



world revolution

The only way to fight the cuts – spread the class struggle!

We will have to wait for the government spending review next month to find out a lot more detail of the cuts to come – which services will lose most funding, which 500,000 (and more) public sector workers will lose their jobs. This hasn't stopped the drip-drip announcements of attacks over the summer. The attack on the 2.5 million people claiming incapacity benefit has already begun – the government aims to have eliminated this benefit stream altogether by March 2014 with 30% being denied benefits altogether, 50% moved onto Jobseeker's Allowance and the remaining 20% shifted onto other benefits.

The Government is taking £74m from regional development and £200m from higher education, just when young people are turning to this for lack of job opportunities. The attempt to find 10-20% cuts in education spending has killed the 'building schools for the future' scheme, which will result in larger classes as primary schools struggle to accommodate over 4000 extra pupils in the next few years resulting in larger classes. 1,300 playground schemes have also been scrapped. Meanwhile, schools are being encouraged to convert into academies and 'free schools' in order to cut centralised costs – costs that should not all be put down to bureaucracy as education authorities also provide vital services that individual schools cannot. Transport budgets are being cut - £309m from local authorities and £100m from Network Rail, on the way to finding cuts of over 25%. And so on.

The NHS on the other hand has its budget ring fenced. Yet it still has to save £20bn by 2014, from an annual budget of £104.6bn, as no extra resources will be provided for new treatments and an ageing population. In other words, health is being cut like everything else. Scottish hospitals will lose 1000 beds in 3 years. Ever tighter budgets, with no leeway for expensive emergency treatment, will be imposed. A new North Tees and Hartlepool hospital has just been scrapped to save £450m.

Why capitalism is imposing cuts

Cuts are not being imposed just because of government ideology and policy. They were already under way under the previous Labour government, which announced £11bn in cuts last March. And it is not just in this country – budget cuts are under way across Europe and not just in the PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain with particularly worrying debt problems) but also Germany, France, Romania and so on.

The huge government deficits are not simply due to individual mismanagement or corruption, however much of that there is. In fact, deficit

spending was what kept the world economy going artificially until the risk of states defaulting on their repayments made them unaffordable.

Now the working class is being made to pay. Lots of democratic spin is being put on it, to make it look as if we are all in this together, such as the Treasury website where the public can suggest and vote on suggestions for cuts. The director

general of the BBC is discussing how to report the spending cuts with Downing Street, and has promised to hold similar discussions with the Labour Party. The media will continue to take up the 'debate' on how the cuts are introduced, whether they could or should be more progressive, take more or less from the poorest in society. But however democratic and 'impartial' the BBC and the

rest of the media may be regarding government and opposition politicians, none of them can admit that capitalism is bankrupt and has nothing to offer humanity but more financial crises, more misery, more wars.

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International resistance to austerity

In South Africa, the patriotic euphoria created by the World Cup is already over. Like every other country in the world, South Africa is ruled by capitalism, and capitalism is a system in crisis which can only survive by stepping up the exploitation of the majority. A bitter strike by 1.3million public sector workers, led by teachers and nurses, has broken out around wage demands. The nurses have attempted to maintain essential services in the hospitals but have been condemned by the media for abandoning the sick and vulnerable. But the struggle has a lot of support within the working class. The strike has been joined by car workers, fuel supply workers, and, briefly, miners, with growing unrest among soldiers being used as strikebreakers.

In nearby Mozambique, a 30% rise in the price of bread has sparked strikes and riots in the streets of the capital Maputo as well as Matola, a neighbouring city to Maputo, and in Beira and Chimoio, urban centres in the central part of the country. Police have responded brutally, with live ammunition as well as rubber bullets. At least 10 people were shot dead and hundreds have been wounded. There have also been clashes over food price rises in Egypt. Prices of basic food stuffs around the world are steadily rising, particularly as a result of droughts and floods – probable effects of climate change - which have devastated agriculture in countries like Russia and Pakistan. The media are already voicing fears that the Mozambique rebellion could herald an international wave of food riots, as we saw in 2008. Across the planet, millions are already faced with starvation and capitalism's economic and ecological breakdown is making the situation dramatically worse.

South African workers mocked the World Cup's official feelgood slogan 'Feel it, it is here', with their own version: 'feel it, it is war'. And the class war is international. Workers in countries like China and Bangladesh, whose cheap labour has

kept up profits for the big western companies, are refusing to lie down in front of the capitalist crisis any longer. There have been huge waves of strikes in China and Bangladesh, many of them outside the control of the established unions, which the workers see as corrupt and subservient to capital and the state. The ruling class has responded with brutal repression, but also by trying to cobble together more 'representative' trade unions which can do a better job of keeping the workers in line. We are seeing similar tactics in South Africa, where the Congress of South African Trade Unions is threatening to break its ties with the ruling ANC so it can present itself to discontented workers as a really 'independent' force.

In the advanced countries, the majority of workers are not yet faced with starvation but they are certainly confronted with all the consequences of the economic crisis: spiralling unemployment and government-led austerity drives. Workers in Greece and Spain have been in the forefront of the new austerity packages, and they have launched wide scale strikes and demonstrations in response. But elsewhere in Europe and in America the resistance is still very hesitant and dispersed. Trade unions are still leading out one sector of workers at a time – like the BA workers and tube workers in Britain at the moment – when what is needed is for different sectors to come together around common demands.

The situation of workers and the poorest layers of the population in the peripheral countries may still seem remote from the daily concerns of workers in the capitalist centres. But there are small signs that this can change. The recent struggles of the Tekel workers in Turkey, for example, gave rise to a group of militant workers who saw the need to visit European countries like Germany and Greece to bring out the lessons of their own struggle. This was organised outside of union control, because the 'Platform of Workers in Struggle' understood



South African workers mocked the World Cup's official feelgood slogan 'Feel it, it is here', with their own version: 'feel it, it is war'

that the unions are not on their side. There were reciprocal visits by Austrian and German workers to Turkey.

On a broader level, the massive struggles in the less developed countries can provide workers in the heart of the system with an example of courage and determination, and a reminder that if they do not fight back, they will also face a plunge into the most desperate poverty, because capitalism's crisis has no other outcome. **Amos, 4.9.10**

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Pakistan, Russia, China

The catastrophic nature of capitalism

This summer pitiless disasters have hit people across the world. Fires have raged in Russia and Portugal, devastating monsoons have covered Pakistan, India, Nepal and China in mud, while floods have also hit eastern Europe and a part of Germany. The list of disasters from summer 2010 is very long.

The proliferation of these phenomena and their growing seriousness is not an accident or a tragic inevitability against which nothing can be done and for which no one is to blame. Capitalism and its laws bear a heavy responsibility in the gestation of these disasters.

Capitalism is destroying the planet

According to numerous scientists global warming plays an important part in the multiplication of extreme climatic phenomena such as torrential rain and hurricanes. In the words of Jean-Pascal Van Ypersele, Vice President of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: "These are events that are known to recur and intensify in an environment disturbed by pollution from greenhouse gas emissions". From 1997 to 2006, with the temperature of the planet continuing to increase, the number of more and more intense catastrophes grew by 60% compared to the previous decade. As a symbol of this global warming, at the beginning of August 2010 a gigantic iceberg of 250 km² broke off into the Arctic Ocean, reducing the extent of the ice cap for the fourth consecutive year so that it is now less than 4 million km². This summer many temperature records have been broken, like the staggering 53.5° on 26 May in Pakistan. "The mean temperature of the planet is growing, according to the records and analyses of James Hansen's team at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies (NASA), as the first six months of 2010 establish a record as the hottest in 130 years" (*Libération*, 12/8/10).

Scientists from oil companies, some politicians and TV pundits resist the idea that global warming is the result of a massive pollution of the atmosphere, but all serious scientific research shows a clear correlation between greenhouse gas emissions, global warming and the proliferation of natural disasters. However, scientists are mistaken when they say that a little political will from governments is the way to change things. Capitalism is incapable of limiting greenhouse gas emissions because that means going against the very basis of its mode of production: the pursuit of profit with its consequent competition and imperative to cut costs. It's because of these laws that the bourgeoisie pollutes, with, among many examples, its heavy industry and the transport of commodities over thousands of kilometres.

The responsibility of capitalism in the spread of these catastrophes is not limited to atmospheric pollution and climate change. The methodical destruction of ecosystems through, for example, massive deforestation, waste disposal in areas of natural drainage, or urban sprawl - sometimes onto the beds of drained rivers or at the heart of particularly inflammable areas - forcefully aggravates the intensity of disasters.

