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## BOSTON BOMBING

# Terrorism Serves the State

It is now one week since two crudely made “improvised explosive devices” tore through the crowd near the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon killing three people and injuring dozens of others, many suffering severe and traumatic injuries including the loss of multiple limbs. What was supposed to be a day of celebration of one of the oldest sporting events in the country had become the backdrop for one of the worst terrorist attacks on US soil since 9/11. The bomb remnants investigators discovered in the aftermath of the blast appeared to have been made from pressure cookers and stuffed with nails and ball bearings so as to maximize casualties from shrapnel. Inspired by similar devices used by insurgents to wreak havoc on American and allied troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, it appeared that the chickens from US imperialism’s adventures abroad might have once again come home

to roost. Trauma surgeons who treated the wounded at local hospitals described the injuries as “combat like”, just as images of the blast sight showing sidewalks stained with blood filled the airwaves and streamed across WiFi connections. America, and especially the city of Boston, appeared to be in a state of disbelief and shock.

Nevertheless, only days later the FBI was able to identify two suspects using footage from the now ubiquitous surveillance cameras that look down on pedestrians and vehicles from the rooftops and traffic signals of just about every major city in the world. And, as the FBI, Governor Patrick and President Obama all boldly promised in the aftermath of the attacks, the state was quickly able to put the pieces of the investigative puzzle together and identify the supposed culprits. By the end of the night on Friday, April 20th, 26 year old Tamer-



lan Tsarneav, a resident of a Boston suburb with a passion for boxing, was dead, killed in a violent shoot-out with police. His badly wounded 19-year-old brother Dzhokhar would be captured, weakened and incoherent from blood loss caused by a hail of police bullets. As this is written, the younger Nasaraev remains in serious condition in a Boston hospital, unable to communicate we are told. Still, the US federal state proudly proclaims, in a tone that appears designed to reassure us of something, that once he comes to they won’t even bother to read him his Miranda rights before the federal

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## KOREA

# Against the threat of war

During the past months tensions between North and South Korea and the USA have once again been on the rise. Repeated missile tests, threats of missiles, artillery and even nuclear attacks against South Korea as well as targets in Japan, Hawaii or Guam have been in the centre of the North Korean war rhetoric. South Korea, the USA and Japan have in turn declared their determination to strike back militarily against North Korea. Once again the ruling class of these countries is ready to threaten the life of millions of people in order to defend their sordid national interests.

Faced with the threat of war it is the fundamental responsibility of those who fight



for the interests of the exploited and the working class:

– to affirm very clearly the internationalist position against all forces of capital

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## Boston Bombing – Terrorism Serves the State

government's "high value interrogation team" <sup>(1)</sup> goes to work.

In the interim period between the attacks and the dramatic events of Friday night, the US state and its media apparatus went into full propaganda mode, exploiting the attacks for all they were worth. On Thursday, President Obama travelled to Boston to speak to an "interfaith service," loudly stating his resolve that the perpetrators would face the "full weight of American justice" <sup>(2)</sup>. Although, the scale of destruction in Boston was nowhere near as severe as what occurred on September 11th, 2001 (nor as grave as that which US imperialism continues to visit upon civilian populations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere), the U.S. state wasn't going to pass up the opportunity to once again beat the drums about the need for national unity in the face of terrorism and run a massive media campaign trotting out all kinds of talking heads from "terrorism experts" to criminal profilers, various psychologists and beyond; all designed, they said, to help an anxious public understand what had happened and reassure them that in the end justice would be done American style.

In Boston itself, the city was kept on high alert for the entire period. Just as the media spouted their drivel about how the city would refuse to be terrorized, Governor Patrick pleaded with residents to stay in their homes, revealing the ease with which the bourgeoisie talks out of both sides of its mouth in the pursuit of a patriotic narrative. On Friday, with Dzhokhar still on the loose, the state put the city on "total lock down" reducing much of the Boston area to a ghost town. The media announced that police were performing door-to-door searches; the city had been divided up into "zones"; Blackhawk helicopters were flying overhead and high tech military equipment would be deployed. The language of military occupation and prison discipline was now flip-

pantly applied to the very American city in which the struggle against British military occupation had been launched two and a half centuries before—all in the pursuit of a wounded and almost certainly terrified 19-year-old kid who appeared to have no real plan for how to elude authorities other than to conceal himself under a boat tarp.

All of this should make it abundantly clear that terrorism, in whatever form, can only ever serve the interests of the bourgeois state—whether this takes the form of giving the state the opportunity to practice the militarization of a city, allowing the media to beat the drums of patriotism, or creating the excuse for the politicians to propose legislation to "beef up security." This was made evident in the aftermath of the arrest of Dzhokhar when local residents spontaneously assembled on neighborhood sidewalks to cheer the police as a parade of squad cars left the scene. Later that night, in the heart of the city a "celebration" broke out that witnessed ordinary working people spontaneously hugging and shaking the hands of the cops sent there to keep order. One is tempted to compare the spectacle of Friday night to Eastern European civilians cheering the arrival of the Soviet army in 1945 – but how quickly do tonight's liberators become tomorrow's jack booted thugs? If there is one thing terrorism generally accomplishes, it is to drive the population into the hands of the state, goading them to identify with its repressive forces as their only protection against the irrational violence of terrorism unleashed in their communities.

Of course, the sense of relief that Bostonians felt once it was clear that the alleged perpetrators had been rendered incapable of causing further damage to their city is understandable; it is a genuine tragedy when working people come to identify with the state, rather than their own struggles, as their best protection against the growing decomposition of society. It is for this reason that anyone concerned with creating a better world—a world beyond the exploitation and violence of capitalism—must categorically reject terrorism as a tactic for pursuing that goal. It accomplishes nothing other than to drive the working class—the only social force capable of offering humanity a real future—into the hands of the very state that represses it.

Nevertheless, the Boston events simply do not have the same scale that the 9/11 attacks did, so it seems likely that the cel-

ebratory fervor whipped up by the media will eventually fade. However, the state did manage to take one of the alleged perpetrators into custody, so we can certainly expect quite the media circus surrounding his trial (if he survives his police perpetrated injuries). Where will he be prosecuted? Will he be treated as an "enemy combatant" or will he be given a civilian trial? Will the federal government go for the death penalty, even though there is no death penalty under Massachusetts state law? How much was the young Dzhokhar under the influence of his older brother? To what extent was he really a hardened terrorist? Will he ask for forgiveness or will he mock the victims? All of this will keep the media buzzing for quite some time.

But underneath all these surface questions lies a more fundamental one: what would drive two young men who had lived most of their lives in the United States towards such violence against their neighbors? There will, of course, be a temptation by some of the cruder elements in the media to blame it all on the brothers' Chechen background and Muslim heritage. "Muslims simply can't be trusted," they will say; "We should be much more circumspect about who we let into the country." International terrorism experts might even tell us that Putin is right to take a hard line with such ruthless and unscrupulous people.

Others will blame the Internet as an "ungoverned" space that allows foreign terrorist organizations to "radicalize" vulnerable youth across national and continental borders. Undoubtedly, the media's hired shrinks, in violation of just about every canon of their profession, will probe deep into the psyches of these two young men they have never met and tell us all about how their inability to fully integrate into American society left them isolated and in search of a purpose beyond themselves <sup>(3)</sup>, which they found in radical Islam or Chechen nationalism or some such archaic ideology. Perhaps the more farsighted elements in the US bourgeoisie will come to recognize that, like most

<sup>3)</sup> A version of this kind of "explanation" was immediately proffered up by the Tsarnaevs' uncle—a seemingly successful Washington, DC area lawyer – who proclaimed in front of media cameras that his nephews were "losers" who could not integrate themselves into American society and who probably perpetrated these acts out of jealousy against those who were able to "settle themselves." Of course, what the bombastic uncle completely failed to explain was why exactly the brothers had failed to "settle themselves."

<sup>1)</sup> Just what this means is unclear, but one wonders what tactics will be employed and what the Obama administration will admit to using?

<sup>2)</sup> Somewhat oddly, despite repeated warnings that dangerous terrorists were probably on the loose in the city, the US state seemed to have little concern about President Obama travelling to Boston and making a public address, something that is sure to fuel the grist of the conspiracy theory mills. In fact, at a Monday night press conference a "reporter" asked the Governor Patrick, before a national audience, if this was yet another "false flag" attack. Whatever success the US state had in exploiting this bombing for its own interests, it seems unable to achieve the level of national integration it did in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

of the Western European countries, they now have their own problem with “home grown” Islamic terrorism that cannot be solved with repression alone and which demands serious sociological and psychological research to address.

But whatever “answers” the bourgeois commissions and academic investigations will come up with, it is highly unlikely they will be able to hit on the real answer as to what fuels such violence and destruction: the decomposition of capitalist society itself, which more and more pushes some young people into a state of desperation and alienation so painful that lashing out at society in one last blaze of violence seems the only answer to their profound existential crises.

The bourgeois experts probably won't see any connection between the violent, but calculated, actions of the Tsarnaevs and the less political, more desperate, but just as nihilistic outbursts of an Adam Lanza, James Holmes, or Jared Lee Loughner. Islamic terrorism is fundamentally different from these kinds of mass shooting they will tell us. One is fueled by a foreign political ideology that exploits vulnerable young people, the other by “mental illness” or the easy availability of guns. But is there any really tangible difference between the Tsarnaev's case and the violent outbursts perpetrated by these young, white, “American” men? Is it not the case that the only difference is that the Tsarnaevs—perhaps as a tangential result of their Chechen heritage or Muslim background—fell under the influence of a sick ideology (itself the product of social decomposition) and thus were able to, in their own minds, rationalize their homicidal rampage as politically necessary? But this does not explain why two young men, in the supposed prime of their lives, supposedly living the American dream, would be in such a state of mind to begin with where such ideologies could even appeal to them. How can such ideologies come to speak to young men growing up in the heart of a supposed capitalist “democracy”?

What are the underlying social, economic and psychological injuries that drive such young men to identify with a suicidal ideology that grows out of political struggle thousands of miles away from them and that has no direct affect on their daily lives and which they can

only experience as an abstract fantasy? (4) Could it be that the political extremism of the type that appears to have subsided at least the older Tsarnaev is only the last exit off the highway before one's desperation arrives at the kind of nihilist insanity that engulfed Lanza, Holmes and Loughner? Maybe the Tsarnaev's route to political extremism was not so different from these three white “American” young men's route to violent insanity? (5) If this is the case, we must look beyond simplistic explanations that would understand these attacks as a result of the young brother's ethnicity and religion and look instead to the social decomposition of capitalist society in the United States itself and the accompanying ethos of “no future” that increases many in the younger generations (in particular young men) today.

