



# world revolution

## Cuts in living standards The false opposition of Labour and the unions

The Comprehensive Spending Review is not due till 20 October, bringing cuts of up to 25% in some government departments. Workers are not so much waiting for the cuts to be announced as waiting for even more cuts on top of those announced in the last Labour budget, the first coalition budget and others since then.

In fact the austerity measures that have been imposed over the last two years are only the latest, and harshest, in a series going back 40 years and resulting in unemployment which has risen higher and lasted longer with every recession (see page 2). They have also robbed us of much that was regarded as an essential part of the welfare state in the 1960s (student grants, school milk, a large number of hospital beds, etc). The relentless pressure to drive down benefits spending, particularly by taking people off incapacity benefit and Disability Living Allowance and cutting housing benefit, is already well underway (see page 2). The new government plan to get people off benefits and into work is unlikely to succeed in getting them into work any more than attempts by previous Labour and Tory governments, because this depends on the economy being able to create the jobs – even with state subsidy – but it will make life harder for the unemployed.

The austerity drive has created more interest in the TUC and party conference season than we've seen for a long time, as the media have looked at how the TUC and Labour Party will respond to the discontent growing among workers, and at the Lib-Dems to see how the coalition is holding up – which it is at present. Will there be another 'winter of discontent' like the widespread strikes in the public sector and beyond in 1978-79? Will there be big confrontations between government and unions as under Thatcher? The TUC have



Left, right and centre play their roles in imposing the cuts

certainly made some militant sounding noises: Brendan Barber condemned cuts in services and jobs which "increase inequality... make Britain a darker, brutish, more frightening place"; Dave Prentis of Unison said "when the call was there" they would "co-ordinate industrial action". All this sound and fury actually comes down to ... a demonstration outside Westminster on the eve of the spending review and a demonstration in March. What of Bob Crow, famous for being a militant firebrand? When he wants to go beyond his TUC colleagues in calling for alliances with communities, he is calling for direct action – what the *Guardian* (14/9/10) accurately described as "Fathers4Justice-style publicity stunts over a general strike".

In fact the TUC, like the Labour Party under the leadership of 'Red Ed' Miliband (see page 3), wants the deficit reduced over a longer period of time, and with a 'fairness test' according to a TUC statement. Downing Street is spot on about

wanting "a genuine partnership with the trade unions". After all, the only disagreement is about the details of the timing of the cuts and not the fact – 'fairness' is a nonsense since all measures to deal with the crisis must hit the working class. This will become much more stormy when there is more workers' struggle and the unions needed to put on a more militant mask – this will not break but disguise the 'genuine partnership'.

### Workers do not need the unions to struggle

From left to right, everyone equates workers' struggles with the actions of the unions. *Socialist Worker* wants them to call a general strike, *Socialist Resistance* wants local anti-cuts campaigning to build the demonstration in March. There have been union called general strikes against austerity in Greece, France, Spain and the important Tekel strike in Turkey which can tell us much about what that may achieve.

In Greece, faced with a horrendous austerity package, the unions responded by keeping the struggle divided up: a public sector strike and march to parliament to protest against the attacks on pensions by the Adedy union on 10 February; a strike called by PAME, the Stalinist union, on 11 February; and a private sector strike by the GSEE, the largest union, representing 2 million workers, on 24 February. "The demonstrations organised by PAME and the CP never come together with the demonstrations called by other workers' unions and student organizations." (Proles and Poor's Credit Rating Agency, aka TPTG 14/3/10, in *WR* 333).

In France around 3 million people participated in the demonstrations against the raising of the pension age on 7th and 23rd September. These days of action were organised on the typical union model of keeping everyone isolated behind their own union banners, chanting sterile slogans and deafened by bangers and noisy sound systems. All to prevent any real discussion. Unlike the students who successfully struggled against the CPE by calling demonstrations at the weekend so as many workers as possible could join them, a struggle controlled by assemblies, mass meetings, of the students, the unions delayed the next demonstration for 2 weeks to a weekday when workers could participate only by losing a day's pay.

In Turkey workers from Tekel were so disgusted with the trade union they tried to form their own

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# Persistent unemployment shows the deepening of the crisis

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes the result of economic crises: “an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity - the epidemic of over-production”. Why is overproduction an “absurdity”? Because it is not overproduction in terms of actual human need but in terms of the market requirements of capitalist accumulation; real human beings may starve to death but where there is no profit, capitalism will not produce food.

Another commodity that suffers from this absurdity of overproduction in capitalism is that of labour power. This is expressed in the phenomenon of unemployment. While begging and vagrancy existed under previous modes of production (usually as a result of physical incapacity, war or famine), unemployment is a curiously capitalist phenomenon. Unemployment follows the needs of capitalist accumulation and plays an essential role in that process.

## Capitalism needs unemployment to function

Unemployment is integral to capitalist accumulation, enabling the system to indirectly force the working class to accept the working conditions that cost capital the least. The oversupply of labour helps keep the price of labour down and helps the capitalist in the drive for profits. In the classical periods of depression during the nineteenth century the oversupply became particularly acute, forcing labour costs down rapidly and putting pressure on those still employed to increase productivity for fear of losing their jobs. In the nineteenth century periods of boom, surplus labour allowed expanding capitalism to take on workers quickly without poaching them from other parts of the economy or causing wages to rise to the point where they threatened the accumulation cycle.

As Marx (*Capital*, Vol 1, Chapter 25) put it “the industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active labour-army; during the periods of over-production and paroxysm, it holds its pretensions in check. Relative surplus population is therefore the pivot upon which the law of demand and supply of labour works. It confines the field of action of this law within the limits absolutely convenient to the activity of exploitation and to the domination of capital”.

So for all the fine speeches of the capitalist class – in the US the state still has a legal requirement to work towards full employment – in the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie knew full well that their ability to accumulate depended on the perpetuation of unemployment. In the twentieth and twenty first centuries, with capitalism now a system in decline and in a permanent economic crisis (taking various forms) the bourgeoisie, even when it resorts to massive debt to stimulate the economy knows that levels of unemployment barely go down whatever the level of economic growth.

## Unemployment and the welfare state

Unemployment has any number of serious consequences for those individuals and communities that are subjected to it: rising crime, drug abuse, ill-health. Studies suggest that long-term unemployment can reduce life expectancy typically by around seven years. These consequences often drive the working class to react. If out of work you don't have the strike weapon, but the unemployed can organise themselves, and can unite with those who are still in work. The greatest fear of the ruling class is that such reactions will take on revolutionary forms but other forms of social unrest can unsettle the bourgeoisie.

In the period of capitalism's historic decline the ruling class therefore does make some effort to limit as far as possible the impact of unemployment on the working class. It is no accident we have witnessed the creation of the so-called 'welfare state' in many of the advanced countries following World War II.

Nonetheless, since the end of the post-war boom, capitalism has been compelled to progressively shrink the benefits paid to the unemployed.

In the UK, for example, in 1984 the ILO measure of unemployment and the claimant count were both roughly the same. By 2010 approximately a million people who are unemployed by the ILO measure were not in receipt of any unemployment benefits.

The ILO figure alone, however, does not paint the full picture of unemployment. It largely excludes the 2.7 million who receive sickness and disability benefits. The hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie is revealed in the fact that after years of deliberately shifting as many unemployed people as it could onto sickness benefits in the 80s and 90s, it is now launching a vicious attack on this benefit stream.

The media portrays the recipients of benefits as fraudsters and scroungers, but it doesn't explain why their numbers are highest in those areas where employment chances are the most limited, namely those areas that have been most scarred by the collapse of traditional industries.

Although unemployment has not tended to fall with the fluctuations of the economy during the last twenty years there has been a rise in levels of employment. This can be accounted for by growing female participation in the labour market, especially younger mothers who work part-time and for generally lower wages. It is also important to remember the growing pressure on students and the retired to take up part-time work to support themselves. The number of part-time workers has grown from around 5 million in 1984 to nearly 8 million in 2010. A significant proportion of these part-time workers are involuntary part-timers – those who are forced to work part-time because they cannot get full-time work. Although the numbers of involuntary part-timers fluctuates, the lowest figure achieved since 2000 was still nearly 600,000. It now stands at over a million. Similarly, although the number of involuntary temporary workers also went down over the same period, it remained at roughly 400,000 at its lowest part.

