



# world revolution

## Syriza's ultranationalism There are no national solutions to the crisis

According to the media, the triumph of the Syriza coalition<sup>1</sup> has made the big capitalist powers very nervous. This 'nervousness' is apparently linked to the manoeuvres around the negotiations over Greece's debt. But Syriza is on the same side as these powers, because it shares with them the defence of the nation, the banner behind which every national capital defends its interests against the proletariat and against its imperialist rivals.

At its last meeting, just before winning the election, Tsipras, Syriza's leader, summarised very well what his party represents: "Beginning Monday, we will be finished with the national humiliation and with orders coming from abroad". This programme is antagonistic to that of the proletariat, whose objective is the formation of the world human community and whose driving force is internationalism.

The triumph of Syriza is not that of the 'people', but of Greek capital whose needs it serves. Its policies will only bring new attacks against the whole working class.

### The catastrophic situation of the Greek economy is an expression of the world crisis of capitalism

The data on the Greek economy is terrifying. We will mention just two figures: national income has fallen by 25% in 7 years, and exports, despite huge wage reductions, are now 12% lower than in 2007. The ruinous state of the Olympic installations built at vast and wasteful expense for the 2004 Olympics are an eloquent symbol of all this.

However, the crisis Greece is suffering is not a local crisis resulting from the poor management of successive governments, but the expression of the historic impasse facing the capitalist mode of production, which has been in open crisis since 1967 – almost half a century. A crisis in which the 'sub-primes' of 2007 marked a new step, followed by the big financial panic of 2008 and the recession of 2009, which has been called 'the Great Recession'.

The measures taken by the big capitalist countries have succeeded in limiting the most dangerous effects of these events, but have not overcome

1. In Greek Syriza stands for Coalition of the Radical Left



the underlying problem: the generalised overproduction which has plagued capitalism for nearly a century. The 'solution' that they came up with – a massive dose of debt taken in hand by states directly – has only aggravated the situation despite patching over the puncture for the moment.

One of the consequences is that "It was now entire states which were confronted with the increasingly crushing weight of debt, 'sovereign debt', which affects their capacity to intervene in order to revive their respective national economies through budget deficits"<sup>2</sup>. This situation has become unbearable for "those countries of the Eurozone whose economies are the most fragile or the most dependent on the illusory palliatives put in motion during the previous period – the PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain)"<sup>3</sup>

In Greece, the public debt has reached 180% of GNP; the public deficit was 12.7% in 2013. This burden is trapping the economy in a vicious circle: just to pay back the interest in the debt, it has to contract new debts and, in exchange, to impose draconian austerity measures which themselves hamstring the economy, demanding even stronger doses of debt and worse austerity measures.

The vicious circle in which the Greek economy is trapped is symbolic of the wider vicious circle in which the whole of world capital is turning. But "this does not mean however that we are going back to a situation similar to that of 1929 and the 1930s. 70 years ago, the world bourgeoisie was

2. 'Resolution on the international situation from the 20<sup>th</sup> ICC Congress', *International Review* 152; <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201310/9219/20th-icc-congress-resolution-international-situation>

3. *ibid*

taken completely aback faced with the collapse of its economy, and the policies it applied, with each country turning in on itself, only succeeded in exacerbating the consequences of the crisis. The evolution of the economic situation over the last four decades has proved that, even if it's clearly incapable of preventing capitalism from sinking deeper and deeper into the crisis, the ruling class has the ability to slow down this descent and to avoid a situation of generalised panic like on 'Black Thursday' on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1929. There is another reason why we are not going to relive a situation similar to that of the 1930s. At this time, the shock wave of the crisis began from the world's leading power, the USA, and then spread to the second world power, Germany"<sup>4</sup>.

Today, unlike those times, the bourgeoisie – thanks to the systematic strengthening of state capitalism – has managed to 'organise' the world economy in such a way that the effects of the crisis fall most heavily on the weakest countries and spares the strongest as much as possible. Germany and the US, which in 1929 were at the epicentre of the crisis, are today the countries which are coping the best and have succeeded in improving their position vis-à-vis their rivals.

### Managing the crisis means dividing the working class

The policies described above are allowing capitalism as a whole to resist further plunges into the crisis by concentrating on the defence of its nerve centres. They are also a means of dividing the proletariat, since "one of the major components of the evolution of the crisis escapes from a strict economic determinism and moves onto the social level, to the rapport de forces between the two major classes in society, bourgeoisie and proletariat"<sup>5</sup>. The economy is not just a blind machine functioning by itself, and the needs of the class struggle do have an influence on it. By displacing the worst effects of the crisis onto the weakest countries, the bourgeoisie gives itself the means to divide the proletariat.

This political management of the crisis means that this dramatic situation is seen by the Greek workers not so much as the expression of the impasse of world capitalism, but as the consequence

4. *ibid*  
5. *ibid*

of the 'well being' of its class brothers and sisters in Germany. And, by the same token, the apparent prosperity in Germany makes it difficult for the workers of this country to grasp the gravity of the situation, making them vulnerable to the 'explanation' that the threat to their 'privileged' position comes from the 'laziness and irresponsibility' of their Greek brothers and sisters and, in general, the waves of immigration lapping at their doors.