What, then, are some of the features of the objective social and economic situation facing the younger generations today that underlie the repeated violent outbursts we have witnessed? First, it should be acknowledged that the effects of capitalism's economic crisis that accelerated in dramatic fashion in 2008 have so far fallen disproportionately on the younger generation. To begin with, unemployment is much higher among younger workers today than their older class peers (6). Many younger workers are simply unable to find a job that would pay them enough to live an “adult lifestyle” and thus complete the psychological transition from adolescence to adulthood in a more or less healthy way. The percentage of college educated young people who continue

4) Of course, in recent memory it was not uncommon for many young men of Irish descent in the Boston area (many of whom had likely never been there or even knew someone from Ireland) to develop an interest in the IRA and the “Irish liberation struggle.” The irony of this never seemed to occur to the bourgeois media.

5) While we do not deny the possibility that some form of “mental illness” suffered by the various perpetrators of the recent shooting incidents may have played a role in motivating the attacks, as Marxists we don't think it is possible to stop our inquiry here. It is necessary to probe deeper and ask what is the cause of mental illness itself? Is it always an “organic brain disease” or is it possible that social, economic and political alienation can also play a role in causing some people to lose their moorings in reality and retreat into a fantasy world of violent wish fulfillment?

6) According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the official unemployment rate for workers aged 20-24 was 13.3 percent for March 2013. The rate among workers aged 16-19 was even higher at 24.2 percent. This compares to a rate of 6.2 percent for those 25 and over. See <http://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseaa10.htm>

to live with their parents has increased dramatically as a result of the crisis (7). Moreover, as the job market continues to stagnate, many younger people find that they can only survive the crisis by prolonging their post-secondary educations and thus get sucked deep into the educational debt trap. Many young people are leaving college (with or without a degree) with staggering debt loads, fueling a sense of not being to get ahead or to even establish oneself as an independent and autonomous person in this world.

It is not a long jump from understanding these objective phenomena to appreciating the psychological toll this can take on young people, many of whom are increasingly thrown into a deep identity crisis. The burden can be particularly hard on young men, who still tend to be socialized in the model of the bourgeois “bread winner.” The frustration from the inability to find a meaningful and sufficiently remunerative job, the sense of uselessness that comes from prolonged periods of unemployment, the embarrassment of having to move back home with one's parents, the reversal of standard gender roles that often occurs when a female partner works, but the male is stuck at home, is often an “emasculating” experience that fuels a profound identity crisis, which can cause some young men to lash out at the women in their lives and the broader society that appears to send mixed messages about masculine identity.

The older Tsarnaev is reported to have been charged with domestic violence in the past—a fact that may have caused the immigration authorities to deny his application for US citizenship (8). It has also been reported that his partner worked, while he was staying home and caring for their child. While it would be extrapolating too much at this stage to say we know the precise role these factors played in his “radicalization,” it seems reasonable to consider whether Tamerlan's strained relationship with his partner was one of the factors which made radical Islam, a philosophy in which gender roles are not

7) “(According to a 2011 report from the BLS), the percentage of men age 25 to 34 living in the home of their parents rose from 14 percent in 2005 to 19 percent in 2011 and from eight percent to 10 percent over the period for women.” See: <http://www.parjustlisted.com/archives/10675>

8) See, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/04/19/relatives-marathon-bombing-suspects-worried-that-older-brother-was-corrupting-sweet-younger-sibling/UCYHkiP9nfsjAtMjJPWJL/story.html>

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so ambiguous and women are supposed to know their place, attractive to him. Can the attraction of these kinds of ideologies, in part, be the sense of male empowerment they can give to young men struggling with their inability to live up to traditional notions of masculinity?

But, even if this is the case, it should be clear that this does not so much represent the penetration of some archaic foreign way of thought into American society, as much as it expresses the breakdown of traditional bourgeois family and social roles and the resultant crisis in male socialization that is a function of capitalist decomposition. While as communists we do not lament the decline of traditional bourgeois gender values, we can still recognize the part this might play in fueling the social crisis before us and how it could contribute to the repeated outbursts of irrational violence that continue to dominate news reports on what seems like a regular basis.

Undoubtedly, some critics will not find our attempt to understand the roots of these violent outbursts convincing. The less forgiving of them will tell us these kinds of attacks can only be condemned, not “understood.” We won’t spend much time responding to this line of argument, as it is not very serious. However, a more sophisticated challenge might say that not all unemployed or debt ridden young people resort to this kind of violence—so we cannot use such objective social conditions to explain these attacks. While it is indeed true that the vast majority of young people will never even consider engaging in this kind of violence, this kind of criticism rather misses the point. Pushed to the edge inevitably some people are bound to go over it and lash out at society in a violent way; and as recent events have shown, it only takes a handful to cause carnage and heartache on a massive scale.

Nevertheless, the critics may have a point in that there are alternatives to such a violent response to alienation and economic stress. Pointless violence is not the only option. Just within the last several years, we have seen several examples of young people coming together in solidarity to discuss an alternative to this society. For all their warts, movements like Occupy and the *Indignados* in Spain are powerful evidence that there is another

way to express frustration and anger at this society that is far more powerful than any individualized violence. It is the collective solidarity forged in struggle that shows us the way forward and demonstrates to us how a world beyond the pain and suffering of the damaged individual ego is possible. Still, these movements cannot be willed into existence. They are themselves products of deep social and historical forces that are thus beyond the power of isolated individuals, or small groups, to create *ex nihilo*. The burning question thus becomes: how to we channel our frustrations in the meantime?

As far as US internal politics go, it is likely that, whatever their initial propaganda value, these bombings will not work in favor of the Obama administration. With reports surfacing that the FBI interviewed the older Tsarnaev brother two years ago at the bequest of Russian intelligence and concluded he was not a threat, it seems inevitable that this will fuel Republican-led investigations on Capitol Hill and accusations that the Obama administration simply cannot keep us safe from terror. With Senators McCain and Graham already calling on Obama to declare the younger Tsarnaev an “enemy combatant” and forego any of the legal niceties supposedly afforded by the US Constitution<sup>9)</sup>, there promises to be another round of heated disputes ahead. The only real question seems to be whether or not the Republicans will overplay their hand.

Moreover, although the Boston bombings momentarily distracted the media’s attention, away from the defeat of gun control legislation backed by President Obama, this defeat only seems to have emboldened the President’s opponents.

9) McCain and Graham’s request was loudly ridiculed by Harvard University law professor Alan Dershowitz who mocked the idea that a U.S. citizen could legally be declared an enemy combatant for a crime that occurred on US soil as expressing a gross ignorance of the law. Nevertheless, this hasn’t prevented the US state from publicly invoking the so-called “Public Safety Exception” to the Miranda requirement in Dzhokhar’s case. One wonders if his authorities recognize how blatantly fascist the idea of a public safety exception to a supposedly fundamental constitutional right sounds? When asked about why the government simply wouldn’t read Dzhokhar his rights, one legal reporter from National Public Radio, in an increasingly common expression of Orwellian Kafkaism, flippantly remarked that, “They are concerned he might actually exercise them.”

Already, despite the apparent willingness of many Republicans to relent to comprehensive immigration reform, there is talk of strengthening right-wing resistance to any bill that would grant anything remotely resembling “amnesty” for illegal immigrants. Clearly, the rancor and furor that has characterized the internal life of the US bourgeoisie over the last several years has not subsided as much as the media would have had us believe the last three months. In line with the nature of the period, it seems likely that these bombings will only become more fodder in what seems like inexhaustible infighting among the various factions that comprise the bourgeois state. What a reversal of fortune for the US bourgeoisie from 2001, when it was able to utilize the 9/11 attacks to forge a national consensus for war.

In the end, even if we have the ability through the Marxist method to begin to understand the underlying social and economic factors that can drive some alienated youth towards acts of terrorism, or other acts of desperate violence, we have to be clear that these can never be a tactic for the emancipation of the proletariat. Terrorism and irrational violence only end up serving the interests of the state, and thus the entire capitalist system, as they are exploited to drum up propaganda and fear campaigns that push significant parts of the working class, even if only temporarily, into the arms of the state. Still, in the context of capitalist decomposition, in which the system is increasingly unable to offer the younger generation any real perspective for their future, regardless of what country they come from, what ethnicity they are or what religion, creed or ideology they are influenced by, we can likely only expect more of these outbursts of irrational violence in the future.

The only hope humanity has to avoid the twin pillars of senseless violence and state repression lies in the independent and autonomous struggle of the working class to defend its standard of living against capital’s attacks. Only this struggle can render the communist perspective visible and offer the younger generations hope for an alternative to the life of frustration, despair and seeming randomness that characterizes capitalism in decomposition.

Henk

## IMPERIALISM

# Conflict between China and Japan

Recent clashes in 2012 and 2013 over the Senkaku/Diaoyu/Tiaoyus islands (the archipelago is located roughly 200 km northeast of Taiwan, 400 km southwest of the Japanese Okinawa island, and almost 400 km east of China) have brutally brought to the fore the ambitions and tensions of the two biggest regional rivals in the Far East. Both China, the most populated country and second most important economic power in the world, and Japan, the third biggest economic power, have escalated tensions around the islands and regularly mobilise troops which have been engaged in shows of force. Taiwan has also clashed with Japan over the island. This must be of great concern not only to the population in Japan and China and the region, but the whole world.

The two big sharks as well as Taiwan claim ownership over these islands. Although the islands are mere rocks and uninhabited, their strategic position as well as possible oil and gas fields and rich fishery grounds in the area have increased the determination of these countries to claim possession of the islands.

## China – an imperialist rival on the rise

While China claims control over these islands and clashes with Japan, this is not the only hotspot where China has run into conflict with its neighbours. During the past years, since its economic ascension, China has become increasingly vulnerable because of its high dependency on raw materials. Up to 80% of its maritime goods pass along the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Any blockage of a maritime strait in Asia would seriously disturb China. Moreover, China has increasingly tried to expand its presence beyond the coastal areas of China itself, in particular in the South-China-Sea <sup>(1)</sup>. In the face of its major rival, India, China has been trying to develop a “string of pearls” – i.e. a series of military outposts in strategically important locations. China has been supporting Iran and Syria against any possible military strike by the USA and other countries. Although the Chinese leadership wants to present the economic rise of

1) <http://en.internationalism.org/internasyonalismo/201204/4852/sprately-conflict-workers-philippines-and-china-unite>



the country as peaceful, the ruling clique has been *investing* heavily in its military capabilities. The USA, the only existing superpower, already perceives China as its main rival in the region and has decided to shift its military focus towards East Asia. The USA plan to position 60% of its navy in the region by 2020.

On top of this, the increasing need for raw materials, in particular energy resources, has driven China to explore and claim exploitation rights in the South China Sea. If the country has been involved in conflict over the South China Sea, and now with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, it shows that the country is not only hungry for raw materials but claims a new position in the imperialist hierarchy of the world. It no longer wants to leave the USA and its allies the dominant role but aims to be a regional power, capable of defending its interests far away from Chinese territories. Thus the conflict between China and Japan is only the tip of the iceberg of growing imperialist tensions in the Far East.