## Unemployment and crisis

Whatever can be read into the official figures it is clear that behind them the level of unemployment and underemployment in the economy is a growing problem for capitalism. The fact that real unemployment has persisted at a high level for decades shows that for capitalism the unemployed are less a reserve army and more a permanent reminder of the bourgeoisie's inability to draw millions into productive (or even unproductive!) work.

## Brutal attack on benefits

Like their European counterparts, the British bourgeoisie and its new coalition government faced with a massive deficit have unleashed an unprecedented attack on the benefit system. On 22 June George Osborne initially announced an £11 billion cut in an emergency budget trying to find £40 billion worth of 'savings' over the next six years.

On October 20 this budget will be consolidated with a further range of attacks in a Comprehensive Spending Review. Alongside these massive proposed cuts will be the biggest 'reform' of the welfare system since the 1940s. Under new proposals which will be introduced as a white paper in a matter of weeks, the present framework for claiming benefits will change completely. Welfare benefits for the unemployed and low paid will be brought together under a new universal credit system planned by the government. The aim is to move everyone off the old benefit system over the next 10 years.

Disability living allowance (the main target for the cuts) would be separate from 'universal credit' with the new system allowing carers to take part time or short time work. Here, the government is deliberately separating these cuts as they will make it almost impossible to claim these benefits. These changes are being brought in to tackle perceived long-term welfare 'dependency' by unemployed workers. In a touching note of concern Iain Duncan Smith said that the long term unemployed and sick would be “better off working than depending on benefits.” The reality is that this new government wants to cut the benefit system to the bone. Osborne and Duncan Smith “agreed on an affordable investment package to reform the welfare system which was 'broken and wildly expensive and often traps the very people it is meant to help'” (BBC online 3/10/10)

After detailed examination of the budget measures, the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that the UK faces the longest, deepest sustained period of cuts to public service spending since World War II. It is the first time that a British government has proposed six consecutive years of spending cuts.

The government has targeted the public sector, imposing a wage freeze for the next two years with a projected job loss of 725,000 jobs planned

over the next five years in the sector. This and an increase in VAT from 15% to 17.5% - an increase designed to help pay for the budget deficit - will ensure that there will be a massive increase in unemployment. The government understands this and wants to have the right type of 'universal benefit' ready for those thrown onto the scrapheap of unemployment.

We can see that the most important target of the government cuts is the massive cost of the benefit system, in particular invalidity benefits and housing allowances.

One million people face eviction from their homes. 900,000 people in private rented accommodation will lose their housing benefit under Osborne's plan to cut housing allowance in this sector by 40%. If you are living on benefits then it's obvious that it is impossible to pay that rate of short-fall in your rent.

Labour's former Chancellor Alistair Darling has said that Labour would have not made such drastic cuts. He's a liar! Labour had already promised across-the-board cuts of 20%. In addition some 70% of the fiscal consolidation measures contained in Osborne's budget had already been identified by Labour and were in train when the coalition came to power. Across the whole political spectrum of the bourgeoisie there was no secret of the need to make such drastic cuts. And it was always clear that they would hit hardest the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population:

- Workers receiving Job Seekers Allowance who have claimed for more than 12 months will have their Housing Benefits reduced by 10% from 2013.
- Non-dependant deductions will increase, this is the deduction made to housing benefit when there are adults staying in the household, including grown up children.
- Disability Living Allowance (a notoriously difficult benefit to access) will be subject to more stringent medical assessment. Its here that there will be a wide scale reduction in those claiming this allowance.
- Child benefit will be frozen over the next two years.
- Child tax credits will be reduced; currently families earning over £40,000 a year will lose

Not only has real unemployment remained at consistently high levels but workers are experiencing increasing lengths in their periods of unemployment. For example, in the United States, the average length of a period of unemployment has been increasing, so that it is now 35 weeks, whereas in 1974 it was just over 15 weeks. The world's largest economy is taking longer and longer to reintegrate those workers expelled from production. In addition to that there are all those who never return to the workforce, or do so only sporadically, or, in the case of many young workers, take literally years before they get their first job.

Paradoxically, the growing mass of the unemployed often takes place with a growth in skills shortages in key business and geographical areas which also stifles accumulation as capitalism is finding it harder and harder to equip its wage-slaves with the skills needed to make them productive. The relentless pressure on profits decreases the incentive for the bourgeoisie to train its workers – increasingly, this role has been passed onto the state and its increasingly under-resourced education system. Capitalists, meanwhile, also often insist only on employing workers who can 'hit the ground running'; that is, who require minimum investment before they can be profitably exploited

These phenomena are clear examples of the remorseless decay at the heart of the profits system: the growing inability of capital to successfully exploit the labour power of the working class.

Ishish 3/10/10

their entitlement. In 2012 this upper limit will fall to £30,000 and those earning £25,000 will experience a benefit cut (most families with two or more earning will have an income over £30,000).

• All welfare benefits will increase by the consumer price increase rather than the retail price index which will effectively lower the value of any increase.

The British bourgeoisie has no choice but to carry out these attacks. They are the most savage since the 1930s. The same attacks are being conducted around the world as capitalism attempts to make us pay for their crisis. **Melmoth 03/10/10**

## ICC Online Discussion forum

The ICC website has recently opened up a discussion forum, replacing the system of comments on individual articles. The idea is to make the discussions easier to follow and more focused. We aim to provide a space for the fraternal, constructive confrontation of ideas without personalisation or sectarianism. Discussion is already underway on a number of issues, with contributions from different parts of the world and posts reflecting a variety of political views. We see our forum as complementary to others that we already participate on, such as libcom.org.

[en.internationalism.org/forum/1056](http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056)

## 'Red Ed' – a good choice for the bourgeoisie

According to many of the bourgeoisie's journalists the Labour party has thrown away the opportunity to elect a mature, serious leader in the form of David Milliband and instead chosen his younger brother, nicknamed by the press 'Red Ed'. These journalists and political analysts seem to think that the Blair years of 'New Labour' provide the paradigm for judging everything, without observing that recent developments at the economic level have substantially changed the situation. The bourgeoisie have to prepare for the future, not look to the past. The Labour party and the trades unions that played the key role in deciding on Ed Milliband as the new leader have to adapt themselves to the deeper, open expression of the economic crisis and the social instability that is likely to go along with it – in particular the obvious danger of greater levels of working class struggles.

The great idea of the Blair years was that all parties have to compete for the 'centre ground' and to appeal to the 'middle class.' This class appears to include practically everybody except for an excluded underclass of poor workers (either with badly paid jobs or else unemployed). The government is exhorting the unemployed to stop making the 'life style choice' of staying at home, and to get jobs (since, naturally, the lack of jobs is not due to the capitalist crisis, but due to their own lack of 'aspiration'). There is a small amount of sympathy for those with lower paid jobs, but again this really shows a lack of effort and aspiration. And then there is the great 'middle class' who basically are doing fine – according to the way the story is told.

In reality the middle strata of the population – the petty bourgeoisie in marxist terms – is not the majority of the population and neither is it doing fine. Made up of the proprietors of small businesses, owners of small landholdings, small farmers, partners in professional firms etc it is just as affected by the crisis as the working class – worse in many ways. This is a normal and inescapable feature of the crisis and typically has political manifestations. In USA the problem of the declining incomes of the greater part of the population (white collar and blue collar) is actually acknowledged. Obama recently gave an interview to Rolling Stone magazine where he listed middle-class income decline – along with civil rights and civil liberties – as a key issue in the next couple of years. Like the British the American bourgeoisie use the term 'middle class' in a very broad and inclusive sense, but at least they acknowledge clearly that the incomes of all except the very rich have actually been declining for many years.

The middle class in the proper sense of the term are hard hit by the crisis even if some of them are relatively well off from the standpoint of workers – precisely because their 'aspirations' are destroyed. This adds to social instability, but can be contained by the bourgeoisie because the petty bourgeoisie have no historical perspective.

The working class is often identified as only blue collar industrial workers, but in reality all those who have only their labour power to sell are part of the working class. Whether white or blue collar, working in an office or factory, whether in a 'service' industry or in manufacturing, all are workers. The working class is a much more serious problem for the bourgeoisie because they do have an historical perspective – the communist revolution – and because they are ultimately capable of a level of struggle that contests the bourgeoisie's control over society. The bourgeoisie are very aware of this and have to organise themselves to deal with the threat, even if we are clearly some way from massive confrontations between the classes. The most important role of the Labour party is to position itself to deal with the developing threat of the class struggle – this it does in conjunction with the trade unions, which are the main weapon of the bourgeoisie against the class struggle. In government the Labour Party imposes austerity, in opposition it denounces the suffering caused by government austerity measures.

