



world revolution

Statement on the social movements in 2011

From indignation to hope

This is an international statement that tries to draw a provisional balance sheet of the social movements of 2011 in order to contribute to a wider debate about their significance.

The two most important events in 2011 were the global crisis of capitalism¹, and the social movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Israel, Chile, the USA, Britain...

Indignation has taken on an international dimension

The consequences of the capitalist crisis have been very hard for the immense majority of the world's population: deteriorating living conditions, long-term unemployment lasting years, precarious work making it impossible to have even a minimum of stability, extreme poverty and hunger...

Millions of people are concerned about the disappearance of the possibility of having a stable and normal life and the lack of a future for their children. This has led to a profound indignation, attempts to break out of passivity by taking to the streets and squares, to discussions about the causes of a crisis which in its present phase has lasted more than 5 years.

This anger has been exacerbated by the arrogance, greed and indifference shown towards the suffering of the majority by the bankers, politicians and other representatives of the capitalist class. The same goes for the incompetence shown by governments faced with such grave problems: their measures have only increased poverty and unemployment without bringing any solution.

This movement of indignation has spread internationally: to Spain, where the then Socialist gov-

1. See: The economic crisis is not a never-ending story, <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4744/editorial-economic-crisis-not-never-ending-story>. Along with the global crisis of the system, the serious incident at the Fukushima nuclear power station -Japan- shows us the enormous dangers that humanity is facing.



The system is obsolete

ernment imposed one of the first and most draconian austerity plans; to Greece, the symbol of the crisis of sovereign debt; to the United States, the temple of world capitalism; to Egypt and Israel, focus of one of the worst and most entrenched imperialist conflicts, the Middle East.

The awareness that this is an international movement began to develop despite the destructive weight of nationalism, as seen in the presence of national flags in the demonstrations in Greece, Egypt or the USA. In Spain solidarity with the workers of Greece was expressed by slogans such as "Athens resists, Madrid rises up". The Oakland strikers (USA, November, 2011) said "Solidarity with the occupation movement world wide". In Egypt it was agreed in the Cairo Declaration to support the movement in the United States. In Israel they shouted "Netanyahu, Mubarak, El Assad are the same" and contacts were made with Palestinian workers.

These movements have passed their high points and although there are new struggles (Spain, Greece, Mexico) many are asking: what did this wave of indignation achieve? Have we gained anything?

Take to the streets! The common slogan of these movements

It is more than 30 years since we have seen such multitudes occupy the streets and squares in order to struggle for their own interests despite the illusions and confusions that have affected them.

These people, the workers, the exploited who have been presented as failures, idlers, incapable of taking the initiative or doing anything in common, have been able to unite, to share initiatives and to break out of the crippling passivity to which the daily normality of this system condemns them.

The principle of developing confidence in each others' capacity, of discovering the strength of the collective action of the masses, has been a morale booster. The social scene has changed. The monopoly of public life by politicians, experts and 'great men' has been put into question by the anonymous masses who have wanted to be heard².

2. It is not without significance that Time Magazine made The Protester as its "Man of the Year". See http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373,00.html.

Having said all this, we are only at a fragile beginning. The illusions, confusions, inevitable mood swings of the protesters; the repression handed out by the capitalist state and the dangerous diversions imposed by its forces of containment (the left parties and trade unions) have led to retreats and bitter defeats. It is a question of a long and difficult road, strewn with obstacles and where there is no guarantee of victory: that said the very act of starting to walk this road is the first victory.

The heart of the movement: the assemblies

The masses involved in these movements have not limited themselves to passively shouting their displeasure. They have actively participated in organising assemblies. The mass assemblies have concretised the slogan of the First International (1864) "The emancipation of the working class is the work of the workers themselves or it is nothing". This is the continuation of the tradition of the workers' movement stretching back to the Paris Commune, and to Russia in 1905 and 1917, where it took an ever higher form, continued in Germany 1918, Hungary 1919 and 1956, Poland 1980.

General assemblies and workers' councils are the genuine form of the struggle of the proletarian struggle and the nucleus of a new form of society.

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Why British capitalism needs the EU

In March, David and Samantha Cameron were received by Barack and Michelle Obama in the White House and accorded a status almost equal to that of a visiting head of state (including a 19 gun salute - just two short of that accorded to a head of state). A few months before Cameron was publicly snubbed by Sarkozy after opposing changes to the EU designed to tackle the economic crisis. To many this showed that the Euro-sceptics now control the Tories and that the 'special relationship' is alive and well. In fact, the situation is more complex than this description would suggest. After all, it was the same Cameron who has given funds to support the European bailout and who complied with rulings of the European Court of Human Rights in the face of calls from the press to simply ignore it. It was the same Cameron who on coming into office declared that Britain should have "a solid but not a slavish" relationship with the US, while his Foreign Secretary called for Britain to "elevate key partnerships beyond Europe and North America."¹

To understand these apparent contradictions we have to look below the surface and examine some of the economic and imperialist issues that determine Britain's international relationships and foreign policy.

The economic importance of Europe and the US

Examination of the statistics of Britain's international trade shows that Europe, as a whole is the UK's largest partner in terms of exports and imports of both goods and services but that the situation is more complex than this suggests. Although British manufacturing has been in decline for many years and makes a smaller contribution to GDP than the service sector, in terms of export value it is still larger than the service sector.

In the trade in goods² the EU 27 accounts for well over half of Britain's exports and imports. However the balance is not only negative but seems to have become increasingly so over the decade. In 2000 trade with the EU accounted for 60% of Britain exports and 53% of its imports, with a negative balance of £5,141m, accounting for 15.5% of the overall deficit of £33,030m in the trade in goods. A decade later the proportion of exports and imports to and from Europe still accounted for more than half of the total (53% and 51% respectively) but now made up more than 44% of the total deficit of £98,462m. This contrasts with Germany where 60.8% of exports were within the EU in 2010 and where the balance is positive.³ Trade with the US is significantly less than with Europe but it is the only major geographical area where the balance is in Britain's favour. The USA accounted for about 15% of exports from Britain in both 2000 and 2010 but the balance in both years was positive, with surpluses of £906m and £10,933m respectively. This tenfold increase reflects the increase in exports to the US from £29,371m in 2000 to £37,925 in 2010 and the corresponding fall in imports from £28,465m to £26,992 over the same period. It is worth noting that while trade with China has grown over the decade, as would be expected, and while trade with Asia remains significant, the balance in both cases is negative.

Turning to the trade in services, the first point to note is that the balance in 2010 in all the main geographical areas shown is positive. Overall, the surplus came to £58,778m. A decade previously, the balance with Europe was negative. In 2010 the EU 27 accounted for nearly 19% of the positive balance of trade and the rest of Europe just over 16%. However, these positive balances arise from nearly half of the value of exports. In contrast, in 2010 trade with the US accounted for over a quarter of the positive balance of trade while the trade itself accounted for only 20% of the value of exports. This suggests that trade with the US is more profitable than trade with Europe, although

the situation with the latter has improved over the last decade.

Within the overall trade in services, financial services are the largest single category, accounting for 28% of total exports of services in 2009 and 25% in 2010. The Report on the British Situation produced towards the end of 2010 noted that from the 1970s onwards the financial sector grew far faster than the rest of economy and was far more profitable: "From accounting for about 1.5% of the economy's profits between 1948 and 1970 the sector has grown to account for 15%."⁴ The report also showed that the financial sector stands above all others in the gross value it adds to the economy. Examination of figures over the last two years shows that here too Europe is Britain's largest market, accounting for 40% of exports and 35% of imports and making up 43% of the total positive balance of trade. However, the data also shows that the US is a significant partner, accounting for 20% of exports and 31% of imports and contributing 17-18% of the total positive balance.

London is the leading global centre of financial services alongside New York. "London is the centre of the UK's banking industry, which holds the third largest stock of customer deposits of any country in the world. 17% of all global trading in equities took place in London in 2009, a higher proportion than anywhere except New York. And UK fund managers, predominantly in London, managed portfolios worth 11% of the global total - again second only to the US."⁵

Another aspect of Britain's international position is the transfer of income from abroad. These include payments to British citizens working abroad, earnings from direct investments overseas and from other types of foreign investment. When these are balanced against transfers out of the country the overall position has been positive in recent years, but this is entirely due to the income from foreign direct investments. In May 2011 the Office for National Statistics reported that: "for the past decade net income flows have generally been positive, meaning that the UK is earning more income from its ownership of overseas assets than it is paying foreigners for their ownership of UK assets. In 2009 this positive net position raised national income by two per cent relative to GDP."⁶ The apparently paradoxical aspect is that this positive return is made from a negative International Investment Position ("that is the difference between its stock of foreign assets and foreign liabilities").⁷

This examination of Britain's international trade shows that its economic interests have their main focal points in Europe and US. This helps to explain the actions of the British ruling class in recent years and during the current crisis in particular.