## Japan – a weakened imperialist power but clinging to its ambitions

Japan in turn has been claiming ownership of the islands, renewing its pride in its imperialist history. Already at the end of the 19th century Japanese capital was directing its ambitions towards Taiwan, the islands of the East China Sea and Korea. Today the regime in Tokyo puts forward its occupation of the islands in 1894 as a justification for its claims of historic ownership. When Japan was defeated by US imperialism in 1945, the USA took control over the islands,

but handed them back to Japanese control in 1972. Of course Japan does not want to leave possible energy resources to its Chinese rival. But Japan also wants to defend its position on the imperialist pecking order. The country must try to leave behind the chains of the past. After its defeat in WW2 Japan was pulled under the wing of the USA. After intensive bombing raids (nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and fire bombings of Tokyo and other cities) the US took control of the country. Japan was forced to write in its constitution that its armed forces were not allowed to intervene in conflicts abroad. But already in the Korean war of the early 1950s, in the context of the cold war, the USA had to rearm its former enemy to draw on Japanese support to fight against Russia and China. With North Korea regularly threatening to use its arsenal of weapons against Japan, the USA or South Korea, and with the increasing might of China, Japan finds itself in a contradictory situation. On the one hand it wants to loosen its dependence on the USA; on the other hand, given the many military threats from North Korea and China, the country has to remain under the US weapons shield. Since 1989 the country has made small steps towards expanding its presence. The Japanese army gained first experience of “out-of-area-operations” in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, providing logistic support to the US-led war coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Japan has participated in military manoeuvres with India and Vietnam in the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. Recently Japan succeeded in establishing its first military basis in Djibuti. Its military can count on the most modern weapons. And the modernisation and expansion of the Chinese army has made Tokyo more determined to invest more money into its armed forces. However, Japan is not only at odds with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands: Japan is also quarrelling with South-Korea over the small *Dokdo/Takeshima* island, which Japan snatched from South Korea in 1905. Japan fears military provocations by North Korea and would perceive a possible unification of the divided Korea

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as a further threat to its position. However, the ascent of Chinese imperialism is perceived by Japan as the biggest danger. Historically Japan and China have been the two main imperialist rivals in the region. With Japan having occupied large parts of China for years and waging a terrible war with many massacres of the Chinese population, the Chinese ruling class constantly uses chauvinist feelings of revenge against Nippon. In turn, the new Japanese Abe government has announced a more aggressive stance against China.

Any escalation of tensions between Japan and China will pour oil on the conflict between the USA and China and contribute to sharpening tensions in other zones of conflict where the USA and China and their allies clash. The rivalries between the two biggest Asian competitors are full of consequences for the entire planet!

### **The conflict between China and Japan: a mere nationalist diversion?**

On several occasions, in particular in autumn 2012, there were protests in several Chinese cities against Japanese military presence around the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands with demonstrators burning Japanese shops or attacking Japanese owned factories. These protests are obviously welcomed by the Chinese State and probably directly organised by it. Like any other regime, the government in Beijing is most eager to sidetrack from burning social issues – growing economic problems, pollution, anger about the corrupt ruling clique etc. As even offi-

cial Chinese institutions have to admit the number of “mass incidents” has been growing steadily over the past few years. The Chinese government wants these protests to be pulled onto a nationalist, patriotic terrain. The clashes with Japan can easily be used as a tool to try to rally the population behind the Chinese state. And the Chinese state has been hammering a sophisticated chauvinist propaganda into the heads of the young generation for years. Likewise, the Japanese government, which has been struggling against the ongoing descent into economic depression for years and is also faced with the disaster of Fukushima and the effects of the Tsunami, also wants the population to run into the nationalist trap and gang up behind the state. But while the ruling cliques certainly manipulate these protests as best they can, it would be dangerous to reduce these clashes to a mere nationalist trick to divert from economic, social or ecological issues. If the two most powerful countries of the Asia-Pacific region clash over these islands, and the USA as well as the other countries of the region are pulled into a process of alignments for or against the contenders, this reveals a sharpening of imperialist tensions in the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Because the two countries are heavily dependent on each other for their exports, and trade between the two countries has fallen considerably because of the recent clashes, one might ask: could the rulers not become “reasonable” and keep a lid on their nationalistic tendencies? But are our rulers “reasonable”? In

reality, militarism is an incurable disease of the capitalist system; it is stronger than any single government. The capitalist system does not allow for a peaceful development of economic rivalries. For more than one century the whole system has been pulling humanity deeper and deeper into barbaric wars. In WW1 the main carnage took place in Europe, and Asia was still relatively spared from the battles. But in WW2 large areas of Asia became a major theatre of war where dozens of millions lost their lives. And the Korean war was one of the deadliest confrontations in the 1950s, before years of imperialist war ravaged Vietnam. Following the collapse of the Russian bloc and the weakening of US imperialism, Chinese imperialism has been able to gain weight and is determined to challenge the imperialist constellation in Asia. All its regional rivals (Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, India etc.) want to prevent a further strengthening of China and look for US military support. The recent confrontation between China and Japan is just one in a series of increased tensions in the entire region.

### **What should be our attitude?**

Should we follow the nationalist orientation of our governments and be ready to massacre each other? No, nationalism, chauvinism, patriotism have been the gravediggers of the proletariat. The problems humanity is facing – an insurmountable economic crisis, permanent war drive, xenophobia, pauperisation of the working class, ecological destruction of the planet – cannot be solved by nationalism. If we run into the nationalist trap, the whole of humanity will be annihilated. In the 20th century alone, some 200 million people have been killed in endless wars. We can only overcome this barbarism and the dead-end that this society drives us into by overcoming this mode of production.

This is the message which the working class, the young generations in particular, have to send to the social movements in other countries. In Japan there have been a number of protests against the effects of Fukushima, and there is growing anger about the effects of the economic crisis (2). In China there have been a series of workers strikes against their incred-

2) <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201208/5087/demonstrations-japan-indignation-spreading>



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ible exploitation, and against the horrible ecological pollution<sup>(3)</sup>. And in so many other countries – we can just mention the Arab Spring, Spain, the USA, Greece, Bangladesh etc. – where the working class population has been suffering from the effects of mass unemployment, pauperisation and the increased pressure at work, the solution is not nationalism, ganging up behind the state, but class confrontation. We cannot overcome the crisis and barbarism if we burn shops and production sites which belong to a “foreign competitor”, call for the boycott of the commodities of the foreign rival or sanctions against them. We need to unite on a working class terrain, the terrain of class against class, and not nation against nation. Our slogan remains: workers have no fatherland!

It was this standpoint which allowed the working class to bring the carnage of the First World War to an end. Revo-

3) For example in January/February 2013, when record levels of pollution in Beijing posed a threat to the health of millions of people in the Chinese capital, and a short time later the smog was driven to Japan where similar record levels of pollution were measured, the governments of the two countries were engaged in military adventures over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands instead of protecting the health of their population.

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In this way he tried to hide from the workers that the capitalist system is based on antagonistic social relations between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and that those who govern the state are part of the bourgeois class.

### The response of the proletariat

Chávez’s death does not mean the end of Chavism. Chávez has not been nor will he be the only populist leader in Latin America. The 20th century gave birth to various leaders with a similar profile, which were thought to now be an extinct species. The bourgeoisie needed Chávez in order to maintain control of and spread illusions amongst the most impoverished masses, including the weakest and most atomised sectors of the proletariat, sectors which will inevitably continue to grow as long as the capitalist system sinks into decadence and decomposition.

lutionaries around Lenin, Liebknecht, Luxemburg and others defended an internationalist position – calling for the unification of all the workers across national boundaries. It was this firm internationalist stance which served as an inspiration to the workers in the factories and fronts, finally encouraging them to end WW1 through revolutionary uprisings. In the war between Japan and China in 1937 the internationalists of the small Left Communist group *Bilan* defended the same position: “*On both sides of the fronts there is a rapacious, dominant bourgeoisie, which only aims at massacring workers. On both sides of the fronts there are workers led to the slaughter. It is wrong, absolutely wrong to believe that there is a bourgeoisie which the Chinese workers could – even temporarily – side with to ‘struggle together even for only a short time’, with the idea that first Japanese imperialism must be defeated in order to allow the Chinese workers to struggle victoriously for the revolution. Everywhere imperialism sets the pace, and China is only the puppet of the other imperialisms. To find their way to revolutionary battles, the Chinese and Japanese workers must return to the class struggle which will lead*

*to their unification. Their fraternisation should cement their simultaneous assault against their own exploiters (...)*”<sup>(4)</sup>.

We must take up this internationalist tradition and break out of the nationalist prison. Today, conditions exist for workers to take up contact, to establish links amongst internationalists, to defend a common internationalist position everywhere. Even if our rulers use all means – censorship, control of the internet, repression, closing off borders etc., - we must work towards the unification of the working class.

While the rulers in China and Japan want the young generation in particular to swallow the nationalist pill, we must firmly put forward our alternative – the class struggle. Such an attitude would be an important message to the workers in North and South Korea, where the rulers threaten each other every day and whip up the same war propaganda, and to the working class of the whole world.

*The ICC* (February, 2013)

See our pamphlet *Imperialism in the Far East, past and present*

<sup>4</sup> journal of the Italian Left, *Bilan*, n°44, October 1937, p1415

## Death of Chávez

This drama poses a historic challenge to the proletariat, to develop its struggles and transform them into a reference point for the masses that have placed their hopes in the state and the Messiah Chávez. The proletariat in Venezuela has struggled, despite the weight of ideological poison and state repression, and the political polarisation created by the different factions of capital. Workers in the industrial and public sectors have used the strike weapon and protests in order to confront the state; despite many of them being sympathetic to Chavism, they have thus shown a lack of trust in the State-boss. The constant attacks by the ‘Socialist’ state have obliged them to resist, and they have had no other road<sup>(5)</sup>. This has also happened in sections of the most impoverished where the

proletariat is weakest, although to a much more limited extent due to their atomisation and not being integrated into the productive apparatus.

Faced with the Leftist ideology of Chavism and the other ideologies that are generated and will be generated in order to preserve the system, the proletariat in Venezuela and internationally need to develop their struggle against capital, going beyond immediate demands, developing their consciousness and organisation as an autonomous class, which also means a development on the theoretical level, based on historical materialism. This task places a great weight on the most politicised minorities of the class – those who have already recognised that our struggle is for communism on a world wide scale.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2010/05/guayana>

*Internacionalismo* (Venezuela)  
24/03/2013

# Korea – Against the threat of war

which are trying to push the exploited into the massacre hanging over them, – to analyse the real issues hiding behind the smokescreens of the speeches of the leaders of the ruling class.

