants (...) The extraction and use of fossil fuels emit greenhouse gases: we’re making agrofuels, which ultimately emit even more. (...) The climate is so urgent that we are dreaming up processes aimed at “capturing and storing carbon”: not only do these processes consume a lot of energy, and therefore emit a lot of CO₂, but they also weaken the Earth’s crust, which is a strange way of saving the planet. In short, the quest for efficiency is turning against itself”. (Hélène Torjman, *La croissance verte contre la nature*, Editions la Découverte, 2021, pp.98-99).

15. *Le Monde*, 21 April 2023.

16. Hélène Torjman, *La croissance verte contre la nature*, Editions la Découverte, 2021, p.97.

17. Andreas Malm, *Corona, climate, chronic*

and concentrate on the only tool left at our disposal, the bourgeois state.¹⁸ The “*Lenin of ecology*” rejects and abandons one of Lenin’s most important contributions to the revolutionary movement: the restoration and clarification of the marxist position on the state. This is as far as one can go in questioning and abandoning marxism!

While criticising this “*very imperfect tool*” and as “*there is almost no chance of a capitalist state doing anything (...) on its own initiative. It would have to be forced to do so, using the whole panoply of means of popular pressure at our disposal, from electoral campaigns to mass sabotage*”.¹⁹ “*For if a state could take control of trade flows, track down wildlife traffickers, nationalise fossil fuel companies, organise the capture [of CO₂] from the air, plan the economy to reduce emissions by ten per cent a year or so, and do all the other things that need to be done, we would be well on the way out of the emergency.*”²⁰

He calls for “*popular pressure to be brought to bear on it, [changing] the balance of power that it condenses, forcing the apparatuses to break away from the hitch and start moving by employing all the methods already quickly mentioned.*”²¹ “*Decisions and decrees from the State are needed - or in other words, the State must be wrested from the hands of all the Tillersons and Fridolins of this world so that a transition programme of the type sketched out above can be implemented.*”²² It is therefore a question of “[jumping] at the slightest opportunity to move the State in this direction, to break with business-as-usual as clearly as necessary and to bring under public control the sectors of the economy that are working towards disaster.”²³

Malm disguises the impossibility and complete inability of the capitalist system as a whole to provide a solution to the ecological question, by passing off this impotence as a problem of state inertia,

emergency War communism in the twenty-first century. P.173 of French translation

18. “*But which state? We have just stated that the capitalist state is incapable by nature of taking these measures. And yet there are no other forms of state available. No workers’ state based on soviets will miraculously come into being overnight. No dual power of the democratic organs of the proletariat seems likely to materialise any time soon. Waiting for another form of state would be as delirious as it would be criminal, and so we will all have to make do with the dismal bourgeois state, harnessed as ever to the circuits of capital.*” Ibid, p.173.

19. Ibid, p.166.

20. Ibid, p.192.

21. Ibid, p.172.

22. Andreas Malm, *L’anthropocène contre l’histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, p. 210.

23. Corona, *climate, chronic emergency War communism in the twenty-first century.* P. 172 of French translation.

held hostage by the selfish interests of the barons of the fossil fuel sector.

What he proposes is to make full use of the mechanisms of the bourgeois-democratic state, backing them up with a healthy dose of “civil disobedience” for a good cause: Malm is making his contribution to the attempts of all the Western states to get the increasingly abstentionist masses to return to the ballot box and the ballot paper. And in so doing, he maintains the illusions about bourgeois democracy by inviting all those who are concerned about the future of the planet to make it the framework for their actions!

At the same time, Malm argues that in order to deal with the causes of the chronic emergency, state coercion is “*necessary and urgent*” and requires “*a new hierarchy of tasks for the repressive apparatuses of states throughout the world.*”²⁴ In order to justify and legitimise the need for more active state violence and repression at the ecological level, he takes as his model and source of inspiration the drastic measures of state control and militarisation of vast sectors of society taken by the Soviet state during War Communism in Russia of 1918-21 in the face of imperialist military intervention, civil war and famine. In the same vein, Malm recalls the enormous sacrifices made by Russian workers and peasants to justify, even today, the demand for “*a form of necessary renunciation*” and the impossibility “*of evading the ban on the consumption of wild animals, the cessation of mass aviation, the gradual abandonment of meat and other things synonymous with the good life.*”²⁵ In the final analysis, this theme is in unison with the bourgeois campaigns advocating “sobriety” on the pretext of defending the planet in order to impose attacks on the living conditions of the exploited class, made indispensable by the economic crisis.

In the name of defending the planet, the exploited must act as citizens, complying with the demands and submitting to the interests of the great orchestrator which, in Malm’s mind, is the state in the fight against global warming.

With a suitcase full of state capitalist measures under his arm, Malm touts his turnkey programme for the bourgeois state. “*The call for the nationalisation of fossil fuel companies and their transformation into direct air capture equipment should be the central demand for the transition in the coming years.*”²⁶ “*This begins with the nationalisation of all private companies that extract, transform and distribute fossil fuels. The rampaging pack that is Exxon-*

24. Ibid, p.153-4.

25. Ibid, p.188.

26. Ibid, p.163.

*Mobil, BP, Shell, RWE, Lundin Energy and all the others will have to be brought under control, and the surest way to do that is to bring these companies back into the public fold, either by acquisition or by confiscation without compensation - which seems more defensible.*²⁷

*“They need to be nationalised (...) not just to get rid of these companies (...) but to turn them into companies providing a carbon removal service. Turn them into a public service for restoring the climate.”*²⁸

Malm is thus openly posing as a manager of the state and capital and would have us believe that the bourgeois state in the hands of determined political forces can force capitalism to implement the solution of abandoning fossil fuels!

To lend credence to his “solution”, Malm develops a completely mystifying vision of the nature of the bourgeois state as being above classes, an arbiter of the general interest, able to act for the common good of society as a whole. This is an old refrain of bourgeois ideology that has been repeated for decades, particularly by the political forces of the capitalist left (beginning with the Social Democrats, then the Stalinists and, following them, the Trotskyists).