On the one hand, Britain would be seriously affected by turmoil in the EU and so recognises the need for action to be taken to ensure the stability of the EU and its member countries and has little option but to support that action to some extent. This is one of the reasons why Cameron has continued to try and play a role in the EU's decisions, even after his 'veto' of the proposed treaty revision in October last year left him formally outside the discussions that led to the recent agreement. The central role that Britain seems to have played in drafting a letter putting forward proposals for growth suggests that this is tacitly acknowledged by other states.

On the other hand, Britain is unwilling to countenance anything that might affect its global position, especially with regard to the financial services sector given its central role in the economy. Hence the 'veto' last October and the opposition to a tax on financial transactions (the so-called 'Robin Hood' or Tobin tax). Trade with the US remains vital to British national interests.

While it would be an error to see a mechanical relationship between Britain's economic and imperialist interests, it would also be a mistake to

deny any such link. Analysis of the economic dimension reveals some of the foundations of Britain's strategy of maintaining a position between Europe and the US.

British imperialist strategy and Europe

In the Resolution on the British Situation adopted at World Revolution's Congress in 2010,⁸ we traced the evolution of Britain's imperialist strategy over the last few years, ending in the impasse that characterised the last years of New Labour. The coalition inherited a serious situation and had to recognise that British imperialism had suffered a further decline in its power and status. However, the resolution underlined that the British ruling class would not simply give up and pointed to the early attempts by Cameron to find a way out "that reached beyond the dominance of the US and Germany (as the main power in Europe)". The highpoint of this strategy to date was its 'successful' intervention in Libya alongside France in 2011. This allowed the British ruling class to play a role on the world stage after all the rebuffs to Blair and Brown and to show its military prowess after all the humiliation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the reduction in 'defence' expenditure forced on it by the economic crisis.

Britain's strategy towards Europe has two key aspects. Firstly, within the global balance of power, Europe can provide an important counterweight to America, not least because it is generally more reluctant to follow the US into wars and imperialist adventures. Secondly, within Europe itself, Britain retains its historical opposition to the growth of German domination. Historically one of the UK's tactics has been to support the expansion of Europe in order to dilute German influence. More recently, the Defence Co-operation Treaty with France announced in November 2010, while partly a pragmatic response to the cuts in the defence budget, was principally aimed at strengthening the capacity of both countries to act on their own to defend their interests. While couched in the language of international co-operation through the UN and EU, it also stressed the development of bilateral capability to carry out a range of operations. The importance attached to this explains the rapid patching up of relations between Cameron and Sarkozy after the insults and snubs that followed the British veto of the Treaty revision last year.

Within Britain, Cameron has effectively managed the Euro-sceptics, who, on paper, probably now form the majority in the party. Many of the new in-take of Tory MPs were trained by the Young Britons Foundation, a right-wing think tank with strong ties to the neo-cons in the US. At times he has been happy to adopt their language, moving the Tory MEPs from the mainstream centre-right group to one encompassing an assortment of far right parties and promising a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. However, in practice he has worked to maintain British influence in Europe and has been prepared to go against the Euro-sceptics in his party to do so. The promise of a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty was scrapped in November 2009 after the Treaty was passed by every member of the EU. Cameron was able to blame the Brown administration for signing and promised he would not ratify another treaty without a referendum. The coalition with the Lib Dems brought former MEPs like Clegg and Huhne into the Cabinet and it is possible that the need to balance the Tory right was a factor in the creation of the coalition. Most dramatically of all, in October 2011 Cameron imposed a three-line whip against attempts by Euro-sceptic MPs to force a vote on a referendum on EU membership. The fact that the vote was lost and no splits appeared in the party suggests a level of pragmatism and discipline that belies the little-Englander outlook of some individual Tories.

With his opposition to the proposed treaty changes in December 2011, Cameron seemed to polish up his Euro-sceptic credentials and won the applause of the Tory right. In fact, far from be-

8. Published in *WR* 340. See also "British imperialism: looking for a way out of the impasse" in *WR* 337 for further details.

ing a change of approach this was a fulfilment of Cameron's commitment to defend Britain's financial and imperialist interests. Blocking the Treaty kept the City free of external restrictions. It also sought to limit Germany's efforts to use the financial crisis in Europe to strengthen its domination of Europe. Cameron's subsequent steps to restore relations with France and to re-engage in European efforts to manage the crisis were both rapid and effective. This doesn't mean that the veto was without cost: over and above the insults suffered at the time it can only have reinforced the perceptions of British duplicity that may contribute to problems in the future. But for now, Cameron has scored another success in European policy.

North 26/03/12

More online - the online version of this article includes many of the statistics quoted here in table form.

Declaration for revolutionary organisation, Belgrade

From the ICC's introduction

"... we are now witnessing the development of a genuinely internationalist politicised minority in both countries (Serbia and Croatia), which openly rejects national divisions and seeks cooperation among all internationalist revolutionaries.

One expression of this new movement is the Declaration of the Birov collective in Serbia, which has recently emerged from a growing nucleus there (see their website, <http://www.birov.net/>). The most important thing about this Declaration, it seems to us, is the clarity and directness with which it puts forward a series of fundamental class positions:

- affirmation of the revolutionary nature of the working class against all "post-marxist mystifications";
- necessity for the self-organisation of the working class in opposition to the trade unions, defined as organs of the capitalist state;
- insistence that the workers' assemblies and eventually the workers' councils are the instrument for the mass struggle against capitalism;
- rejection of all national liberation struggles and capitalist wars, seen as a fundamental "border line between revolutionaries and the patriotic, social democratic left";
- characterisation of the so-called 'socialist states' as capitalist regimes.

The last two points are obviously especially important given the recent conflicts in the region, and the increasing use of nationalist rhetoric by the ruling class.

Underlying these revolutionary positions is a definite recognition that capitalism is no longer in its progressive phase and can no longer provide permanent reforms: in other words, that it is a system in decline..."

Read the whole article online

1. *Britain's prosperity in a networked world*. Speech given in Tokyo 15th July 2010. Available from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website.

2. The majority of the statistics in this article are based on data in the 2010 Pink Book - United Kingdom Balance of Payments - published by the ONS.

3. Deutsche Bundesbank, Monthly Report March 2011 *German Balance of Payments in 2010*

4. Published in *International Review* no. 144 as "The economic crisis in Britain"

5. *London's competitive place in the UK and global economies*, Oxford Economics, 2011.

6. ONS *Economic and Labour Market Review*, May 2011, p.15.

7. Ibid.

All budgets are for millionaires

It's difficult to find anyone with a good word to say about George Osborne's latest budget. Ed Milliband claimed it "failed the fairness test" and was a "millionaire's Budget which squeezes the middle" and was an expression of the "same old Tories"¹.

The material attack

Those defending the Budget point to the increase in personal tax allowance to £9,250: i.e. no-one will be taxed on income up to this threshold. Touted as a measure to help "the poor", in fact this will affect everyone but only by about £14 a month. Taken by itself, one might argue that every little helps – but the reality is that any benefit will be swallowed up by record petrol prices, increasing VAT on "hot food" (which will punish workers who have a main meal at work for example) and the below-inflation rise for the National Minimum Wage (with rates for younger workers frozen entirely). Public sector workers face additional targeted attacks with the proposed introduction of local pay rates. And there was £10 billion which Osborne estimated needed to be cut from the benefits bill, without saying exactly when and how it would be done.

The ideological attack

Predictably, the left leaning press attacked the reduction in the top rate of income tax from 50p to 45p and the decrease in corporation tax and commentators (even those normally considered friendly to the Conservatives) lined up to condemn the "Granny Tax" – a reduction of the tax allowance for pensioners.

The sound and fury of the media is, of course, designed to steer the debate in particular ways and the outrage over the Granny Tax is a good example. There is no question that the erosion of the allowance will cause pain to many pensioners. And, after all, who could be stony-hearted faced with the narrative of 'hard working' oldsters, who've 'paid into the system all their lives' now facing penury in their old age? Against this, another argument is presented: the effects of the crisis have, so far, disproportionately affected young people who suffer from chronic unemployment and low wages, the latter even lower now the age-bands of the minimum wage have been frozen. Shouldn't older people pay their share?