In Pakistan millions of victims of imperialist conflicts

Since July torrential rain has battered Pakistan causing major flooding, landslides, thousands dead or injured, 20 million people affected, 11,000 schools damaged, 1.2 millions houses damaged, 3.6m hectares of crops destroyed, 1.2m livestock lost, 6m poultry lost and much other material damage. A fifth of the country is submerged in the worst floods in the region since the late 1920s. Officially, the number of people living below the poverty line has risen from 33% of the population prior to the floods to 40% now.

Famine and the spread of disease, particularly cholera, have worsened an already desperate situation. For more than a month, in the middle of this horrible tableau, the Pakistani bourgeoisie and its army have displayed a mind-blowing cynicism and incompetence, blaming the remorselessness of nature, when between unplanned urbanisation and impotent emergency services, the laws of capitalism appear as the essential element in understanding the magnitude of the disaster.

But a particularly nauseating aspect of this tragedy is the way in which the big imperialist powers try to benefit from the situation using the humanitarian operations as an alibi, to the detriment of the victims. The US supported the fragile government of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and very rapidly profited from the events in deploying a significant military contingent, including helicopter carriers and amphibious assault vehicles. In the name of the war against terrorism the US has spread its net over Pakistan and checks all arrivals of 'international aid' coming from other countries. 'Humanitarian aid' is made up of soldiers, diplomats and unscrupulous investors.

As with every disaster of such a magnitude, all the resources that are sent by each country are made to serve their imperialist interests. This includes the promise of aid, which has become a systematic con trick. Each government officially announces substantial financial help, which is officiously granted according to the interests and ambitions of the donors. Take the example of Haiti where only 10 % of the international aid promised in January 2010 has actually been given to the Haitian bourgeoisie so far. Pakistan is not going to be an exception to this rule. \$800m has been promised, but what will be handed over to the state will be for services rendered by the Pakistani bourgeoisie.

Fires in Russia show the contradictions of capitalism

From late July hundreds of fires raged throughout a large area around Moscow, burning hundreds of hectares of forest, peat bogs and agricultural and urban areas. The fires have killed dozens of people and left thousands homeless. For several days a thick cloud hung over the capital with devastating effects on health, to the extent that the usual mortality rate doubled. And, for good measure, significant nuclear and chemical risks threaten people beyond the Russian borders, in particular with fires on the land contaminated by the Chernobyl explosion, but also with nuclear sites and more or less forgotten stocks of arms and chemical products menaced by fire. Curiously enough this has not attracted much media attention.

These fires show the negligence of the bourgeoisie and the decay of capitalist society. One of the most striking aspects of these events was the incapacity of the Russian state to get the fires under control. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin can play the superhero in front of the TV cameras, piloting a fire-fighting plane, but this disaster is the result of several decades of typical bourgeois policies, cynical and blinded by profit.

An essential element in understanding the role of the bourgeoisie in the extent of the wildfires is the staggering neglect of the forests. Russia is an enormous country endowed with very significant and dense forestry, requiring particular care to promptly contain fires in their early stages and prevent them spreading and getting out of control. A lot of massive Russian forests don't have access routes, so the fire service is incapable of getting to the heart of many fires. Russia has only 22,000 fire-fighters, less than many much smaller countries. Many particularly corrupt regional governments prefer to use limited resources intended to manage forests to buy luxury cars, as several scandals have revealed.

The same cynicism is shown with the impact of wildfire on peat bogs, areas where the soil is made of particularly inflammable decomposing organic matter. In abandoning the peat bogs the Russian bourgeoisie has favoured the construction of housing in those areas where fires were particularly rife in 1972. In these dangerous areas property speculators have been able to buy land - declared

building land by law - at derisory prices. It is in such ways that capitalism transforms natural phenomena, controllable by humanity, into veritable disasters. Incidentally, the Russian authorities have been reduced to waiting for the winter freeze to put out the fires in the peat fields.

It is also, at this point, worth recalling the damage across the Gulf of Mexico from the oil slick caused by the explosion on the BP oil rig. The recklessness of capitalism in its search for materials that it can profitably sell has never known any limitations. To this it can be added that China, in addition to recent floods and landslides in several provinces, has also suffered its worst ever oil spill after a fire at an oil depot caused crude oil to leak into the sea for several days in the area around the important northern port of Dalian. Far from employing the latest cutting-edge technology there were poignant pictures of people on beaches trying to clean them up using only chopsticks and

plastic bags. Elsewhere "Fishermen covered in oil, some of them working just in their underwear, scrape up the toxic sludge that spilled out of the jars they have brought back from the open sea. No one is wearing protective goggles, facemasks or even gloves to protect them from the hazardous chemicals in the oil." (BBC 30/7/10).

Capitalism and its state are directly responsible for the multiplication and the deadly extent of the climatic catastrophes. The working class must not have any illusions in the capacity of the ruling class to protect humanity against devastating natural phenomena, no illusions in replacing the existing government cliques with more 'green' leaders and no hope for ecological reforms that will save the planet and humanity from environmental chaos. The basis of capitalism, with its drive for profit, competition and exploitation is at the heart of the problem at every level. We must destroy it. **V 31/8/10**

Chilean miners: exploitation kills

The San José mine in the Atacama Desert where 33 miners have been trapped since an explosion in the Chilean mine on 5 August has seen dozens of previous accidents. In 2007 it was actually closed down because of health and safety considerations. When it was reopened there was supposed to be a ladder from the emergency shelter to the surface - this was never finished.

When it was discovered that the miners were still alive there were jubilant scenes on Chilean streets. But the media frenzy that followed obscures the reality: across the world the conditions of miners are of no concern to their employers, whether in state enterprises or private mining companies. In China, in particular, where it is estimated that 80% of the world's mining accidents occur, death and injuries from explosions, floods and other accidents are widespread.

Official figures for deaths in Chinese mining accidents run from 2009's 2631 to 2002's 6995. Serious analysts of the industry suggest that a typical

annual figure of 20,000 deaths is probably more accurate, and this is without estimates of injuries or lung afflictions. One guess for the number of Chinese miners suffering from pneumoconiosis gives a figure of 600,000.

Productivity in the Chinese coal mining industry is very low. That is to say, it is very labour intensive: this accounts for the 5 million workers employed in it. The accident rates per 100 tons of coal are 100 times greater in China than the US, 30 times greater than in South Africa.

While the world's media turns its attention to the prospects of the Chilean miners it's worth remembering that, looking world-wide across all industries in a typical year, and only taking the official statistics, more than 2 million workers are fatally injured as the result of a work-related accident - the equivalent of 6000 a day. People make jokes about the absurdities of the health and safety industry, but the fact that capitalist exploitation kills on such a scale is deadly serious. **Car 4/9/10**

The catastrophic nature of capitalism

London Public Meeting

18 September 2.00pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
Holborn, WC1
Nearest tube: Holborn

For many people, when you mention capitalism, the first thing they think of are big businesses dominated by the pursuit of the bottom line. Trying to keep out of the red, or trying to increase profits - that's what capitalism's all about.

With the fall into recession it became clear for many that each country also wants to balance its books. In this year's general election in the UK all the main parties insisted that the question of the deficit was the number one issue facing a new government, whatever colour it turned out to be. As such, the cuts in public sector expenditure are already having an impact on workers' lives, with the prospect of much worse to come with each new announcement. Capitalism is affecting workers' jobs, pay, working and living standards.

But capitalism affects a lot more than that. As the main article on this page shows, there continues to be a proliferation of disasters that can be attributed ultimately to capitalism's pollution of the atmosphere, global warming and climate change, as well as disasters that are obviously manmade.

The reckless pursuit of profit has led to a massive ecological deterioration. Not only that, capitalism is showing itself increasingly incapable of being able to deal with the catastrophes that it has created.

The competition that has always been integral to the capitalist mode of production is not limited to the battle between individual companies for resources, customers, sales and profits. Competition takes place at a military level in conflicts between different countries - the ultimate form of competition being imperialist war. And the perspective for future conflicts in the epoch of 'total war', taking into account nuclear weaponry and the massive capacities of conventional armaments, is potentially the obliteration of humanity.

Capitalism is a disaster: at the level of government cuts, environmental devastation and imperialist war. Come and discuss this catastrophe, as well as the struggle of the working class, the only force with the potential to destroy the capitalist system and create a new and human society.