### The internationalist position

In October 2006, following a nuclear test by North Korea, a meeting of internationalists from South Korea and other countries adopted the following statement:

*Following the news of the nuclear tests in North Korea, we, the communist internationalists meeting in Seoul and Ulsan:*

*Denounce the development of a new nuclear weapons capability in the hands of another capitalist state: the nuclear bomb is the ultimate weapon of inter-imperialist warfare, its only function being the mass extermination of the civilian population in general and the working class in particular.*

*Denounce unreservedly this new step towards war taken by the capitalist North Korean state which has thereby demonstrated once again (if that were necessary) that it has absolutely nothing to do with the working class or communism, and is nothing but a most extreme and grotesque version of decadent capitalism's general tendency towards militaristic barbarism.*

*Denounce unreservedly the hypocritical campaign by the United States and its allies against its North Korean enemy which is nothing but an ideological preparation for unleashing – when they have the capacity to do so – their own pre-emptive strikes of which the working population would be the principal victim, as it is today in Iraq. We have not forgotten that the United States is the only power to have used nuclear weapons in war, when it annihilated the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.*

*Denounce unreservedly the so-called "peace initiatives" which are bound to appear under the aegis of other imperialist gangsters such as China. These will be concerned not with peace, but with the protection of their own capitalist interests in the region. The workers can have*

*no confidence whatever in the "peaceful intentions" of any capitalist state.*

*Denounce unreservedly any attempt by the South Korean bourgeoisie to take repressive measures against the working class or against activists in their defence of internationalist principles under the pretext of protecting national freedom or democracy.*

*Declare our complete solidarity with the workers of North and South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia who will be the first to suffer in the event of military action breaking out.*

*Declare that only the world wide workers' struggle can put an end for ever to the constant threat of barbarism, imperialist war, and nuclear destruction that hangs over humanity under capitalism.*

*The workers have no country to defend!*

*Workers of all lands, unite! <sup>(1)</sup>*

In the face of the present situation the declaration of October 2006 remains totally valid.

### Understanding the rising military tensions

In order to analyse the recent escalation between North Korea and its rivals, and the perspectives which flow from this, we must place this conflict into the broader historical and international context.

The sharpening of tensions between North Korea and its rivals is part of a more general sharpening of tensions in the Far East. During the past months the two major rivals of the region, China and Japan, have repeatedly claimed control over the Senkaku/Diayo islands and whipped up patriotic campaigns (URLink to statement). During the past years China and several states surrounding the South Chinese Sea have been colliding over territorial claims in the South China Sea. South Korea and Japan regularly quarrel over Takeshima/Dokdo island. The recent escalation crystallises a global trend of sharpening imperialist tensions in the region. At the same time, the conflict between North and South

Korea is also one of the longest standing conflicts in East Asia <sup>(2)</sup>.

### The roots of the conflict

In World War 1 East Asia was basically spared from the atrocities of the war. However, in World War 2 East Asia became one of the major battlefields between all imperialist powers (more than 20 million people lost their lives). As soon as the Nazi regime in Germany was defeated and Europe divided up amongst the winners of the war in May 1945, the Soviet Union and the USA clashed with each other over the control of Asia in several zones. Fiercely determined to prevent Russia from grabbing parts of Japan, the USA dropped the first nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, after having flattened Tokyo with fire-bombs in the winter of 1944/1945. In China, Russia supported Mao's Red Army and the USA Chiang Kai-shek. China was the first country to be divided between a pro-Russian (People's Republic of China) and a pro-American part (Taiwan), leaving behind a deadly division which still exists today, with the two sides pointing a heavy arsenal of weapons at each other. And in 1945, after the defeat of the Japanese occupiers, while Russian troops prepared to take over the entire Korean peninsula, the USA forced Russia to accept a joint occupation of Korea, which led to the division of Korea along the 38th parallel in 1945. Thus since 1945 East Asia has constantly been marked by a confrontation between the USA and its allies on the one hand, and China and Russia and other allies on the other. It is no coincidence that the Korean war 1950-1953 was the first and one of the bloodiest phases in the Cold War between the two blocs, pitting a coalition of US-led forces against North-Korean forces supported by Chinese and Russian troops. During the Korean war, more than 3 million people died. Many got killed in massacres perpetrated by both sides. The war itself left behind a destroyed country, with Seoul and Pyongyang heavily bombed on a number of occasions. The country remained divided, with a very high level of militarization: it was one of

1) <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2006-north-korea-nuclear-bomb>

2) See also Imperialism in the Far East, past and present.

the “best defended” military zones in the world and the armies have been pointing their weapons at each other for more than 60 years.

The present escalation is thus an expression of this continuity and an intensification of the series of conflicts which have gripped East Asia since the end of WW2. Its roots lie in the imperialist carve-up, the fragmentation of the world into nations, which are engaged in deadly struggles for survival, threatening each other with annihilation. Korea is no exception. The whole of Europe was divided after 1945 between two blocs, Germany remained divided until 1989, the entire Indian subcontinent was carved up between Pakistan/Bangladesh and India, Vietnam was divided, in the 1990s, former Yugoslavia torn apart by a number of secessionist wars. The territories of the former Ottoman Empire in the Middle East were broken up into a number of small and constantly warring nations, with the additional factor of the foundation of Israel in the midst of this landscape, leaving behind another permanent war zone. All this shows that the formation of new nations no longer offers any progress for humanity. They are a deadly trap, a cemetery for the working class.

In the same way as the Korean war in the early 1950s was already a direct confrontation between the USA and China, the present escalation also opposes the same “staunch defenders” of their allies.

### The imperialist chessboard

The North Korean regime has been supported to the hilt by China from its first day of existence. The geographic-strategic position of Korea means that the country is both a target for all neighbouring rivals, as well into a precious buffer. In particular China sees North Korea as a buffer between itself and Japan and the USA.

- **China** is an emerging power and has constantly been challenging the USA and extending its influence internationally. The country has been modernising its armed forces and trying to set up a string of bases in the whole of Asia to expand its position – at the expense of the USA. The USA, aware of the danger that this new challenger poses in the long term, has declared its intention to mobilise the major part of its troops in East Asia to contain China. The USA is trying to rally as many countries as possible behind itself.

Thus any conflict in East Asia is not only overshadowed but becomes more or less directly a part of this global power struggle between the USA and the newly rising China. China could not tolerate a collapse of the Pyongyang regime, because North Korea’s bellicose stand polarises tensions with Japan and South Korea and above all it ties down the US military arsenal aimed against North Korea, which otherwise would be directed even more against China. The idea of a reunification of North and South Korea (under South Korean domination) and the prospect of US military bases near the Chinese border can only increase Chinese determination to defend North Korea. Although it is impossible to assess the degree of influence and control China has over North Korea, a defeat of the North Korean regime in a military confrontation with the USA would mean a significant weakening of China. Thus China has to try and “restrain” North Korea, yet at the same time let North Korea “tie down” US troops.

- **Russia**, as in many other zones of conflict since 1989, has been in a contradictory position. On the one hand, Russia has been a rival of China since the 1960s after their initial alliance in the Cold War, but since the rise of China as an “emerging power” during the past decade, Russia has tended to take sides with China against the USA. At the same time it does not want China to become too assertive. Concerning North Korea, Russia does not want the USA to increase its presence in the region.

- The **USA** has never been ready to let Korea fall into the hands of China or Russia. In the present stand-off they are again the staunch defenders of South Korea and Japan. Of course their major motive is to contain China. To a certain extent the North Korean military threats are a welcome justification for the USA to increase their arsenal of weapons in the Pacific (they have already moved more weapons to Guam, Alaska, and Korea itself). Of course these can be used against North Korea but also against China. At the same time, any country that directly threatens US bases in Guam or Alaska, or the territory of America’s allies, is a challenge to US domination. Thus in addition to the weakening of the US position by China, North Korea’s threats to use nuclear weapons cannot be tolerated by the USA. The US policy of containing China in turn

contributes significantly to the tensions with North Korea.

- **Japan**, the old arch-enemy of China, feels most threatened by China and its ally North Korea. At the same time, Japan has a conflict with South Korea over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands. Since the demise of the Russian bloc after 1989, Japan has been aiming at loosening the USA’s regional grip. At the same time, due to the emergence of China and the repeated and escalated conflicts with North Korea, Japan has not been able to reduce its dependency on US military might. And if Korea was reunited, Japan would face another major rival in the region. Japan, which occupied Korea for more than three decades, would also – paradoxically – regret to see disappear the North Korean buffer state. The recent increase of tensions with China and North Korea has been a welcome pretext for the Japanese government to increase its arms spending.

Thus almost exactly 60 years after the end of the Korean war in 1953, not only are the same forces opposing each other, but now we are seeing nuclear, conventional missile or artillery threats from North Korea and vice versa against some of the biggest metropolises of the world (Seoul, Tokyo, Pyongyang). With the growing polarisation between China and the USA, the two biggest economic nations, East Asia has become another permanent zone of conflict, with consequences for the whole world.

### Two regimes two arch-enemies of the working class

The North Korean regime, which claims to be socialist, came to power not through a workers’ uprising, but thanks to the military help of Russia and China. Entirely dependent on its Stalinist patrons, the regime has been focussing its resources on maintaining and expanding the military apparatus. As a result of the gigantic militarisation, out of a population of 24.5 million, the country claims to have a standing army of 1.1 million plus a reserve of up to 4.7 million men and women. Similar to all the former Stalinist ruled countries of Eastern Europe, the North Korean economy has no competitive civilian products to offer on the world market. The hypertrophy of the military has meant that during the past 6 decades there has been frequent if not permanent rationing of food and other consumer goods. Since the collapse of the Russian

## Korea – Against the threat of war

bloc in 1989 industrial production has fallen by more than 50%. The population was decimated by a famine in the mid 1990s, which apparently was only halted after delivery of food supplies from China. Even today North Korea imports 90% of its energy, 80% of its consumer goods and some 45% of its food from China.