The masses are thus invited to take sides in a debate about which section of the population should shoulder the burden of the system's crisis. Class divisions are completely obscured in this debate. No mention is made of wealthy pensioners or young people from wealthy families. They are conveniently forgotten, allowed to carry on

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17461083>

in hidden pockets of privilege that are only minimally affected by the various changes, while the rest of society is allowed to fight over the scraps. The fixation on particular items also manages to obscure (without actually hiding) the more draconian elements of the Budget mentioned above.

Of course, the ruling class can't completely hide the fact we live in a class society. But the rhetoric about the budget being for millionaires once again hides a deeper reality behind a self-evident truth: all budgets are for millionaires! Contrary to the democratic myth, the state is not the expression of 'the people' but the highest synthesis of the ruling class, the capitalist class. It rules in the name of the whole population but actually in the collective interest of the capitalists. The state may sometimes appear to be "in hock" to the "business community" or at other times to ruthlessly impose its will upon them, but these are only the surface expressions of an underlying constant: defending the basic capitalist framework of society. Everything the state does – even when it grants concessions to the workers – is done with aim of preserving that framework and the domination of the ruling class.

As long as we allow ourselves to be drawn into arguments about how to manage an economic system in terminal decline, the working class will always lose, no matter what items the Budget contains. Instead, we need to understand the real function of the state in order to destroy both the state itself and the social foundation of exploitation on which the state rests. Only then can society really be organised for the benefit of all.

Ishamael 26/3/12

Oil tanker drivers' struggle Bourgeois campaigns obscure the needs of the struggle

The furore over the oil tankers' dispute shows what workers are up against in today's capitalist system. The workers are fed up with the working conditions imposed on them by the oil companies and the contracting agents they use to hire them. They frequently have to work extremely long hours, which is a dire threat not only to their own safety but the safety of many others given the volatile nature of their cargo. There have also been serious attempts to cut their wages.

But because of the key role they play in the economy – the 2000 employed tanker drivers supply up to 90% of fuel to UK gas stations – this potential conflict has immediately been transformed into a national political scandal by the intervention of the government and its vilification by the press, opposition politicians and union officials.

First the government, faced with a possible strike over Easter, made it known that troops would be called in to ensure that oil supplies were not disrupted. Then we had Francis Maude's 'jerry can' speech which instantly provoked panic buying and fuel shortages around the country, while fears that this would lead to real fire hazards were almost immediately vindicated by the horrible 40% burns suffered by a woman trying to decant fuel in her kitchen.

The trade unions often tell us that the conflicts they are given to manage are industrial and not political, but the response of the government made nonsense of any such claim. A worried *Daily Telegraph* blogger, ex-*Telegraph* editor Charles Moore (i.e. a Tory!), even brought to light a private memo from Tory MPs to constituency associations which announced the government's very political intentions in this dispute:

"This is our Thatcher moment. In order to defeat the coming miners' strike, she stockpiled coal. When the strike came, she weathered it, and the Labour Party, tarred by the strike, was humiliated. In order to defeat the coming fuel drivers' strike,

ICC leaflet for March 28 day of action Why are we not united?

Thousands of teachers are striking in London on 28 March against the governments pension 'reforms'.

But is it just teachers who have a reason to protest?

No. It's the whole public sector. All pensions are under attack, and the latest budget, with its 'granny tax', has made it worse. Last November the civil servants, local government employees and others were out alongside those who work in education. Why have the unions decided not to bring them out today?

It's the whole private sector, where growing numbers of workers can't look forward to any kind of pension at all.

Is it just pensions?

No. More and more workers face long term pay freezes, worsening conditions at work – if they have a job at all. Over 20 percent of young people between 16 and 25 are out of work.

Is it just London?

No. These conditions are faced by workers up and down the country.

Is it just Britain?

No. The brutal austerity measures being imposed on the working class and the entire population in Greece, Portugal and Spain, where wages and pensions are already being directly cut and hundreds of thousands of jobs wiped out, are what lie in store for all us, because the crisis of this system is world wide and terminal.

Why then are we being divided, if we all face the same attack, and need to fight back together?

There are many reasons. The widespread feeling that there is no alternative, the hope that it will all go away, the lack of confidence about taking things into our own hands.

But this lack of perspective and lack of confidence means that those who falsely claim to represent our interests – above all our 'official' trade union representatives – can keep us divided into countless little sectors, trades, and categories, call us out on separate days, cancel strikes when the courts give the order, and imprison us in trade union legislation which makes us fight with one hand tied behind our backs.

Despite all this, can we unite?

Yes, if we cut across professional and trade union divisions and come together in assemblies open to all workers.

If we ignore laws about ballots and use these assemblies to make actual decisions about how to struggle.

If we ignore trade union laws about 'secondary picketing' and use massive delegations to call on other workers to join our struggle.

If we open out to casual workers, students, the unemployed, pensioners.

If we use demonstrations, occupations and street meetings not to listen passively to speeches by the experts but to exchange experiences of struggle and discuss how to go forward.

If we rediscover our identity as a class – a class which everywhere, in all countries, has the same interests and the same goal: the replacement of this rotten system with a real human community.

International Communist Current, 23.3.12

ICC Online

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The Occupy movement on the West Coast: how 'organising the unorganised' led to division

Occupy Zurich: when the movement becomes exhausted

USA

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The economic crisis announces the end of a system and the struggle for another world

Debate in the revolutionary milieu
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Decadence of capitalism (xii)
40 years of open crisis show that capitalism's decline is terminal

Spain, Portugal, the international struggle against austerity

The wave of austerity measures that governments across Europe have imposed because of recession and the debt mountain that stem from capitalism's economic crisis has been met with a mixed response from the working class. We have seen the rise of the 'indignados' in Spain and the angry demonstrations and assemblies in Greece, but there are other countries where workers' discontent is more held back by the actions of the unions.

On the rack in Portugal

Already the poorest country in Western Europe, Portugal, like Ireland and Greece, has had a bailout package from the IMF and EU. As things stand the Portuguese economy is predicted to shrink by 3.3% in 2012, with no serious economist expecting the economy to pick up in 2013. There will probably be a need for a second bailout before long.

The crisis has led to an array of attacks on basic standards of life. The government has privatised several industries, cut public sector jobs/wages/services, cut welfare benefits, frozen pensions and put up a whole range of taxes. A rise in the mortal-

ity rate in February, with a thousand more deaths than usual, is being attributed to the increased costs of heating and health care.

General strikes in November 2010 and November 2011, although expressing workers' anger, were very much under the control of the unions. More recently the Portuguese government has introduced new labour laws to make it easier to sack workers, to reduce holidays and cut redundancy money. One of the union federations, the UGT, signed up to these measures in January in a pact with the government and employers. The Stalinist federation, the CGTP, declared itself against the latest attacks, denouncing them as, among other things, a "return to feudalism". The attacks are in reality the latest expression of the crisis of capitalism, and the actions of the Stalinist 'opposition' have held back the response of workers. On 22 March there was a further general strike. The 'Socialist' UGT was not participating, and the lack of coordination between the demonstrations called by the CGTP and others further served to divide up the energies of different groups of workers. It was also significant that it was mainly workers

from the public sector who were involved. There were clashes with the police, who also beat up a number of individuals. However, it's not just the threat of state violence that workers have to be wary of; the union straitjacket holds workers back everywhere.

Struggle in Spain

Similar measures in Spain have also led to a general strike, the first in 18 months. Recent government measures make it easier to lay workers off and cut wages. This is in a country where half of those under 25 are out of work (the highest rate in the EU) and the overall rate is officially 24%: that's 5.3million in a population of 47million. The union organisers of the 29 March strike claimed that millions were on the street, attending demonstrations in 110 locations with 80% of the workforce involved. More realistic observers suggested that hundreds of thousands were on the street, which could easily translate into an impressive number on strike. Clashes with the police in a number of places underlined the depth of workers' anger, and the force that the state has at its disposal.

The trouble is, these union controlled processions provide an outlet for discontent, but are not part of an effective fight. Over the last year there have been two general strikes in Portugal, more than ten in Greece, not as expressions of workers' discontent but as a means of diverting it. Workers' anger is channelled into actions that only lead to frustration and a sense of impotence.