'Red Ed' despite owing his election to the unions, has immediately distanced himself from them. Does this make sense? It does, because the Labour Party may have other responsibilities

to fulfill. In any case, even when the party is in opposition it does not simply identify itself with the class struggle – after all, neither the party nor the trades unions are actually trying to encourage the class struggle – their role is to contain it. But clearly, it is not advantageous to the bourgeoisie to have the Labour party continuing to make the sort of attacks as are going to come in the coming period.

Furthermore, matters are not even as simple as that for the bourgeoisie at the current juncture. The coalition seems at present quite stable and there is no obvious reason they should not be able to make the necessary attacks, even if there is disquiet among sections of the Liberal Democrats about the position they have got themselves in. Nonetheless it is at least possible that the Labour party could need to move into government again at some point in the not too far distant future, since the economic crisis is so profound that almost anything is possible at the political level. For example, although the Labour party's 'opposition' to the cuts is mainly political – to make itself look good in front of the working class – it also has sound economic sense in it. It is not that the cuts are not 'necessary' – they are. But there is also a danger that they will undermine the tentative signs of a very limited recovery in the economy – and that will make the debt situation even worse, since the key is the ratio between the size of the economy and the level of debt. Many serious economic commentators are pointing this out – including a senior commentator in the Financial Times, for example. Even Cameron and Clegg can hardly be unaware of this danger and that they are taking a very big risk.

Because there are so many uncertainties in the situation the bourgeoisie has to maintain its flexibility. And this is the other reason why Ed Milliband is a good choice for the bourgeoisie. He is carrying a lot less political baggage than the other contestants for the Labour leadership, mainly because he is younger. This allows him for the present to be all things to all people, and gives him a great deal of room for manoeuvre if the political and economic situation gets more difficult.

**Hardin 2/10/10**

## Cuts in living standards The false opposition of Labour and the unions

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strike committee, and when they tried to talk to the union they found their way barred by 15,000 police leading one worker to conclude: "If you ask me, it is quite natural for the police to protect the union and the union bosses, because don't the union and the trade-unionists protect the government and capital? Don't the trade-unions exist only in order to keep the workers under control on behalf of capital?" (<http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/2010/05/tek-el-what-are-the-unions-doing>).

On 29 September workers in Spain showed their anger at the cuts by a general strike affecting, among other industries, refuse collection and transport. However workers show their greatest strength when they organise themselves in general assemblies which discuss and take decisions on the struggle, as the Madrid metro workers did, and there was real solidarity from other workers, as in the Post Office (*WR* 337).

We have also seen some very powerful wildcat strikes where the unions are very weak and unable to control the workers, as in China and Bangladesh (*WR* 337 and 335).

## Leaks on defence cuts reveal divisions on imperialist strategy

In this year's general election all the major parties agreed that the extent of the deficit meant cuts in expenditure would be at the top of the incoming government's agenda. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have been able to work together because they share this priority; and Ed Miliband, even in opposition where 'radical' poses are easy, admits that cuts are inescapable.

While some areas have supposedly been marked as off limits or 'ring fenced', in reality nothing is sacred. The conventional view of the Tories is of a party of unembarrassed militarists, but the ongoing debate about the extent and nature of defence cuts shows that no area will be spared.

The idea of Tory defence cuts should not be a surprise. Look at the early 1990s. After the end of the Cold War and with the break up of the imperialist blocs there were widespread cuts in defence spending and reductions in the numbers of the armed forces. The total strength of NATO armed forces went from 5.4 million in 1985 to just over 4 million in 1995. In the UK, under Conservative governments, the proportion of GDP expenditure on defence went from 5.2% in 1985 to 3.1% in 1995. There was talk of a 'peace dividend', but that's all it was, just talk.

Liam Fox's letter leaked to the *Telegraph* showed that the Defence Secretary doesn't have the same view as Cameron and Osborne. In the summer he said that "We face some difficult, delicate and politically charged decisions" and that "We must act ruthlessly and without sentiment." Yet now he is warning of the "grave political consequences" of "such draconian cuts."

Fox warns that British imperialism "will be unable to undertake all the standing commitments" it is involved with today. For example: Britain "could not carry out the Sierra Leone operation again"; the Navy would have to withdraw from

one of its "standing communities" – the Gulf, Indian Ocean or Caribbean; there would be a limitation on the "ability to deploy maritime forces rapidly into high-threat areas"; there would be "some risk to civil contingent capability" including dealing with strikes, terrorist attacks and fuel shortages.

One commentator, referring to the possibilities of repeating the Sierra Leone operation, wrote "If the Government sticks to its plan of slashing the defence budget by between 10 and 20 per cent, we won't be able to defend ourselves against the Icelandic fishing fleet, let alone drug-crazed groups of Afghan militiamen" (*Daily Telegraph* 1/10/10). This is a polemical point made for effect, but it is part of a real debate.

### How close is Britain to America?

The divisions within the British government stem from a longstanding difference in the ruling class on the nature of Britain's relationship with US imperialism.

When Fox went to the US in September he told US Defence Secretary Gates that in future Britain "would only be able to provide the manpower for medium-scale conflicts or for support in large conflicts where others took a greater part" (*Telegraph* 24/9/10) In practice this meant that "the military could only deploy 6,000 troops to any one war zone". Currently there are around 10,000 in Afghanistan, but Britain is committed to leaving by 2014. During the meeting Gates warned the British government "that deep cuts in the Armed Forces could imperil the Special Relationship between the two countries".

After the meeting Fox said "We need to concentrate on where we think we can be best contributors as an ally to the US." This was part of his attempt to reassure his hosts. Fox is from that part of the British bourgeoisie that wants to maintain the closest links with the US. British imperialism might only be able to fight on its own in medium-sized conflicts, but would support greater powers if called on. 'Greater power' in this context can only mean the US.

Against this the main faction of the British bourgeoisie is more concerned to emphasise an independent orientation for British imperialism. The proposed defence cuts come partly from economic necessity and partly from an acknowledgment of reality. The basic question is asked: 'what has Britain gained from allying itself with the US in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan?'

In Iraq, for example, Britain has met with no successes. In a forthcoming documentary Colonel Peter Mansoor, a past US commander of coalition forces in Iraq says "I don't know that you could see the British withdrawal from Basra in 2007 in any light other than a defeat." A retired US general thought "it was a huge mistake to pull out of Basra and to leave the people of Basra to be subjected to the Iranian surrogates who brutalised them, intimidated them, terrorised them." Whether seen as a defeat or a mistake the British bourgeoisie is still capable of learning from experience.

This year we saw another British retreat, this time in Afghanistan. After four years in the Sangin area of Helmand province British troops have been withdrawn and redeployed to an easier area, in central Helmand. Their role has been taken over by US forces. Again, according to those who advocate an orientation more independent of the US, withdrawal from Afghanistan can't come too soon.

An article in the *Spectator* (2/10/10) summarises the differences "should Britain exercise an expensive blue water strategy or concentrate on a petite professional army designed for home defence and limited expeditions?" Part of the ruling class emphasises the need "to build more small ships to defend trade routes, target seaborne crime and aid humanitarian operations" and understand that "Britain's military future lies in counter-terrorism and post-conflict resolution". Of course there is more to British imperialism's military strategy than that, but it shows that the debate over defence cuts is not just down to the state of the British economy. **Car 2.10.10**

### All over the world, same crisis, same struggle

There is no doubt that workers all over the world face the same capitalist exploitation, the same capitalist crisis, austerity everywhere, and have the same need to struggle against it. Large scale strikes have largely not developed in Britain, workers are discontented but often do not see how to take the struggle forward. Struggles here also give the same lessons as those elsewhere in the world – when unions are in charge of the struggle workers are kept separate, as with the BA cabin crew and BAA workers, whatever fine speeches are made about "co-ordinated industrial action", but when workers go into struggle on their own they find ways of showing solidarity as with the Heathrow baggage handlers strike in support of Gate Gourmet workers 5 years ago.