Contrary to what Malm implies, the state is not “neutral”, nor is it the place where the exploited class can exercise and enforce its will. On the contrary! As the expression of a society divided into antagonistic classes, the state is the exclusive instrument in the hands of the ruling class for maintaining its domination and guaranteeing its class interests; it is by definition the tool for defending its system and imposing its logic.

Nor is the state an organ of “rationalisation” or “regulation” of the contradictions of capitalism to which it could provide a “solution”. The omnipresent and growing control of the state over the whole of social life for more than a century does not correspond to the implementation of viable solutions to the contradictions of the capitalist system (social, economic and imperialist), which have been increasingly exacerbated in the period of its decadence.

The tentacular development of the state is, on the contrary, the expression of these contradictions and of the inability of the bourgeois world to overcome them, of the historic impasse of this mode of production.

In the present historical situation, after more than a century of decadence, the accumulation of contradictions at the root of

the capitalist system, and of their effects, is reflected in the growing tendency of the ruling class to lose control over its system, which is falling apart and rotting on its feet. Far from acting as a brake on this tendency, the state is itself more and more openly proving to be a vehicle for the destructive irrationality which characterises and dominates the capitalist system as a whole. The state and its actions are themselves becoming an increasingly obvious factor in aggravating the historical crisis of the capitalist system in the final phase of its existence, the phase of decomposition.

There is therefore nothing to be expected from action on the part of the state, and all illusions in this respect must be firmly rejected.

It is in this context that Malm invites us to distinguish between the different parts that make up the state apparatus, some of which are more recommendable than others, and which, in classical Trotskyist mode, he presents (critically!) as progressive allies:²⁹ *“This does not mean that the social-democratic formations do not have a role to play. On the contrary, they are perhaps our best hope, as we have seen in recent years. Nothing would have been better for the planet than a victory for Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom in 2019 and Bernie Sanders in the United States in 2020. If they could have found themselves in charge of the two traditional bastions of capitalism, there would have been real opportunities to use the current crisis and those on the horizon to break with business-as-usual”*.³⁰ No comment! This is yet another deception perpetrated by Malm to confuse working-class consciousness about the true nature of these bourgeois parties and to lure the population and workers back to the Socialist or Social Democratic parties (which have repeatedly proved their anti-working-class nature). This is yet another lie designed to conceal the fact that, in our time, all bourgeois parties are equally reactionary, and that there is no more to be expected from one than from the other!

On the questions of the state and its left forces, Malm at least has the merit of clarity. He reveals the basic logic common to the Trotskyist current as a whole: the defence of state capitalism!

Malm’s political constructions are an integral part of the ideological campaigns of the ruling class in the direct service of its interests. Their aim is to provide them

29. Left-wing parties with which Malm collaborates directly, include the Institut La Boétie in France, the think tank of La France Insoumise. Further proof that he belongs to the bourgeois camp!

30. Andreas Malm *Corona, climate, chronic emergency War communism in the twenty-first century*. P. 137 of French translation.

with the radical, supposedly anti-capitalist wrapping they need to sterilise the beginnings of reflection on capitalism’s responsibility for the ecological disaster, and to divert it into the realm of the state and bourgeois democracy. Malm therefore deserves to be awarded the “Order of Lenin” for Ecology, since:

- Malm’s “theories” prolong and continue the campaign against communism that has been underway since 1989, this time in the name of realism in the face of the climate crisis, which, because of its urgency, is changing the situation and rendering the fight for communism ineffective.
- By denying that the solution to the climate crisis requires the destruction of the bourgeois state and the capitalist social relations it guarantees, and the replacement of the capitalist system by a classless society, the word revolution, in Malm’s mouth, changes meaning and now only means the development and management of the capitalist system.
- Whether it’s a question of the means Malm advocates – encouraging civil disobedience and individual or mass sabotage against major greenhouse gas emitters (deflating the tyres of the richest people’s SUVs, targeting a private jet airport or a cement factory, etc.), or their aim – putting pressure on the capitalist state to finally take the right decisions – they are really only intended to lock those who might be seduced by this rhetoric into the confines of the capitalist order. Leaving intact and preserving the exploitative social relations of the capitalist order, at the root of the ills that beset society, is all to the benefit of the ruling class: they are nothing but sterile dead-ends that guarantee the status quo and impotence.

In the next part of this article, we will look at why the social and ecological questions can only be resolved at the same time, and why only the proletariat has the solution.

Scott

27. Ibid, p.158.

28. Ibid, p.163.

The "green Trotskyism" of Andreas Malm against the communist perspective

In the first part of this article in this issue of the *Review*, we showed that the self-styled "Lenin of ecology", Andreas Malm, is in fact defending a completely bourgeois conception of this question, and in reality serves as an agent of state capitalism, which he aims to propagate to the working class. In this second part, we will show how much his approach is based on a fundamental distortion of the marxist vision of the capitalist mode of production and its relationship with nature.

At first glance, Malm claims to be a marxist, which provides him with a seemingly radical posture, but he then proceeds to completely distort marxist theory. The shameless use of double-speak, typical of the Trotskyist current, which says one thing to defend its opposite in reality, as well as other falsifications, allows him the extraordinary sleight-of-hand of both eliminating the responsibility of the capitalist system for the gravity of the ecological crisis and obscuring the only perspective which could allow humanity to emerge from this nightmare: communism, which is the historical project of the exploited class, the proletariat, the gravedigger of capitalism.

In this section, we show why and how capitalism is incapable of solving the ecological crisis, why and how the revolutionary class of our time, the proletariat, alone holds the key, and why the social question and the ecological question can only be solved at the same time by destroying capitalist relations of production and replacing the capitalist system with a society free of exploitation, communism.