This political management of the crisis reinforces a deformed vision among the proletarians of each country: seeing the problems as something specific to 'their' country, and thus having national solutions, when really the problem is worldwide and can only be solved at the world level. In Greece, unemployment has reached the intolerable level of 27% and public employees, who generally have had jobs for life, have been reduced from 900,000 to 656,000; a third of the population lives below the poverty threshold; around 40,000 people have abandoned the cities and have headed to the countryside in a desperate search to live by subsistence farming in the most precarious conditions. The minimum wage in Greece has gone down by 200 euros over the last 5 years; pensions by 5% a year...all this is the extreme expression of a situation which is developing to varying degrees in all countries, but appears to be a phenomenon strictly limited to Greece and caused by Greek problems. This helps the bourgeoisie to create a thick smokescreen which makes it hard to understand the prevailing general tendencies in world capitalism.

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# Leftists give credence to Syriza's 'anti-austerity' claims

In Greece the triumph in the January elections for the left-wing Syriza party produced a pleasing symmetry in the response of the right and left of the political spectrum. In the UK, from the right, the *Times* declared "Far-left firebrand races to victory", joined by the *Daily Mail's* "Shock waves across Europe as the far left sweeps to power in Greece".

In contrast to the scaremongering of the right, leftist groups welcomed Syriza's coming to office. In Germany Die Linke were delirious (26/1/15) "Greece has experienced a truly historic election day. We rejoice with you ...It is a great achievement SYRIZA has accomplished. As a pluralistic and modern leftist party you've managed to become the voice of millions. People give you confidence because you are consistent and honest, and because you give them back their pride." In France, the NPA (the New Anticapitalist Party) (10/2/15) agreed "The victory of Syriza is an extremely positive event. It will help to loosen the grip of austerity that caused a fall in living standards of the Greek population.... At the European level, it is a defeat for the governments of the right and left who keep repeating that there is no alternative to austerity and the destruction of social gains." In the UK, the Socialist Workers Party (27/1/15) followed suit: "Voters in Greece delivered a resounding rejection of austerity ... Radical left party Syriza stormed to victory while the mainstream parties were left humiliated."

It's true this Right/Left pattern of demonisation/celebration was not perfect as some right-wingers also queued up to salute Syriza (and not just for their coalition with the far right ANEL). Marine Le Pen of the French Front National was

"delighted by the enormous, democratic slap in the face that the Greek people have delivered to the European Union". Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party saw the election result as "a desperate cry for help from the Greek people, millions of whom have been impoverished by the euro experiment."

The reason for citing this range of views is because this is a classic range of the different expressions of bourgeois ideology. The Right warns that a change in Greek economic policy will disrupt other economies in Europe, and maybe even have an impact on the functioning of capitalism beyond. The Left portrays Syriza's ascendance as evidence that an 'alternative' capitalism is possible, and is glad that there is a newly emerged social force in which people have confidence.

One dissident voice on the left is that of the French group Lutte Ouvrière. In an article entitled "Showdown after the victory of Syriza" (18/2/15), while expressing some familiar sentiments ("workers expressed their anger by voting for Syriza" etc) it is also very critical. "Tsipras and Syriza have never questioned the capitalist order. They do not claim to fight, much less seek to overthrow it. They are completely on the terrain of the bourgeoisie." Also, in a country where "anti-German sentiments are widespread ... Syriza fights on the terrain of nationalism and emerges as champion of Greek national independence." However, in the final analysis, LO do not reject the defence of Syriza: "There is an objective need to be in a position to fight in solidarity with the government of Tsipras when it sticks to the measures favourable to workers that it has promised and against it if it turns its back on its

promises." LO holds out the possibility that a capitalist government in Greece under Syriza could somehow act in the interests of a class other than the bourgeoisie.

## Various ways of managing the capitalist crisis

The position that Syriza has taken is as part of the political apparatus of the Greek capitalist state. It is subject to the same pressures as bourgeoisies elsewhere, and it is no surprise that Syriza, very soon after coming to power, started to make many of the concessions that it had previously set itself against. As a coalition it started as the offspring from splits from PASOK and the KKE (both of which have had periods in power, the former over many years, and the latter once in coalition with the conservative New Democracy). As a party vying for power it was situated on a capitalist terrain, differing from others only in the manner in which it expressed its nationalism, in the particular emphasis of its state capitalist economic policies.

For the leftists to depict Syriza as some sort of alternative is utterly fraudulent. Just before the election, a group of 18 distinguished economists (including two Nobel Prize winners and a former member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee) wrote to the *Financial Times* endorsing aspects of Syriza's economic policies: "We believe it is important to distinguish austerity from reforms; to condemn austerity does not entail being anti-reform. Macroeconomic stabilisation can be achieved through growth and increased efficiency in tax collection rather than through public expenditure cuts, which have reduced the revenue base and led to an increase in the debt

ratio." The letter appeared under the headline "Europe will benefit from Greece being given a fresh start", clearly seeing the advent of Syriza as potentially beneficial for European capitalism. As a commentator in the *New Statesman* (29/1/15) put it "Syriza's programme ... is mainstream macroeconomics. The party is merely planning to do what the textbooks suggest."

And so, following the textbooks, Syriza negotiated with Greece's European creditors, in the first instance to extend the bailout and its conditions until 30 June. While there were demonstrations on the streets of Athens against this, in the German parliament Die Linke were voting along with the government parties. Usually they have voted against the bailouts because of the austerity measures that have been imposed as a condition of funding. This time they claimed that it was 'out of solidarity' with Syriza. Die Linke's leader told the German parliament that "Now you'll see that a leftwing government can achieve anything." Anything, that is, that fits in with capitalist socialist relations and the pressures of the economic crisis.