Wikileaks on Afghanistan confirm the growth of chaos

In July, following its April release of footage of a US Apache helicopter firing on civilians, including children, Wikileaks, coordinating with the *Guardian*, *Der Spiegel* and the *New York Times*, released 92,000 secret US documents dating from January 2004 to December 2009, relating to the war in Afghanistan. Thousands more were held back. Julian Assange, the prime mover behind Wikileaks, said that “*you have to dig down in the archives to understand*”. Not much archaeology is needed. The leaks show, in the words of the US military itself, the atrocities carried out against civilians by US, British, French, German and Polish ISAF troops and the cover-ups involved; the scale and extent of the Taliban attacks; the dubious role of Pakistan and the involvement of Iran; assassination squads and special forces at work with ‘collateral’ damage; the lies and misinformation put out by the US and Britain and the other militaries involved and the lack of trust between the ‘allies’. President Obama, initially commenting on the leaks, said that they showed how bad things were under the Bush regime, and the White House used the logs to further blame Bush for “*under-resourcing*” the war. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates said, with the gall of a US war chief, that Wikileaks had “*blood on its hands*” and that they were damaging to “*our relations and reputation in this key part of the world*”!

The *Guardian* calls these Afghan war logs “*the unvarnished picture*”, but it’s not quite that. These logs are secret, not “top secret” or a higher classification. Much of what they contain (or what’s been reported so far) was in the public domain already and much could have reasonably been surmised from official statements and reporting. A point on the controversial ‘intelligence’ contained in many of the logs is that this is one of the major, most lucrative industries in the whole corrupt ‘state’ of Afghanistan, a state that is rotten to the core; a great deal of the information, at this level, is totally unreliable. The information from higher up is no better: the Afghan intelligence unit, the National Directorate of Security, is a bitter rival of the Pakistani ISI and its intelligence is coloured accordingly. Former US ally and powerful warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar¹, is involved with Iranian intelligence units, further muddying the waters. US Major-General Michael Flynn said in January that foreign newspaper articles about Afghanistan were more useful than intelligence gathered on the ground.

What the logs clearly show, though, is the extent and depth of the war – the sheer scale of it all and the imperialist rivalries, killings and chaos that it is spreading. They show the real nature of the war, the atrocities, torture, intrigues, the corruption and the growing recognition that the war is unwinnable. The idea of a stable Afghan government in 2, 4 or 10 years time is manifestly risible. By the end of this month 100,000 US forces will be on the ground, plus 50,000 others, tens of thousands of ‘contractors’ and mercenaries and thousands of NGOs more or less representing the interests of the states that they come from; plus hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers. The current propaganda from ISAF/NATO is about how civilian casualties have been reduced through their policy of “*courageous restraint*” and how the Taliban are increasing civilian deaths. There’s no doubt about the latter as the war spreads; but General Petraeus’s recent orders to “*pursue the enemy relentlessly*” can only mean more civilian grief. There’s no one Taliban enemy but factions, ethnicities, tribes and even local farmers taking up arms against the military despoliation of their lives and land. One of the factors of this war is that whenever there’s an ISAF push, in Kandahar or Helmand for example, Taliban and anti-coalition forces appear where they didn’t exist before. To add to the chaos being generated, Afghan border guards, police and army units have been fighting each other in some instances. This is turning out not to be a fight against the Taliban or al-Qaida, but an increasingly complex local and regional war involving Pashtun, Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara 1. This Hekmatyar is a well known mass murderer. He was given aid and training by the US and Britain in the 1980s and held talks with British officials in Whitehall. Britain backed Hekmatyar to conduct secret operations inside the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union.

factions with wider powers interceding.

The war is spreading

The war is spreading, involving and arousing other forces of imperialism. Pakistani territory and peoples have been hit by ‘black’ US special units, Warthog warplanes, Apache helicopters, drones and howitzer shells, and there has even been bombing by B52s in order to deny Taliban the safe havens described as “*unacceptable... intolerable*” by the White House. This is the slow implementation of the threat made several years ago by the US to “bomb Pakistan back into the Stone Age”. Afghan President Karzai has had secret meetings with the Pakistani secret services (ISI), with the latter encouraging rapprochement between his faction and the ISI-sponsored jihadi network of Sira-juddin Haqqani², giving the latter the Pashtun south and consolidating Karzai in Kabul (the US was not party to these talks). In echoes of the Great Game between Britain and Russia over a hundred years ago, Pakistan regards the small, but significant presence of India in what they claim as their backyard with the fear and horror of a threatened imperialism. This danger is highlighted in a report by Matt Waldmen of the Harvard Carr Centre, documenting how the ISI “*orchestrates, sustains and strongly influences* (the Taliban... even being) *represented as participants or observers on the Taliban supreme leadership council, the Quetta Shura*”. As William Dalrymple says in *The Guardian*, 2.7.10, Afghanistan is turning into a proxy war between India and Pakistan.

Behind Pakistan, China lurks in the shadows, and in the geo-strategic games being played out, particularly in the confrontation with Iran, US and British forces have a free rein along the Afghan/Iranian border. This latter is one of the ‘values’ of the US presence in Afghanistan. There are further tensions within ISAF/NATO itself; disagreements and unilateral actions involving Germany, France, Holland, Canada, with US ‘policy’ only demonstrating the tendency towards imperialist chaos in and beyond Afghanistan itself.

Iraq: the war continues

The war in Iraq is instructive here. President Obama, who called it “*a dumb war*”, has now said that he has brought it to “*a responsible end... as promised and on schedule*”. This will obviously be news to the people of Iraq where more civilians are living in intolerably frightful conditions and more are dying than in Afghanistan. In Iraq there is still no functioning government 5 months after ‘democratic’ elections; and, from nothing, al-Qaida is now firmly established there. At any rate, the US won’t be leaving Iraq any time soon but retreating behind its fortresses. As Seumus Milne shows in *The Guardian*, 5.8.10, at least 50,000 US troops (plus British forces and tens of thousands of mercenaries) will remain in 94 bases, “*advising, training... providing security and carrying out counter-terrorism measures*”. In fact, as Milne makes clear, there is a “surge” of private contractors to be based in “enduring presence posts” across Iraq. Killings and torture are still commonplace here, health and education have worsened as has the position of women; fifteen hundred checkpoints divide the capital and ordinary Iraqis protesting on the streets about the frequent power cuts have been labelled “*hooligans*” and attacked by Iraqi troops. If the Iraq war has been a monumental and bloody failure on the part of US and British imperialism then not only are these latter still very much involved but are also now locked into an even bloodier and irrational mess in Afghanistan that has even more dangerous implications for the whole region and beyond. **Baboon, 12.8.10**

2. Haqqani is a warlord in the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM) terrorist network. Pakistan has also backed him in its proxy war against India in Kashmir. Britain has provided covert aid to the HUM in the past and there are reports that Britain was involved in units of this group being sent to fight in ex-Yugoslavia and Kosovo in the 90s. Many HUM fighters have received indirect aid from Britain. Two of the four London bombers were trained in Pakistani camps run by the HUM. So much for being in Afghanistan to keep the streets of London safe!

British imperialism: looking for a way out of the impasse

During visits to America, Turkey and India in July, British Prime Minister David Cameron upset war veterans by saying that Britain was the junior partner to the US in 1940 (ie before the US even entered the war and when Britain was fighting the Battle of Britain), annoyed Israel by describing Gaza as a prison camp and angered Pakistan by accusing it of facing two ways on terrorism. These were widely reported as ‘gaffes’ arising from a lack of experience and a badly thought-out attempt by Cameron to present himself as a straight talker. However, with the exception of the 1940 slip (he should really just have said ‘the 1940s’), it seems more likely that they were part of a carefully thought out attempt to find a strategy to defend Britain’s interests.

The challenges facing British imperialism

In *World Revolution* 334 we outlined the evolution of British imperialism since 1989 and placed it in the context of Britain’s continuing decline as an imperialist power. We concluded that Britain no longer has the power to shape events but must react to them, and that the failure of its strategies under Blair has placed British imperialism in an impasse. The new government is confronted with this reality and is compelled to try and put together a new strategy. But in doing this it has to deal with a number of factors.

Firstly, the evolution of the global situation remains characterised by the tendency towards looking after number one. This has created a complex situation, but one that is dominated by the decline of US leadership and its attempts to reverse this. The election of Obama, although it has led to the adoption of a more multilateral approach, has not changed the fundamental aim. The recent withdrawal of combat forces from Iraq allows the US to focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan in order both to assert its dominance and to control essential energy routes. Nor is the withdrawal from Iraq quite what it seems, since 50,000 troops remain in a ‘training’ capacity. Other significant factors include the rise of China and, to a lesser extent, of other countries in Asia and further afield such as Brazil.