The Trotskyist distortion of marxism

Denying the capitalist mode of production's responsibility for the climate crisis

Malm seems to rely on marxism. He states that: "*Capitalism is a specific process that unfolds as a universal appropriation of biophysical resources, because capital itself has a unique, unquenchable thirst for surplus value derived from human labour by means of material substrates. Capital, one might say, is supra-ecological, a biophysical omnivore with its own social DNA.*"¹

Similarly, he refers to Marx himself: "*Volume III of Capital shows how capitalist property relations 'cause an irremediable hiatus in the complex equilibrium of the social metabolism composed by the natural laws of life'; the theory of metabolic rift – of hiatus – allows us to explain a great many phenomena, from imbalances in the nitrogen cycle to climate change.*"²

1. Andreas Malm, *L'anthropocène contre l'histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, page 137.

2. Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm*, Verso, 2017. French translation: *Avis de Tempête, Nature et culture dans un monde qui se réchauffe*, Editions La Fabrique, 2023, p.155.

But it soon becomes clear that this is just a pretence. Indeed, as the pages turn, a shift occurs. It becomes clear that Malm's anti-capitalism is not aimed at capitalism as a whole, but is reduced to questioning certain of its components – particularly the fossil fuel production sector, oil and gas, which he blames for global warming. In the end, he never incriminates the capitalist system as such in the ecological disaster (which he reduces to global warming). By targeting only certain sectors of the bourgeoisie or certain states (those that dominate the planet), and by denouncing as the central problem only the "business as usual" attitude of the ruling class in the face of the climate emergency, he in fact absolves capitalism as a mode of production of responsibility for the climate crisis.

Thus, Malm castigates the outrageous cynicism and lack of concern for the planet and humanity of Exxon boss Rex Tillerson, who declares: "*My philosophy is to make money. If I can drill and make money, that's what I want to do.*" But here, by focusing on Tillerson alone, Malm conceals (knowingly for a self-styled marxist!) that Tillerson's "philosophy" is in fact that of the ENTIRE ruling class! The illusionist Malm throws a veil over the exploitative nature and unbridled pursuit of maximum profit inherent in capitalism as a whole.³ Ascending the heights of hypocrisy and dissimulation, and in typical Trotskyist

3. "*Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent certain will produce eagerness; 50 per cent., positive audacity; 100 per cent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent., and there is not a crime at which it will scruple.*" T.J. Dunning, quoted by Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, footnote to page 538.

fashion, Malm admits (and ultimately defends!) the existence of an "admissible" capitalist exploitation of nature!

Furthermore, Malm also agrees with: "*the two reports published for COP21 [which] underlined the extent to which CO2 emissions are inseparable from such a polarity. The richest 10% of humanity is responsible for half of current consumption-related emissions, while the poorest half is responsible for 10%. The per capita carbon footprint of the richest 1% is 175 times that of the poorest 10%: the per capita emissions of the richest 1% in the USA, Luxembourg or Saudi Arabia are 2,000 times greater than those of the poorest inhabitants of Honduras, Mozambique or Rwanda.*"⁴ Malm concludes that: "*if there is a global logic of the capitalist mode of production with which rising temperatures will be articulated, it is undoubtedly that of uneven and combined development. Capital develops by drawing other relations into its orbit, while it continues to accumulate, people caught up in external but integrated relations - think of the herders of north-eastern Syria - who derive little or no benefit, and may not even come close to wage Labour. Some amass resources while others, outside the extortion machine but in its orbit struggle for a chance to produce them*".⁵

To sum up, according to Malm, the world is simply divided between "rich" and "poor", between "beneficiaries" and "victims" of the system according to an "unequal" geographical distribution between a rich North and a poor South. In other words, this is the commonplace of the dominant bourgeois ideology, which runs from UN reports to the entire bourgeois media, via... the columns of the Trotskyist press! Malm's position is even identical to that of the Chinese government, for whom "*the climate crisis is the result of a highly unequal model of economic development that has spread over the last two centuries, enabling today's rich countries to achieve the income levels they have, in part because they failed to take into account the environmental damage that today threatens the lives and lifestyles of others.*"⁶ An approach

4. Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm*. P.164-65 of French translation.

5. Andreas Malm, *L'anthropocène contre l'histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, p.190-91.

6. Sha Zukang, "Foreword", in *Promoting Development and Saving the Planet*, page VII, quoted by C. Bonneuil, J.B. Fressoz, *L'événement Anthropocène*

based on China's defense of the concept of "common but differentiated responsibility" requiring global climate governance to respect the development needs of the poorest countries: Malm is now an apostle of Chinese imperialism!

Unless you consider the People's Republic of China as an expression of the proletarian and marxist avant-garde, this gives you an idea of the validity of what Malm wants to pass off as marxism!

This concordance of views between the official ideology of the Chinese state and Malm owes nothing to chance. The conception of a capitalist world divided between "dominated" and "dominators", where the scourges that plague society are attributable solely to the big imperialists who "victimise" the small, is in line with Trotskyist thinking. It constantly draws a distinction between different states, of which only the big ones are imperialist. As if there was a fundamental difference between the big underworld bosses who dominate the scene and the neighbourhood pimps; in practice, the only difference is in the means at their disposal!

The ever-increasing concentration of capital by its very nature conditions an imbalance within the capitalist world and has as its corollary and consequence the existence of marginalised peripheries. This is a permanent historical fact of capitalism, written in its genes. It is concretised in the existence of states capable of exercising global hegemony, while others are deprived of it. The bewitching Malm hypnotises the audience by focusing on the appearance and surface of things, in order to create the illusion that, in the end, a solution exists within each national state, provided it is better managed and seeks greater "harmony" between nations!