On demonstrations in Spain on 29 March the ICC distributed a leaflet that showed where the strength of the working class lies. Any movement that leads towards the holding of workers' assemblies is a real step forward for the struggle. Against union parades it's impossible to overestimate the importance of assemblies. Holding workplace or street meetings to discuss, to exchange experiences and develop new initiatives – this is a vital means of developing workers' organisation and consciousness.

The ICC also published on our Spanish website other leaflets produced by radicalised minorities coming out of recent workers' struggles or the Indignados movement. Their common denominator was the concern to advocate the active participation of the greatest number of workers – which necessarily implies challenging the trade union control of the demonstrations and rallies. As the leaflet of the 15M Assembly Castellón put it:

"At the end of the demonstration we will go the Ma Agustina so that those who agreed yesterday can try to take the stage and read our statement. If that is not possible to do what we agreed:

▲ *begin to shout "we want to talk" for a period of time*

▲ *to shout "freedom of expression"*

▲ *finally if that still doesn't work, to leave with a great commotion shouting "they do not represent us"*

▲ *to head towards the Las Aulas*

On the theme to be discussed at the end of the demonstration, as was proposed on Wednesday, a letter will be communicated to the main trade unions on Monday which will ask what is the order of speakers at the end in order to know when we will be able to speak".

Two other appeals are published on page 5.

The reason these initiatives are so important is that the attacks of the bourgeoisie are not letting up; on the contrary they are being intensified. On the day after the 29 March strike the Spanish government announced a further 27 billion euros worth of cuts. Central government spending will be cut by a further 17%, public sector workers' pay is frozen, and fuel bills will go up with tax on gas on electricity. The Finance Minister said it was the most austere budget since 1977. Some commentators criticised the proposals for not cutting enough. The cuts are supposed to keep costs down, but will just as likely further contribute to the deepening of recession.

Against the attacks of the bourgeoisie many have been tempted to emigrate. Maybe half a million have left Greece; a majority of Spanish and Portuguese youth are reportedly considering emigration. But, apart from such choices always being attempts at individual solutions to widespread problems, this ignores the international reality of the capitalist crisis from which no country is immune.

In Germany the lowest unemployment figures in two decades have just been announced. Yet the evidence of a series of strikes in March in the German public sector shows that, whatever the differences between national economies, workers' anger is an international phenomenon. It's true that in the latest strikes in Germany workers have been, to a certain extent, used as pawns in pay negotiations between unions and government, but there is clearly real discontent. Ultimately, an international workers' struggle is the only response to the attacks brought on by an international capitalist economic crisis. **Car 30/3/12**

More online - read the article **Spanish indignados' movement What remains of 15M?** on our website

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From indignation to hope

Assemblies which aim to massively unite ourselves point the way towards breaking the chains of wage slavery, of atomisation, "everyone for themselves", imprisonment in the ghetto of a sector or a social category.

Assemblies in order to think, to discuss and decide together, to make ourselves collectively responsible for what is decided, by participating together both in the making of decisions and their implementation.

Assemblies in order to build mutual confidence, general empathy, solidarity, which are not only indispensable for taking the struggle forward but can also serve as the pillars of a future society free of class and exploitation.

2011 has seen an explosion of real solidarity that has nothing to do with the hypocritical and self-serving "solidarity" that the ruling class preaches about. The demonstrations in Madrid called for the freeing of those who have been arrested or have stopped the police detaining immigrants; there have been massive actions against evictions in Spain, Greece and the United States; in Oakland *"The strike Assembly has agreed to send pickets or to occupy any company or school that punishes employees or students in any way for taking part in the General Strike of the 2nd November"*. Vivid but still episodic moments have happened, when everyone can feel protected and defended by those around them. All of which starkly contrasted with what is "normal" in this society with its anguished sense of hopelessness and vulnerability.

The light for the future: the culture of debate

The consciousness needed for millions of workers to transform the world is not gained through being handed down by the ruling class or through the clever slogans of enlightened leaders. It is the fruit of an experience of struggle accompanied and guided by debate on a massive scale, by discussions which take into account the past but which are always focused on the future, since as a banner said in Spain *"There is not future without revolution"*.

The culture of debate, that is, open discussion based on mutual respect and active listening, has begun to spring up not only in the assemblies but around them: mobile libraries have been organised, as well as countless meetings for discussion and exchange of ideas... A vast intellectual activity has been carried out with very limited means, improvised in the streets and squares. And, as with the assemblies this has reanimated a past experience of the workers' movement *"The thirst for education, so long held back, was concerted by the revolution into a true delirium. During the first six*

*months, tons of literature, whether on handcars or wagons poured forth from the Smolny Institute each day, Russia insatiably absorbed it, like hot sand absorbs water. This was not pulp novels, falsified history, diluted religion or cheap fiction that corrupts, but economic and social theories, philosophy, the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, Gorky"*³. Confronted with this society's culture that is based on the struggle for "models of success" which can only be a fount of millions of failures, the alienating and false stereotypes hammered home by the dominant ideology and its media, thousands of people began to look for an authentic popular culture, making it for themselves, trying to animate their own critical and independent criteria. The crisis and its causes, the role of the banks etc, have been exhaustively discussed. There has been discussion of revolution, although with much confusion; there has been talk of democracy and dictatorship, synthesised in these two complementary slogans "they call it democracy and it is not" and "it is a dictatorship but unseen".

The proletariat is the key to the future

If all of this makes 2011 the year of the beginning of hope, we have viewed these movements with a discerning and critical eye, seeing their limitations and weaknesses which are still immense.

If there is a growing number of people in the world who are convinced that capitalism is an obsolete system, that "in order for humanity to survive, capitalism must be killed" there is also a tendency to reduce capitalism to a handful of "bad guys" (unscrupulous financiers, ruthless dictators) when it is really a complex network of social relations that have to be attacked in their totality and not dissipated into a preoccupation with its many surface expressions (finance, speculation, the corruption of political-economic powers).

While it is more than justified to reject the violence that capitalism has exuded from every pore (repression, terror and terrorism, moral barbarity), this system will however not be abolished by mere passive and citizen pressure. The minority class will not voluntarily abandon power and it will take cover in its state with its democratic legitimacy through elections every 4 or 5 years; through parties who promise what they can never do and do what they didn't promise; and through unions that mobilise in order to demobilise and end up signing up to all that the ruling class puts on the table. Only a massive, tenacious and stubborn struggle will give the exploited the necessary strength to destroy the state and its means of repression and

to make real the oft repeated shout in Spain "All power to the assemblies".

Although the slogan of "we are the 99% against the 1%", which was so popular in the occupation movement in the United States, reveals the beginnings of an understanding of the bloody class divisions that affect us, the majority of participants in these protests saw themselves as "active citizens" who want to be recognized within a society of "free and equal citizens".

However, society is divided into classes: a capitalist class that has everything and produces nothing, and an exploited class -the proletariat- that produces everything but has less and less. The driving force of social evolution is not the democratic game of the "decision of a majority of citizens" (this game is nothing more than a masquerade which covers up and legitimises the dictatorship of the ruling class) but the class struggle.

The social movement needs to join up with the struggle of the principle exploited class -the proletariat- who collectively produce the main riches and ensure the functioning of social life: factories, hospitals, schools, universities, offices, ports, construction, post offices. In some of the movements in 2011 we began to see its strength, above all in the wave of strikes that exploded in Egypt and which finally forced Mubarak to resign. In Oakland (California) the "occupiers" called a general strike, going to the port and gaining the active support of the dockers and lorry drivers. In London striking electricians and the St Paul's occupiers carried out common actions. In Spain certain striking sectors have tended to unite with the assemblies in the squares.

There is no opposition between the class struggle of the modern proletariat and the profound needs of the social layers exploited by capitalist oppression. The struggle of the proletariat is not an egoistical or specific movement but the basis for the *"independent movement of the immense majority to the benefit of the immense majority"* (*Communist Manifesto*).

The present movements would benefit from critically reviewing the experience of two centuries of proletarian struggle and attempts at social liberation. The road is long and fraught with enormous obstacles, which calls to mind the oft repeated slogan in Spain *"It is not that we are going slowly, it is that we are going far"*. Start the most widespread possible discussion, without any restriction or discouragement, in order to consciously prepare new movements which could make it clear that capitalism can indeed be replaced by another society.