Secondly, the ‘financial’ crisis. The British government has said military spending will be ‘protected’ but it seems that this means there will still be cuts of 10-20%. This has fuelled arguments within the armed forces about where the cuts should fall, and also within the government, notably about whether the £20bn cost of replacing Trident nuclear missiles should come from the defence budget, necessitating cuts in other areas, or from general taxation. More will be known with the outcomes of the comprehensive spending review and the Strategic Defence Review later in the year.

Thirdly, the working class. Although the level of open class struggle is low there is no strong support for the war in Afghanistan. This reflects the international situation where the working class remains undefeated and is not mobilised behind the state and its wars.

Britain will defend its imperialist interests

In this context there was nothing accidental about where Cameron went or, with that one exception, in what he said when he got there. Both actions and words fitted into the framework set out by the Foreign Secretary William Hague in speeches around the same time. While being careful to reiterate the importance of its alliances with the US and with France and Germany, Hague emphasised the need for Britain, “*to look further and wider*”, and to “*elevate key partnerships beyond Europe and North America*”.

Starting in the US, Cameron declared “*I understand that we are the junior partner—just as we were in the 1940s and, indeed, in the 1980s*”. While this is a statement of the obvious, it also breaks with the pretence maintained by previous governments of some sort of equality between Washington and London. It is a tentative redefinition of Britain’s relationship with US: recognising the reality of the disparity in power but also

insinuating that Britain will not be subservient to Washington – hence the comments about Britain not being too “needy” in its relationship.

Moving on to Turkey, Cameron repeatedly declared his support for its entry into Europe and criticised those who oppose it. It seems likely that this was aimed in part at Germany, which has strongly opposed Turkish membership. He also had a dig at France, recalling De Gaul’s veto of British membership to empathise “*we know what it is like to be shut out of the club*”.

While there he criticised Israel, saying “*Gaza cannot and must not be allowed to remain a prison camp*” and referring to the aid flotilla attacked by the Israeli military. Such statements seem intended for a wider audience in the Middle East.

Finally, to India where he declared “*I want to take the relationship between India and Britain to the next level*”. Trade and security were stressed in public with the announcement of the sale of £700m worth of military aircraft and of an agreement to export civil nuclear technology. It was here that he attacked Pakistan, India’s mortal enemy: “*we cannot tolerate in any sense the idea that this country is allowed to look both ways and is able in any way to promote the export of terror, whether to India or whether to Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world*”. This statement, intended to win support within India, could be an attempt to push Pakistan to increase its efforts against the Taliban but could also be part of an effort to disengage from the war given Cameron’s recently declared aim to have British troops out of Afghanistan by 2011.

Towards a new imperialist strategy?

It would be premature to state that a new strategy has been laid out but there seem to be two strands to the coalition’s efforts.

Firstly it is trying to reposition Britain on the imperialist stage, hence the visits to the world’s remaining superpower and two of the main theatres of imperialist struggle, and the effort to build its relationship with India and Turkey.

Secondly, it has given greater prominence to the pursuit of economic interests. This is a necessity given the depth of the crisis in Britain and the continued weakness of its economy. There can also be a strategic purpose to reinforcing economic links, especially with countries like India that have regional ambitions and which are also factors at the global level.

However, these efforts are fraught with difficulties. Britain’s position as a second rate power forced to respond to events means that its options are limited. The present situation, characterised by uncertainty and crisis, offers little scope for a constructive policy of building up a strong position. On the other hand, a purely destructive approach, using the plethora of opportunities to cause difficulties to greater powers, risks increasing the hostility of its rivals with no long term gains. The response of Israel and above all of Pakistan demonstrated this. Britain’s ability to develop relationships is hampered from the start by the legacy of distrust arising both from its previous dominance of the globe and its more recent overly intimate relationship with the US. Britain also remains vulnerable to pressure by its erstwhile friends and allies.

All of this can only increase the difficulty for British imperialism to develop a clear, long term policy. The probable result is that it will be increasingly forced towards a more ‘opportunistic’ and short-term strategy.

The present situation also increases the risk of further divisions developing within the ruling class. These divisions have not gone away. The dominant trend still seems to be a recognition of the need for a more independent policy, but the anger over Cameron’s ‘gaffes’ was not entirely manufactured. Similarly, the arguments within the armed forces and government about defence spending are not just about parts of the state protecting their own interests but suggest that there are real differences over the orientation of British military policy. The future for British imperialism is uncertain but the unequivocal message from Cameron is that Britain will continue to defend its interests as best it can. **North 24/08/10**

BA, tubes

We can't win our demands in isolation

On the 17th August the Unite union representing airport workers reached an agreement with the British airport operator, BAA, for a measly 2% increase on basic pay and allowances with the added guaranteed lump sum of £500. Let's be clear what this manoeuvre means: the same union, UNITE, which 'represents' both airport workers and cabin crew staff who have been engaged in a year long running dispute have delivered ... for the bosses of BAA and British Airways.

UNITE claimed "*this offer is double what BAA had originally offered with no strings attached*". In reality, the deal comes with 500 redundancies attached and a one year pay freeze which calculated on top of the pay freeze imposed on BAA ground staff last year means a pay-cut! "*Terry Morgan, of BAA, added: 'We believe that the unions are going to recommend acceptance of our offer to their membership' ... BAA said it was 'very, very confident' that potential disruption to passengers had now been avoided*". (Telegraph 17/810).

A strike at BAA could have had the potential to shut the airports simply on the basis of safety grounds.

Unifying this struggle with that of the British Airways cabin crew could have broken the deadlock and isolation of the latter. Previous struggles in the airline industry have demonstrated the immense power workers have when they support each others' struggles – for example, in 2005 baggage handlers at Heathrow went on strike to support the unofficial action of those workers who had been sacked by the airport catering company, Gate Gourmet. As we reported at the time (see WR288), this struggle was eventually contained by the unions by dividing up the two groups. By keeping the BAA and British Airways struggles separated, the union machine has achieved the same result in these latest struggles.

The British Airways cabin crew dispute is now pretty well isolated. At the end of July, BA cabin crew workers threw out 'a final offer' from Willy Walsh and BA management. They are now waiting for UNITE to organise a fresh ballot for more strike action.

UNITE officials are using the low turnout (45%) of workers voting on BA's latest offer to justify not calling further action. This is part of the prevarication which is aimed at wearing down and demoralising cabin crew who, right from the start of this dispute, showed incredible combativity in spite of their inexperience in struggle. Even at this point there have been calls on UNITE's website for a new strike ballot. Once again, the real problem is the isolation of this struggle, an isolation maintained and instigated by UNITE itself. In response to this, the union points to the so-called 'anti-union' legislation which sees management seeking court injunctions for each stage of the strikes. This mechanism ensured BA cabin crew were prevented from striking over the Christmas period. In reality, unions use these injunctions to protect sequestration of union money but more importantly, to control and isolate strikes.

In other disputes, there has been an overwhelming strike vote by workers at London Underground, in a response to management's attempt to make £16 million worth of savings. The reality of this 'rationalisation' will be to close ticket offices with the loss of some 800 jobs. This is a massive attack and will see some 10,000 workers striking on Monday 6th September. This will include both drivers and station staff in a series of one-day strikes.

200 Alston Metro tube maintenance workers have also voted for strike action over a management pay offer. This strike is to begin on 5th September with further 24 hour strikes to be announced in October and November.

Drivers at Stagecoach in Liverpool have also rejected a 2% offer from management and are looking for parity with Arriva drivers which will bring them up to £10 per hour. Importantly, in this dispute the 6 'official' pickets were joined by 140 drivers looking to take an active participation in their own struggle. This is, of course, strictly illegal. But no doubt we will see unions moving swiftly to ensure that the letter of the law is enforced.

There are many more expressions of fighting to protect pay, jobs and conditions. Today, these are the main examples of struggle. With capitalism carrying out a programme of massive attacks, particularly on public sector workers, we can expect many more strikes to take place. The important question is **how** do we struggle? Firstly, we have to recognise that all effective methods of struggle are illegal. We have to reject the union mantra 'we can't do this because it's illegal'. As we have seen in the BA strike, following management/union procedures means only one thing - certain defeat by isolation. This is clear in the BA strike, where cabin crew have been subjected to a war of attrition! Secondly, it's important that we don't fight alone. If the BAA workers and the BA cabin crew had linked up their struggles, this would have presented a powerful movement that could have forced the bosses to back down. Understanding this will be particularly important in the London Underground strikes and we can expect the tactic of divide and rule to be applied to separate drivers and station staff. The fact that they are in different unions will make this easier for management and unions to work this trick.