In a recent debate in London between a leading member of the SWP and Stathis Kouvelakis from Syriza's central committee, the latter is quoted (*Socialist Worker* 3/3/15) as saying "32 general strikes and hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets haven't succeeded in defeating a single measure." Syriza "provided the political imagination that was missing" and translated these movements into a 'challenge to power'. And while Syriza's demands are moderate, Stathis reminded the audience that the Russian Revolution of 1917

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## There are no national solutions to the crisis

### The extreme nationalism of Syriza

Syriza is a product of the evolution of the political apparatus of the Greek state and, in turn, of general tendencies appearing in the central countries of capitalism. As marxism has explained many times, the state is the executive organ of capital and a means of exclusion: it is always, however democratic its forms, the expression of the dictatorship of the ruling class over the whole of society and more particularly over the proletariat. In the decadence of capitalism, the state becomes totalitarian and this is expressed in a tendency towards a single party. But in the most democratic countries which have a sophisticated electoral game at their disposal, this tendency is expressed by what can be called 'bi-partyism' - a two party system, with one inclined towards the right, the other leaning to the left, alternating their role in the exercising of power. This schema has functioned perfectly since the Second World War in Europe, America, etc.

However, with the unrelenting acceleration of the crisis and the weight of decomposition, this schema has suffered from a lot of wear and tear. On the one hand, the rival-partner parties have been more and more forced to manage the crisis, which has irredeemably discredited them; each time they occupy the seat of government, they have taken austerity measures which give the lie to the promises they made when they were in opposition; in the opposition, they say things they'll never actually do and when they are in government, they do things they never said they would.

Furthermore, the decomposition of the capitalist system has caused a growing dislocation in the ranks of the major parties and an increasingly obvious irresponsibility, the most spectacular expression of this being record-breaking corruption, which is always outdoing itself in cynicism, dishonesty and indecency.

The two main traditional parties in Greece - New Democracy on the right and PASOK on the left - illustrate this to the point of caricature. For a start - and this is a mark of the archaic nature of Greek capital - they are led by two dynasties which have been at the head of these two parties for over 70 years, the Karamanlis family on the right and the Papandreou clan on the left. The funds coming in from Europe have resulted

in a 'perpendicular corruption': with stupefying cheek, the two parties have been dividing up the goodies among themselves.

So where does Syriza come from? This is a coalition that became a party in 2012, and which picked up factions coming from Stalinism and social democracy, ingredients to which it added, to give itself a spicier flavour, Trotskyist, Maoist and ecologist groups. The founding nucleus of an important split from the Stalinist KKE party, following the collapse of the USSR in 1989, changed the formula of 'really living socialism' to a more democratic version, more adapted to a liberal form of state capitalism. Tsipras himself made a career in this clique of rats who were abandoning the sinking ship of Stalinism.

This is why Syriza resembles, like two drops of water, other attempts to renew the bi-party political schema which have emerged in other countries like Italy for example, where the old model (based on Christian Democracy which, with the support of the social democrats, acted almost like a single party for 40 years) was replaced by another, on the right, the irrepressible Berlusconi and, on the other hand, the chaotic coalition whose spinal column is the former Communist Party converted into a 'democratic' party. It is highly significant that Syriza has associated to its government ANEL, a party of the far right.

Syriza's partner, ANEL, has a policy towards immigrants very similar to that of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. This xenophobic policy, which presents the immigrants as invaders stealing jobs and social benefits from Greeks, has two aims.

On the one hand, to drag the workers and the 'popular' strata into this degrading policy of seeking a scapegoat personified in the blacks, the Arabs, the Slavs, etc - in sum, all those not born Hellenes. But on top of this, it obeys a political and economic calculation: to get the highest price for playing the role of gendarme which the European Union has assigned to those countries (Greece, Italy and Spain) who constitute the gate of entry of all those desperate masses of people fleeing from the most extreme poverty and from interminable wars. In the gangster struggle between the different thieves of the EU, the new Greek government knows quite well that having a hard policy towards immigrants is a trump-card in any

negotiations.

The defence of the nation is the common patrimony of all parties of capital whatever political colours they adopt. One of the most sinister arguments that Syriza and ANEL share with Golden Dawn is the idea of 'Greece for the Greeks', the fanatical pretension of closing yourself up in a supposed 'national community' in which you can have a decent life. This is a reactionary utopia, but it is above all a frontal attack on the consciousness and solidarity of the workers, whose greatest force is precisely that it constitutes a community in which all nationalities, races and religions can be fused.

Nationalism and the defence of the interests of Greek capital is the real programme of Syriza. The programme of structural reforms is a show for the gallery, whose outlines have become more and more fluid and whose content has attenuated the closer Syriza approached government. We find in it the old worn-out recipes typical of the left of capital. Renationalising the banks, this or that privatisation put into question, a plan for guaranteed employment, some emergency measures to deal with extreme poverty, and a few other bits of patchwork.

These measures have been used thousands of times in capitalism and they have never succeeded in improving the workers' living conditions. Capitalism, even its most right wing factions, is happy to 'socialise the banks' whenever they are in danger. De Gaulle, Hitler, Franco and other champions of the right set up public banks. Former US president Bush, during the crisis of 2007-8, passed measures for the state to take hold of the banks - to the point where the Venezuelan president Chavez called him a comrade and deliriously compared him to Lenin.

Regarding the promise for a 'plan to guarantee employment', which got smaller in scope the nearer Syriza got to power (from creating 300,000 new jobs the promise went down to 15,000), we can see how serious this is when we consider the new government's attitude towards the civil servants: the evaluation programme established by the previous government, which included a drop in wages, downgrading to lower positions or even going on to a 'manpower reserve', which is nothing less than a cover for lay-offs and unemploy-

ment, has not been abrogated: it will simply be 'applied in a fairer manner' according to the new minister, who also announced that wages in the public sector will be frozen.