We see the same effort to understand and respond to the situation on discussion forums and in local groups discussing working class politics, such as the Manchester class struggle forum (*WR* 337). Workers getting together in discussion circles or networks, discussing the lessons of past struggles, and all questions of working class politics, the dire perspective capitalism has to offer and how it can be overthrown, are an important promise and preparation for the future. **Alex 2/10/10**

# Imperialism hooked on drugs

Recent newspaper articles, Simon Jenkins in *The Guardian*, September 10 for example, have expressed some hand-wringing within the bourgeoisie recently over the question of drugs: the obvious failure of the “war on drugs”, whether to legalise this or that drug, whether to decriminalise and so on. It’s all hot air. Drugs and the drugs business are integral aspects of capitalism and, further, integral aspects of militarism, imperialism and capitalist decomposition. Jenkins points to the 28,000 people in Mexico killed in the last four years as a direct result of the drugs trade. He also gives an estimate of half-a-million people directly employed in the Mexican drugs trade - other estimates go up to a million<sup>1</sup>. In Mexico the drugs industry is one of the few expanding businesses in an increasingly poverty-stricken country and President, Felipe Calderon, has admitted defeat in his four year “war on drugs”. Drugs war ‘expert’ Edgardo Buscalgia in *The Guardian* 13.9.10, has called the predominance of the drugs cartels in Mexico a “narco-insurrection” and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, earlier this month, went some way to suggesting that Mexico was a failed state, with all the military implications that that has for this weaker neighbour of US imperialism. Jenkins bemoans the impact of the criminalisation of drugs on Latin American democracies, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and now Mexico. But these democratic states have not been ‘polluted’ by illegal drugs but by the fact, particularly in this period when capitalism is rotting on its feet, that these relatively weaker states can only be organisations of gangsters and all the criminality that goes with that. The same is also essentially true of the stronger, major powers whose militaries and secret services are deeply involved in the illegal drugs industry. Drugs, legal or illegal, are not a Latin American problem but a facet of imperialism world-wide.

Just one example: on the Canadian border, despite various crackdowns, the business of “drugs for guns” as well as for cash is just as active if not as dramatic as the southern US border region. Canadian police estimate one hundred thousand British Columbians engaged in the marijuana business alone. There’s a veritable United Nations of organised criminal gangs of tens of thousands involved in cross-border drug-running from Canada into the United States with home grown outlaw motor-cycle gangs involved. Simon Jenkins above argues that there should be a relative weight between “hard” and “soft” drugs with an element of decriminalisation involved. But he himself, though he can only see a way out within capitalism, is correct about the hypocrisy of the “war on drugs” and quotes the words of the UN’s prohibitionist drugs czar, Antonio Maria Costa with justifiable anger: Costa recently suggested that \$352 billion of drug cartel’s money helped to stave off the collapse of the world’s economic system in 2008-9 by providing much needed liquidity. But even this is not the major indication of the scale of the drugs industry and its relationship to the irrationality and decomposition of capitalist society.

## Drugs and imperialism in Afghanistan

For some years now, the poppy, as a symbol of the carnage wrought by war, has had an added piquancy. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has detailed Afghan poppy cultivation as increasing from 64% of the world’s heroin production seven years ago to just over 92% today. It also estimated the number of Afghans involved in the whole production and distribution process as between 1.7 to 2.3 million. Over the same period the farm-gate price of dry opium at harvest time has fallen by 69%. The British military occupation of Helmand province has overlooked the largest expansion of the cultivation of poppy production now extending to over 70,000 hectares. In the context of imperialism, the “war on drugs” is just as fraudulent as the “war on terror”. In both cases capitalism is driven to use the decay of its system in order to prop up the self-same system. This has consequences that can be seen, unseen, debated or simply not cared about as far as the devastation caused to humanity is concerned. In early 2007, the UN estimated



there were around one million opium addicts in Afghanistan, 600,000 under 15 and a growing number of women (*Al Jazeera*, 17.5.07). Cheap heroin from Afghanistan is having a devastating effect on Iran, India, Russia the US, Canada and China, where it’s causing particular social instability, along with the consequences of AIDs and other diseases, prostitution and the elements of slavery that go along with it. In the major European states the effects of the misery are felt right up to the Scottish islands where newly unemployed fishermen, solid and strong members of the community, with compensation in their pockets, have fallen into the arms of Madame Joy. From one side of the world to the other, from the poorest to the relatively better off, cheap Afghan heroin is wreaking havoc.

A week or two ago newspapers (also BBC, 12<sup>th</sup> September) were reporting a whistleblower talking about “large quantities” of opium being exported from Afghanistan on US, Canadian and British military aircraft. This is quite possible and doesn’t have to be a deliberate policy of the military, but it is a direct consequence of imperialism. When opium production in Afghanistan began to take off in the early 90s, rivalling Colombia and Burma in the heroin trade, the CIA funded and supported the Afghan drugs lord, Ahmed Shah Massoud. MI6 also armed and funded him and British intelligence taught his immediate entourage English<sup>2</sup>; prior to that the Russian KGB was involved with him as was French intelligence. Since the west’s direct intervention in Afghanistan from late 2001, Afghan poppy production has increased 33-fold. According to Britain’s ex-ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray in a 2007 piece in the *Daily Mail*, western intelligence agencies helped Afghanistan go from simple poppy farming to industrial-scale conversion into heroin with, needless to say, the direct implication of the Afghan state. The big change here is the export of heroin rather than opium and this needs large factories, volumes of chemicals imported, labour and a lot of transport to ship the refined product out (it’s one of the many ironies of Afghanistan that the west is paying the Taliban to at least partly watch over the transportation of refined heroin). Before 1979, very little opium came from Afghanistan to the west but then the CIA in its anti-Russian campaign trucked arms to Karachi one way from whence they returned laden with heroin (*The Road to 9.11*, UCP, 2007).

The role of imperialism’s secret services in the drug business has been detailed since World War II: the CIA and the Corsican mafia’s involvement in the cocaine trade in the late 40s – the famous “French Connection”; Burma, Laos and Thailand in the Golden Triangle where the CIA flew drugs all over south-east Asia; Panama in the 70s and US involvement with drugs through their puppet Noriega; Vietnam, where the CIA’s “Air America” flew drugs between Laos and Hong Kong; the cocaine trade in Haiti in the 80s; the Iran-Contra “guns in, drugs out” policy of the CIA and, more recently, the CIA’s rendition “torture taxis” be-

ing used to pick up and transport drugs through Gatwick and other European airports (*The Independent*, 17.1.10) with, one would think, the complicity of those states or at least a blind eye being turned. The CIA and the Pakistani secret service through the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, also used by British intelligence and Mossad, was a major factor in financing from opium profits the US, Pakistani, Saudi, British jihad against the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

## The drugs trade: a noble capitalist tradition

This is just part of the extent of imperialism’s role in the drug trade and the abject hypocrisy of the “war on drugs”. From further back, in order to underline this point, we have the example of the Anglo-French Opium Wars against China. To quote Karl Marx from the *New York Daily Tribune*, 25.9.1858: (the) “Christianity-canting and civilisation-mongering British government... In its imperial capacity it affects to be a thorough stranger to the contraband opium trade and even enters into treaties proscribing it”. There’s nothing new under capitalism’s sun; thus we see British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston’s “war on drugs” while conducting wars for the forced cultivation, propagation and sale of opium. Some of this was also sold to the working class in Britain under the benevolent title of “Godfrey’s Cordial”, an opiate used to dope children while both parents went out to work<sup>3</sup>, raising a generation of opium addicts. While this was in some respects the “revenge” of China and India, the whole opium trade was totally irrational and at the expense of legitimate commerce. The East India Company ceased to become direct exporters of opium by the end of the 1700s but it became its producers, while the company’s own ships were sanctimoniously forbidden from trafficking the drug. Despite the attempts of the Celestial Empire to fight the importation of British production of Indian opium into China, Britain and Palmerston facilitated the “trade” by force of arms. Marx pointed to this irrationality and contradiction of the expansion of capitalism without moralising. But in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 20.9.1858, in an article titled ‘Trade or Opium?’, he quotes the Englishman Montgomery Martin: “Why, the ‘slave trade’ was merciful compared to the ‘opium trade’. We did not destroy the bodies of the Africans, for it was in our immediate interest to keep them alive; we did not debase their natures, corrupt their minds, nor destroy their souls (Well, just a little, B). But the opium seller slays the body after he has corrupted, degraded and annihilated the moral being of unhappy sinners, while, every hour is bringing new victims to a Moloch which knows no satiety, and where the English murderer and Chinese suicide vie with each other in offerings at his shrine”.

It’s been said that Marx supported the opium wars of Britain against China, but this isn’t true and could have come from a misreading from the *Communist Manifesto* about how capitalism’s cheap commodities “batter down all Chinese

walls, with which it forces the barbarian’s intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate”. In fact in this case it wasn’t cheap commodities but gunboats, artillery and opium – the latter cheap enough to give the East India Company and thus the British state a return of some 800% on volumes of this particular “trade”.