The old maxim of the workers' movement, 'united we stand, divided we fall!' applies today as it did yesterday. **Melmoth, 04.09.10**

For years the workers in the peripheral countries have been presented as being in competition with workers in the more developed regions. But now they are showing themselves to be our class brothers and sisters; victims like we are of the economic crisis of capitalism. This is why the bourgeoisie prefers to impose a black-out on their struggles

Continued from page 1

The only way to fight the cuts – spread the class struggle!

The difficult fight back

Cuts today have an air of inevitability about them in a way they didn't in the 70s and 80s, after two decades of post-war growth. Now we have the experience of the 1970s, the Labour government with its Social Contract to keep wages down in a period of high inflation, the growth of unemployment to a million; then the Thatcherism of the 1980s with more cuts, with closure of much of the steel and mining industries among other things, along with cuts in public expenditure and the growth of unemployment to 3 million, before they changed the way the figures are counted. We also have the experience of the defeat of the miners' courageous year long strike which seemed to demonstrate the futility of fighting these attacks. These attacks have continued ever since, even with the last Labour government and its stealthy attacks on benefits, its plans to raise the pension age, all of which have recently been accelerated.

But we dare not just put up with the new attacks, for the easier it is for the government to impose them, the harsher they will be.

Difficult as the struggle is we must avoid the siren call of quick fixes, or any political campaign that relies on the Labour Party or the trade unions or other prominent public figures. For example, the Coalition of Resistance, launched by Tony Benn, wants to "*develop and support an alternative programme for economic and social recovery*"; sowing the illusion that capitalism can have such an alternative policy. Supported by many Labour MPs, it asks us to rely on the very political forces that were in government and supervising the attacks until only 4 months ago!

Bangladesh: wildcat strikes and demonstrations

Faced with appalling living and working conditions, with miserable wages and price rises in basic necessities like rice, thousands of textile workers in Bangladesh have launched massive and very determined struggles. In June there were bloody confrontations with the forces of order. The workers were so angry that they rejected the offer of an 80% pay rise drawn up by the government, the bosses and the unions. The strikes spread spontaneously to factories at the edge of the capital Dhaka and to other parts of the country, especially in response to state repression. The workers' indignation with their situation also expressed itself in the destruction of machinery, seen as symbols of their enslavement. But they also set up barricades, blocked motorways and invaded the centre of the city, in order to make their voices heard and defend themselves collectively.

In response to these initiatives, the bosses resorted to lockouts and factory closures while calling on the forces of order to assist them. A number of workers were killed in battles with the police. More than 300 'ringleaders' were arrested; many of them are still in prison. Thousands more were injured by truncheons, tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon. The workers replied by hurling stones and even their own sandals.

Exploitation and class struggle in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has seen more and more wildcat strikes, often violently put down by the state, es-

pecially since the explosion of unrest in 2006. The country employs 3.5 million workers in the textile and garment industry. 80% of this production is exported by the big international corporations. These western merchants of 'designer goods' are full of noble speeches about demanding decent wages for their workers and banning child labour, but they exert a huge pressure on local employers to keep the price of labour power as low as possible. This is perhaps one of the cheapest labour forces in the world. And in a world context of overproduction and crisis, even wages of 19 euros a month seem rather high to the capitalists!

The textile workers, who have often just come from the countryside, cannot survive on such poverty wages. They live in the slums of Dhaka that are often exposed to floods. Their living conditions are in many ways worse than those experienced in the early days of the industrial revolution. The majority of the workforce is made up of women who work over 10 hours a day, many of them through the night, at a frenzied pace in conditions of searing heat. They are victims of all kinds of brutality from the bosses and foremen, including physical threats and sexual abuse. One worker in five is less than 15 years old. The archaic infrastructure and lack of safety regulations mean that accidents are extremely frequent. In 2009 hundreds of workers died in two factory fires.

Now that the poorer countries are witnessing such violent and visible explosions of anger, the bourgeoisie is becoming aware that repression alone is not enough and it is trying to complement the police with more suitable organs of social control – trade unions. In Bangladesh, the main unions have very little grip over the workers. This is why unofficial unions are taking up the slack, presenting themselves as a real opposition and criticising the lack of trade union rights. As a trade unionist in Bangladesh put it: "*Because legal recourse is virtually impossible, spontaneous demonstrations are often the solution*" (www.lemonde.fr). With the same concern, the local trade union, the BGWUC, aware of the need to keep things in the proper framework, emphasises that "*minimising repression can give the union leaders the chance to intervene quickly in the workplace to prevent nascent conflicts from degenerating into the usual violence*" (www.dndf.org).

In other words, the trade unions are insisting that before resorting to the truncheon, the bosses should call on their services to stifle the class struggle. This is why western trade unionists have been travelling to Bangladesh recently. Members of the UK union Unite and the American United Steel Workers have been over there helping local trade unions. It was the same in 1980 when British, French and other trade unionists went over to Poland to help build the Solidarnosc trade union and support its efforts to corral the mass strike.

The common struggle of the working class

Against the various weapons of the enemy class, the proletariat has to be vigilant. The wildcat strikes and militant street demonstrations in Bangladesh are part of a huge international movement which began in 2003 with the public sector strikes in France. Since then, this dynamic of resistance has grown, especially in the poorer regions, as we have seen in countries like Algeria, Turkey and China.

For years the workers in the peripheral countries have been presented as being in competition with workers in the more developed regions. But now they are showing themselves to be our class brothers and sisters; victims like we are of the economic crisis of capitalism. This is why the bourgeoisie prefers to impose a black-out on their struggles while spreading the same old lies. It needs above all to hide all signs of a growing solidarity between the workers.

In this process of international struggle, the workers of the advanced countries have a particular role in extending the movement and, given their historical experience, in providing it with the perspective of revolution. **WH 24.810**

can only rely on itself in the fight back against the cuts and against capitalism. **Alex 4.9.10**

Spain

Solidarity with the metro workers of Madrid!

The following statement was written by the ICC's section in Spain to express our warmest solidarity with the workers of the Madrid metro during their strike against wage cuts

First of all because they have shown that massive and determined struggle is the only answer that the exploited have against the criminal attacks that our exploiters want to impose. In this case a 5% cut in wages. An anti-working class attack that is completely illegal even from the point of view of bourgeois legality, since it is a unilateral violation of the Collective Agreement signed by the authorities. Yet they still dare to call the Metro workers "criminals"!

Solidarity also faced with the campaign of lies aiming at the "social lynching" of these comrades. The right wing politicians and media have carried out a rancid campaign which tries to present the strikes as the pawns in a campaign by the Socialist Party against the "leader" of the PP (Esperanza Aguirre), and made the most rabid calls for sanctions and sackings. However, we should not forget the left's energetic collaboration with this campaign aimed at isolating and disparaging the workers. Aguirre or Rajoy called for a firm hand against these "vandals", the minister for development carried out a massive mobilisation of other means of transport in order to break the strike and the interior minister placed nearly 4500 police at Aguirre's disposal! Whilst the 'left' media was less odious it was more hypocritical, reinforcing the idea of "a strike with hostages" as *El Pais* headlined on the 30th June. These "Red" lackeys of the capitalist system know which side to choose between Aguirre and striking workers.

What they have been most indignant about has not been the problems faced by passengers. It is enough to see the conditions they have to endure on 'normal' days and the growing chaos caused by the increasing deterioration of public transport. Nor are they particularly irritated by the losses incurred as a result of delays or employee absences. It takes some nerve to accuse the striking Madrid Metro workers of violating the "right to work" when Spanish capital has deprived nearly 5 million workers of this "right"!

No, what really worries and preoccupies them about the struggle of the Madrid Metro workers is that they have refused to accept the sacrifices and attacks that have rained down on them from all sides, that they have tried to push back these attacks. These workers have not been willing to accept sterile parades like the civil servants' strike on the 8th June, but instead have given an example of unity and determination. As the aforementioned editorial of *El Pais* recognised "*The works committee claims that there is an Agreement in place until 2012 and that the Madrid Municipality has unilaterally broken it. But this was the case for the Civil Servants ('and they were satisfied with the pantomime of the 8th June' is the paper's subliminal message). It is possible that it is necessary to have a more pedagogic explanation of the seriousness of the situation which demands such sacrifices in exchange for job security (and they have the gall to brand the strikers as blackmailers!) and a greater clarity in order to explain how to square a 5% pay reduction with a later guarantee to maintain purchasing power...*"

As an expression of the response of the working class, the struggle of the comrades of the Madrid metro is full of vital lessons for all workers. Today the struggle has entered a kind of lull and it is difficult to know how it will develop, so it is too soon to make an exhaustive balance sheet of all of these lessons. Here we will take up the most striking ones.