As for the payment of the gigantic Greek debt, Syriza is approaching this like a real poker player. To win over the electors, the party began with ultra-radical proposals. But even during the election campaign, it began moderating its discourse. As soon as its victory looked plausible, new figures appeared. Now, installed in government, it has watered down its wine to the point of making it completely colourless. For example, it has gone from refusing to pay the debt to a staggering of the debt after a partial payment and, finally, it proposed to exchange debt for perpetual bonds and other instruments of financial engineering. This now looks a lot like the Brady plan which, during the 1980s, was set up by the American government to deal with Argentina's debt, a plan that is well known for involving grave attacks against the living conditions of the working class.

### The difficulties of the proletariat

The proletariat today has to a large extent lost its sense of class identity and its self-confidence. This situation of profound weakness can't simply be overcome through a wave of struggles. It has given rise, within the political apparatus of capital, to a series of 'left wing' populisms coming along to complete the work of the 'right wing' populisms. Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany, the Front de Gauche in France, etc, are taking advantage of the difficulties of our class to put forward their slogans about 'the people' and 'citizenship' in order to defend the nation defined as the community of all those who live on the same territory.

With this kind of propaganda, these forces are not only, like real con-men, taking take advantage of the difficulties of the proletariat, but they are rubbing salt into the wound by creating barriers which make the recovery of class identity and self-confidence even more difficult for the workers. This is why we propose to denounce the lies of this new anti-proletarian apparatus and counter them with real class positions. **G, 15/2/15**

# Paris killings

## An excuse for increased militarisation

The bloody and barbaric attacks in Paris last month gave rise to a massive indignation and disgust. All this was shown in the gigantic gatherings in all the major towns of France and in numerous cities of the world. Millions of people and hundreds of thousands of workers all wanted to express their total rejection of these barbaric terrorist acts. Solidarity spontaneously took hold in the streets and in the squares. But this healthy and necessary reaction was immediately confronted with calls for patriotism, “national unity” and the “sacred union” from almost all wings of the French bourgeoisie – a bourgeoisie shamefully profiting from the emotion which gripped a shocked population. To listen to the politicians and the media France was about “to go to war”. Only the state could protect us; it alone could provide “security for the French”, the defence of “democracy” and “freedom of speech”. And this same ideological poison widely infected the population of Denmark after the recent attacks in Copenhagen. The fear and worry cleverly distilled by all the media was such that inside the head of every terrified proletarian was the idea that the state was the head of the family proposing to the “good people” its benevolent and protective shadow.

Beyond these mystifications some real questions are posed to the proletariat. Who really profits from these odious crimes perpetrated against the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* and the customers in the kosher supermarket? What does the soft talk of the government amount to? What is hidden behind the intense media propaganda on the famous “post-January 7”, likened to the “post-9/11”? The truth behind the bourgeois speeches must come out. The proletariat cannot naively accept everything that the state says, or it will pay dearly for it in the future.

### The latest attacks in Paris are an ideal pretext for strengthening the militarisation of society

The French bourgeoisie, from the time of the attacks, has displayed its unity. The permanent wars between its different cliques and competing factions have disappeared as if by magic. In the name of the defence of “the country under attack”, of the “French people in danger”, the “French nation” must “face up to the terrorist menace as one”. Dressed up in a humanist facade, hiding behind hypocrisy and lies, the imperialist wolf finds a democratic alibi in order to justify its more marked military engagement in the world, aimed at ensuring that France “takes up its proper rank”. Without hesitation, the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* left for French outposts in this new crusade. We are no longer meant to be disturbed by the active military role that French imperialism is playing in a number of wars which are soaking the planet in blood and which it tries hard to cover up under the flag of “humanitarianism”. Erased is the role played by the French bourgeoisie and its army in the genocide in Rwanda during the time of another Socialist president – Mitterand. Forgotten are the declarations of the latter according to which the genocide, which led to over a million deaths in this country, was nothing really serious! The extreme barbarity of the attacks in Paris seems to give the French state the right to make war and restrict so-called “freedoms”. After the attacks, the bourgeoisie has thus dressed itself up, without any complexes, in the costume of the guardian of order and security. Faced with irrational, crazy murders, the ordinary barbarity of the democratic state must be presented as “normal”. Its zealous servants, the media, can now show on the TV screens a massive deployment of the forces of order on a war footing. Thousands of police, gendarmes and military can henceforth take over and carve up all the public spaces. And they pretend that this is for our well-being! Without at all holding back, one part of the French right asks for the setting up of a French Patriot Act on the model of what the US bourgeoisie put into effect after 9/11. This is something that the left and the government rapidly and hypocritically “reject” so as to actively prepare measures which are exactly like it. In fact, regarding the ideological and repressive response, there’s a great similarity be-

tween the Patriot Act and the policy adopted by the bourgeoisie in France this last month. Moreover, this security policy that the Socialist Hollande has prepared acts as a spearhead within the European Union which has already been seduced and conquered.