International Communist Current
12/03/11

3. John Reed: 10 days that shock the world. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/reed/1919/10days/10days/ch1.htm>

General strike in Spain Radical minorities call for independent workers' action

A CALL-OUT AND PROPOSAL by the ALL-CANTE CRITICAL BLOC AND ASSEMBLY faced with the general strike.

Workers, unemployed, young people, students, retired, service users, EVERYONE who is participating in initiatives, assemblies and struggles.

We want to propose the formation of a participatory, critical, unitary space, based on self-organisation through assemblies, aimed at the repeal of the Labour Reform and against all forms of exploitation.

We want to take advantage of the "general strike" in order to put forward actions that go beyond what we consider to be an inadequate form of mobilisation.

WHETHER STRIKING OR NOT, LET'S GET TOGETHER ON THE 29-M

– in the morning: **GENERAL ASSEMBLY** at 11.00 in the Plaza de la Montanyeta Alicante. To think about and propose alternative actions for the 29th

– Midday: **EAT TOGETHER** in order to create a space for reflection and discussion.

– In the afternoon: **TO PARTICIPATE AS A BLOC ON THE DEMONSTRATION** at 18.00. We will be at the back of the demo.

– At night **AN OPEN ASSEMBLY** of workers, unemployed...after the demonstration in the Plaza de San Cristobal, around the theme: how to continue the struggle after the 29th?

Participate in the assemblies, no one should decide for you!

We need to go from indignation to action!

Together we can change everything!

FOR A STRIKE WITHOUT INTERMEDIARIES

(Workers' group of Palencia)

Once again the ruling class has reminded us who is in charge; this time with the Labour Reform which leave workers even more at the mercy of the employer. From now on, whether you keep your job or not will depend exclusively upon the boss's need to maximise profits. This is not due to this or that government but rather expresses the fact that for Capital we are nothing more than commodities. Faced with this prospect we have no other option than to struggle: What should this struggle be? How to carry it out?

The majority unions offer us their model: they command, we obey. They make a lot of fuss about the Labour Reform, but at the same time they cut deals that make things worse for the workers. In reality, our rights are of no importance to them. For them we are nothing more than a number that justifies their existence and their subsidies. What is important to them is that we are exploited and enslaved while they continue their charade! They are nothing more than puppets in the service of the capitalists. Their real function, which is why they continue to exist, is to absorb, divert and subdue the real struggle of the working class; to stop it becoming a real danger to the system and its ruling class.

... we cannot follow the majority unions nor their strategies. In order to nullify all revolutionary struggle, they have agreed to hold a strike with conditions, the so-called "minimum services". When have we ever seen a war where a pact has been signed with the enemy in order to "not cause too many problems"? The aim of a strike is to cause harm, to oblige the employers to bend before our interests. To strike where it hurts them most: the economy. This will not be done with an agreed strike and only on one day: it will be achieved through indefinite wildcat strikes.

We cannot give the traitorous unions and the opportunists on the Left of Capital more time. We must organise ourselves and without intermediaries in assemblies, in workers' councils. Only through determined action and without conditions can we defeat the exploiters and their servants in all areas: from the stopping of the Labour Reform to the destruction of the capitalist system.

AGAINST THE CUTS

ORGANISE OURSELVES WITHOUT INTERMEDIARIES!

All-India workers' strike of 28 February 2012: General strike or union ritual?

The general strike called by trade unions representing 100 millions workers spread all across India took place on 28 Feb 2012. All national unions, belonging to all political parties, including the Hindu fundamentalist BJP, joined the strike, as did thousands of local and regional unions. Bank employees, postal and state transport workers, teachers, dock workers and many other sectors of workers participated in the strike. The fact that all unions agreed to call this strike together goes to show the dynamic of workers' struggles behind it.

The unions put forward a mishmash of demands: defend the public sector, control prices, compulsorily register unions within 45 days, strict enforcement of labour laws, increase of minimum wages to Rs. 10000.00 per month and social security etc. They made no effort to show that the bourgeoisie is mercilessly attacking workers today as its system is in crisis and sick and rotten. Instead, the unions' efforts were aimed at building trust in the system – the bourgeoisie can concede anything, if it wishes to do so.

But the way the unions went about this whole strike showed their real intent. For one, they did not ask several millions of their members to even formally join the strike. More than one and a half million railway workers, an equal or even bigger number of state power sector workers, many other workers, most of whom are members of these unions, were not even called upon to join. While proclaiming a 'general strike', unions agreed to millions of their members going to work as usual and not disrupting the smooth flow of the main arteries of capitalism.

Even in sectors whose unions pledged to join the strike, their attitude was more one of proclaiming a ritual strike. Most workers who participated did so by staying at home. Unions made no big efforts to bring them onto the streets and together or organise demos. Not much effort was made to involve millions of private sector workers, who belong to striking national unions, in the strike. We can see the seriousness of this exclusion when we recall that recently and for quite some time private sector workers have been far more militant and less respectful of the laws of the bourgeoisie. Even industrial areas like Gurgaon and auto hubs near Chennai and factories like Maruti at Gurgaon and Hyundai near Chennai that have recently witnessed major strikes did not join this strike. In most industrial areas, in hundreds of big and smaller cities all across India, while public sector workers joined the strike, millions of private sector workers continued to work and their unions did not join the strike.

Why did the unions call the strike?

It is clear that unions did not use the strike to mobilise workers, to bring them onto the streets and unify them. They used it as a ritual, as a means to let off steam, to keep workers apart, to keep them passive and demobilised. Striking workers sitting at home and watching TV do not strengthen workers' unity or consciousness. It only encourages a sense of isolation, a sense of passivity and of a wasted opportunity. Given this attitude, why did unions then call the strike? And what made all of them, including BMS and INTUC, join it? To understand this we have to look at what is happening at the economic and social level and within the working class in India.

Worsening living conditions of workers

Despite all the big talk about economic boom by the Indian bourgeoisie, the economic situation has been worsening over the last few years. Like capitalism everywhere, the capitalist economy in India too has been in crisis. According to statistics issued by the government, the growth has stalled and come down from nine percent to nearly six percent. Many industries have been badly hit by the crisis. These include the IT sector but also other sectors like textiles, diamond processing, capital goods industries, infrastructure, private power companies and airlines. This has led to intensified attacks on the working class. General inflation has been hovering around ten percent for more than two years. Inflation in food and other items of

daily use has been much higher, sometimes going up to 16%. This has made the life of the working class miserable.

Development of class struggle

In the midst of these deteriorating living and working conditions, the working class has also been discovering the path to class struggle. Since 2005 we have seen a slow acceleration of class struggle all across India. Of course this is not unique to India but part of a global resurgence of the class struggle. The years 2010 and 2011 have seen numerous strikes in many sectors, including in auto hubs at Gurgaon and Chennai. Some of these struggles, as the strikes by Honda Motor Cycle workers in 2010 and Maruti Suzuki workers in 2011, had shown great militancy and determination to confront the security apparatus of the bosses. This has also been the characteristic of strikes in Hyundai Motors in Chennai, where workers struck work several times against casualisation and other attacks of the bosses. These strikes showed strong tendencies toward solidarity and spread across factories. They also expressed tendencies toward self-organization and setting up general assemblies, as seen in strikes by the Maruti workers who occupied the factory against the advice of 'their' union.

In addition to this the struggles taking place in Middle East, in Greece, in Britain and the global 'occupy movements' have been having an echo in the Indian working class.

Fear of the contagion of class struggle

In the face of this situation the bourgeoisie has really been worried about the spread of class struggle. At times the bourgeoisie has been very scared. This fear has been clearly expressed in the face of many of the recent strikes.

At the time of violent confrontations at Honda Motor Cycles and in the face of repeated strikes in Maruti-Suzuki, this fear could be seen clearly. Each time the media was full of stories that strikes could spread and engulf other auto companies in Gurgaon and paralyse the whole area. These stories were not speculation. While the main strikes were in a few factories, other workers went to the gates of the striking companies. There were workers' joint demos, even one strike across the whole industrial city of Gurgaon. The provincial government was itself seriously concerned about the spread of the strike. The Chief Minister and Labour Minister of Haryana, at the prompting of the Prime Minister and Union Labour Minister, brought management and union bosses together to dampen down the strike.

Like the rest of the bourgeoisie, unions have been even more concerned over losing control over the workers if the militancy increases. Again, this was evident in strikes at Maruti in 2011 where workers took many actions against the directions and the wishes of the union.