In this way, Malm succeeds in removing from the field of reflection the key points which alone can really provide a solid basis from which to correctly pose the question of the effects of the capitalist mode of production on nature:

- The reality that capital is a social relation that transcends the borders of each national state and exists on a global scale; whose main "polarisation" (to use his own smoky terminology) is expressed in the fundamental and irreducible antagonism between the two main social classes that make up capitalist society, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. As Marx points out: "just as production based on capital produces universal

– *La Terre, l'histoire et nous*, Seuil, 2013, p.252; This approach was championed by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the 2019 Climate Action Summit and by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the 2019 Global Commission on Adaptation.

industry... on the one hand, so does it on the other produce a system of universal exploitation of natural and human qualities."⁷

- At the same time, Malm overlooks the fact that: "In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place."⁸ Put another way, it is through the intercession of different forms of social organisation throughout history that the relationship between humankind and nature is established. To understand the origins of today's ecological climate crisis, we need to consider the existence of the capitalist mode of production and its effects on nature.

For Malm, the working class is no longer the subject of history

The other level on which Malm rejects marxism is that of the alternative to the capitalist system. For Malm, in the central countries of capitalism, it is the individual who must act through sabotage to influence the policies of the capitalist state: "In a scientifically founded reality, *Ende Gelände*⁹ is the type of action whose number and scope would have to be multiplied by a thousand. Within the advanced capitalist countries and in the most developed areas of the rest of the world, there is no shortage of suitable targets: just look around for the nearest coal-fired power station, the oil pipeline, the SUV, the airport and the expanding suburban shopping mall... This is the terrain on which a revolutionary climate movement would have to rise in a powerful and ever-accelerating wave."¹⁰ In other words, Malm is simply proposing a more radical version of a citizen's movement, one that is no longer content simply to take action on a legal terrain, and will not refrain from going beyond it to take action against the barons or sectors of capitalism identified as responsible for global warming, by attacking their companies or the products they put on the market.

More generally, to fight against the "drivers of the climate crisis", Malm multiplies references to various social movements in history (apartheid, abolition of slavery...

7. Karl Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*, 1853. "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy" (Rough Draft of 1857-58) [First Instalment], III. Chapter on Capital, Section Two, "Circulation Process of Capital" (Collected Works vol. 28, page 336).

8. Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, 1847.

9. "Ende Gelände (In English: "here and no further") is a civil disobedience movement occupying coal mines in Germany to raise awareness for climate justice." (Wikipedia).

10. Andreas Malm, *L'anthropocène contre l'histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, page 210.

without bothering about their class nature!) into a magma in which it's impossible to recognise the specific social force we can rely on to find a way out of the nightmarish situation caused by capitalism: "Insofar as current capitalism is totally saturated with fossil energy, virtually everyone who takes part in a social movement under its reign is objectively fighting global warming, whether they care about it or not, whether they suffer its consequences or not. The Brazilians protesting against the rising cost of bus fares and demanding free transport are in fact raising the banner of the fifth measure in the program set out above, while the Ogonis evicting Shell are dealing with the first."¹¹ Similarly, European car workers fighting for their jobs, in keeping with the type of union consciousness they have always possessed, have an interest in re-converting their factories to the production of the technologies needed for the energy transition – wind turbines, buses – rather than seeing them disappear for a low-wage destination. All struggles are struggles against fossil fuel capital: subjects just need to become aware of it."¹²

Malm's bloated claim of updating marxism to face the realities of climate change by establishing new "polarisations" that govern the capitalist world, and which replace the fundamental antagonism between the two main classes of capitalist society – the exploited class (the proletariat) and the exploiting class (the bourgeoisie) – has only one aim: to deny the revolutionary nature of the proletariat. Dedicated to demonstrating that communism can in no way represent a realistic, credible alternative to environmental catastrophe, and that the proletariat's struggle is incapable of playing any role whatsoever against the climate crisis, Malm simply glosses over the existence, role and revolutionary perspective of the working class. If he refers here and there to the proletariat or its history, it's only as an exploited class or as a simple sociological category of capitalist society, drowned in the undifferentiated whole of the people. In sum, he reserves for it a role as an irrelevant extra or dilutes it in composite interclass movements, which actually constitute a mortal danger for its ability to act as an autonomous class with interests distinct from those of other social categories.

Here again, Malm makes his contribution to bourgeois campaigns to prolong the proletariat's difficulties in recognising itself as the driving force behind the transformation of society, as the revolutionary

11. See the points of Malm's "green transition programme", in part one of this article, in the section headed "A thoroughly bourgeois method"

12. Andreas Malm, *L'anthropocène contre l'histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, p.206.

class of our time, which the advent of capitalism has historically raised up as its gravedigger.

The capitalist mode of production and nature

Malm's bourgeois falsifications of the nature of capitalism and its responsibility for environmental destruction oblige us to re-establish some fundamental acquisitions of marxism that Malm denies, obscures or abandons (according to the various needs dictated by the ideological role he plays for the benefit of the bourgeois state). First and foremost, the *Communist Manifesto* itself.

The global character of the capitalist mode of production

Malm sees capitalism only as the sum of its individual components, and denies that beyond the reality of a capitalist world by definition marked by competition and division between nations lies the unity of the capitalist system as a mode of production, as well as the universal terrain of its existence and domination.

As the *Manifesto* says: "*The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country ... it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new Industries ... by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.*"¹³

And as Rosa Luxemburg points out, this has meant that: "*From the very beginning, the forms and laws of capitalist production aim to comprise the entire globe as a store of productive forces. Capital, impelled to appropriate productive forces for purposes of exploitation, ransacks the whole world, it procures its means of production from*

all corners of the earth, seizing them, if necessary by force, from all levels of civilisation."