We should remind ourselves how the Patriot Act appeared! On September 11, 2001, two planes smashed into the twin towers in New York. Two others crashed in Washington and Pennsylvania. The outcome was terrifying: more than three thousand people killed. Doubts persist about the breadth of complicity of the US state in the attacks. But one thing is certain, just like France immediately after these attacks, the US political apparatus and its media were requisitioned to mobilise the population behind the establishment of a state of war on American soil. The imperialist aims of the United States were not at all absent from this cynical calculation and the orchestration of a war psychosis. For the US bourgeoisie, it had to profit from this dramatic event in order to wipe out the “Vietnam war syndrome”, and prepare its entry into Afghanistan and Iraq. Any terrorist attack of any scale on national soil is always used by the bourgeoisie for its nationalist and imperialist aims. Not only are the anti-terrorist measures of states powerless to stop the growth of terrorism but they are part of the further escalation of terror. They further feed the climate of suspicion towards others by generating divisions within populations. France is no exception to this rule. If terrorism is an arm of war of the bourgeoisie, of no matter which country and whatever religion, it is nevertheless equally a precious ideological weapon of the latter against the working class. Thus the crusade against “the Axis of Evil”, launched at the time by the Bush administration, allowed the implementation of this famous Patriot Act without even the need to pass it through the legislature. Then it becomes normal to have surveillance over e-mails, letters, telephone calls of each one of us and the power to shamelessly enter any dwelling including those where the occupants are absent. A group of people going to work can be stopped without any explanation. As to the police, they are provided with an almost total immunity. The more and more frequent assassinations perpetrated by the police against black people do not in general give rise to any sort of judicial pursuit. In fact what up to now have been punctual and exceptional measures have now become permanent. The exception has become the norm, as in Britain for example where this same pretext has allowed the justification of innumerable surveillance cameras practically everywhere. In democracy exceptional laws have become normal.

Of course in France the proletariat has had quite another experience to that of the United States. The Paris Commune of 1871 and May 1968 are not totally wiped out of the memory of the working class. The French bourgeoisie knows this perfectly well and it’s for this reason that despite everything it remains prudent. It advances in a more disguised way than its American homologue. But two weeks after the attacks in Paris that didn’t stop the office of Prime Minister Valls disclosing a whole series of measures which were supported by all the European bourgeoisies, and which even the American leadership wouldn’t have disowned. This same minister declared that faced with “*the strong challenge facing France means that there will have to be exceptional measures*”.... which we know will be permanent. The financial burden has gone up to 700 million euros, to be paid for by clear cuts in a public expenditure already in restricted mode. On the other hand the army will not now suffer the cuts previously imposed. And the forces of the gendarmerie and the police will be massively strengthened with men and material. Well-armed cops and soldiers will thus extend their patrols and not only in “sensitive” areas. The proletariat cannot be naive. A state which shows its force in this way is engaging in a direct form of intimidation. It is a warning given to the workers. Here it’s a question of the power of surveillance and repression “in all its republican legality”, not only against everything that bothers it and which it considers is outside the norm, but above all to arm itself against the proletariat and its struggle

which it is necessary to criminalise. The laws of the Patriot Act are in fact an obsession of the entire democratic bourgeoisie. For proof, in France, even children of seven or eight at primary school can’t escape a very close surveillance. And beware those teachers who do not become informers in this dirty work. In the name of secularism, the government wants infants to receive a “civic” education, thus reinforcing their worship of the state and their total conditioning and subservience to it. This is training in bourgeois rules and values. If conscription is no longer conceivable for the bourgeoisie then it’s a good bet that a strengthened civic service will be soon adopted with total unanimity.

### Some well known repressive laws against the proletariat

The dominant class, beyond its own internal divisions, has always understood the nature of its gravedigger. The history of this class abounds with examples of the means with which it has systematically provided itself in order to face up to its only real enemy – the proletariat. In a revolutionary period, the capitalist state will dispense with any legality in order to massacre a proletariat in struggle. The Cossacks during the revolution of 1917 or the Freikorps in social-democratic Germany in 1919 are sinister examples of this. But when the working class doesn’t directly threaten the power of the bourgeoisie, the latter hides its real exploitative nature behind a heap of ideological lies, behind a sophisticated democratic screen. It’s now nearly 150 years ago, at the time when the socialist parties were real revolutionary organisations, that the Chancellor of the German Empire, Herr Bismarck, who had had the help of the bloody republican attack-dog Monsieur Thiers, the executioner of the Paris Commune, promulgated his “Anti-Socialist Laws”. These were laws which banned socialist and social-democratic organisations and all their activities within the German Empire. This repressive law was accompanied by the reinforcement of the military and police presence within all the big German towns. But this policy of the “Iron Fist” was not the prerogative of the German Empire. In 1893-1894, in the very democratic French Third Republic, laws came onto the books under the name of the “villainous laws”. They were aimed, under the cover of the struggle against “evildoers”, at anarchist groups, but overtly threatened all workers’ organisations at the same time. Merely to be under suspicion for having sympathy with anarchism or the workers’ struggle became a crime. As today these laws equally encouraged informers. In 1894, on his way back from Carmaux where he’d supported the miners’ strike which had been violently repressed by the army and military, Jaures, in the Chamber of Deputies, spoke out against the villainous laws: “*Thus you are obliged to recruit into crime, those who oversee crime, into misery those that oversee misery and into anarchy, those who oversee anarchy*”. The real villains were to be found in Paris amongst those who promulgated these laws. At Carmaux, a certain Tornade, who was active in the strikes of 1892, offered funds from Paris to the striking miners to buy dynamite, thus directly opening the way to repression which was immediately justified in the name of “the struggle against terrorism”. Jaures had good reason to denounce the action against the workers’ struggle and the workers’ voices, which was really the aim here.

From this point of view, “free expression” or “freedom of the press”, much vaunted today after the attacks, have always been illusions knowingly maintained by the dominant class. Not only because the media and the official speeches are the emanation of capitalist property, but because straightaway they show their allegiance to the bourgeoisie state without it being necessary for anyone to “guide” them or to systematically dictate the content of their propaganda. Nepotism and clientism are well known among a good number of journalists and the collusion of the media with leading politicians are thus only purely anecdotal consequences and not the cause of their docility. Any real, critical opposition, anything that calls the capitalist state into question, has no place in

the media and it will not be accepted or disseminated by it. “Freedom of expression” is in reality summed up in speeches that are subordinate to the state, to the laws and values of capitalism.