Assemblies: the head and heart of workers' struggle.

One of the characteristics of the struggle of the comrades of the Madrid metro has been the holding of truly mass assemblies. On the 29th June when the assembly decided not to accept the minimum service, most people could not get into the room; on the 30th, despite the campaign of lies about the

struggle, even more took part than the day before. Why? As the metro workers said themselves "*In order to show that we are united as one*".

During these assemblies there was an effort to avoid the habitual tricks of the unions. For example, dispersal and confusion around the calling of the strike. Thus the assembly of the 30th June agreed to implement the minimum service on the 1st and 2nd July in order to avoid the struggle being squeezed between the union which was for a total strike and those that were not. This assembly also drew back from the radical verbiage of the former spokesman for the committee, whose declaration "*We are going to shut down Madrid*" served the interests of the enemies of the struggle in their campaign of disinformation aimed at isolating the metro workers.

The assemblies not only served to temper this phony radicalism and avoid being dragged into provocations. Above all they acted to encourage the workers, to support their determination and militancy. Thus, for example, instead of the usual secret ballots and individual union votes, the metro strike was decided upon and organised by raised hands, which allowed the determination of some comrades to help stimulate those who were more undecided. Of course the media wanted to raise the ghost of some metro workers being 'pressurised' by the pickets, but what has really animated the workers to take part in the stoppage is the fact that it is the result of a conscious decision taken after open and frank discussion, where it was possible to express fears as well as give reasons for the struggle. On one of the websites that served to express the solidarity with this strike (www.usuariossolidarios.wordpress.com) a young Metro worker said frankly that he had attended the assembly of 29th June "*in order to lose his fear of the struggle*".

The trap of the "minimum service"

In the case of the metro strike, the decree on minimum service has served as the basis for battering the strikers and trying to intimidate them in order to undermine the struggle.

Annex:

Letter of solidarity from a group of Madrid postal workers

Total solidarity with the Madrid Metro Strikers

Hello comrades:

The writers of this text are from district 43 of the Madrid Post Office. As postal workers we are in the streets daily; as workers we live several kilometers from our place of work as do others (a relocation imposed precisely by our employers). As public sector workers we are paying for the feast that the government invited the bankers to, we are being privatised, packaged up and contracted out, and like you we are no longer civil servants. We just want to give you our full support. We want to tell you that we are taking the long displacement bus journeys with smiles on our faces, because you have shown us WHAT CAN BE DONE, that we do not have to be indefinitely fucked over by this world, that we can have a little of the dignity that has been lost for some time.

We want you to know that daily we talk with hundreds of people through our job, we know that reality is not what the media shows us, there is anger and excitement, that there are discussions on buses, in squares and bars...

We are with you because you give us hope. In our district whilst we are working we hear comments: "*We are the ones who have to pay*" and "*This strike has balls*", there are those who say

As much as Ms Esperanza Aguirre would like to presented herself as a damsel in distress in the evil clutches of ruthless strikers, the truth is that the decree allows the authorities (the bosses for public sector workers) to set the minimum service. Knowing from experience the margin of maneuver provided by this law and, above all, having the support of Sexta, President of the Madrid local authority, she made a really provocative move by dictating that 50% of the workforce maintain a minimum service.

This trap placed the workers between a rock and a hard place. If they accepted it they would break their hard won commitment not to bend to management dictates. If they didn't provide a service they would give a gift to their adversaries who would blame them for the suffering of their class comrades who are the main users of the metro... Furthermore this strike law, which according to all the defenders of bourgeois order needs "to be toughened", allowed the employer, which in this case we have to insist is the government, to impose sanctions against those who do not provide a minimum service, giving it another bargaining tool. Two days after the metro workers agreed to put in place a minimum service, management increased the number of those sanctioned from 900 to 2800 comrades.

The only way to escape this trap is by seeking the solidarity of the rest of the working class.

Class solidarity is the foundation for the growth of workers' militancy and strength.

The strength of workers' struggles does not reside in their capacity to causes losses for capitalist firms. As the Madrid metro experience has shown, the managers of these firms are more than capable of doing that. Neither does it lie in their ability to paralyse a city or a sector. There again it's difficult to outdo the bourgeois state on that score.

The strength of the workers' struggles is fundamentally that they put forwards, more or less explicitly, a universally valid principle for all of the exploited: that human needs should not be sacrificed on the altar of the law of profit and capitalist competition.

No matter how radical the confrontation between this or that sector of workers and their bosses may be, if the bourgeoisie can present it as something specific or particular, it will be able to defeat it and inflict a demoralising blow against the whole working class. On the other hand, if workers

can win the solidarity of other workers, if they can convince them that their demands are not a threat to the other exploited, but an expression of the same class interests, if they can form their assemblies and hold demonstrations in order to draw in other workers, they will be able to strengthen themselves and the whole of the working class.

For the struggle of the comrades of the Madrid Metro, what was important was not to dedicate pickets to stopping the movement of trains – though of course the assemblies had to ensure its decisions were carried out – but to explain to their comrades working for the EMT or Telemadrid, or the other public sector workers, the cause of the struggle. Moreover, the future of the struggle will not be determined by this or that percentage of a minimum service, although the majority of workers will have to be freed up in order to be able to attend the assemblies, man the pickets, attend demonstrations etc; the most important thing will be to gain the confidence and solidarity of other sectors of workers, to go to the workers' neighborhoods to explain their demands in order to show that the Madrid metro workers are not privileged nor a threat to other workers, but are responding to the attacks caused by capitalism's crisis.

These attacks are going to affect the working class internationally, whatever their conditions or jobs. If the bourgeoisie are able to play off one group of workers against another, or to keep struggles isolated, even if they are radical but trapped in their own corner, they will be able to impose the needs of their system of exploitation. If, on the other hand, workers' struggles begin to spread and unite against these criminal attacks we will be able to impede the imposition of new and more brutal sacrifices. This will be an important step in the development of a proletarian alternative to capitalist poverty and barbarism. **Accion Proletaria, 12th July 2010.**

The 'right to strike' in China is no gain for workers

Bloomberg (4/8/10) report that workers in Guangdong province may soon have the 'right to strike.' "*The proposed law is seen as a trial balloon before a possible countrywide rollout. The rules: If one-fifth or more of a company's staff ask for collective bargaining, then management must discuss workers' grievances. Once workers demand negotiations, the union must elect worker representatives. Until now, union representatives came from management ranks.... For six decades, allowing workers to picket and disrupt production has been officially illegal and subject to punishment. Under the Guangdong proposal, as long as workers first try negotiating and don't engage in violence, they are allowed to strike.*"

The problem for Chinese capitalism is that, regardless of their 'rights', workers have already been launching determined waves of struggle against the ruthless exploitation of the bosses and their state. In the past the Chinese state has very often relied on repression to deal with workers' struggles, now it seems to be adopting the methods of democratic capitalism to undermine workers' efforts to defend their interests.

The Guangdong experiment is no advance for workers. The legal framework will be a fetter on workers' energies. As with workers elsewhere, workers in China need to hold mass meetings to discuss the needs of their collective struggle, to elect delegates who can be recalled at any time, to discuss the best means to spread the struggle to other workers. What the capitalists fear is when workers begin to express their solidarity outside the union framework. *Ishish 4/9/10*

Post men and women of District 43, 1 July 2010

1. COPE is a right wing radio station and Prisa is a left wing media enterprise.

A proletarian discussion forum in Manchester

The Manchester Class Struggle Forum was created at the beginning of 2010 and has met once a month since February. It was motivated by a group of young people who are active in the internet forums like Libcom and who see the need to deepen an understanding of working class politics by bringing similar minded people together, including several older, experienced militants. The aim is to discuss in the context of assisting a fight back against the current and planned attacks on the working class produced by the deepening economic crisis of world capitalism. The meetings are the forum for a confrontation of positions between different organisations and individuals and between the anarchist/ anarcho-syndicalist and marxist traditions and their different perspectives for political work and intervention.