To satisfy its insatiable need for profit: "*it becomes necessary for capital progressively to dispose ever more fully of the whole globe, to acquire an unlimited choice of means of production, with regard to both quality and quantity. The process of accumulation, elastic and spasmodic as it is, requires inevitably free access to ever new areas of raw materials. ... Since capitalist production can develop fully only with complete access to all territories and climes, it can no more confine itself to the natural resources and productive forces of the temperate zone than it can manage with white labour alone. Capital needs other races to exploit territories where the white man cannot work. It must be able to mobilise world labour power without restriction in order to utilise all productive forces of the globe.*"¹⁴

Contrary to Malm's assertion, this is the starting point for any reflection that seeks to establish capital's responsibility for the ecological crisis: not the narrow, local framework of the nation and its state, but the international and global level.

Capital's destructive effects on nature and the workforce

In the historical phase of the ascendancy of its system: "*The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.*"¹⁵ As such, it has played a historically progressive role. But the development of productive forces in mud and blood by the capitalist system of production is founded, both socially and environmentally, on devastation, with the most frightening consequences.

For the exploited class: "*The first few decades of unrestricted operation of large-scale industry produced such a devastating effect on the health and living conditions of the mass of working people, with tremendous mortality, disease, physical crippling, mental desperation, epidemic disease and unfitness for military service, that the very survival of society seemed deeply threatened.*"¹⁶

As with nature. In the Americas, for example: "*...tobacco cultivation exhausted the land so quickly (after only three or four harvests) that in the 18th century produc-*

tion had to be moved from Maryland to the Appalachians. The transformation of the Caribbean into a sugar monoculture led to deforestation, erosion and soil exhaustion. Sugar cane plantations introduced malaria to the American tropics. ... As for the fabulous silver mines of Mexico and Peru, they were exhausted within a few decades, leaving intensely polluted environments. ... We could also mention the virtual disappearance of the beaver; the American bison or the bowhead whale at the end of the 19th century, in connection with industrialisation, as bison leather provided excellent transmission belts and whale oil an excellent lubricant for the mechanics of the industrial revolution."¹⁷ Elsewhere in the world, the same causes had the same effects: "*The gutta percha tree disappeared from Singapore in 1856, then from many Malaysian islands. At the end of the 19th century, the rubber rush took hold of the Amazon, causing massacres of Indians and deforestation. At the beginning of the 20th century, rubber trees were transferred from Brazil to Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Sumatra and then Liberia, where British and American companies (Hop-pum, Goodyear, Firestone...) established huge plantations. The latter laid waste to several million hectares of land. The latter are destroying several million hectares of forest, depleting the soil and introducing malaria.*"¹⁸

In *Capital*, Marx denounces the fact that "capitalist progress", which means nothing other than the generalised plundering of both worker and soil, leads to the ruin of natural resources, the land and the working class. Drawing on the scientific work of his time, he argues that the effects of capitalist exploitation and accumulation are equally destructive for the planet and for the Labour power of the proletariat: "*In modern agriculture, as in the urban industries, the increased productiveness and quantity of the labour set in motion are bought at the cost of laying waste and consuming by disease labour-power itself. Moreover, all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer; but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole,*

13. Marx-Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1947.

14. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, III: "The historical conditions of Accumulation", 26: "The Reproduction of Capital and its Social Setting".

15. Marx-Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1947.

16. R. Luxemburg, *Introduction to Political Economy*, 1907.

17. C. Bonneuil, J.B. Fressoz, *L'événement Anthropocène – La Terre, l'histoire et nous*, Seuil, 2013, p.260.

18. *Ibid*, p.267.

only by sapping the original sources of all wealth - the soil and the labourer.”¹⁹ From the outset, capitalism has asserted itself as the destroyer of both nature AND the labour power of the proletariat.

The destruction of nature at its peak in the decadence of capitalism

The main manifestation of the capitalist system's entry into decadence, once the world market has been “unified”, is war and capitalism's permanent state of war, with profoundly ecocidal consequences. If “the two world wars, the Cold War confrontations and the decolonisations caused ecological destruction on a planetary scale... the preparation of conflicts, and in particular the development, testing and production of armaments, produced effects no less massive. ... But these direct impacts are far from summing up the importance of the war phenomenon in the relationship between human collectives and their environments.”²⁰

“The wars of the twentieth century were also decisive in shaping the political, technical, economic and cultural logics that governed the exploitation and conservation of resources, on the scale of nations but also of the planet as a whole ... The effects of the two world wars on economies and ecosystems ... were decisive in globalising and intensifying ... extractions on a planetary scale, and catalysing increased control of these resources by state powers (in the North) and Western firms (in the South) ... The Second World War was a decisive break. ... [It] catalysed the emergence of major extractive activity, crystallised during the conflict and perpetuated ... after the war... [The] large-scale reconfiguration of economies of exploitation, transport and ‘use’ concerns ‘a wide range of materials elevated to the rank of ‘strategic resources’, from wood to rubber to fossil fuels ... The supply imperative of a war economy leads to duplication of productive infrastructures and, ultimately, to industrial overcapacity.”²¹

As the ICC has pointed out, in this period: “capital's ruthless destruction of the environment takes on a different scale and quality... This is the epoch in which all the capitalist nations are forced to compete with each other over a saturated world market; an epoch therefore, of a permanent war economy, with a disproportionate growth of heavy industry; an epoch characterised by the irrational, wasteful

duplication of industrial complexes in each national unit, by the desperate pillaging of natural resources by each nation as it tries to survive in the pitiless rat-race of the world market. ... The rise of megacities, ... the development of forms of agriculture that have been no less ecologically damaging than most forms of industry.”²²

The “great acceleration” of the ecological crisis in recent decades is one of the manifestations of the historical crisis of the capitalist mode of production in its period of decadence, pushed to its climax in its ultimate phase of decomposition. Its severity now represents a direct threat to the survival of human society. Above all, the ecological consequences of decaying capitalism are interwoven and combined with the other major phenomena of the dislocation of capitalist society – economic crisis and imperialist war – interacting and multiplying their effects in a devastating spiral whose combined repercussions are far greater than the sum of their individual parts.