A final quote from Marx, from the newspaper article above, on the fanciful irony of this whole bizarre situation: “While the semi-barbarian stood on the principle of morality, the civilised opposed to him the principle of self. That a giant empire, containing almost one-third of the human race, vegetating in the teeth of time, insulated by the forced exclusion of general intercourse, and thus contriving to dupe itself with delusions of Celestial perfection – that such an empire should at last be overtaken by fate on occasion of a deadly duel in which the representatives of the antiquated world appears prompted by ethical motives, while the representatives of overwhelmingly modern society fights for the privilege of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest markets – this, indeed, is a sort of tragical couplet stranger than any poet would ever dared to fancy”.

Today, when the contradictions of capitalism are reaching screaming point and the relationship of imperialism and drugs are just one more expression of this, we are treated to the farcical couplet of the “war on terror” and the “war on drugs”.

**Baboon, 24.9.10**

## 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.”*

**What are the workers’ councils? (iii)  
The revolution of 1917 (July to Oct):  
the renewal of the workers’ councils and  
the seizure of power**

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

**The decadence of capitalism (vii)  
Rosa Luxemburg and the limits  
to capitalist expansion**

*“Consciously or unconsciously [Luxemburg’s critics] suppressed the fact that on this issue Capital is an incomplete fragment which stops short at the point where this problem should be opened up.”*  
Lukacs

**The Communist Left in Russia  
The Manifesto of the Workers’ Group of  
the Russian Communist Party**

*“This group formed part of what is called the Communist Left... The represented a proletarian response in the form of left currents, like those that had existed previously faced with the development of opportunism in the Second International”*

**History of the workers’ movement  
The left wing of the Communist Party of  
Turkey**

*“The importance of the Turkish Left’s experience lies not in its theoretical heritage but in the fact that the struggle between nationalism and communism in the East was played out in Turkey to the bitter end, not in debate but on the ground, in the class struggle.”*

1. John Ross, *El Monstruo - Dread and Redemption in Mexico City*.

2. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

3. Chapter 13 *Capital*, Large Scale Industry.

# Trotsky, Pannekoek, Appel

## Loyal proletarian fighters

*“More than any other class in history, the proletariat is rich in great revolutionary figures, in devoted militants, tireless fighters, martyrs, thinkers and men of action. This is due to the fact that, unlike other revolutionary classes, which only fought against the reactionary classes in order to put in place their own system of domination, to defend their own egoistic interests as a privileged class, the proletariat has no privileges to win”* (*The Three L’s: Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht*, *L’Étincelle*, paper of the Gauche Communiste de France, 1946). The workers’ movement has so many exemplary militants that it is impossible to pay homage to all of them. Some of them however embody in a very particular way the passion for revolution, and here we want to salute the memory of three of them who went through the difficult test of the period of counter-revolution of the 1920s and 1930s, then of the Second World War. We are referring to Leon Trotsky, who was killed 70 years ago, Anton Pannekoek, who died 50 years ago, and Jan Appel, who died 25 years ago. Despite their very different histories and the often very deep divergences between them, despite the political errors they made, these ferocious proletarian fighters never ceased to dedicate their lives to the interests of their class.

### Trotsky

At the beginning of the Second World War, Trotsky, after a life of ardent dedication to the cause of the working class, was killed by a pickaxe wielded by an agent of the GPU. Despite very serious political errors, Trotsky’s contribution to the workers’ movement is immense. Arrested many times during his life, expelled and exiled, he never stopped working for the perspective of revolution. As a very young propagandist for the social democratic paper *Iskra*, as an unrivalled orator, he was the president of the Petrograd Soviet in the revolution of 1905 in Russia. Although he had some important disagreements with Lenin, and though he had been forced into exile in the USA, he returned to Russia and joined the Bolshevik party in May 1917. He played a decisive role in the October revolution, and in the formation of the Red Army, which was revolutionary Russia’s rampart against the attacks of the counter-revolutionary White armies and of the Allied forces who worked together to crush the communist plague<sup>1</sup>.

Trotsky played the particularly thankless role – since it was criticised from all sides – of chief negotiator of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany in March 1918, the result of which was to give the population of Russia a short breathing space. Trotsky was also at Lenin’s side in the work of the Communist International, many of whose founding documents he wrote. His *History of the Russian Revolution* is a fundamental reference for understanding the whole importance of this historic event. And Trotsky’s literary heritage, whether on the political, historical, cultural or theoretical level, is immense, a testament to Marx’s motto that *“Nothing human is alien to me”*.

Trotsky’s theory of the ‘permanent revolution’, despite the errors of analysis which went with it (such as the idea that the proletariat had to carry out the bourgeois revolution in countries where the bourgeoisie was too weak to vanquish feudalism) was still one of the sources of Stalin’s hatred for him. This was because the theory contained the fundamental idea that the revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not stop at bourgeois and national tasks and was thus contrary to the theory of ‘socialism in one country’ and of ‘revolution by stages’ which was the basis of Stalinism in the 1920s and 30s.

In his later years, Trotsky, who used to say that *“reality will not forgive a single theoretical error”* defended many opportunist positions such as the policy of entryism into the social democratic 1. The harsh difficulties faced by the Bolshevik party and the working masses at both the economic and military level were to result in the justification of grave errors: the massacre of the insurgent workers at Kronstadt in 1921 and the military offensive against the Makhno movement in the Ukraine. While certain parts of the Bolshevik party correctly opposed these errors, Trotsky was not one of them, and was indeed one of the main artisans of these acts of repression.

parties, the United Front, the ‘working class’ nature of the Stalinist USSR – positions which the communist left rightly criticised in the 1930s. But he never joined the bourgeois camp, which the Trotskyists did do after his death. In particular, on the question of imperialist war, he still defended the traditional position of the revolutionary movement: the transformation of imperialist war into civil war. In the Manifesto, the so-called *Alarm*, of the 4<sup>th</sup> International which he wrote to take an unambiguous position on generalised imperialist war, we read:

*“The 4<sup>th</sup> International bases its policies not on the military fortunes of capitalist states but on the transformation of imperialist war into a war of the workers against the capitalists, for the overthrow of the ruling class in all countries, for the world socialist revolution”* (Manifesto of the 4th International, May 29 1940). This is what the Trotskyists forgot and betrayed.

The more the world imperialist war intensified, the more the elimination of Trotsky became a central objective for the world bourgeoisie<sup>2</sup>, and for Stalin in particular.

In order to buttress his power and develop the policies which made him the principal architect of the counter-revolution, Stalin had first eliminated numerous revolutionaries by sending them into the camps. They included many old Bolsheviks and companions of Lenin, those who had played a key role in the October revolution. But this was not enough. The most dangerous of the Bolsheviks, even though by now in exile, was still Trotsky. Stalin had already struck him hard by murdering his son Leon Sedov in Paris in 1938. Now it was Trotsky himself who had to be eliminated. And this murder had an even greater significance than the killing of the other Bolsheviks and members of the Russian communist left.

### Anton Pannekoek

On 28 April 1960 Anton Pannekoek died after over 50 years of combat for the working class. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century he had made his presence felt in the workers’ movement during the struggle against the revisionist current, initially within the Dutch movement as represented by Troelstra. Along with Gorter, he denounced all collaboration with liberal factions of the bourgeoisie in parliament: *“neither a conciliatory attitude, nor an approach to the bourgeois parties, nor the abandonment of our demands are the means to obtaining anything. We can only do this by strengthening our organisations, in number and in class understanding and consciousness, so that they appear to the bourgeoisie as increasingly menacing and terrifying forces”* (Pannekoek and Gorter, ‘Marxism and Revisionism’, *Nieuw Tijd*, 1909).

When he moved to Germany in 1906, to deliver a course at the SDP school, he soon got into conflict with the party leadership, with Kautsky among others, on the importance of autonomous mass action by the workers. In 1911, he was the first of the socialists to affirm, following Marx in the wake of the Paris Commune, that the workers’ struggle against capitalist domination had no choice but to destroy the bourgeois state: *“The struggle of the proletariat is not simply a struggle against the bourgeoisie for state power: it is a struggle against state power”* (‘Mass Action and Revolution’, *Neue Zeit*, 1912, cited in Lenin’s *State and Revolution*).