If a ruling class has nothing to offer its population but scarcity, hunger, repression, and permanent militarisation, and if its companies cannot compete on the world market with any product, the regime can only try to gain “recognition” through its military capacity to threaten and blackmail. Such behaviour is a typical expression of a ruined class, which has nothing to offer humanity but violence, extortion and terror. The posture of threatening its rivals with all kind of military attacks shows how unpredictable and lunatic the situation has become. Faced with a growing economic impasse, the regime for some years has been trying to introduce limited economic measures of “liberalisation”, hoping to improve the supply situation. Some believe that the present sabre rattling is a mere diversion from economic problems and a manoeuvre of the young successor Kim Jong-un to impress the army. While we cannot speculate about the political stability of the regime, we think it would be mistaken to underestimate the real dangers of escalation of the situation. The rise of imperialist tensions is never just “bluff” or “bluster” or a mere diversion and political theatre. All governments in the world are forced to intensify the spiral of militarism – even if this may appear to be working against their own interests. The ruling class has no real control over the cancer of militarism. Even though it is obvious that in the case of a North Korean attack against South Korea or the USA, this would lead to a considerable weakening if not even collapse of a whole regime and state, we must know that the ruling class knows no limits to the policy of scorched earth. In many places of the world, people commit suicide attacks, killing and wounding an endless number of people and sacrificing their own life. The case of North Korea shows that an entire state is threatening to commit massacres and is ready for “suicide”. And even though North Korea is extremely dependent on China, China cannot be sure of being able to “rein” in the regime in Pyongyang, which has shown a new

dimension of insanity. During the Korean war both China as well as North Korea were ready to sacrifice millions of soldiers as cannon-fodder. The present North Korean regime is no less ready to sacrifice its “own” cannon-fodder and annihilate as many lives on the enemy side as possible. The North Korean regime thus illustrates the what fighting for your own national interests really implies. As a result this leads to more chaos on the imperialist chess-board. The policy of threats and blackmails by the North Korean regime is no exception but a caricature of the perspectives of the capitalism system as a whole, which is pushing humanity into an ever growing barbarism.

With a regime in the North so openly threatening South Korea, Japan and the USA, South Korea can present itself as “victim” and “innocent”. But the South Korean ruling class is no better and not less ferocious than its counter-part in North-Korea.

In May 1948 in the South the US-supported Rhee government organised a massacre of some 60.000 people in Cheju (a fifth of the island’s residents). During the war the South Korean government massacred with the same intensity as Northern troops. During the reconstruction period, the country was run by governments which exercised dictatorial rights either indirectly as under Rhee or directly under Park Chung-Hee for more than 4 decades. Whenever workers’ or students’ protests flared up, the regime used repression. In 1980 a popular rising with a strong working class participation in Kwangju was crushed in blood. However, in the reconstruction period after the Korean war, above all since the 1960s thanks to a harsh exploitation of its workforce, South Korean capital managed to get access to the world market through the low price of its goods. South Korea boasts one of the world’s highest percentages of precarious, temporary contract labour <sup>(3)</sup>. However, with or without a “dictator” as president, all the governments have maintained their policy of repression. The National Security Law gives the government the authority to hunt down any voices critical of the South Korean regime, accusing anybody of being an agent for North Korea. And in so many strikes and protests by workers or students or even “ordinary citizens” (see for example Sangyong or the “candle light protests”), the South Korean State

<sup>3</sup> See also The “Asian Dragons” run out of steam.

constantly uses repression against the working class in particular. While the media ridicule the way the different generations of the Kim dynasty in North Korea pass on power, the recent election of Park Geun-hye, the daughter of the former dictator Park Chung-Hee shows a remarkable continuity of power transmission under “democracy”. Moreover, the common exploitation of the North Korean work force in the industrial zone of Kaesong shows that the South Korean capitalists are perfectly able to cooperate with any North Korean clique. And the South Korean ruling clique is as determined to use any military means against its Northern rival. Recently Seoul has been aiming at developing nuclear weapons itself.

### Class war against imperialist war

History has shown: the two types of regime are basically the same: arch enemies of the workers. The workers cannot take sides with either of them. The recent sharpening of tensions in East Asia crystallises the destructive tendency of capitalism. But the recent conflict is not just a repetition: the dangers have become much bigger for humanity. This time the most powerful rivals are clashing with each other, the USA and China, China and Japan, all heavily armed and committed to speeding up the arms race. During the time of the Korean and Cold War the working class was defeated and unable to raise its head. Only a very small number of revolutionaries of the communist left defended an internationalist position at the time of the Korean war. Today, the proletariat in East Asia is not willing to sacrifice its life in the deadly spiral of capitalism. Only the working class can save humanity from sinking into an ever deeper barbarism. In order to do so the working class must reject patriotism and the spiral of militarism.

No to a “united front with the government”! The only solution for the working class is to resolutely fight against their own bourgeoisies – in the North as well as in the South. For revolutionaries today this means we must continue to defend the internationalist tradition of Lenin, Luxemburg, and Liebknecht during World War 1, of the Communist Left during World War 2 and during the Korean War – a tradition that was defended again in the 2006 internationalist statement on the threat of war in 2006.

ICC, 8.4.2013

## ECONOMIC CRISIS

# Neither right nor left have a solution

Explaining why it decided to downgrade Britain's AAA *credit* rating, the credit agency Moody's tells us that Britain's "sluggish growth" will in all probability "extend into the second half of the decade", resulting in a "high and rising debt burden". And indeed, Britain's borrowing is already forecast to be £212 billion higher than planned over this parliament.

Britain is therefore facing not just a triple-dip recession, with the economy shrinking in five out of 10 quarters since the summer of 2010 but an out-and-out depression. Britain's poor performance is second only to Italy's among the countries of the G7. Investment in the UK economy is 15% below what it was before the open financial crash of 2007.

The human cost of these dry figures? A fall in living standards unprecedented since the 1920s. The average worker has lost around £4,000 in real wages over the past three years. In 2017, real wages are predicted to be no higher than their 1999 level. And although there has recently been a 7.8% fall in official unemployment figures, there has been an increase in involuntary part-time working and a sharp drop in productivity.

The government's response to this disaster? That the loss of the AAA rating, maintaining which was a central justification for the Coalition's austerity programme, only goes to show that we must press on regardless. The Tory-LibDem medicine is accelerating the patient's decline into depression and failing to shrink the UK's gigantic tumour of debt. And these wise doctors reply: 'more of the same'.

So the economic policies of the right are proving their utter worthlessness. And less and less people are fooled by the excuse that 'we are only making up for the 13 years of Labour misrule' which preceded the present Coalition.

All these points are taken from the ar-

ticle 'Osborne hasn't just failed – this is an economic disaster' by Seamus Milne, published in the Comment pages of *The Guardian* on 27 February. Milne is one of the most left-wing of *The Guardian's* regular commentators. His article demonstrates very clearly the *bankruptcy* of the government's economic solutions. But his 'alternative' programme no less clearly demonstrates the bankruptcy of capitalism's left wing.

*"The shape of that alternative is clear enough: a large-scale public investment programme in housing, transport, education and green technology to drive recovery and fill the gap left by the private sector, underpinned by a boost to demand and financed through publicly-owned banks at the lowest interest rates for hundreds of years"*.

These apparently radical measures go hand in hand with a criticism of the hesitations of the Labour Party. For Milne, Ed Miliband is faced with a "crucial choice", since the fall in living standards is greatly increasing Labour's chances of re-election: "So far Miliband has backed a limited stimulus, slower cuts and wider, if still hazy, economic reform. Given the Cameron Coalition's legacy and the cuts and tax rises it's planning well into the next parliament, the danger is that Labour could lock itself into continuing austerity in a bid for credibility. As the experience of its sister parties in Europe has shown, that would be a calamity for Labour – but also for Britain".

It is arguments like these which show that Milne's starting point is a fundamental premise of bourgeois ideology: that capitalist social relations, and the political state which maintains them, are eternal, the only possible basis for organising human society.

This is clear at the 'political' level: a solution to the economic disaster can be found by pushing the Labour Party further left and engaging in the alleged choice of-

fered by parliamentary elections. The existing system of bourgeois democracy is not to be questioned.

And the state system which was born and has its being in the needs of the exploiting capitalist class is also proclaimed as the instrument which will defend the needs of the vast majority: public investment, public banks, Keynesian policies of stimulating demand. And all within the framework of 'Britain', of the nation state. These policies can all be summed up in the phrase: state capitalism.

So just as Cameron, faced with the slide into depression, advocates policies that can only make it slide faster, so Milne, like the TUC in its 'Alternative for Growth', advocate the same measures which provoked the 'debt crisis' in the first place: economic growth fuelled by vast injections of fictitious capital.

Neither the right or left wings of the official political spectrum are capable of admitting that today's economic depression is, just like the depression of the 1930s and the world wars that preceded and followed it, confirmation that capitalist social relation as such – the exploitation of wage labour, production for sale and profit, the division of the world into competing nation states armed to the teeth – have become an obstacle to human progress. Neither the right nor the left will admit that we are witnessing the bankruptcy not just of this government or that country, but of the capitalist phase of human civilisation, and on a worldwide scale; that this civilisation has outlived its usefulness and its capacity to be reformed. This is why the only genuine 'alternative' is for the exploited of the world to struggle together against all attacks on their living standards, preparing the ground for a social revolution that will halt the accumulation of capital and replace it with a real human community – with communism.

*Amos 2/3/13*

# Notes on the subterranean maturation of consciousness

We are publishing a contribution to the discussion about the development of class consciousness by comrade mhou who regularly contributes to our internet forum. We agree with its approach but welcome further contributions, either as articles or on the forum. The comrade also has a blog where he further develops his ideas: <http://occupythecpusa.com/>

*“At all times the economic and social relationships in capitalist society are unbearable for the proletarians, who consequently are driven to try to overcome them. Through complex developments the victims of these relationships are brought to realize that, in their instinctive struggle against sufferings and hardships which are common to a multitude of people, individual resources are not enough. Hence they are led to experiment with collective forms of action in order to increase, through their association, the extent of their influence on the social conditions imposed upon them. But the succession of these experiences all along the path of the development of the present capitalist social form leads to the inevitable conclusion that the workers will achieve no real influence on their own destinies until they have united their efforts beyond the limits of local, national and trade interests and until they have concentrated these efforts on a far-reaching and integral objective which is realized in the overthrow of bourgeois political power. This is so because as long as the present political apparatus remains in force, its function will be to annihilate all the efforts of the proletarian class to escape from capitalist exploitation.*

*“The first groups of proletarians to attain this consciousness are those who take part in the movements of their class comrades and who, through a critical analysis of their efforts, of the results which follow, and of their mistakes and disillusion, bring an ever-growing number of proletarians onto the field of the common and final struggle which is a struggle for power, a political struggle, a revolutionary struggle”* <sup>(1)</sup>.