This fear has been pushing the unions to appear to be doing something. They have called a number of ritual strikes including a bank workers' strike in November 2011. The present strike, while without doubt an expression of the rising tide of anger and militancy within the working class, is also the latest effort of the unions to contain and channel it.

Taking the struggle into our own hands

Workers need to understand that going on a ritual strike and sitting back at home does not take us anywhere. Nor does it help to gather in a park and listen to speeches of union bosses and party MPs. The bosses and their government are attacking us because capitalism is in crisis and they have no way out. We need to understand that all workers are under attack, all are in the same boat. Remaining passive and isolated from each other does not discourage bosses from intensifying their attacks against workers. Workers need to use these occasions to come out on the streets, to mobilise themselves, to come together and discuss with other workers. They need to take their struggles into their own hands. This will not immediately solve workers' problems but it will make it possible for us to mount a genuine struggle against the bosses

to defend ourselves, to push the bosses back. It will help us develop our struggle against the whole of capitalism and work toward its destruction. As those occupying the Athens Law School in Greece in February 2012 said, in order to liberate ourselves from present crises of capitalism, "we must destroy the (capitalist) economy."

Communist Internationalist, 9 March 2012

Continued from page 8

Catholic or Orthodox. The word 'ghetto' originally referred to a small island in Venice where Jews were compelled to live from the early sixteenth century. The word 'pogrom' (literally 'destruction') comes from nineteenth century Russia. It was in Europe, in response to the pogroms in the east and the wave of anti-Semitism linked to the Dreyfus affair in France, and not in North Africa or the Middle East, that we saw the development of Zionism, the nationalist ideology born at the end of the nineteenth century and advocating the return of the Jews to Palestine and the creation of a state based on Jewish identity in a land mainly inhabited by Muslims.

After the First World War a 'Jewish national homeland' was created in Palestine under a British mandate that came into force in 1923. During the 1930s many victims of Nazi persecution emigrated to Palestine and this marked the real beginning of antagonism between Jews and Muslims. But it was above all the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, whose objective was to provide a home for hundreds of thousands of survivors of the Shoah, people who had lost everything, which was to feed and aggravate the hostility of many Muslims towards the Jews, especially after 750,000 Arabs fled to refugee camps. The various wars between Israel and the Arab countries, as well as the creation of Jewish settlements in the territories occupied by Israel, further inflamed the situation and provided more oil to the propaganda machine of the governments of the region, who have found that Israel's colonial policies serve as an excellent way of channelling the anger of populations which these governments have kept in poverty and oppression. The same goes for the rhetorical or armed 'Crusades' by the American leaders and their western and Israeli allies in or against Muslim countries such as Iran, Iraq or Afghanistan in the name of the struggle against 'Islamic terrorism'.

Born out of the barbaric history of the twentieth century, right at the centre of a crucially important region from the economic or strategic point of view, the state of Israel and its policies can only feed tensions in the Middle East and hatred of Jews among Muslims.

What is the perspective?

Mohamed Merah is dead, his body riddled with bullets, but the causes behind his tragic itinerary are not about to go away. With the deepening crisis of a capitalist system in its death throes, with the ineluctable growth of unemployment, of precariousness and exclusion, especially among the young, despair and hatred as well as religious fanaticism have a bright future ahead of them, offering the little chiefs of the drugs game or 'jihad' plenty of opportunities for recruitment. The only antidote to this slide into barbarism is the massive, conscious development of proletarian struggles, which can offer young people a real identity, a class identity; a real community, that of the exploited and not of the 'believers'; a real solidarity, the solidarity that emerges in the struggle against exploitation, uniting workers and unemployed of all races, nationalities and religions; a real enemy to fight and overcome –not the Jews, but capitalism. And by the same token it is the same workers' struggles which alone will allow the Middle East to come out of its current state of permanent warfare, whether open or hidden, when Jewish and Muslim proletarians, those on both sides of the 'Wall of Shame', understand that they have the same interests and have to be in solidarity with each other against exploitation. By developing in all countries, the workers' struggle will have to take up the only perspective that can save humanity from barbarism: the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society. **Fabienne 29/3/12**

The making of the UK state, part 2: Ireland

This is the second in our series by a close sympathiser examining the formation of the British state in the 17th and 18th centuries. The first article in WR 352 showed how English capital expanded to dominate the rest of the British Isles, and why attempts to form an independent capitalist state in Scotland failed. Here we turn to the case of Ireland, and then draw some conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the modern UK state and their implications for the class struggle today.

The destruction of feudalism in Ireland and the invasion of mainland capital

Feudalism in Ireland was more fully developed and resistant to external change than in England or Scotland. As part of its attempt to impose direct rule on the island, in the 16th century the centralising English Tudor monarchy began to confiscate the lands of rebellious Catholic nobles and ‘plant’ them with their own colonists, but the north of Ireland only came under English control after the defeat of a Spanish-backed revolt in 1603. The subsequent ‘plantation’ of Ulster with Protestant English and Scottish settlers, financed by the City of London, was the first major colonial project of the English empire in the British Isles.

Faced with this steady destruction of its power, in 1641 the Catholic nobility mobilised the impoverished Irish peasantry in an attempted *coup d'état*. The ensuing massacre of Protestant settlers in Ulster, and the enfeebled Stuart monarchy's willingness to make an alliance with the Irish nobility against the Protestant Scots, provided the English bourgeoisie with the perfect propaganda weapon with which to mobilise popular support for its own political struggle against the monarchy under an anti-absolutist, anti-Catholic banner.

Seizing the opportunity presented by civil war in England, the Irish nobility set up what was in effect a separate state, the ‘Catholic Confederation’, with French, Spanish and Papal support. In return for a promise of self-government and religious rights the majority allied themselves with the royalist side, while a minority called for a Catholic state fully independent of England, which led to a brief Irish civil war. The Confederate-royalist alliance was finally defeated by Cromwell's army in 1653.¹

The subsequent English re-conquest of Ireland, which included the infamous massacres at Drogheda and Wexford, was followed by military occupation and the mass confiscation of land, effectively destroying the power of the Catholic nobility and subordinating the Irish state to the interests of English capital, whose ruthless campaign to impose itself on the island decimated the already impoverished Irish peasantry. From the survey carried out for the government and completed by William Petty in 1656 it has been estimated that over 618,000 people died in Ireland between 1641 and 1653, about 40% of the population, with around 12,000 exported as slaves. Not surprisingly the brutality of this bourgeois revolution from the outside left a lasting legacy of hatred and resentment.

Some land was returned to pro-royalist nobles after 1660 but the restored Stuart monarchy was forced to accept the main terms of the Cromwellian ‘settlement’ in Ireland. The expropriated Irish Catholic landowning class opposed the ‘Glorious Revolution’ in 1688, backing the restoration

of the Stuart dynasty as the only chance of regaining its lost power; and, except for Protestant Ulster, Ireland became a stronghold of the ‘Jacobites’ (ie. supporters of the deposed Stuart King James II), remaining under the control of an Irish army with French support until 1690 when, after a campaign that was to become a major source of mythology for future Protestant Ulster Unionism, the forces of Irish Catholic feudalism were finally defeated by the forces of English capitalism led by the Dutch Willem van Oranje (‘King Billy’), with the active support of the Protestant settlers of the north east.

Having regained control, the political priority of the English bourgeoisie was to ensure that its interests in Ireland were protected by a loyal colonial garrison, to be provided by a narrow section of the mostly English Protestant landowning elite. Economically its priority was to open up Ireland to English capitalist producers desperate for new markets while denying the markets of mainland Britain to Irish products, and to this end any Irish economic activity that threatened English industry was ruthlessly destroyed.

The growth of Irish trade and manufacturing despite these restrictions, and the emergence of an indigenous capitalist class in the second half of the 18th century, directly conflicted with these priorities, and the new British state found itself faced with growing political demands for Irish self-government and free trade led by the Presbyterian bourgeoisie of the north east. Weakened by the American Revolution (1776-1783), and under increasing threat from a national liberation struggle led by formerly loyal settlers, the British bourgeoisie was forced to concede Irish legislative independence and free trade within the British empire – but not full self-government.

This failed to disarm the growing bourgeois national movement, which received a further political impetus from the French Revolution; the programme of the Society of United Irishmen, founded in 1791, included religious equality, national independence and an end to English commercial monopoly. Faced with this threat, the British bourgeoisie now played the tried and tested ‘anti-popey’ card, deliberately fomenting religious sectarianism in order to divide the revolutionary national movement and then unleashing state terror against a French-backed insurrection in 1798. Having crushed this movement it imposed direct rule and forcibly incorporated Ireland into the British state. From now on Irish capitalist development was to be totally subordinated to the needs and interests of British imperialism.