### The bourgeoisie is the most Machiavellian class in history

The working class in France, as internationally, is going through a profoundly difficult period. But the proletariat is far from giving up its arms. In a situation where the economic crisis can only continue to get worse and living conditions are deteriorating more and more, the bourgeoisie knows perfectly well that there will come a time when it will have to confront widespread workers’ struggles. The more it prepares for it the better! The dominant class has known for a long time the danger that the revolutionary proletariat and its avant-garde organisations represent for it and its system. Its consciousness of this danger, its unity faced with it, in short its Machiavellianism has no limit. Machiavelli, who lived in the epoch of the Renaissance, has, in this area, been a clear precursor of the bourgeoisie. He declared that “*Lies and deception are the means of governing that any Prince must know how to handle with a maximum of efficiency*”. In a word the means used are defined by the aim to be achieved. There is no moral principle to be respected here and the current bourgeoisie has carried this method of government to heights never achieved before in history. Lies, terror, coercion, blackmail, scapegoats, pogroms, plots and assassinations are the usual methods of capitalist governance. The assassination of the revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919 by soldiers on the orders of the social-democratic government of Ebert in Germany is one of the most symbolic expressions of it. As the assassination of Jaures in July 1914 was prepared by a whole hateful and patriotic campaign, this time by the French democratic republic, talking only of the sacred union and wallowing in the mire of the first world butchery. The Machiavellianism of the bourgeoisie is not a perversion of democracy; it is the product of its nature as the most intelligent ruling class in history. Pearl Harbour is a terrifying example of the Machiavellianism of the bourgeoisie. In 1941, the United States wanted to enter the war against Japan and Germany. In order to justify it, being well aware of the imminent attack by the Japanese air force on the military base of Pearl Harbour, the American state didn’t for a moment hesitate to sacrifice its Pacific Fleet and thousands of unarmed and helpless soldiers. In this domain, examples are legion. The strengthening of control of police surveillance, the increase in the weight of the repressive arsenal announced by the government of President Hollande are only some expressions of the Machiavellianism of the bourgeoisie. The displays about protecting the French population, the “citizens”, are only a smokescreen, a simple alibi. Faced with the defence of its capitalist interests the bourgeoisie has always shown a complete contempt for human life. The militarisation of society is the direct strengthening of the totalitarian power of state capitalism and democracy is only an ideological mask for the dictatorship of capital. A terribly hypocritical mask, making it possible to ensure the monopoly of violence by the state and the maintenance of exploitation with its constant companions: bullying and daily humiliations at work, mass unemployment and a growing pauperisation. In brief, an unprecedented violence against which revolt is forbidden and which is necessary to for the “good citizen” to accept without flinching. Ignoring what’s behind the good will of the state and the humanitarianism of this exploiting class would leave the proletariat politically disarmed. The measures of Valls and Hollande today, like those deployed in the past, are a serious and active preparation for repression. Only the revolutionary proletariat, by affirming its communist perspective, can paralyse the strong arm of the bourgeoisie and its state. **Cyril, 10.2.15**

# A painful but salutary crisis for the future of the revolutionary organisation

The ICC's section in France recently held its 21st Congress which took place over two sessions. The first, devoted to debates about the organisational problems of the oldest section of the ICC, took place during our Extraordinary International Conference last May<sup>1</sup>. The second session of the Congress was devoted to two questions:

1. The analysis of the balance of forces in the social situation in France, on the basis of a critical examination of our difficulties in analysing the movement against pension reforms in the autumn of 2010. The debates on this question led to the Congress adopting a 'Resolution on the social situation in France' which we publish in this issue of WR.

2. The defence of the organisation faced with pogromist and police-type attacks (fuelled by certain social networks, blogs and websites) which targets us as the main internationally organised current of the communist left.

## The 'culture of theory': an indispensable weapon in the intellectual and moral revival of the organisation

As shown by the article the ICC published on its third Extraordinary International Conference, 'The news of our death is greatly exaggerated', the ICC's section in France was the epicentre of the 'moral and intellectual' crisis the organisation has been going through. This crisis (which hadn't been identified at the time) came to the surface in the discussion on the activities resolution of the 20th Congress of RI, which insisted on the necessity for a marxist culture of theory and pointed to the weaknesses of the section in France and the ICC on the level of our internal debates. The diagnosis of a 'danger of sclerosis' and 'fossilisation', even of organisational 'degeneration' put forward in this activities resolution prompted the raising of a shield-wall on the part of a circle of militants linked by ties of affinity, along with personal attacks against one comrade who had supported and defended this orientation (which had actually been developed by the activities resolution of the preceding ICC Congress). Emotional and irrational approaches emerged, animated by a strong tendency towards the personalisation of political questions (with the absurd idea that this activities resolution was targeting certain young militants who had difficulties reading theoretical texts). Faced with this aberrant situation, with this open crisis, the central organ of the section in France, once it had identified the nature of this crisis, carried out a political fight aimed at the recovery of the section. Among the weaknesses of the section in France, the organisation identified the lack of any in-depth debate on the problem of the circle spirit, which had been analysed at length in the orientation text 'The question of the functioning of the organisation in the ICC', written in response to the internal crisis of 1993<sup>2</sup>. Given the predominance of good old common sense, of the 'religion of everyday life' and of the distrust which are the hallmarks of the circle and clan spirit, certain militants wrongly identified this text as a weapon against this or that individual, when in fact it was dealing with a political question which has a long history in the workers' movement (in particular in the First International and in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903).