A number of views have been put forward in recent discussions about consciousness in the ICC’s internet discus-

sion forum <sup>(2)</sup>. From the common starting point of the necessity of communism, of the proletariat’s agency, it was agreed that there is such a thing as class consciousness, and that this consciousness is necessary for the transformation of existing social relations and the capitalist mode of production. One aspect of the theory of class consciousness which brought a lot of disagreement in the course of discussions on the ICC’s forum was the theory of the subterranean maturation of consciousness. This theory was developed by the ICC in the wake of the mass strikes in Poland in 1980-1981. The crux of the theory is that the working class develops class consciousness in its struggles with capital, and that the collective experience and memories of these struggles inform the thoughts and actions of workers in their future struggles. With this theory, it is possible to analyze and understand the appearance of seemingly spontaneous yet advanced and militant forms of struggle containing class conscious content. The example of the time it was developed was the appearance of the mass strike in Poland, which shook the geopolitical world, the opposing imperialist blocs, and the international working class at the time. Polish workers developed a system of revocable worker-delegates, workplace committees, and inter-profession assemblies, encompassing workers from a variety of industries and geographic locations into one unified struggle. To understand this phenomenon, the history of the Polish working class in the years leading up to the outbreak of advanced forms and content of struggle were analyzed; the forms and content of struggles in 1956, 1970 and 1976 were viewed as stepping-stones or building blocks for the upheaval

2) See in particular the discussions on “Why is it so difficult to struggle?” and “The maturation of consciousness”.

of 1980. French and English workers in similar industries (such as steel, on the docks, rail) had also been engaging in similarly militant and advanced struggles throughout the 1970’s, informing the thoughts and actions of the workers in Poland- giving the struggles of the proletariat an international dimension (and the communist minority a reference point for being in advance of generalized international struggle). The emergence of pro-revolutionary minorities is another facet of the subterranean maturation of consciousness.

*“The misery of the miners, with its eruptive soil which even in ‘normal’ times is a storm centre of the greatest violence, must immediately explode, in a violent economic socialist struggle, with every great political mass action of the working class, with every violent sudden jerk which disturbs the momentary equilibrium of everyday social life”* <sup>(3)</sup>.

In the accelerating centralization and globalization of capital since the late 1960’s, the echoes of forms and content of struggles appears to be informing workers all over the world at a faster rate than ever before- such as the outburst of struggle in Northern Africa during the Arab Spring, where workers struck and swarmed the public squares in constant protest. This form of struggle was picked up by American workers in Wisconsin when teaching assistants occupied the capital building and inter-profession crowds of public sector workers occupied the public square around the capital building in constant protest- in short order, signs began showing up in Tahrir Square with slogans like, “Solidarity with Wisconsin Workers”. In this instance, the history of struggle informed future praxis, which also informed the thoughts and actions of workers internationally, while also being recognized by the initiators of the forms and content of struggle in that period. All of which is indicative of the subterranean maturation of consciousness. Leading up to the Arab Spring, the most advanced section of the Egyptian

3) Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, 1906.

1) Amadeo Bordiga, *Party and Class Action*, 1921.

## Notes on the subterranean maturation of consciousness

proletariat had been the public sector textile workers in the industrial city of Mahalla. Their cycle of struggles began in 2006 during the anti-Dutch cartoon Islamist protests, with reactionary strikes based on religious dogma and sectarian rage. However, from this ideological and reactionary starting point, the textile workers of Mahalla began combining in struggle across public and private sector divisions, winning demands repeatedly as the state thought the textile workers could be appeased with mild reform and increased wages.

*“Faisal Naousha, one of the leaders of the walkout at Misr Spinning and Weaving, said the factory was running again after the strikers’ main demands were met.*

*“Around 15,000 workers from the plant which employs 24,000 people in the Nile Delta city of Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra, 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of Cairo went on strike last week.*

*“We ended the strike, the factory is working. Our demands were met, including a 25 per cent increase in wages and the dismissal of a manager involved in corruption, Naousha said.*

*“Misr Spinning and Weaving is the largest plant in the Egyptian textile industry, which employs 48 per cent of the nation’s total workforce, according to the Center for Trade Union and Workers’ Services” (4).*

Over the course of the next 6 years, both public and private sector textile workers engaged in escalating mass strike tactics, forming workplace committees, refusing the promises of concessions from the state and disregarding the advice of union leaders (when the workers weren’t physically ejecting them from the factory):

*“Al-Mahalla witnessed a successful strike in September 2007, with workers demanding a greater share of the company’s annual profits and removal of company management. The strike ended in victory, with the government succumbing to the workers’ demands after six days. The head of the local union resigned after he was hospitalized by the strikers while trying to persuade them to disband the strike. The CEO was removed a month later” (5).*

The public sector textile workers at Misr Spinning & Weaving led the struggle against the state, realizing that as

its employer they were in direct conflict with the state (which would sporadically send security forces to clash with striking workers) rather than individual managers and executives. By 2011, the Arab Spring movement which would topple authoritarian regimes all over the Middle East (including and especially in Egypt) was incubated in Mahalla, where the textile workers acted as the advanced section of the reaction against the Mubarak regime. Yet even after the de-legitimization of the Mubarak government and the spectacle of a new ‘democratic’ state, they renewed their struggles against the state for its inability to provide promised reforms and against the bourgeois apologists of the ‘official Opposition’ parties and trade union apparatchiks telling them to give the state more time to meet their demands. In the latest round of mass action, the Mahalla workers declared their forms of self-organization (encompassing the geographic area of the city) independent of the Morsi state, while at the same time chasing political representatives of the opposition and Muslim Brotherhood out of the city and taking over the offices of the city council.

*“... thousands of protestors in the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kubra were reported to have announced the city ‘independent’, and planned a revolutionary council. “We no longer belong to the Ikh-wani [Brotherhood] state.” The protestors or insurgents seized the City Council building and blocked roads into and out of the city” (6).*

This escalation of struggle, development of the forms and content indicative of growing class consciousness, and learning from the events during struggles, is a perfect example of the subterranean maturation of consciousness. However, there are many communists who do not consider such phenomena to be indicative of growing class consciousness. Some argue that it is simple mysticism to theorize the existence of something that cannot be empirically observed and documented; that it relies entirely on subjective interpretation of events and actions. That if we can’t measure it, it cannot be considered part of the science of Marxism (‘Scientific Socialism’). While demanding verifiable proof before accepting the possibility that a theory may be valid may seem reasonable, in practice it would paralyze

the creative energies and capacities of the communist minority to act in the class struggle or (more importantly) when the proletariat turns the capitalist crisis into a revolutionary crisis - the time when the historic role of the communist minority becomes necessary. The methodological tools of Marxism enable us to better understand the world around us, with a conscious understanding of history and a vision for the future. When the objective situation changes in favor of proletarian offensive, our ability to interpret events becomes paramount; without such an understanding of what is happening around us, we would be unable to understand the changes in the balance of class forces and to act in accordance with the movement of the class- in short, unable to be in advance of this movement of the class. Demanding a high threshold of hard facts before accepting any changes in the objective socio-political conditions of the classes would lead to simply tail-ending the real movement of the proletariat; the history of proletarian offensives and revolutionary attempts, even in the time of Marx and the Paris Commune, shows us that events move quickly, as do changes in the trajectory of revolutions and offensives. The actions of the ‘center’ of the Bolshevik Party of 1917 (embodied in members like Kamenev) show us what happens when sections of the communist minority hesitate and doubt the advance of the proletariat; putting forward (now outdated) theories and tactics and not up to the tasks of the hour (it is the difference between ‘The Democratic Republic’ and ‘All Power To The Soviets!’).

Our analysis of class consciousness and use of theories related to it is to advance our understanding of the real movement of the proletariat in its mission to carry out the historic task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and abolishing all classes. Either a theory can aid our understanding and allow us to be in advance of events, or it cannot. The subterranean maturation of consciousness is a useful tool, the way many psychologists believe psychoanalysis is a useful tool, for accomplishing specific ends.

*“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 ‘spontane-*

4) Egypt Workers’ Solidarity.

5) *Idem.*

6) See this article on the “Mahalla soviet”.

## Notes on the subterranean maturation of consciousness

ous' - 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" (7).

Utilizing the theory of the subterranean maturation of consciousness allows the communist minority to clearly analyze and understand the state of the class struggle at a given time. Since the latest manifestation of the crisis of capital in late 2007, the working class response has taken similar forms internationally: of which the Arab Spring and the struggles in Mahalla are but one facet. The emergence of the General Assembly form has been seen in diverse regions of the world, applied in workplaces, in the streets, in occupied buildings and spaces, all in a specific time frame. The assembly, whether general or specific to a group of workers (of one workplace, one company, one industry), is one of the most basic forms of proletarian self-organization. Doubt has been brought up as to whether we are still living through the downward spiral of retreat and defeat for the working-class; despite the explosion of large strikes, extra-parliamentary activity, and the wave of struggles during the Arab Spring-Occupy-Indignados troika.

*"If, in a single large factory, between May 16 and May 30, a general assembly had constituted itself as a council holding all powers of decision and execution, expelling the bureaucrats, organizing its self-defense and calling on the strikers of all the enterprises to link up with it, this qualitative step could have immediately brought the movement to the ultimate showdown, to the final struggle whose general outlines have all been historically traced by this movement. A very large number of enterprises would have followed the course thus discovered. This*

*factory could immediately have taken the place of the dubious and in every sense eccentric Sorbonne of the first days and have become the real center of the occupations movement: genuine delegates from the numerous councils that already virtually existed in some of the occupied buildings, and from all the councils that could have imposed themselves in all the branches of industry, would have rallied around this base" (8).*

This is where the distinction between the subterranean maturation of consciousness and the spontaneism of councilism becomes most apparent. When the view of class consciousness is that it is the immediate product of escalating struggles, a linear advance (and if mass action is defeated, a linear reflux), the perspective of the trajectory of the struggle, the existing conditions, leads to tunnel-vision. If there are mass struggles of the working-class, they think there is always a chance at the movement for communism and turning the capitalist crisis into a revolutionary crisis of capitalism. In May 1968, the Situationists clearly defended the councilist position, succinctly captured in the passage quoted above. While the mass action of May 1968 was an historic series of struggles of the proletariat, the potential of the struggle was vastly overestimated. A new generation of young workers had entered the factories during the 1960's, who were critical of the Machiavellian hold the Stalinist parties and Stalinist unions held over the central working-class. Just prior to this return of the proletarian offensive, ushered into history in May 1968, the deepest depths of the counter-revolution still prevailed, where the 'official Opposition' to capitalism, recognized by the Situationists as the 'pseudo-Communist parties of the spectacle-commodity society', continued to mystify the proletariat from Moscow (and later Peking). This was a working class without a connection to the revolutionary principles and positions of the communist wing of the worker's movement; a link broken by the failure of the revolutionary wave of 1917-1923 and the victory of the counter-revolution for

8 The *Beginning of an Era*, Internationale Situationniste #12, 1969.

over 40 years. The connection between the communist minority and the working class is organic, the former developing from the class consciousness of the latter within the class. The subterranean maturation of consciousness allows us to understand the events of May 1968 (the return of the economic crisis after the post-war boom, the experience of the post-war escalation of struggles in Western Europe—such as major strikes at Renault and Fiat in the 1950's), as well as the context of the struggle— which did suggest further escalation of struggles of a young proletariat, and the creation of a new revolutionary minority in the midst and as a result of these struggles (evident in organizations born after the ferment of 1968— such as the ICC and other organizations of the communist milieu). However, for the councilists of the Situationist International, the May movement had as much a chance at the transformation of all things in the movement for communism as the revolutionary wave 50 years earlier; and afterward, saw in it only a failed revolutionary attempt, rather than an important moment in the resurgence of the working-class, a change in the balance of class forces. So for the councilists, any large struggle has the potential to 'boil over' into proletarian revolution, if only the workers form councils. The form of the soviet becomes more important than the actual content of the struggle or its context and trajectory— leading to confused intervention and an inability to absorb the lessons if struggles are defeated and consciousness goes into reflux (which happened to the Situationists in 1972 with their organizational implosion and dissolution). Such a conception of class consciousness loses perspective and obstructs the communist minority's ability to properly interpret, theorize and intervene in the struggle. Without such an understanding and ability to draw the appropriate lessons, we are less capable. The theory of the subterranean maturation of consciousness improves our capabilities, which is the necessity of any theoretical or methodological tool in the arsenal of the working class and its most advanced fraction.