Capitalism's irremediable incompatibility with nature

As early as the middle of the 19th century, Marx was already highlighting the fact that capital, driven by the need to accumulate more and more, affects the very natural basis of production, dangerously unbalancing the interaction between humankind and nature by causing an irremediable breakdown in its metabolism. “Capitalist production, by collecting the population in great centres, and causing an ever-increasing preponderance of town population, on the one hand concentrates the historical motive power of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil, i.e., prevents the return to the soil of its elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; it therefore violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil.”²³ “Large landed property reduces the agricultural population to a constantly falling minimum, and confronts it with a constantly growing industrial population crowded together in large cities. It thereby creates conditions which cause an irreparable break in the coherence of social interchange prescribed by the natural laws of life. As a result, the vitality of the soil is squandered, and this prodigality is carried by commerce far beyond the borders of a particular state. Large-scale industry and large-scale mechanised agriculture work together.”²⁴ Marx could already discern that

capitalism was compromising the future of subsequent generations and, potentially, endangering the future of mankind. As we have seen, these predictions have been amply confirmed after more than a century of capitalism's decadence.

Why is this so?

Capitalism did not inaugurate the plundering of nature. But unlike previous modes of production, which were more limited in geographical scope and local impact on the environment, this plundering changes scale with capitalism. It takes on a planetary dimension and a predatory character that is qualitatively new in human history. “For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognised as a power for itself; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate it under human needs, whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production.”²⁵

For capitalism, which enshrines the reign of the commodity, and presents itself as a system of universal commodity production, driven solely by the frenzied pursuit of maximum profit, EVERYTHING becomes a commodity, EVERYTHING is for sale. Thus, since modern times, with the construction of the global market: “industrialisation involves the transfer of control over nature into the hands of a handful of major capitalists;”²⁶ “a growing number of natural objects have been transformed into commodities, meaning above all that they have been appropriated, disrupting environments as well as economic and social relations. ... The appropriation of natural entities, the privatisation of living beings, has major environmental, economic and social consequences. All kinds of natural beings become property and commodities ... The objects of nature, in fact, are not spontaneously commodities: commodities are the result of a construction, an appropriation (sometimes violent) coupled with a transformation that makes it possible to make the object conform to market exchanges.”²⁷

Capitalism sees the Earth and nature only as a “free gift” (Marx), a reservoir of resources “providentially” placed at its disposal, from which it can draw without limit, to make it one of the sources of its profits. “In today's economic order, nature does not serve humanity, but capital. It is

19. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part 4: “Production of Relative Surplus Value”, Section 10: “Modern Industry and Agriculture”.

20. J.B. Fressoz, F. Graber, F. Locher, G. Quenet, *Introduction à l'histoire environnementale*, Ed. La Découverte, 2014, page 92-93.

21. *Ibid.*, p.96-97.

22. “Capitalism is poisoning the earth”, *International Review* n° 63 (1990).

23. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part 4, Chapter 15, Section 10, “Modern Industry and Agriculture”.

24. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Chapter XLVII “Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent”, V. “Métayage

And Peasant Proprietorship Of Land Parcels.”

25. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, “Transition from the process of the production of capital into the process of circulation”, page 336.

26. B. Fressoz, F. Graber, F. Locher, G. Quenet, *Introduction à l'histoire environnementale*, Ed. La Découverte, 2014, page 61.

27. *Ibid.*, page 56-57.

not the clothing, food or cultural needs of humanity that govern production, but capital's appetite for profit, for gold. Natural resources are exploited as if reserves were infinite and inexhaustible. The harmful consequences of deforestation for agriculture and the destruction of useful animals and plants expose the finite character of available reserves and the failure of this type of economy. Roosevelt recognises this failure when he wants to call an international conference to review the state of still available natural resources and to take measures to stop them being wasted."²⁸

It is therefore not only from the exploitation of the main commodity, the Labour power of the proletariat, that capitalism derives its wealth, but also from the exploitation of nature. "Labour is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as Labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human Labour power... And insofar as man from the beginning behaves toward nature, the primary source of all instruments and subjects of Labour, as an owner, treats her as belonging to him, his Labour becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth."²⁹

The cause of the climate crisis lies not in "human activities" in general or in certain sectors of capitalism's economic activity, but in the existence of the capitalist mode of production itself. It is because capitalism derives its wealth from two sources: the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of the Labour power of the proletariat, both transformed into commodities, that it has no solution to the ecological crisis. It can only exploit both to the point of exhaustion and destruction. This is why the social question and the ecological question go hand in hand, and can only be solved at the same time and by the proletariat, the only class with an interest in abolishing all forms of exploitation.

Communism, the only prospect for humanity

This is precisely what Malm denies, as usual, peremptorily and without any real argumentation, when he declares that: "In a warmer capitalist world, the extortion machine can do no more than extract the same amount of surplus value by squeezing out every last drop of sweat from the workers. But beyond a locally determined tipping point, this may simply no longer be possible. Is a victorious workers' revolution waiting in the wings? Probably not. ... Ex-

traction of surplus value probably remains the central extortion machine, but the explosive effects of climate change are not transmitted directly along this axis."³⁰ For him, the climate crisis and the social question belong to completely separate spheres with no connection or relationship between them. And since the proletariat's struggle does not develop specifically against the effects of the ecological crisis, but on the terrain of the conditions imposed on it by capitalism, Malm concludes that nature and ecology do not fall within the scope of the proletariat's struggle for emancipation on a historical scale, and that it is not capable of integrating the ecological question, the relationship between humankind and nature, into its revolutionary perspective.