This lack of a culture of theory necessarily went hand in hand with emotional approaches and the conception of the organisation as a group of friends or a big family, linked by ties of affection and not by common political principles. The resurgence of the pogromist mentality of the clan which was to form the 'Internal Fraction of the ICC', whose apotheosis has been the police-type group 'International Group of the Communist Left', had its roots in the absence of any theoretical discussion of an orientation text submitted for discussion after the crisis of 2001, 'The pogromist mentality and the fight against capitalist barbarism'. The idea that was prevalent in the wake of this crisis was of a 'return to normal', to the routine func-

tioning of the organisation, with the illusion that the 'evil' had been eliminated with the exclusion of the members of the IFICC for behaving like informers. There was also the idea it was not necessary to expend any energy in discussing the question of pogromism, even though it is a phenomenon of decadent capitalism which, especially in its phase of decomposition, tends to invade all spheres of social life (not only in imperialist wars, as we have seen in Ukraine for example, but also among young people in the 'banlieux', in schools and even at the workplace).

The 21st Congress of the section in France thus had to take on the character of an extraordinary congress. The section had to draw up a balance sheet of the work of its central organ and of the struggle it had waged over the past two years, aimed at exposing the 'familialist' conceptions of organisation which still existed in the section in France and which are the most fertile soil for the development of a pogromist mentality (via the spirit the family vendetta or taking revenge on behalf of your gang of mates).

All the militants of the section took an active part in the debates to support and salute the work of the central organ which had made it possible to prevent this moral and intellectual crisis from leading to an explosion of the section or to the formation of a new parasitic group (motivated by the defence of wounded pride, which Lenin described as 'aristocratic anarchism'). The attachment to the ICC as a political body, the will to reflect on and understand the underlying reasons for the serious errors made by certain comrades, loyalty to the organisation and a determination not to capitulate to the 'invisible hand' of capital (to use the expression of Adam Smith) made it possible for the militants of the section in France to engage fully in the orientations of the 20th Congress of RI, in particular the fundamental importance of the work of theoretical elaboration, of assimilating marxism. In order to be able to surmount this moral and intellectual crisis, the only way forward is to develop a marxist culture of theory against the ideology of the ruling class, against the alienation and reification which mean that in capitalist society relations between human beings become relations between things.

One of the weaknesses of the Congress was that it didn't manage to develop a deep discussion of the two conceptions of organisation which have been co-existing for many years in the oldest section of the ICC, and which have repeatedly been the source of cleavages and fractures: on the one hand, this familialist conception in which the political positions that militants adopt are motivated by personal sympathies or loyalties, and on the other hand the conception that what holds the organisation together is the militants' commitment to shared organisational principles.

If these two years of open crisis in the section in France didn't end up giving rise to a new parasitic split, it is also thanks to the capacity of the central organ in France to push forward and animate the life of the section and to carry out the orientations of the 20th Congress, notably by organising days of study and discussion to combat the danger of sclerosis, the loss of the ICC's acquisitions, and to develop a marxist theoretical culture within the organisation and among all the militants. This was a way of fighting against intellectual laziness, dilletantism, the loss of taste for reading and theory, along with the persistence of hierarchical and elitist ideas which see the work of theoretical reflection as the work of 'specialists'. The section in France thus organised several days of study over the last two years on different themes connected to the organisational problems which have re-appeared in an even more dangerous manner than in the past:

- The conception of the individual in Marx, the question of associated labour against the Stalinist notion of the anonymous collective;
- The congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party of 1903: the circle spirit as an expression of petty bourgeois ideology in the former editorial board of *Iskra* and the divergences between Lenin and Martov over paragraph 1 of the statutes of the RSDLP;
- Volume 1 of *Capital* and in particular the question of the fetishism of commodities, of

the value form, the marxist conception of reification and alienation in the analysis of the commodity, and the connection between these questions and our recurrent organisational difficulties;

- The history of the statutes of the organisations of the workers' movement since the Communist League;

- The final RI day of study during this period was held after the 21st Congress, with the attendance of the international delegation that had been at the Congress. It examined an aspect of the 'Theses on Morality' which have been submitted for international debate by the ICC's central organ: the 'exogamic revolution' in the history of human civilisation and the 'endogamic' principle of pogromism (as evidenced, for example, by the anti-Semitic laws of the Nazi regime).

The crisis which has shaken the section in France and sent shockwaves throughout the ICC was in this sense a **salutary** crisis, since it has made it possible to face up to a fundamental question of marxism and the workers' movement which up till now has not been posed at the theoretical level by the ICC: the moral and intellectual dimension of the proletarian struggle.

The 'news of our death' triumphantly announced by the pogromist, jihadist appeal of the IGCL has thus indeed been greatly exaggerated.

## Reappropriating the marxist method for analysing the class struggle

The session of the Congress devoted to the analysis of the balance of forces between the classes had the aim of understanding the underlying causes of the social calm that has reigned since the movement against the pension reforms of autumn 2010, and the errors in the analysis by the section in France. These errors are reflected in certain articles in our press which we were able to critically review. In reality, the organisational crisis was already potentially contained in losing the marxist compass, in losing our theoretical acquisitions in analysing the dynamic of the class struggle. Impatience, immediatism, losing sight of the function of the organisation were expressed by activist tendencies which saw a focus on intervention in the immediate struggles to the detriment of an in-depth discussion about the social movements. The Congress drew out the fact that the movement of autumn 2010 against the pension reforms was in reality the result of a manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie which was able to revitalise its trade unions in order to inflict a serious defeat on the working class and push through with its attacks.