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## DEATH OF CHÁVEZ

# Chávez' legacy: the defense of capital and the deception of the impoverished masses

It's not only the hierarchy of the Venezuelan state that lamented Chávez's demise, but also in many Latin American governments and others around the world, who have said their 'last farewells' to the leader of the "Bolivarian revolution". Several of those attending the funeral did so because of commercial and political agreements, such as the members of ALBA <sup>(1)</sup>, along with those benefiting from oil agreements. But they were all united in their grief at the loss of the state boss in whose name a 'struggle against poverty' and for 'social justice' took place, who, over the course of 14 years, carried out a project in the interests of a good part of the bourgeoisie, aimed at attacking the proletariat's living conditions and consciousness. They, along with the leading representatives of the national capital, whether officials or 'opposition', recognised that this was an excellent opportunity to make propaganda about 'the world's solidarity with the Venezuelan people' and to puff themselves up by exalting the international significance of their 'great leader'.

The proletariat has its own historical experience to draw on in order to reject and unmask this torrent of bourgeois and petty bourgeois sentimentality and hypocrisy. Chávez is a myth created by capitalism, nurtured and strengthened by the national and international bourgeoisie, a figure who came to their rescue with the bourgeois hoax called "21st Socialism". The international bourgeoisie, principally its left tendencies, want to keep this myth alive. The proletariat however needs to develop its means of struggle against Chavist ideology in order to show the most impoverished layers of society the real road to socialism.

## The emergence of Chavismo: a project of the nationalist bourgeois left

Chávez first came to public notice when he led the attempted military coup against the Social Democrat Car-



los Andrés Péres in 1992. From then on his popularity underwent a spectacular growth until he was elected President of the Republic in 1999. During this period he capitalised on the discontent and lack of trust across broad sectors of the population towards the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic Parties who had alternated power between themselves since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1958. This discontent was particularly marked amongst the most impoverished masses affected by the economic crisis of the 80s, who were the main protagonists of the 1989 revolt. The two main political parties were undergoing a process of disintegration, characterised by corruption at the highest levels and the neglect of government tasks. This was an expression of the decomposition that had engulfed the whole of society, principally the ruling class, which had reached such levels that it was impossible to cohere its forces in order to guarantee reliable governance and 'social peace'.

Chávez's charisma and his ascendancy amongst the most impoverished masses, his ability to convince them that the state was there to help them, enabled him to strengthen his hold on various sectors of the national capitalism: the armed forces and above all the parties of the left and the extreme left. The latter in particular

changed their political programme from one based on 60's 'national liberation' struggles against 'Yanqui imperialism', to one in favour of the creation of a real national bourgeoisie, ideologically supported by the Bolivarian myth of the 'great South American fatherland', and materially sustaining its aims with the important income from the export of oil. To this end various leaders and theoreticians of the Venezuelan left and extreme left (amongst them ex-guerrilla fighters and members of the Venezuelan Communist Party) set about the task of visiting various 'Socialist' and 'progressive' countries in order to understand which model to implement in Venezuela when Chávez came to power: China, North Korea, Libya, Iraq, Cuba, etc. There is no doubt that from the very beginning the Chavist project was understood as a bourgeois project by the nationalists of the left, based on civil-military unity, taking as its reference points the most despotic regimes in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, many of them allies from the old imperialist Russian bloc.

Throughout his 14 years in government, Chávez was developing his government project that came to be known as "21st century Socialism", based on the exclusion of and confrontation with those sectors of national capital that had held power until 1998, and sectors of private capital

1) Alternativa Bolivariana para las América, which is formed by Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Cuba and other countries.

## Death of Chávez

who opposed him; this went together with an aggressive regional and world geopolitics based on radical anti-Americanism. His great secret, recognised by a good part of the world bourgeoisie, was that he was able to renew the hopes of the immense masses of the abandoned poor in Venezuela, bring them in from the cold, making them believe that one day they would be able to get away from their poverty. In reality, what has happened is that the whole population has become impoverished, the workers above all, through the application of the left's principal of 'levelling from below'. In this way Chavismo managed to contain the social unrest of the mass of the poor, a social layer produced by the course of decadent capitalism throughout the 20th century, when it has been increasingly impossible to incorporate them into productive work. But he also achieved an aim that was the envy of other bourgeoisies: he gained the support of an electoral mass which allowed the new civil and military elites of the ruling class to perpetuate themselves in power. It is not by accident that during 14 years in power the Chavists won 13 of the 15 national elections that took place.

### **Chavismo is a product of the decomposition of capitalist society**

Chavismo's rise was not due to the failures of the preceding governments, nor to Chávez's charisma (an idea typical of the bourgeoisie which sees personalities as the motor force of history). Rather it was the expression of the decomposition of the whole capitalist system. The collapse of the Russian bloc at the end of the 80s marked capitalism's entry into this new phase in its decline, the phase of decomposition<sup>(2)</sup>. The events which broke up the imperialist blocs that had been in existence until then had two main consequences: the progressive weakening of US imperialism at a world level and an attack on the proletariat's class consciousness, around the campaign developed by the international bourgeoisie identifying the collapse of the Stalinist bloc with the 'death of communism'. The left wing of capital, in order to be able to carry on their task of containing the working class and the impoverished masses, had to generate 'new' ideologies. This led to the emergence in the 90s of the "third way" in Europe, and left wing movements in the countries of the periph-

ery. It was from this seedbed, the product of the decomposition of the capitalist system, that Chávez and his project emerged, along with other leaders and left movements in different Latin American countries. There was Lula with the support of the Workers' Party, the MST and the Social Forums in Brazil; Evo Morales in Bolivia with the indigenous movement; the Zapatistas in Mexico with the support of indigenous and peasants movements, etc.

The significance of Chávez from the beginning was that his project was seen as a movement for Latin American integration (sustained by Bolivarian thinking) founded upon radical anti-Americanism. From this point of view, he was seen as a second Fidel Castro, but who substituted the 'social movements' of the workers and socially excluded masses of the region for the 60s ideology of 'national liberation'. Chávez's Venezuela of the 2000s was transformed into the shop window for the benefits of 'real Socialism' that Cuba had been in the previous century. With the importance difference that Chavism was able to finance the franchise of "21st century Socialism" through the large incomes from oil exports.

The Chávez regime however could not stop the overwhelming advance of social decomposition in Venezuela; rather it was turned into an accelerating factor at the internal and regional level. It replaced the old business and state bureaucrats with a new civil and military bureaucracy who have amassed great fortunes and properties inside and outside the country, who have superseded their predecessors in government in the levels of corruption. Chavism has bought loyalty for its 'revolutionary project' by sharing out the oil incomes. This method was used to replace the old military High Command and to buy the necessary loyalty of the Armed Forces, principally after the 2002 coup which removed Chávez from power for a few hours. In fact the Armed Forces have been transformed into the regime's 'Praetorian Guard', and it carries a lot of weight in the regime.

The hegemony of the Chavista bourgeoisie is based on the reinforcing of the state at all its levels and through a permanent confrontation with the sections of the national capital that are opposed to the regime, principally against the emblematic representatives of private capital, who have been subject to expropriations and controls. A form of government justified

to its followers as a struggle against the 'bourgeoisie', when in reality many of the Chavistas used to be 'leading members' of private capital. Thus the confrontation between fractions of the national capital has dominated national politics throughout Chávez's time in power. In this struggle each fraction tries to impose its own interests, thus dragging down the whole of society and affecting every level of society. At the economic level, the general crisis of the system has inevitably evolved and a high price has been paid for making Venezuela a 'regional economic power'. This can be seen in the abandoning of the industrial infrastructure of the country (even affecting the 'the goose that lays the golden egg', the oil industry); the roads infrastructure and power services (one of the best in Latin America only two decades ago) are practically on their last legs; at the level of telecommunications Venezuela is technologically lagging behind the rest of the countries in the region. The main drama has been at the social level: the deterioration of public health and education services (which Chávez has sold as one of the great 'gains' of the revolution) is much worse than a decade ago; public safety has been practically abandoned (although this has not stopped the police repression of protests by workers and the population); in the 14 years of 'Socialist' government more than 150,000 people have been murdered, which has given Venezuela (above all Caracas, the capital) one of the highest crime rates in the world per 100,000 inhabitants, surpassing Mexico and Colombia<sup>(3)</sup>.

At the time of the death of the great leader of the "Bolivarian revolution", the homeland of "21st century Socialism" found itself in a serious economic crisis. In 2012 all the indices showed that the economy was as ill as the President: high fiscal deficit (18% of GDP, the highest in the region), the result of public spending reaching 51% of GDP; imports were the highest in 16 years, at \$56 billion, equal to 59% of exports; 22% inflation, the highest in the region. State spending which up until now has been covered by internal and external debt, which have grown steeply in the last years, has reached 50% of GDP; the printing of money has led to the highest inflation rates in the region, seriously

3) See the article "Incremento de la violencia delictiva en Venezuela: Expresión del drama de la descomposición del capitalismo" <http://es.internationalism.org/node/3417> [2]

2) See Theses on Decomposition. [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/107\\_decomposition](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/107_decomposition).

undermining workers' wages, pensions and the crumbs distributed by the state. The economic crisis can no longer be hidden and cheated by the state's control of the economy: 2012 began with the devaluation of the Bolivar by 46% in order to try and cover part of the immense public spending and shortage of products (of the order of 22% according to the Central Bank of Venezuela), mainly food items; inflation is estimated to be going to increase to 30%. China, an important lender to the Venezuelan state in recent years, is now making matters worse by refusing to give more resources to an economy that looks like a bottomless pit. Doubts about the health of the economy have made the issuing and realisation of shares more difficult, and the activity that does take place is done at a high price, a premium of 13.6%.