With the outbreak of world war in 1914, Pannekoek took a firm position against the treason of the social democratic leaders in the Second International. During the war he became a sympathiser of the ISD (International Socialists of Germany)

2. Robert Coulondre, the ambassador of France to the Third Reich, provides an eloquent testimony to this in his description of his last meeting with Hitler, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Hitler was boasting about the pact he had just signed with Stalin. He outlined a grandiose panorama of his coming military triumphs. In reply the French ambassador tried to appeal to his reason and spoke to him of the social tumult, the risk of revolution that would be brought about by a long and murderous war, resulting in the destruction of all the belligerent governments: *“You think of yourself as the victor, but have you thought about another possibility: that the victor could be Trotsky?”*

in Bremen and of the SDP in Holland, writing articles against the pro-war policy. In a letter to Van Ravensteyn, dated 22 October 1915, he explained that he had rallied to the initiatives of the left wing at Zimmerwald. Later on he expressed his unconditional solidarity with the Russian workers when they took power through the soviets in 1917, and he never ceased propagandising for the world revolution. *“What we had been hoping for has now arrived. On 7 and 8 November, the workers and soldiers of Petrograd overthrew the Kerensky government. And it is probable that this revolution will extend to the whole of Russia. A new period is opening up, not only for the Russian revolution but for the proletarian revolution in Europe”* (‘The Russian Revolution’, *de Nieuwe Tijd*, 1917)

When the majority excluded from the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) founded, in April 1920 a new Party, the KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany), Pannekoek was an inspiration to its programme. This document summarised the most important positions of the new period. Pannekoek (like Rosa Luxemburg until her murder in 1919) was, at the beginning of the 1920s, a critical but passionate defender of the October revolution.

But this did not prevent him from eventually drawing mistaken conclusions about the defeat of the 1917 revolution in Russia. He arrived at the view that the Bolsheviks had in fact led a bourgeois revolution. Why? Not only because, in the Russia of 1917, there were still vestiges of feudalism, of dispersed forms of petty bourgeois property, but also because Lenin had not understood the distinction between proletarian materialism and bourgeois materialism (see John Harper – alias Pannekoek – *Lenin as Philosopher*, 1938).

For any revolutionary today, the work of Pannekoek, despite these later errors, remains an essential reference point, if only because he was, along with other left communists, a bridge between the end of the social democratic Second International and the beginning of the Third, Communist International, a period which went from 1914 to 1919, and because he then continued to develop his theoretical contribution to the movement. As he said later: *“Our task is principally a theoretical one: finding and indicating through study and discussion the best route for the action of the working class”* (letter to Castoriadis of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 8 November 1953).



Jan Appel

On 4 May 1985, the last great figure of the Communist International, Jan Appel, died at the age of 95. This was a life lived for the liberation of humanity.

The revolutionary wave at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was defeated. Thousands of marxist revolutionaries were killed in Russia and Germany; some even committed suicide. But despite this long night of counter-revolution, Jan Appel remained faithful to marxism, to the working class. He remained convinced that the proletarian revolution would still come.

Appel was formed and tempered in the revolutionary movement in Germany and Holland at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He fought side by

side with Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Lenin, Trotsky, Gorter, Pannekoek. He fought for the revolution on the streets of Germany in 1919. He was one of those who never betrayed the proletarian cause, a worthy representative of that anonymous mass of the proletariat’s past generations. Their historical struggle has always renounced the glorification of individuals or the search for glory and titles. Like Marx, Engels and so many others, Jan Appel did not seek fame in the sensational capitalist press.

But he also stood out in that anonymous mass of courageous revolutionaries produced by the revolutionary movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He left a trace which has allowed the revolutionaries of today to take up the torch. Jan Appel was capable of recognising those who, no less anonymous and for the moment reduced to a small minority, were once again carrying on the communist struggle. Thus we were extremely proud to welcome Jan Appel to the founding Congress of the ICC in Paris in 1976.

Born in 1890, Jan Appel began work very young in the Hamburg shipyards. As early as 1908, he was an active member of the SDP. In the turbulent years of the war, he took part in the discussions about the new questions facing the working class: the attitude to imperialist war and to the Russian revolution. This led him at the end of 1917 or beginning of 1918 to join the left radicals of Hamburg, who had taken up a very clear position on the war and the revolution. In July 1917 the IKD in Hamburg had issued an appeal calling on all revolutionary workers to work for an independent party opposed to the reformist and opportunist politics of the SDP majority. Pushed forward by the workers’ struggles at the end of 1918, he joined Rosa Luxemburg’s Spartakusbund and, after the unification of different groups into the KPD, took up a position of responsibility for the Hamburg section.

On the basis of his active participation in the struggle since 1918, and of his organisational talents, the participants at the founding congress of the KAPD chose Appel and Franz Jung to represent the new party at the second congress of the Third International in Moscow. Their role was to negotiate adhesion to the International and to discuss the treacherous attitude of the KPD Centrale during the Ruhr uprising. To get to Moscow, they had to lead a mutiny on a ship. Once there, they had discussions with Zinoviev, the president of the Communist International, and with Lenin. They held long discussions on the basis of the manuscript of *Left Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, refuting the accusation among other things of syndicalism (i.e. the rejection of the party) and of nationalism.

Several more trips to Moscow were needed before the KAPD was admitted into the CI as a sympathising organisation, participating on this basis at the Third Congress of the CI in 1921.

Appel was active wherever the KAPD or the parallel ‘Workers’ Union’, the AAUD, sent him. He was responsible for the AAU’s weekly *Der Klassenkampf* in the Ruhr, where he remained until November 1923.

At the Third Congress of the CI in 1921, Appel, Meyer, Scwab and Reichenbach were delegated to conduct the final negotiations in the name of the KAPD and to oppose the growing opportunism of the CI. They tried in vain, along with delegates from Bulgaria, Hungary, Luxemburg, Mexico, Spain, Britain, Belgium and the USA, to form a left opposition. At the end of the Congress, ignoring the sarcasms of Bolshevik or KPD delegates, Jan Appel, under the pseudonym Hempel, underlined some of the questions posed for the world revolution: *“the Russian comrades are not supermen and they need a counter-weight. This counterweight should be a Communist International which has liquidated all tactics of compromise, of parliamentarism and using the old trade unions”*.

Until the end of his days, Jan Appel was convinced that *“only the class struggle is important”*. We continue his fight. **MW 29/9/10**

# The communist left and internationalist anarchism part 3

## The approach needed for this debate

This series has the aim of showing that the members of the communist left and the internationalist anarchists have a duty to discuss and even work together. The reason for this is simple. Despite important disagreements, we share key revolutionary positions: internationalism; the rejection of any collaboration and any compromise with bourgeois political forces; the defence of workers taking their struggles into their own hands...<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, for a long time there have been practically no relations between these two revolutionary currents. Over the last few years we have only just begun to see the first efforts to discuss and work together. This is the fruit of the painful history of the workers' movement. The attitude of the majority of the Bolshevik party in the years 1918-24 (the indiscriminate banning of the anarchist press, the armed confrontation with Makhno's army, the bloody suppression of the Kronstadt uprising, etc) opened up a huge gulf between revolutionary Marxists and anarchists. But it was above all Stalinism, which massacred thousands of anarchists<sup>2</sup> in the name of communism, which led to decades of trauma<sup>3</sup>.

Today there are still fears about debating and working together. To go beyond these difficulties, you have to be convinced that we do indeed belong to the same camp, the camp of the proletariat and the revolution, despite our disagreements. But that is not enough. We also have to make a conscious effort to develop the quality of our debates. "Rising from the abstract to the concrete" is always the most perilous step. This why in this article we will try to be more precise about the spirit in which this possible and necessary relationship between the communist left and internationalist anarchism needs to be approached.

### The absolute necessity for constructive criticism among revolutionaries

Our press has often repeated, in different ways, the argument that anarchism still bears the original mark of petty bourgeois ideology. This radical criticism is often seen as unacceptable by anarchist militants, including those who are usually the most open to discussion. And for many, the use of the term "petty bourgeois" in connection with anarchism is enough for some to decide they don't want to listen to the ICC at all. Recently, on our internet forum, a participant who refers to himself as an anarchist has called this view a real "insult". But this is not our view. However deep our reciprocal disagreements, they should not make us lose sight of the fact that the militants of the communist left and of internationalist anarchism are debating together as revolutionaries. What's more, the internationalist anarchists also make many criticisms of marxism, such as its alleged natural penchant for authoritarianism and reformism. The website of the CNT-AIT in France, for example, contains numerous passages of this kind: "The Marxists (after 1871) progressively became a force for lulling the exploited to sleep and gave birth to working class reformism"<sup>4</sup>. "Marxism is responsible for orienting the working class towards parliamentary activity...it is only when this has been understood that we can see that road to the social revolution passes through the happy land of anarchism and means by-passing Marxism"<sup>5</sup>. These are not "insults" but radical criticisms...which we obviously disagree with totally. It's in this sense of open criticism that our analysis of the nature of anarchism has to be considered. This analysis needs to be summed up here.