With the defeat of its attempted national revolution, the Irish bourgeoisie found itself deeply divided along sectarian lines. This division broadly corresponded to the uneven development of capitalism in the island, where a largely Catholic class of merchants and traders, heavily dependent on agriculture, had emerged in the south, with a Protestant bourgeoisie based on the linen industry (which did not compete with English producers) in the north east. Southern capital needed a protected home market to have any chance of developing, while in the north, large-scale capitalism was able to develop on the basis of its close ties to mainland capital.

These opposing economic interests – themselves shaped by the priorities of English imperialist policy – became the basis for the emergence of the conflicting nationalist movements of Protestant Ulster Unionism and southern Catholic Republicanism. Above all, these sectarian divisions were deliberately sponsored by the British state in order to retain its political and social control in Ireland, and became a major obstacle to the future unification of the working class in Ireland.

Ireland's forcible incorporation into the new ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’ in 1801 formally marked the creation of the modern UK state, but the divisions within the capitalist class eventually gave rise to a nationalist struggle by the Southern Catholic bourgeoisie in order to set up its own protected home market. The ‘Irish Free State’ seceded from the UK in 1922. We don't intend to deal with the complexities of the ‘Irish question’ here, or with the anti-working class nature of nationalist struggles in the epoch



How mainland capital imposed itself on feudal Ireland - A 19th century depiction of the massacre at Drogheda, 1649

of capitalist decadence.² We have shown that its roots lie in the uneven development of capitalism in the British Isles, the full-frontal assault of mainland capital in order to impose itself on a resistant feudal state, and the strategic priorities of British imperialism faced with revolutionary threats at home and abroad.

Some conclusions

As a result of its process of formation, from its origins the ‘United Kingdom’ was not a single nation state like, say, France, but a state containing at least four ‘nations’: England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. More specifically, this state reflected the domination of English capital over the rest of the British Isles and the success of its efforts to prevent the emergence of any potential rival, which had involved a series of pragmatic measures and hastily cobbled-together mergers.

It happened differently elsewhere. There are certainly some similarities in the role played by England in the British Isles with that of Prussia in the process of German unification, but whereas the latter resulted at least formally in a federated nation state, even the British bourgeoisie is forced to accept that the UK state today is ‘complex’. But there was never a single process to be followed for the replacement of feudal regimes with state structures defending the interests of the new mode of production, and no single ‘model’ of the bourgeois revolution. It happened differently, over a whole epoch, in the USA, Russia, Japan, the Ottoman Empire... In the UK it left political, economic and ethnic fault lines, some of which, as in the case of Ireland, proved deep and unstable, while others, as in the case of Scotland, were largely but not completely submerged in the pursuit of common capitalist and imperialist interests. These fault lines still shape the British bourgeoisie and the modern UK state.

Given the depth of the capitalist crisis today and the growing tendency towards the decomposition of capitalist society, it would be wrong to dismiss the possibility of the break-up of the UK state. The bourgeoisie everywhere is less and less able to control events or prevent the disintegration of its system. But it is still dangerous to underestimate the continuing ability of the capitalist class to manipulate events and direct campaigns to divide the working class and maintain its rule.

A defining feature of the bourgeois revolution in England is that it was one of the earliest in the world. As a direct consequence the English bourgeoisie is one of the longest-ruling, most experienced factions of the capitalist class. It also had a very valuable early experience of defeating a threat from the exploited masses, which demanded not only cunning and ruthlessness but also in-

telligence and flexibility. This means it can still teach the rest of the bourgeoisie lessons in how to deal with the class struggle.³ After the respective roles of parliament and the monarchy were settled by the ‘Glorious Revolution’ there were to be no major changes in the structure of the state for over a hundred years, while due to its insularity the UK state was spared invasions or major convulsions, giving it an almost unprecedented stability compared to its continental counterparts.

This defining feature also shaped the characteristics of the UK state and the institutions that emerged from the bourgeois revolution, which still bear the aristocratic features of the landowning interests that played such a key role in their formation (along with the City of London financial interests). Landowning classes played an important role in the bourgeois revolution in other countries (eg. the *Junkers* in Prussia or the samurai in Japan), but the English landowning aristocracy was the wealthiest and most powerful, having gradually transformed itself into a capitalist landowning class over a very long period. Even when a manufacturing class did eventually arise from the Industrial Revolution, instead of using its economic power to seize political control of the state and rip out all the symbols of the ‘old regime’ – monarchy, House of Lords, state church, even the colonies – as so many unnecessary ‘overheads’, as Marx at one time anticipated, it largely accommodated itself to the existing state structures.⁴

The British bourgeoisie eventually paid a price for the backwardness of these state institutions, which exacerbated its lack of industrial competitiveness when rival powers like Germany and the USA emerged, but they continued to enable a very subtle and flexible system of rule and mystification. It took a sharp external observer like Trotsky to pinpoint these key characteristics of British capitalist society:

“The British bourgeoisie developed under the protection of ancient institutions, on the one hand adapting itself to them and on the other subjecting them to itself, gradually, organically, ‘in an evolutionary way’. The revolutionary upheavals of the 17th century were profoundly forgotten. In this consists what is called the British tradition. Its basic feature is conservatism. More than anything else the British bourgeoisie is proud that it has not destroyed old buildings and old beliefs, but has gradually adapted the old royal and noble castle to the requirements of the business firm. In this castle, in the corners of it, there were its icons, its symbols, its fetishes, and the bourgeoisie did not remove them. It made use of them to consecrate its rule. And it laid down from above upon its proletariat the heavy lid of cultural conservatism.”⁵

The persistence of these institutions, particularly of the monarchy, still serves the British bourgeoisie in two ways; on the one hand they help to disguise its naked class dictatorship, providing a potent source of mystification that assists in ensuring social order. On the other hand, they allow factions of the bourgeoisie, particularly from the left, to create campaigns around the long-overdue ‘modernisation’ of the state, presenting very modest proposals for changes in state structures as in some way ‘revolutionary’. As we have seen with the devolution issue, this can be an effective tactic to divert attention from the capitalist crisis when combined with nationalist feelings and resentment. **MH, March 2012**

1. If England was the major imperialist player in Ireland, Scotland was a minor one, along with France and Spain. Due to its proximity, the north east of Ireland had long been a Scottish sphere of influence, and a Scottish army was sent to Ulster in 1642, ostensibly to protect Scottish settlers, remaining there until the end of the civil wars.

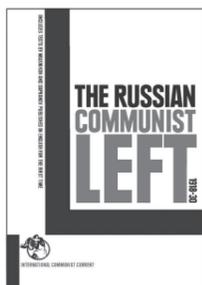
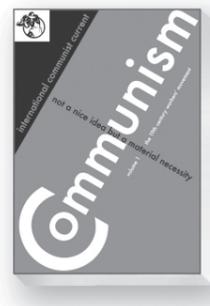
3. See the series on ‘Lessons of the English revolution’ in WRs 323, 325 and 329.

4. Marx, ‘The Chartist’, 10 August 1852, in *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin, 1973, pp.262-264.

5. Trotsky, *Through what stage are we passing?* (1921) (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/06/stage.htm>).

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How to work with the ICC

First by discussing with us. Write to us by letter, email, or take part in our online discussion forum (<http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056>) Come to our public meetings and meetings organised for contacts. Raise questions about our positions, analyses, the way we write, the way our website works, etc etc.

Write for our website and papers, whether reports on meetings you have attended, what's happening in your workplace, sector, or neighbourhood, or more developed articles, theoretical contributions, etc.

Help us translate from/into the many different languages in which we write.

Participate in our public activities: selling the press on the street, speaking and distributing our press and leaflets at picket lines, demonstrations, occupations. Help us to intervene at political meetings, go along to them yourselves and argue for revolutionary ideas; contribute to the internet discussion forums in which we participate, such as www.libcom.org, or www.revleft.com (in particular the left communist forum on the latter: <http://www.revleft.com/vb/group.php?groupid=9>), www.red-marx.com, etc

If you know others who are also interested in talking about revolutionary politics and the class struggle, set up discussion circles, class struggle forums or similar groupings, which we would be very happy to help you get going and to take part in ourselves.

Help increase our very restricted finances by making regular financial donations, subscribing to our press, taking extra copies to sell to those you know, or to place in local bookshops.