Scientists and environmental specialists generally identify production based on commodity exchange, the "commodification" and over-exploitation of nature, and the system of private property as the central factors responsible for the ecological crisis, and stress the need for a solution on a universal scale. The diagnoses they put forward undoubtedly condemn the capitalist mode of production and point indisputably in the direction of the communist social project carried by the proletariat. But what do they do in practice? Blindly, or as more or less willing accomplices of the ruling class, all they do is propose dead-ends or aberrations with no prospects by way of a solution: they ask the state to improve laws and regulations, better regulate; or they may claim to draw inspiration from the (idealised!) relationship with nature of primitive societies or they may advocate a return to small-scale, individual, parcel-based farming, call for producing locally, etc. In any case, they all converge in seeking solutions within the conditions of present-day society, while ignoring and blacking out the prospect of communism, which is precisely the ONLY social project that proposes to rid the world of commodity exchange and exploitation, which they all see as the root cause of the climate crisis. Here again, Malm is no exception,³¹ joining

30. Andreas Malm, *L'anthropocène contre l'histoire*, Editions La Fabrique, 2017, page 190-91.

31. Similar elucidations can be found in another "genius thinker" of "critical ecology", Fabian Scheidler, who is also praised by many: "You don't design a new society on a drawing board in the same way as you do a new interior, a machine or a factory. New forms of social organisation are the result of persistent conflicts and processes of convergence between different groups. What emerges in the end can never, in principle, be the result of a single plan, but only the consequence of many plans, contradictory or convergent. (...) Major system changes are not the result of a slow, gradual transition from one mode of organisation to another, nor of a deliberate break with the past on the model of the October Revolution in Russia. (...) What there actually is not is a master plan for building a new system to replace the previous one". Not only is there no such plan, but there are not many people left who think one is needed." (F.

the chorus of bourgeois campaigns with his Trotskyist background.

Only the proletariat can abolish exploitation and the reign of the commodity

Capitalism has simultaneously created the premises of material abundance – revealed in the existence of crises of overproduction which point to the possibility of overcoming exploitation – and the social forms necessary for the economic transformation of society: the proletariat, the class destined to become capital's gravedigger.

The generalisation of the commodity by the capitalist mode of production has, first and foremost, affected the labour power employed by human beings in their productive activity. The proletariat, the class that produces all goods, deprived of the means of production, has no other commodity to sell on the market except its labour power – a sale to those who own these means of production, the capitalist class. Only those subject to collective exploitation, to the sale of their Labour power, can have an interest in revolting against capitalist commodity relations. Since the abolition of exploitation is essentially synonymous with the abolition of wage-labour, only the class that suffers this specific form of exploitation, the product of the development of these relations of production, is capable of providing itself with a perspective for overcoming them.

Hence the fact that: "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history."³²

Scheidler, *La Fin de la mégamachine. Sur les traces d'une civilisation en voie d'effondrement*, Chapitre 11 "Possibilités, sortir de la mégamachine", Ed. Seuil, 2020, page 445-50).

32. Marx-Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1947. Ibid. "The peasants, although they are exploited in all sorts of ways, and can sometimes wage very violent struggles to limit their exploitation, can never direct these struggles towards the abolition of private property because they themselves are small owners, or, living alongside the latter, aspire to become like them. And, even when the peasants do set up collective structures to increase their income through an improvement in productivity or the sale of their products, it usually takes the form of cooperatives, which don't call into question private property or commodity exchange. To sum up, the classes and strata which appear as vestiges of the past (peasants, artisans, liberal professions, etc) and who only survive because capitalism, even if it totally dominates the

28. Anton Pannekoek, "Destruction of Nature", 10 July 1909.

29. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

“Our epoch ... possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.”³³ It is from the specific place occupied by the proletariat within the capitalist relations of production that it derives the ability to assert itself as a social force capable of developing a consciousness and a practice capable of “revolutionising the existing world, of practically attacking and changing existing things.”³⁴ The proletariat’s struggle against the effects of exploitation and the conditions imposed on it by capitalism can only truly succeed if it sets as its goal the abolition of exploitation itself and the establishment of communism. This is why “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”³⁵

The material foundations of communism as a solution to the ecological question

The buying and selling of produced wealth can only disappear if society’s wealth is appropriated collectively. “The appropriation [by the proletariat of all the means of production] can only be achieved by a union which is in turn necessarily universal, because of the character of the proletariat itself, and by a revolution which will overthrow, on the one hand, the power of the previous mode of production and exchange and the power of the previous social structure, and which will develop, on the other hand, the universal character of the proletariat and the energy which is necessary for it to carry through this appropriation, a revolution in which the proletariat will also strip itself of all that remains of its previous social position.”³⁶ With the seizure of the means of production by society, the collective appropriation by society of the wealth it produces, commodity production is eliminated, and with it, exploitation in all its forms.

The abolition of commodity exchange

world economy, is incapable of transforming all the producers into wage labourers - these classes cannot be the bearers of a revolutionary project. On the contrary, the only perspective they can dream about is the return to a mythical ‘golden age’ of the past: the dynamic of their specific struggles can only be reactionary.” Quoted in “Who can change the world? (Part 1): The proletariat is the Revolutionary Class”, *International Review* n° 73).

33. Marx-Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1947.

34. Marx-Engels, *German Ideology*, 1946.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

presupposes the abolition of its very foundation: private property, which means the end of the right to possess and appropriate nature: “...Land, being the prime raw material for all human Labour and the basis of human existence, must be made the property of society, together with the means of production and distribution. At an advanced stage of development society will again take possession of what it owned in primeval days. At a certain stage of development all human races had common ownership of land. Only by the rise and development of private property and the forms of rulership connected with it, has common property been abolished and usurped as private property, as we have seen, not without severe struggles. The robbery of the land and its transformation into private property formed the first cause of oppression. This oppression has passed through all stages, from slavery to ‘free’ wage-Labour of the twentieth century, until, after a development of thousands of years, the oppressed again convert the soil into common property.”³⁷ The end of private property means the end of the monopoly exercised by a few capitalists “over determined parts of the earth’s surface,”³⁸ [and] as exclusive spheres of their private will to the exclusion of all others.”³⁹

“With the seizing of the means of production by society production of commodities is done away with ... Anarchy in social production is replaced by systematic, definite organisation. The struggle for individual existence disappears. Then for the first time man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature because he has now become

37. August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*, Chapter XXII “Socialism and Agriculture, 1. Abolition of the Private Ownership of Land”.