In a section headed 'The petty bourgeois core of anarchism' in our book *Communism is not just a*

nice idea but a material necessity, we read:

"The growth of anarchism in the second half of the 19th century was the product of the resistance of the petty bourgeois strata - artisans, intellectuals, shopkeepers, small peasants - to the triumphant march of capital, a resistance to the process of proletarianisation which was depriving of them of their former social 'independence'. Strongest in those countries where industrial capital arrived late, in the eastern and southern peripheries of Europe, it expressed both the rebellion of these strata against capitalism, and their inability to look beyond it, to the communist future; instead it gave voice to their yearning for a semi-mythical past of free local communities and strictly independent producers, unencumbered by the oppressions of industrial capital and the centralising bourgeois state. The 'father' of anarchism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, was the classical incarnation of this attitude, with his fierce hatred not only of the state and the big capitalists, but of collectivism in all forms, including trade unions, strikes, and similar expressions of working class collectivity. Against all the real trends developing within capitalist society, Proudhon's ideal was a 'mutualist' society founded upon individual artisan production, linked together by free exchange and free credit" (first published in 1994).

Or again, in 'is it possible to reconcile anarchism and marxism', in *International Review* 102 (2001)

"In the genesis of anarchism you have the standpoint of the worker who has just been proletarianised and who rejects his new status with every fibre of his being. Having only just emerged from the peasantry or the artisans, often half-way between worker and artisan (like the Jura watchmakers for example), these workers expressed a regret for the past faced with the drama of their descent into the condition of the working class. Their social aspiration was to turn the wheel of history backwards. At the heart of this conception was nostalgia for small-scale property. This is why, following Marx, we analyse anarchism as the expression of the penetration of petty-bourgeois ideology into the ranks of the proletariat."

In other words, we recognise that, from its birth, anarchism was marked by a profound feeling of revolt against capitalist exploitation and barbarity but that it also inherited the vision of the "artisans, shopkeepers and small peasants" who played a key role in this birth. This does not at all mean that today all the anarchist groups are "petty bourgeois". It is obvious that the CNT, the KRAS<sup>6</sup> and others are animated by the revolutionary spirit of the working class. More generally, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many workers espoused the anarchist cause and really fought for the abolition of capitalism and the coming of communism, from Louise Michel to Durruti or from Voline to Malatesta. During the revolutionary wave which began in 1917, the anarchists were often in the front line of the workers' ranks. Within the anarchist movement there has since been a constant struggle against this original tendency to be influenced by the radicalised petty bourgeoisie. This is partly what lies behind the deep divergences between the individualist, mutualist, reformist and internationalist-communist anarchists, with the latter alone really belonging to the revolutionary camp. But even the internationalist anarchists still show the influence of the historic roots of their movement, as can be seen for example in a tendency to replace the struggle of the working class with calls for "autonomous popular resistance". The ICC thinks that it is its historical responsibility to honestly bring all these disagreements into broad daylight in order to make a contribution to strengthening the revolutionary camp as a whole. As it is the responsibility of the internationalist anarchists to bring out their criticisms of marxism. This should not be an obstacle to holding fraternal debates and eventually working together, on the contrary<sup>7</sup>.

6. The KRAS is the Russian section of the International Workers' Association with whom we have had very good comradely relations for some years, publishing a number of its statements in our press.

7. This said, during the debate that has taken place

### For the ICC, is the relationship between marxists and anarchists one of teacher to pupil?

The ICC does not address these criticisms to the anarchists like a teacher correcting a pupil. However, interventions on our forum have reproached our organisation for having a "professorial" tone. Leaving aside matters of taste for this or that literary style, there is a real theoretical question behind these remarks. Does the communist left have a role as a guide for internationalist anarchism or represent a model for it to follow? Do we think that an enlightened minority has to inject the truth or a clear understanding? Or, as a more concrete example, do we see the ICC as some kind of tutor for the CNT-AIT?

In fact, such a notion would be in total contradiction with the approach of the communist left; on a deeper level, it poses the question of the link between revolutionary communists and their class.

In his letter to Ruge, published in the *Franco-German Yearbook* in 1843, Marx affirmed: "We do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles. We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for"

Revolutionaries, be they marxists or internationalist anarchists, do not stand above the working class; they are an integral part of it. Their organisations are the collective secretion of the proletariat.

The ICC has never seen itself as an organisation whose task is to impose its views in the working class or on other revolutionary groups. We fully identify with these lines from the 1848 Communist Manifesto:

"The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement".

It was the same principle that *Bilan*, organ of the Italian communist left, brought to life in the first issue of its review in 1933:

"Certainly, our fraction lays claim to a long political past, a profound tradition in the Italian and international movement, an ensemble of basic political positions. But it does not argue that its political past of itself means that others should accept the solutions it puts forward in the present situation. On the contrary, it is up to revolutionaries to verify in the light of events the positions it currently defends as well as the political positions contained in its basic documents".

Since its origins, our organisation has attempted to cultivate the same spirit of openness and the same will to discuss. Thus, as far back as 1977, we wrote:

"In our relationship with groups of this type, who are close to the ICC but outside it, our aim is clear. We attempt to engage in fraternal debate with them and take up the different questions confronting the working class...We can really only fulfil our role...if we are able:

a. to avoid considering ourselves as the one and only revolutionary group that exists today;

b. to firmly defend our positions in front of them;

c. to maintain an open attitude to discussion with them, a discussion that must take place in public and not through private correspondence" ('Resolution on proletarian political groups', *IR* 11)

This is a **rule of behaviour** for us. We are convinced of the validity of our positions (while remaining open to a reasoned critique), but we don't take them as the solution to all the problems of the world. For us they are a contribution to the collective struggle of the working class. This is why we attach such importance to the culture of debate. In 2007, the ICC devoted a whole orientation text to this one question: "If revolutionary organisations

recently, anarchist comrades have rightly protested against certain exaggerated formulae which appear to pronounce a definitive and unjustified sentence on anarchism.....

are to fulfil their fundamental role of the development and spreading of class-consciousness, the cultivation of collective, international, fraternal and public discussion is absolutely essential" "The culture of debate - a weapon of the class struggle" *IR* 131.

Of course, the attentive reader will have noticed that all these quotations also contain, alongside affirmations of the need for debate, the insistence that the ICC must firmly defend its political positions. There is no contradiction here. Wanting open discussion does not mean that all ideas are equal and that everything is valid. As we underlined in our 1977 text: "Far from being in contradiction with each other, firmness in our principles and openness in our attitude mutually complement each other. We are not afraid of discussion precisely because we are convinced of the validity of our positions".

In the past as in the future, the workers' movement has had and will have a need for frank and fraternal discussion between its different revolutionary tendencies. A multiplicity of points of view and approaches will confer a whole richness to the struggle of the proletariat and the development of its consciousness. We are repeating ourselves, but inside the territory shared by revolutionaries there can be deep disagreements. These must absolutely be raised and discussed. We are not asking the internationalist anarchists to renounce their own criteria or what they consider to be their theoretical patrimony. On the contrary, we want them to draw it out with as much clarity as possible in response to the questions posed to all of us; we want them to accept critiques and polemics in the way that we do - not to see them as the final word but as contributions to an open debate. We are not saying to these comrades: throw down your weapons in face of the superiority of marxism.

We profoundly respect the revolutionary nature of the internationalist anarchists. We know that we will fight side by side when massive class movements appear on the scene. But we will defend with equal conviction (and, we hope, no less convincingly) our positions on the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party, on centralisation, the period of transition, the decadence of capitalism, the anti-working class nature of trade unionism.....

We are not here to pose as schoolteachers or just to persuade a few anarchists to join us but to play a full part in the debate between revolutionaries; a debate which will be both animated and passionate.