The first discussion of the Forum was held just prior to the British general election and addressed the question of the relevance of parliamentary elections to the working class. Then we discussed the role of the trade unions to today's working class in the context of a revival of current labour disputes in Britain (strikes and occupations). The third meeting took up the question of nationalism and internationalism, both in the history of the workers' movement and with regard to the importance it has for revolutionaries today. Next we attempted to broach the question

of how revolutionaries organise themselves, including some reflections on the positions and practices of Lenin and the Bolshevik party. The meeting in July was about anarcho-syndicalism and we discussed around the personal experience of a member of the Solidarity Federation. The last meeting on August 19th looked at the massive growth of strikes and struggles (and the way the Chinese ruling class is dealing with them) that have seen the working class of China at the forefront of the international class struggle in the recent period, this following the opening up the country to foreign investment and 'free market' forces since the mid-1990s.

What is important about these meetings is that they are open to anyone who wants to discuss and deepen their understanding of revolutionary politics. In addition they have demonstrated a real proletarian spirit of fraternal debate and respect for the different political viewpoints and positions of the participants. They are attended by people involved in various groups, primarily the Anarchist Federation, SolFed, the Commune group and the ICC, as well as people who are not directly involved with any groups, and there have also been people from various left-ist groups, including someone with a profound knowledge of the situation in China, at the last meeting, which proved a good stimulus to the discussion. There is a solid core of regular attenders, amongst them some individuals who are eager and willing to take on the responsibility of

doing the presentations and who are prepared to book the room and post the details on the internet (see the Manchester Class struggle Forum blog on Libcom) without which the meetings couldn't take place. Others attend irregularly and there are some who have only attended once and may not want to return. But it is significant that new faces appear at each meeting. Everyone who attends has been able to contribute by bringing their own knowledge, experience and understanding to the Forum.

We can draw a positive balance sheet of these meetings because they express a commitment to the class struggle and a concern to improve our understanding of the measures and the manoeuvres the ruling class uses against the class's capacity to defend itself against the attacks. The discussions so far have clearly rejected any illusions in the capitalist state, such as through support for the 'lesser evil' in elections or through defence of 'oppressed' minority nationalisms in imperialist wars, in the guise of anti-Americanism or anti- any other imperialism. In other words they have adopted a clearly internationalist orientation.

The Forum did have some discussion at one of the meetings about a joint intervention in the class struggle but this wasn't pursued as the specific strike/dispute that would have been the focus didn't materialise. We did present an ICC international leaflet that was written around the time of the big strikes in Greece for discussion

in the context of organising an intervention in Manchester, but that was at the end of a meeting and there hasn't been the opportunity to re-discuss a joint intervention since. No doubt it will come up again soon.

Just as the working class as a whole is faced with the difficulty of re-connecting with its traditions of organisation and debate, so the Forum is in its early stages and there are many questions posed about how it can best organise its activities, draw conclusions from its discussions, attract new elements to the meetings and develop a coherent framework for combined activities.

There are immense challenges ahead for the working class today. It is under attack internationally because of capitalism's need to make it pay for the deepening economic crisis. If workers are going to resist, it is essential for them to unify their struggles across all the divisions that capital imposes on them. It is equally important for revolutionaries to come together across the different proletarian traditions and across the generations to develop clear political perspectives and a common intervention towards the working class. The Manchester Class Struggle Forum is one small step along this road, and it is an example that deserves to be followed elsewhere in the country. **Duffy 30.8.10**

Continued from page 8

Communist left and internationalist anarchism (pt 2) On the difficulties of debating and the ways to overcome them

historical experience of a proletarian revolution which was momentarily victorious. But it is up to revolutionaries to draw the lessons of this experience as *Bilan* sought to do in the 1930s. For *Bilan* "a deep understanding of the causes of the defeat" was a fundamental requirement. "And this understanding cannot permit any taboo or ostracism. Drawing the balance sheet of the post war events is thus the way to lay the bases for the victory of the proletariat in all countries" (*Bilan* no. 1, November 1933)

The anarchists and the communist left

Periods of counter-revolution are not at all favourable to unity or even cooperation between revolutionary forces. The disarray and dispersion which affects the working class as a whole also has repercussions on its most conscious elements. Among the groups who had broken with Stalinism while still defending the October revolution, debate was not easy in the 20s and 30s, and discussion between the communist left and the anarchists was particularly difficult throughout the period of counter-revolution.

As we saw above, the fact that the outcome of the Russian revolution seemed to provide grist to the mill of its criticisms of marxism meant that the dominant attitude within the anarchist movement was to reject any discussion with the 'inevitably authoritarian' marxists of the communist left. And this was all the more true given that in the 1930s the anarchist movement was much better known than the small groups of the communist left, largely because of the key position occupied by the anarchists in Spain, where one of the most decisive historical events of this period took place.

At the same time, while the anarchist movement generally considered that the events in Spain were a confirmation of the validity of its ideas, the communist left saw them above all as proof of their failure, and this for a long time made collaboration with the anarchists very difficult. We should however bear in mind that *Bilan* did not put all the anarchists in the same pot: for example, they published a tribute to the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri when he was murdered by the Stalinists in May 1937. Berneri had made an intransigent criticism of the policies carried out by the leadership of the Spanish CNT.

More significant was the fact that in 1947 there

was a conference which brought together the Italian communist left (the Turin group), the Gauche Communiste de France, the Dutch left and a certain number of internationalist anarchists. One of them even presided over the conference. This shows that even during the counter-revolution, certain militants of the communist left and of internationalist anarchism were animated by a real spirit of openness, showing a will to discuss and an ability to recognise the fundamental criteria which unite revolutionaries above and beyond their differences. These comrades of 1947 give us a lesson and hope for the future³.

Obviously, the atrocities committed by Stalinism in the usurped name of marxism and communism still weigh very heavily today. They function as an emotional wall which gets in the way of sincere debate and loyal collaboration. The tradition of the - murdered - generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living, as Marx put it in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. This wall will not be demolished overnight. However, it is starting to crack. We have to continue the debate which little by little is developing in front of our eyes, maintaining a fraternal atmosphere and always keeping it in mind that we are all sincerely working towards the goal of communism, of a classless society. **ICC August 2010**

3 In fact, debate, co-operation and mutual respect between internationalist anarchists and communists were not something new at that point. Among other examples, we can refer to what the American anarchist Emma Goldman wrote in her autobiography (published in 1931, ten years after Kronstadt): "Bolshevism was a social conception taken up by the shining spirit of men animated by the ardour and courage of martyrs...it was extremely urgent that the anarchists and other genuine revolutionaries should take up the resolute defence of these defamed men and of their cause in the events which broke out in Russia" (*Living my Life*, translated from the French edition). Another very well known anarchist, Victor Serge, in an article written in August 1920, 'The anarchists and the experience of the Russian revolution' adopted a very similar tone and while still referring to himself as an anarchist and criticising certain aspects of Bolshevik policy, continued to support this party. For their part, the Bolsheviks invited a delegation from the anarcho-syndicalist CNT in Spain to the second congress of the Communist International. They held very fraternal discussions and invited the CNT to join the International.

ICC Online

Recent additions include

Poland, August 1980: rebirth of the mass strike

"Even though 30 years have passed since then, and even though many of the workers who took part in the strike movement at the time have become unemployed or forced to emigrate, their experience is of inestimable value for the entire working class. As the ICC already said in 1980: 'On all these points the struggles in Poland represent a great step forward in the world-wide struggle of the proletariat, which is why these struggles are the most important for half a century'."

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Solidarity with the workers of Panama: Statement by LECO (Liga por la Emancipación de la Clase Obrera) , Costa Rica

You can't fight the Mafia and corruption with "more democracy" (on the appeals put out by Saviano in Italy)

British state's links to radical Islamic terrorism

The 18th Congress of Révolution Internationale: Confidence in the future

www.en.internationalism.org

International Review 142

Capitalism has reached a dead-end: neither austerity packages nor recovery plans can change anything

"The austerity packages which a large number of countries are putting in place can only accelerate the all into depression and will engender a process of deflation, some sighs of which are already appearing."

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"In this series... we want to answer the question by analysing the historical experience of the proletariat."

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Contact the ICC

Debate is vital to the revolutionary movement. One of the most important elements of our activity, defined in our Basic Positions, is the "Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions". This, we are convinced, is only possible through the confrontation and discussion of differing views and positions within the revolutionary camp.

For this reason, we urge our readers to write to us with their comments, opinions and disagreements on the positions and analyses that we defend in our written press, including our web site.

We will do our best to reply to all serious correspondence as quickly as possible, although given our limited resources we may not always be able to do so immediately. Should the subject matter be of general interest, then we may publish both correspondence and our reply in our press.