Discuss with the ICC on our online forum

Recent threads include:

Statement on the social movements of 2011

"The bourgeoisie fears the contagion of revolt, but they must also fear the culture of debate which is its precursor. The protest movements of 2011 have initiated this process and shattered the bourgeoisie's preferred conception of the exploited as " failures, idlers, incapable of taking the initiative..."

Speed of neutrinos: is scientific progress faster than its shadow?

"the greatest scientific advance has been in scientific socialism, dialectical materialism, marxism - whatever you want to call it. And that advance has been the exposition of contradictions of capitalism and the negation of that, ie, the class struggle.

But I agree more with K that that doesn't preclude taking in particular scientific advances. Maxime says the same in the original piece: science is tainted by capitalism but communists have a more materialist and historical approach to "scientific" questions."

Questions on activity and intervention

"In the other parties who call themselves socialist/communist, one could only argue that a MAJORITY of the people involved in these groups have genuine intent in building communism. Sure, you could say their positions might negate this genuine intent. But nevertheless, I see people involved in the "workers parties" and think of them in a positive light, I get the sense the ICC does not. I feel they can be won to REAL class positions through consistent, friendly, and mutually beneficial discussions--- increasingly I feel as the ICC thinks not. Otherwise, wouldn't we be engaging these groups now?"

ICC Public meetings

Why we need communism

Lunchtime meeting at Tent City University,
 Finsbury Square, London EC2
 Wednesday 11 April, 2012, 1pm -3pm

We need communism - not the state capitalist nightmare of Stalinism but a global human community without states, markets or money - because:

- capitalism, as a world-wide system of production, can offer us no future except crisis, war and ecological catastrophe
- this system cannot be reformed or made more 'democratic'
- at the same time, the possibility of producing for our real needs already exists

Day of discussion

23 June in London - watch this space
 What can we learn from the occupy movements?

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Write by e-mail to the following addresses:

From Great Britain use uk@internationalism.org
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The drama in Toulouse and Montauban

Symptoms of capitalism's barbaric demise



The murders committed on the 11, 15 and 19 March in Toulouse and Montauban, as well as their fall-out, are a striking illustration of the barbarity engulfing the present system.

According to President Sarkozy, Mohamed Merah, the young Toulousain who carried out these crimes and was executed by the French police, was a "monster". This raises some questions:

What is a 'monster'?

How could society create such a 'monster'?

Monsters good and bad

If the cold-blooded killing of completely innocent people, people you don't even know, makes a human being into a monster, then the whole planet is ruled by monsters because many chiefs of state have committed similar crimes. And we are not just talking about a few 'bloody dictators' like Stalin or Hitler in the past, Gaddafi or Assad in the present period. What are we to think of Winston Churchill, the 'Great Man' of the Second World War, who as early as summer 1943 ordered the bombing of the German cities of Hamburg and Dresden, which took place 13-15 February 1945? These bombings took tens, probably hundreds, of

thousands of civilian lives, 50% of them women and 12% children. What are we to think of Harry Truman, president of the great American democracy, who ordered the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in August 1945? These also killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, the majority of them women and children. Those killed were not the 'collateral damage' of operations aimed at military targets. The bombings were expressly aimed at civilians and in particular, in the case of Germany, those who lived in working class areas. Today the leaders of the 'democratic' countries are constantly covering up the bombing of civilian populations, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza or elsewhere.

In order to exonerate the political and military leaders, we are told that all these crimes are the price that had to be paid for winning the war against the 'forces of evil'. Even reprisals against civilian population are justified in this way: these acts of revenge had the aim of 'demoralising' or 'dissuading' the enemy. This is exactly what Mohamed Merah said, if we are to believe the policeman who talked to him prior to his execution: by attacking soldiers, he wanted to "avenge his brothers in Afghanistan". By attacking children who went to a Jewish school he wanted to "avenge the children of Gaza" who have been the victims of Israeli bombings.

But perhaps what made Mohamed Merah a 'monster' was that he himself pulled the trigger of the murder weapons? It's true that the leaders who order massacres are not usually in direct contact with their victims: Churchill did not fly the planes that bombed German cities and did not have the opportunity to see the agonising deaths of the women and children that they killed. But wasn't that also the case with Hitler and Stalin, who were also rightly seen as sinister criminals? What's more, the soldiers who, on the ground, murder unarmed civilians, whether following orders or acting out of the hatred that has been put into their heads, are rarely treated as monsters. Sometimes they even get medals and are considered 'heroes'.

Whether we are talking about the leaders of states or ordinary people enlisted into a war, there are many 'monsters' in the world today, and they are above all products of a society which is indeed 'monstrous'.

The tragic trajectory of Mohamed Merah clearly illustrates this.

How to become a monster

Mohamed Merah was a very young man, a North African immigrant, brought up by a single mother, a failure at school. When still a minor he committed various violent crimes which got him into prison. He was unemployed on a number of occasions and tried to join the army, which rejected him because of his prior convictions. While this was happening he moved towards radical Islamism, apparently under the influence of his older brother.

Here we have a classic journey that many young people have been through. Not all these young people end up as killers. Mohamed Merah was a particularly fragile personality, as can be seen by his attempted suicide when he was in prison and the time he spent in a psychiatric institution. But it is significant – as shown by attempts to set up websites that glorify him – that Mohamed Merah is already being seen as a 'hero' among many young people in the banlieues, just like the terrorists who blow people up in public places in Israel, Iraq or London. The move towards violent, extremist forms of Islam is especially strong in Muslim countries and can take on a mass character – witness the success of Hamas in Gaza for example. When it involves young people born in France or other European countries it is, in part at least, the result of the same causes: the revolt against injustice, the product of despair and a feeling of exclusion. The terrorists of Gaza are recruited mainly from the young in a population which for decades has been living in poverty and unemployment, which has been colonised by the Israeli state and is constantly subjected to Israeli bombing raids.

As Marx famously put it in the 19th century: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature. It is the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." Faced with an intolerable present and the absence of any future, populations find no other consolation or hope than a flight to religion, which promises them a paradise after death. Playing on irrational feelings, since they are based on faith and not on rational thought, religions are the perfect soil for fanaticism, for the outright rejection of reason. When they contain the ingredient of 'holy war' against the 'infidels' as a way of entering paradise (as is the case with Islam, but also with Christianity), added to poverty, despair and daily humiliation, they can easily be converted into a celestial justification for violence, terrorism and organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

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.

* 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

massacres. In the autumn of 2005 the wave of violence which swept through the French banlieues was a symptom of the malaise and despair infecting a mass of young people who are the victims of unemployment and the lack of any future, in particular young people from a North African or Sub-Saharan background. The latter suffer from a dual burden: as well as the exclusion that unemployment itself brings, there is the exclusion that comes from the colour of your skin or your name: starting with equal talents, a Joseph or a Marie has a much better chance of finding a job than a Youseff or a Mariam, especially if the latter wears a veil or a headscarf in deference to her family's wishes.

In this context, the retreat into 'identity' or 'communitarianism', as the sociologists call it, can only get worse, and religion is its main glue. And this kind of communitarianism, above all in its most violent and xenophobic forms, has been further fuelled by the international situation, in which the state of Israel, the Jewish state, is seen as the 'enemy' par excellence.

The roots of anti-Judaism

According to the information provided by the police, it was because he couldn't find any soldiers to shoot on 19 March that Mohamed Merah turned to the Jewish school where he killed three children and a teacher. This horrific act was just the extreme point of the very strong anti-Jewish feelings harboured by many Muslims today.

However, anti-Judaism is not a historical 'specificity' of Islam, on the contrary. In the Middle Ages, the situation of the Jews was better in the countries dominated by Islam than in the countries dominated by Christianity. In the Christian west, the persecutions of Jews, accused of being the murderers of Christ, their use as scapegoats in periods of famine, epidemic or political turmoil, came at the same time as good relations and cooperation between Jews and Muslims in the Arab-Islamic empire. In Cordoba, the capital of Al-Andalus (Muslim Andalusia in Spain), Jews were university teachers and diplomats. In Spain the first massive persecutions of Jews were carried out by the 'Catholic kings' who expelled them as well as the Muslims during the 'reconquest' of 1492. After that, the situation of Jews would be much better to the south of the Mediterranean than in the Christian countries, whether

Continued on page 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the Communist League of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the International Workingmen's Association, 1864-72, the Socialist International, 1884-1914, the Communist International, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Lefts.