To conclude this series of three articles on the communist left and internationalist anarchism we will finish with a few words from Malatesta:

"If we anarchists could make the revolution on our own, or if the socialists<sup>8</sup> could do the same, we could have the luxury of acting on our own account, perhaps lending each other a hand now and again. But the revolution will be made by the whole proletariat, the whole people, in which the socialists and the anarchists are just a minority, even when the people have lot of sympathy for one or the other. To divide us from each other is to divide the proletariat, or more exactly, it is to cool down its sympathy and make it less inclined to follow this noble common socialist orientation which the anarchists and socialists together can help to triumph within the revolution. It is up to revolutionaries, and the anarchists and socialists in particular, to make sure this happens, by not accentuating their disagreements and above all by occupying themselves with goals that unite them and help them attain the best possible revolutionary result". (*Volunta*, 1 May, 1920)

ICC September 2010

8. At the time Malatesta wrote this article, the Italian Socialist Party, along with reformists, also regrouped the revolutionary elements who went on to form the Communist Party of Italy in January 1921 at the Livorno Congress.

1. The first two articles in this series appeared in *WR* 336 and 337.

2. As well as thousands of Marxists and millions of proletarians in general.

3. See the second part of this series 'On the difficulties of debating and the ways to overcome them'.

4. [http://cnt-ait.info/article.php?id\\_article=472&var\\_r\\_echerche=r%E9formisme+marxisme](http://cnt-ait.info/article.php?id_article=472&var_r_echerche=r%E9formisme+marxisme)

5. To be exact, this is a quote from Rudolf Rocker which the CNT-AIT takes up.

## 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.

### Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:

**ACCION PROLETARIA** Apartado Correos 258, Valencia, SPAIN.  
**COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALIST** POB 25, NIT, Faridabad, 121001 Haryana, INDIA.  
**INTERNACIONALISMO** Due to the political situation in Venezuela, we ask that all correspondence be sent to Accion Proletaria in Spain.  
**INTERNATIONALISM** 320 7th Avenue #211, Brooklyn, NY 11215, USA.  
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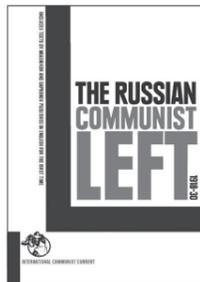
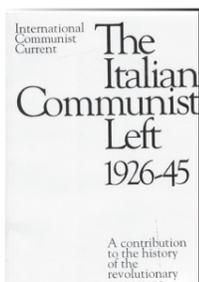
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### Write by e-mail to the following addresses:

From Great Britain use [uk@internationalism.org](mailto:uk@internationalism.org)  
 From India use [india@internationalism.org](mailto:india@internationalism.org)  
 From USA use [usa@internationalism.org](mailto:usa@internationalism.org)  
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Unlike the bourgeois press, revolutionary publications such as *World Revolution* have no advertising revenue, no chains of news agents and no millionaire backers. We rely on the support of our sympathisers, and those who, while they might not agree with all aspects of our politics, see the importance of the intervention of a communist press.

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# Commonwealth games and the reality of workers' exploitation

There has been a great scandal in the media about the atrocious state of athletes' accommodation and facilities at the Commonwealth Games site in Delhi: big name athlete's pulling out, various teams delaying their travel or staying in hotels while they wait for the village to be brought up to standard. The Commonwealth Games 'brand' has been damaged!

But this pales into insignificance compared to the much greater scandal related to the construction – the conditions faced by workers at the site.

70 workers have died in accidents on the sites, and 109 on Delhi Metro construction sites, – but since many workers are not registered no-one knows what the real toll is. And this is hardly surprising:

*"Workers often labour without elementary safety precautions, like helmets, masks and gloves. If workers are given boots, the costs of these are sometimes cut from their wages. Accidents were reported from almost all the sites, but these were rarely reported to the Commissioner, Workmen's Compensation, and their legal reparation was withheld or diluted. Rarely are medical services available on site, beyond a first aid kit."* (The Hindu, 1.8.10)

The workers risking their lives are not even getting the legal minimum wage, *"Workers are paid two-thirds or half of the minimum wage on all sites... and made to live in sub-human conditions,"* said Shashi Saxena for the People's Union of Democratic Rights (The Hindu, 16.8.10). In particular, they are working 10 to 12 hours a day, into the night, day in day out without any day off, and robbed of the pittance they are 'legally' due for overtime: Rs 100 (approx £1.50) for a 10 hour day, Rs 200 (approx £3) for a 12 hour day.

Living accommodation was described as 'basic' by the PUDR: insufficient toilets, lack of hygiene, sanitation deplorable, a breeding ground for malaria and dengue fever, in huts made of tin and plastic sheets totally inappropriate to the extremes of Delhi weather – very hot in summer, cold in winter. And there is worse – the company Times of India Crest recruited a worker, Vijay, from a village. He arrived to find *"The dug-up footpath where he was to lay the lovely pink stones would function as work place during daytime, bedroom at night"*. 150,000 migrant workers were recruited to work on the project. Those that are responsible for children have no choice but see them living in these deplorable conditions, without any chance

of school.

These dangerous conditions do not just apply to the Commonwealth Games, as the deaths of 43 textile workers in Kolkata in March illustrates (<http://en.internationalism.org/ci/2010/workers-burn-india-shines>).

Lastly, just as in Beijing for the Olympics, just as in South Africa for the World Cup, slum dwellers have been cleared out of the way for the big event, as though they were so much vermin. A night shelter was demolished last December leaving 250 homeless; a slum housing 365 Dalit Tamil families was bulldozed in April to put up a car part for the Games. Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit admitted *"We will have about 30 lakh [3,000,000] homeless in the city after the Games"* (Outlook, April 2010).

## India's economy: a malignant growth

India's economy is predicted to grow by 8.5% this year, based on just this sort of fierce exploitation, *"its private companies are strong. Indian capitalism is driven by millions of entrepreneurs all furiously doing their own thing"* (The Economist, 2.10.10). That's how capitalism likes it.

It has not translated into better conditions for the working class. The plight of workers on the Commonwealth Games site is just one example of the brutality of exploitation faced by workers. Permanent jobs are decreasing while casualisation increases, as at Hero Honda in Gurgaon, despite increasing production to 4.3 million bikes. Meanwhile the economy has seen job losses in textile and diamond industries. Unemployment stood at 10.7% in 2009, officially – the reality is much greater, as can be seen at any station or tourist attraction as dozens clamour for a few rupees to drive a rickshaw or sell a souvenir. These are people capitalism has failed to integrate into its production.

As more money has come into the economy prices are going up to those of 'affluent' economies, leaving workers struggling to afford essentials like transport, health, education, housing, let alone movies. Food inflation is officially 18%.

While the growth rates are high, the Indian economy has in no way escaped the conditions of declining capitalism that are threatening so many with recession. Growth has been fuelled by foreign institutional investors who were part of the casino economy before 2008. This pushed the debt-to-GDP ratio up 20 points, with public



debt at 83% of GDP in 2007. It has been based on the service sector, with outsourcing of call centres etc. The country still lacks the infrastructure necessary for a large development of industry. The industry that has developed has been the like of small cheap cars, based on equally cheap labour, and destined for the home market of workers in the service industry. As the situation of farmers declines more are forced into the cities – or into suicide – even with the current high growth rates (see 'The Indian boom: illusion and reality', <http://en.internationalism.org/ci/2008/indian-boom>).

In any case the erection of large venues like the Commonwealth Games and the Olympic and other stadia for one-off, high profile events, often end up as an expensive white elephant and is not necessarily an indication of economic health.

## The only answer is the struggle of the working class

It is impossible to read about the horrendous conditions faced by workers in India without indignation on a human level, clearly illustrated by the PUDR and CRY (Child Relief and You) which collected many of the statistics used in this article.

However, the answer to these crimes does not lie in democratic reform – India is already a democracy and capitalism continues to trample workers underfoot; nor in legal protection for workers – the law is simply broken; nor in charity, however much that may help various individuals. Nor should we wait for the Indian economy to grow to provide better conditions, since the economy cannot stand apart from the rest of the world which remains crippled with debt, the very debt that is fuelling India's economic growth.

It is important to understand that these conditions arise from capitalism itself, from the relentless struggle for profit. They can only be abolished by the overthrow of capitalism. Until then they can only be attenuated by massive working class resistance, such as the struggles of car workers in Gurgaon last year, of jute worker in Kolkata, of Air India workers, and of government employees in Kashmir who were able to unite to defend their interests despite the gun battles between the state and separatists (see our website). The only answer is the struggle of the working class. **Alex 3.10.10**

## 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 statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

\* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in

the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

### OUR ORIGINS

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