While debate amongst revolutionaries is vital, it is equally necessary not to fall into the trap of thinking that our activity is something anodyne and acceptable to the bourgeois dictatorship disguised under the trappings of the democratic state. We will not under any circumstances publish our correspondents' real names, nor their home or e-mail addresses.

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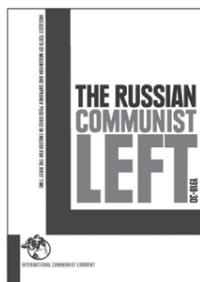
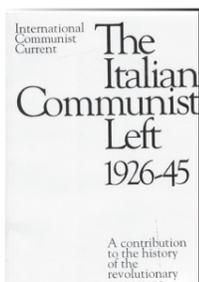
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ICC Public Forums

The catastrophic nature of capitalism

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BIRMINGHAM
 9th October, 2.00pm
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ICC books on the history of the workers' movement

- The Italian Communist Left £10**
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- Communism is not a nice idea but a material necessity £7.50**
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Communist left and internationalist anarchism (part 2)

On the difficulties of debating and the ways to overcome them

In the first part of this new series of articles, we tried to show that there are fundamental points of agreement between the internationalist anarchists and the communist left. For the ICC, without denying that important differences exist, the crucial thing is that we are all determined defenders of workers' autonomy, since we refuse to give our support "even in a 'critical' or 'tactical' way, or in the name of the 'lesser evil', to a sector of the bourgeoisie - whether the 'democratic' bourgeoisie against the 'fascist' bourgeoisie, or the left against the right, or the Palestinian bourgeoisie against the Israeli bourgeoisie, etc. Such an approach has two concrete implications:

1. *Rejecting any electoral support or cooperation with parties which manage the capitalist system or defend this or that form of this system (social democracy, Stalinism, 'Chavismo', etc)*

2. *Above all, during any war, it means maintaining an intransigent internationalism, refusing to choose between this or that imperialist camp."* ('The Communist Left and Internationalist Anarchism', Part one, *WR* 336)

All those who defend these essential positions in theory and practice need to be aware that they belong to the same camp: the camp of the working class and the revolution

Inside this camp, there are necessarily differences of opinion and position between individuals, groups and tendencies. It is by debating on an international scale, openly, fraternally, but also firmly, without making any false concessions, that revolutionaries can best participate in the general development of proletarian consciousness. But in order to do this, they have to try to understand the origin of the difficulties which still stand in the way of such a debate.

These difficulties are the product of history. The revolutionary wave which began in 1917 in Russia and 1918 in Germany put an end to the First World War but it was defeated by the bourgeoisie. A terrible counter-revolution descended on the working class in all countries, the most monstrous expressions being Stalinism and Nazism - precisely in the two countries where the proletariat had been in the forefront of the revolutionary tide.

For the anarchists, the establishment, by a party which claimed to be marxist, of a terrifying police dictatorship in the country of the October revolution was seen as a confirmation of the criticisms it had always made of marxist ideas, reproaching them for their 'authoritarianism' and 'central-

ism', for not calling for the immediate abolition of all forms of the state the day after the revolution, for not making the principle of Liberty their number one value. At the end of the 19th century, the triumph of reformism and of 'parliamentary cretinism' within the Socialist parties had already been seen by the anarchists as confirmation of the validity of their refusal to take any part in elections'. It was very similar following the triumph of Stalinism. For them, this regime was just the logical consequence of the 'congenital authoritarianism' of marxism. In particular, they saw a continuity between the policies of Lenin and those of Stalin, since, after all, political terror had already developed when Lenin was still alive, and indeed not long after the revolution.

Obviously, one of the arguments given to prove this 'continuity' is the fact that, as early as spring 1918, certain anarchist groups in Russia were repressed and their newspapers shut down. But the 'decisive' argument was the bloody crushing of the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921 by the Bolshevik power headed by Lenin and Trotsky. The Kronstadt episode was obviously very significant because the workers and sailors of this naval base had been in the vanguard of the October 1917 insurrection which overthrew the bourgeois government and allowed the soviets (the workers' and soldiers' councils) to take power. And it was precisely this most advanced sector of the revolution which had rebelled in 1921, raising the slogan 'power to the soviets, not the parties'.

The communist left and the Russian experience

Inside the communist left, there is full agreement among its different tendencies on these obviously essential points:

- recognition of the bourgeois, counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism;
- rejection of any 'defence of the workers' bastion', the USSR, and in particular the rejection of any participation in the Second World War in the name of defending the USSR or on any other pretext;

1. For Lenin, "*In Western Europe revolutionary syndicalism in many countries was a direct and inevitable result of opportunism, reformism and parliamentary cretinism*" (Lenin's preface to a pamphlet by Voinov (Lunacharsky) on the party's attitude towards the unions - 1907). Anarchism, which had existed well before revolutionary syndicalism but was close to it, also benefited from the evolution of the Socialist parties in this direction

- the characterisation of the economic and social system in the USSR as a particular form of capitalism, state capitalism in its most extreme form.

On these three decisive points, the communist left is thus in agreement with the internationalist anarchists but is totally opposed to the Trotskyists who considered the Stalinist state to be a 'degenerated workers' state', the Communist Parties to be 'workers' parties' and who, in their great majority, enlisted in the Second World War (mainly in the ranks of the Resistance)

On the other hand, within the communist left, there are notable differences in understanding the process which led from the 1917 revolution to Stalinism.

Thus, the Dutch left current (the 'council communists' or 'councilists') consider that the October revolution was a bourgeois revolution whose function was to replace the feudal Czarist regime with a bourgeois state more capable of developing a modern capitalist economy. The Bolshevik party, which was at the head of this revolution, is itself seen as a bourgeois party of a particular type, charged with establishing a kind of state capitalism, even if its militants and leaders were not really conscious of this. Thus, for the 'councilists' there is indeed a continuity between Lenin and Stalin, the latter being, in some way, the 'executive heir' of the former. In this sense there is a certain convergence between the anarchists and the councilists, although the latter did not give up their reference to marxism

The other main tendency of the communist left, the one which descends from the Italian left, considered that the October revolution and the Bolshevik party were proletarian in nature². The framework that this tendency puts forward for understanding the victory of Stalinism is the isolation of the revolution in Russia - the result of the defeat of the revolutionary struggles in other countries, above all Germany. Even before the October revolution, the whole workers' movement, and the anarchists were no exception, thought that if the revolution didn't extend onto the world scale, it would be defeated. But the fundamental historical element which illustrated the tragic destiny of the Russian revolution was that this defeat didn't come from the 'outside' (the White armies, sup-

2. We should note that there were several groups who came out of the Bolshevik party which had the same analyses. See our book *The Russian Communist Left*.

organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active

ported by the world bourgeoisie, had been beaten) but from the 'inside', through the working class losing power, above all losing all control over the state which had arisen in the wake of the revolution, as well as through the degeneration and betrayal of the party which had led the revolution, through its integration into this state.

Having said this, the different groups who claim descent from the Italian left don't all share the same analyses on the policies of the Bolsheviks during the early years of the revolution. For the 'Bordigists', the monopoly of power by a political party, the establishment of a form of monolithism in the party, the use of terror and even the bloody suppression of the Kronstadt revolt are not to be criticised. On the contrary, they still fully endorse such policies; and given that internationally the Italian left current has largely been known about through the 'Bordigists', this has served to repel a lot of anarchists from the communist left.

But the Italian left current cannot be reduced to Bordigism. The Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy (which later became the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left) undertook a whole work of drawing up a balance sheet of the Russian experience (the name of its French review was *Bilan* or Balance Sheet). Between 1945 and 1952, the Gauche Communiste de France (which published *Internationalisme*) carried on this work and the current which was to form the ICC in 1975 had already taken up its torch in Venezuela in 1964 and France in 1968.

This current (and also a current within the Partito Comunista Internazionale in Italy) considered it vital to criticise certain aspects of Bolshevik policy from the very beginning of the revolution. In particular, many of the elements which the anarchists denounce, the taking of power by a party, the terror, and in particular the repression of Kronstadt, are seen by our organisation (following on from *Bilan* and the GCF) as errors, even crimes committed by the Bolsheviks which can perfectly well be criticised from a marxist standpoint, and even from the standpoint of Lenin, notably his *State and Revolution* written in 1917. These errors can be explained in various ways which we can't go into here, but which are part of the general debate between the communist left and the internationalist anarchists. Let's just say here that the essential reason is the fact that the Russian revolution was the first (and to this day the only)

Continued on page 6

Political positions of the ICC

World Revolution is the section in Britain 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 ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union

factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 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*.