The Chavist project of "21st century Socialism" is another bourgeois failure: a version of state capitalism in the 21st century that engulfs workers and society in poverty whilst enriching the bourgeoisie, which includes the Chavist elites. It shows that neither right nor left, nor the leftists represent a way out of the poverty and barbarity that capitalism subjects us to.

### **The myth of reducing poverty**

One of the things that the top representatives of organisations such as the UN or the World Bank have stressed since Chávez's death has been his concern for the cause of the poor, which according to them allowed the reduction of levels of poverty in Venezuela. The representatives of the left parties, the leftist groups and social movements, have acted as the mouthpieces for the manipulation of statistics and the well-thought out propaganda of Chavism in order to show the world the great gains made through a 'redistribution of riches' by orientating the state's food, health, and education resources towards the parts of the population most in need. According to the figures of the INE, the organisation charged with collecting the statistics to show the 'gains of the revolution', the number of households living in poverty in Venezuela was reduced from 47% to 27.4% between 1998 and 2011 (about 4 million people). This in turn is part of the 37 million people who have been lifted out of poverty over the past decade in Latin America, according to the World Bank. The international bourgeoisie need to exalt any countries under the capi-

talist regime that have been able to 'overcome poverty' and are near to achieving the "Millennium Goals" proclaimed by the UN.

The reality is that the Chávez regime widened poverty, maintaining the poor in poverty, worsening the living conditions of employed workers and the lower layers of the middle class. Chavism carried out a programme of social engineering, taking part of the mass of surplus value produced by the workers to provide social benefits and directing it towards the most desperate sections of society. What this did was to worsen the precariousness of work that already existed before Chávez came to power: non-official studies from 2011 show that 82% of the employed population are in precarious jobs<sup>(4)</sup>. The government claims to have increased employment (an increase of 1 million jobs in the public sector) while the official propaganda show how unemployment has grown in the US and Europe. Employment has certainly grown in Venezuela, along with other countries in the region; but it is a question of precarious work, without fixed contracts or only part time, violating the state's own employment laws and depriving workers of basic social benefits (health, help with education for workers and their children, etc). The state has created parallel health, education and other services, whilst worsening workers' living conditions in these sectors and throughout the public sector, to the point where they accumulated vast debts, to the sum of thousands of millions of dollars. This social engineering has been a real bloodletting for workers in the productive sectors, driving down wages to around the minimum wage (\$300 if the official amount is applied or \$100 in the informal sector).

Chavism has rejected workers' demands, saying that they will worsen the 'people's' living conditions. But this is the great lie: through states social plans (which to a greater or lesser extent each national bourgeoisie tries to implement in order to maintain 'social peace') the bourgeoisie has tried to redistribute some of the crumbs from oil profits to a limited part of the poor, whilst the majority are left to hope that one day that they too will also benefit from this or that plan for social assistance. The reality of this can be seen with the distribution of

4) See <http://vprimero.blogspot.com/2011/05/826-de-la-poblacion-ocupada-tiene-un.htm> [3]

price-regulated food, which can only be obtained after long queuing and only in limited quantities; or the limited amount of housing built by the state (constructed in high visibility areas in order to show off the 'gains of the revolution'), which are given to a few government supporters and without any deeds. Others receive money benefits, pensions, scholarships etc from the state but this money does not cover the cost of food. On the other hand, inflation (the highest in the region) generated by the incessant costs of the state, make these hand-outs worthless overnight, whilst further undermining workers' wages. According to official figures over the last 14 years of the Chávez government there has been an accumulated inflation of 1500%, which has meant a real cut in wages over this period.

The franchise of "21st century Socialism" which is sold by the left, the leftists and leaders of 'social movements' in the region, has fed the illusions of the weakest parts of the proletariat about the creation of a model of the capitalist state – one that in reality is just as savage as the state in other countries.

### **Strengthening the state**

Chávez gave a new life to the democratic mystification with the idea of 'participatory democracy'. This has allowed the state to penetrate and place under its control the poorest sections of the population and their social movements, through the use of such organisations as the Bolivarian Circles and more recently the Communal Councils. In this way Chavism appeared to carry out the egalitarianism promoted by the left as 'levelling from below', which means the spreading of poverty to the whole population, above all the working class.

Chávez's government has also brought about a major strengthening of the state against society, which corresponds to the left's vision that 'Socialism' means more state. The state has not only been reinforced at the economic level through the expropriation of businesses and land from sections of private capital opposed to the regime, but it has also fortified the totalitarian state: making it all pervasive in society. Chávez has militarised society and expanded the political character of the state in order to control and repress the population, principally the working class.

At the internal and external level, Chavism, like the Cuban and other bour-

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geoisies in the region, has used the scapegoat of 'North American imperialism' to justify its own imperialist policies. Historically the Venezuelan bourgeoisie has not hidden its intention to be a great regional power, an orientation intensified by Chavism with the weakening of the USA in the world and in its own backyard. With the excuse of the 'threat of the Empire' Chavism has justified increased arms spending, to such a point that according to the Report on the Tendencies in the Arms Sales 2012 by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Venezuela is the main importer of conventional arms in South America, despite its constant talk about peace and unity. This swelling of the arms sector is part of the growth of militarisation of the bourgeoisies in the region and contributes to regional destabilisation. This arms spending represents greater indebtedness and directs of society's riches against society itself. It is more likely to be used for controlling social discontent than for confronting the 'Empire'.

The Chávez regime has carried out a more aggressive geo-political policy than any of its predecessors. With the end of the construction of 'Bolivar's great fatherland' and using oil incomes as the means of penetration, it has become a factor of destabilisation due to its competition with the other aspiring regional 'little' imperialists, principally Brazil and Colombia. With Cuba it has formed the ALBA, which brings together countries who have bought into the "21st century Socialism" franchise; it has set up "Petrocaribe" in order to penetrate the Caribbean and made agreements with the countries of Mercosur, principally with Argentina. These countries receive benefits in the form of oil exports and 'aid' from the Venezuelan state. In this manner Chavism has bought loyalty at a regional level through investing a good part of oil profits – and this policy has further worsened the living conditions of the proletariat in Venezuela.

### **The trivialisation of socialism and the attack on class identity**

For over two decades the international bourgeoisie has proclaimed the 'death of Communism' following the collapse of the Stalinist bloc in 1989, with the aim of trying to weaken class consciousness and the proletariat's struggle for a new society. Chavism has reinforced this campaign by trivialising and undermining of the idea of socialism, with the aim of destroying its

real proletarian essence. The sections of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie who are opposed to the regime have also have contributed to this, calling the regime 'Communist' or 'Castro Communist'. This is one of the major contributions of the Chavist bourgeoisie and its counter parts in the rest of the bourgeoisie, since it represents a direct attack on the proletariat's class consciousness, not only in Venezuela but at the regional and international level.

This was not the development of a 'revolution', but the implementation of 'Socialism in one country' by a handful of military and leftist adventurers taking control of the capitalist state and strengthening it. The 'overcoming of poverty' was by achieved through state hand-outs, which has been presented as being against capitalism and imperialism because of the regime's diatribes against the US. To present it as a 'revolution' is to repeat in the 21st century the tragedy that was the so-called 'Cuban revolution' and its impact upon the development of class consciousness amongst the proletariat in Cuba, Latin America and the world. Thus it is no surprise that Chavism has close links with the Castro brothers and their clique. The Chavist regime has been maintaining them in their 50 year rule through paying for their 'advice' in oil.

The so-called "Bolivarian revolution" has nothing to do with socialism. The *Communist Manifesto*, the first political programme of the proletariat, in 1848 proclaimed "the proletariat has no homeland or national interests to defend", whereas Chavism is a patriotic and nationalist movement. The Chavist 'revolution' dreams of going back to pre-Colombian society and is based on the thinking of Bolivar, which was already reactionary at the time since his struggle against Spanish rule could only replace it with a creole oligarchy. It is a bourgeoisie project that has nothing to do with the workers' struggles, but everything to do with sections of the leftist, civil, military and petty bourgeoisie, who are full of social resentment for having been excluded from power following the fall of the dictatorship in 1958. It has also been sustained by the impoverished masses and the weakest sections of the proletariat who the Venezuelan bourgeoisie have manipulated for decades through a policy of hand-outs and cronyism, since they are vulnerable to the crumbs thrown to them by the state and

the illusions that go along with this. The organisation of the Bolivarian Circles and the Communal Councils, which can be mobilised against the employed working class worse (whom they accuse of being the 'aristocracy of labour'), and even confront them with armed gangs, are the continuation of this policy. The Chavist project is an integral part of the 'social movements' promoted by the left and leftism which use the most impoverished masses, those who are accustomed to living in poverty and precariousness, and who are not united with the struggles of the proletariat – a class which produces in an associated way, which uses strikes as the means for confronting capital, which can become conscious of the social force it represents and which is capable of struggling to overcome the poverty that capitalism subjects it to.

Chavism has used the full strength of the state in order to confront the workers' struggles, which have been obscured by the intense political polarisation introduced by the bourgeoisie. It has had recourse to the most barbaric means to attack the proletariat: in 2003, following the strike in the oil industry promoted by bourgeois fractions opposed to Chávez, a veritable pogrom was unleashed against the workers, using unemployed workers and supporters of the government. Not content with laying off 20,000 oil workers, the government made it impossible for them to find work inside or outside the state enterprises and subjected them to permanent harassment. This has been an important attack on class solidarity amongst the proletariat in Venezuela, which has accentuated divisions and polarised politics within the working class. Chavism has weakened class solidarity and consciousness.

Chavist ideology seeks to trivialise the class struggle, presenting it as a struggle of the 'poor against the rich'. In his frequent speeches on TV and radio Chávez constantly repeated that "to be rich is bad", with the intention that workers should passively accept a precarious life, whilst at the same time the hierarchy and the state bureaucrats, along with their families, disport themselves as the new rich. Chávez constantly went on about how he was struggling against 'the bourgeoisie', presenting his government as being the government of the poor, because he came from a poor background.

*Continued on Page 7*

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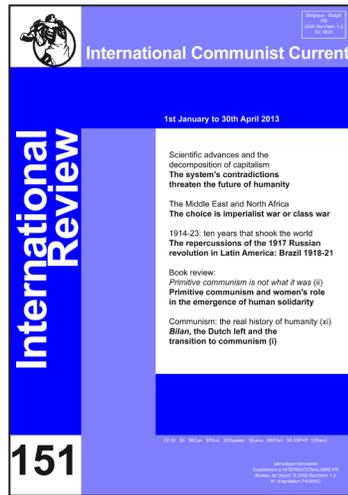
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## Political positions of the CCI

*Internationalism is the section in the USA of the International Communist Current which 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 stratified 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 Political positions of the ICC 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 organizations (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 organization, 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 organization 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 organized 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 nationalization 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 organization constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalization of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to “organize 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. Organized 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 organizations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organizations 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, 1884-1914, 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.