38. “As soon as these have reached a point where they must shed their skin, the material source of the title, justified economically and historically and arising from the process which creates social life, falls by the wayside, along with all transactions based upon it. From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.” (Karl Marx, *Capital* – Volume III, Chapter 46. “Building Site Rent. Rent in Mining. Price of Land.”)

39. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Part VI. “Transformation of Surplus-Profit into Ground-Rent, Chapter 37. Introduction.”

master of his own social organisation. ... Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history – only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him.”⁴⁰

The communist mode of production revolutionises mankind’s relationship with nature

This new stage in the history of humankind, a veritable leap from the reign of necessity to freedom, from the government of men to the administration of things, ushers in a new era: communism will first have to tackle the priority of feeding, clothing and caring for the whole of humanity, as well as beginning to repair the damage caused by the ravages of capitalist production on the environment. The generalisation of the condition of producer to all members of society, and the liberation of productive forces from the limitations and constraints of capitalist production and profit-making, will lead to an explosion of creativity and productivity on a scale unimaginable under current social conditions. By instituting a new and higher relationship between humankind and nature, it will be the beginning of a unified world humanity, conscious of itself and in harmony with nature: “Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature.”⁴¹

The development of the communist mode of production will introduce a totally different type of equipment for the soil and subsoil; it will aim for a better distribution of human beings across the globe and the elimination of the opposition between town and country.

With a view to “systematically establish (the metabolism between man and the earth) in regulatory law of social production,”⁴² communism cannot do otherwise than reappropriate and critically integrate the best contributions of past societies, starting with a better understanding of the more harmonious relationship between humankind and nature that prevailed during the long period of primitive communism, while integrating and transforming all

40. F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part III: “Socialism, II. Theoretical.”

41. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Part VII. “Revenues and their Sources”, Chapter 48. “The Trinity Formula”.

42. Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, “The development of capitalist production”, section IV, “production of relative surplus-value”, Chapter XV.

the scientific and technological advances developed by capitalism.⁴³

Communism puts an end to the predatory and plundering relationship that has featured in class societies, replacing it with “*conscious rational cultivation of the soil as eternal communal property, an inalienable condition for the existence and reproduction of a chain of successive generations.*”⁴⁴

In conclusion, against all the bourgeois falsifiers such as Malm,⁴⁵ we reaffirm, with Marx, that by placing the satisfaction of human needs at the centre of its mode of production, by overturning the relationships between human beings as well as those of the whole human race to nature, “*Communism*” represents the “*the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man.*”⁴⁶ It is the only door that leads to the future of humanity.

Faced with the urgency of climate change, the urgency of communist revolution

Communism has been the order of the day since the capitalist mode of production entered its period of decadence at the turn of the twentieth century, when bourgeois relations of production, which had become too narrow, collided definitively with the development of productive forces they could no longer contain.

Unlike the revolutionary classes of the past, all of which created new systems of exploitation and were able to develop their new relations of production within the old, now obsolete relations of production, before finally sweeping them away, the proletariat, the first class in history to be both exploited and revolutionary, lacking any material support within capitalist relations of production, must first break the political power of the ruling class in order to establish itself as the ruling class. Since it only has its consciousness and capacity for organisation as weapons of combat, only once the destruction of the bourgeois state -of all states- has been achieved, and the seizure of revolutionary power on a global scale has been secured, can it advance its

43. “*After the mighty advances made by the natural sciences in the present century, we are more than ever in a position to realise and hence to control even the more remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities. But the more this progresses the more will men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature, ...*” (Friedrich Engels, *Dialects of Nature*, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man”.)

44. K. Marx, *Capital* – Volume III, Chapter XLVII “Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent”, “V. Métayage And Peasant Proprietorship Of Land Parcels”.

45. Or à la Scheidler.

46. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, “Private Property and Communism”.

project for a new society, inaugurating the communist transformation of the world.

In the current historical situation of decomposition, the ultimate phase in the decadence of capitalism, and faced with the spiral of destruction it has set in motion and which threatens the future of civilisation, and even the survival of humanity, time is no longer on the side of the working class. But it alone, as the revolutionary class of our age, holds the key to emerging from this nightmarish situation. It retains all its potential to bring its historic project to fruition. The only alternative, the only valid one, for those seeking a way out of capitalist calamities is, without panicking in the face of the immediate situation, to work determinedly to bring about the conditions for the advent of communism, to hasten the process leading to this act of world liberation, by joining the struggle of the oppressed class in its effort to develop awareness of its action and its movement towards the fulfilment of its historic mission.

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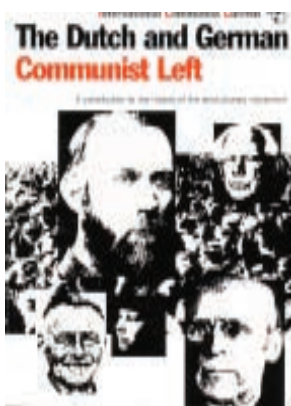
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Why trade unions can no longer be used as the organisational form for working class struggle. How the unions consistently sabotage independent class action.



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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International Review 169

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

Critique of the "communisers" (parts I & II)

100 years after the foundation of the CI (part V)

International Review 171

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

Resolution on the international situation

International leaflet
Massacres and wars...

Call from the communist left

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

**Spiral of atrocities in the middle east: the terrify-
ing reality of decomposing capital**

War atrocities used to justify...new atrocities

**The USA: Superpower in the decadence of capital-
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the necessity for politicisation**

Critique of the so-called "Communisers" part III

International Review 170

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**International Revolution or the destruction of
humanity**

**The crucial responsibility of revolutionary
organisations**

Balance sheet of the congress

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**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**

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

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

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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