The social calm over the last four years has shown that the proletariat in France has not yet digested this defeat. To understand this manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie and the breadth of the defeat in 2010, the Congress pointed out that our impatience had led us to forget the ABC of Marxism: as long as a revolutionary period has not opened up, until there is a situation of 'dual power', it's always the ruling class which is on the offensive, and the exploited class can only develop its defensive struggles, its resistance against the attacks aimed at it. To understand how the bourgeoisie has been able to carry out its economic, political and ideological attacks against the working class in France, the RI Congress had to take a step back from immediate events and re-examine the dynamic of the class struggle since the 'turning point' of 2003, placing it back in the historical and international framework determined by the collapse of the eastern bloc and the ideological campaigns about the 'failure of communism', the 'end of the class struggle' and the 'disappearance of the proletariat' as the only force capable of changing the world.

This 'turning point' of 2003, marked by the search for solidarity between the generations and in the struggle, showed that the working class in France and internationally was in the process of returning to the path of struggle after the deep reflux it had been through in the wake of the collapse of the eastern bloc and the so-called 'communist' regimes. Thus, in 2006, the struggle of the students against the CPE, which took the bourgeoisie by surprise, threatened to extend to other generations and the employed workers, forcing the ruling class to withdraw its project because of the real risk of the development of a wider solidarity,

the danger of contamination of the mass of wage workers. This is why in 2007 the bourgeoisie went onto the counter-offensive. It could not tolerate this defeat and had to try to wipe out all traces of it: the attack on the special pension provisions was thus orchestrated with the aim of directly attacking this dynamic towards active solidarity within the working class.

The debates at the Congress also showed that the section in France had been a victim of the media campaigns about the 'financial crisis' of 2008, which was aimed at sowing panic throughout society, especially within the working class in order to make it accept sacrifices, trying to get it to believe that because this really was a financial crisis (i.e. one that could be fixed through a few reforms) and not a new convulsion of a historically condemned world system based on the production of commodities and the exploitation of workers' labour power.

This wind of panic also affected the ICC, particularly its section in France, so the Congress had to restore the balance, notably by re-appropriating our analysis of the 'Machiavellianism' of the bourgeoisie, its capacity to use its tame media as a means of ideological intoxication to obscure the consciousness of the exploited masses. Since consciousness is the main weapon of the proletariat in the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a new society, it is inevitable that the ruling class will always try to disarm its moral enemy through ideological media campaigns.

The Congress noted that the disorientation of the section in France, its activist tendencies in the immediate struggles to the detriment of our long-term work contained the danger of dragging the organisation into dangerous adventures, in particular the traps of workerism and radical leftism. As we have often argued, immediatism is the royal road to opportunism and revisionism, towards the abandonment of proletarian principles.

The Congress underlined that losing sight of the acquisitions and method of marxism in analysing the class struggle is linked to an underestimation:

- Of the necessity for revolutionary organisations to study the functioning of capitalism and the political life of the ruling class;
- Of the difficulties of the proletariat to rediscover its revolutionary class identity in the historical context opened up by the collapse of the eastern bloc and the Stalinist regimes;
- Of the capacity of the bourgeoisie to keep control of the situation both on the economic and political levels, despite the social decomposition of its system.

The resolution on the situation in France, adopted by the congress, could not integrate and develop all the questions examined in the Congress debates, which will have to carry on in the organisation (in particular, the discussion about the strengthening of state capitalist measures, which is not limited to France).

## The fight for the defence of the revolutionary organisation

The report presented to the Congress on the defence of the organisation had the object of synthesising the experience of the ICC and its section in France in the face of attempts to destroy the organisation. Such attempts were identified by our comrade MC, a founding member of the ICC, particularly in the crisis of 1981, which obliged us to carry out an operation to get back material stolen by the 'Chenier tendency' (typewriters, etc). In the face of petty bourgeois hesitations and resistance in RI at the time (notably in the Paris section), MC won the support of the central organ of the section in France to recuperate its material and publicly denounce the gangster methods of this 'tendency' (with a communiqué on the expulsion of Chenier in order to warn and protect other groups of the proletarian political milieu against the activities of this suspicious element).

The revolutionary organisation is an alien body in bourgeois society, since as Marx put it the proletariat "is a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates". What he meant by this is that

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1. <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201409/10330/news-our-death-greatly-exaggerated>, *International Review* 153

2. [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/109\\_functioning](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/109_functioning), *International Review* 109

# Resolution on the social situation in France

We are publishing here the resolution on the social situation in France adopted at the 21st Congress of RI. This document goes back over our analysis of the balance of forces between the classes, with the aim of arriving at a better understanding of the underlying reasons for the relative social calm which has existed since the movement against pension reforms.

1. The analysis of the class struggle in France, of the balance of forces between bourgeoisie and proletariat, can only be understood in the context of the current world situation, even if, of course, the proletariat in each country faces economic, political and ideological specificities. In his sense, it is necessary to analyse the broad lines of this world situation, in particular to understand the difficulties encountered by the proletariat in France in responding to the increasingly violent attacks coming from the ruling class.

2. From September 1989, the ICC had been predicting that the collapse of the Stalinist regimes would strike a very heavy blow against the consciousness of the world proletariat:

*"The disappearance of Stalinism is the disappearance of the symbol and spearhead of the most terrible counter-revolution in history.*

*But this does not mean that the development of the consciousness of the world proletariat will be facilitated by it. On the contrary. Even in its death throes, Stalinism is rendering a last service*

## Continued from page 4

the proletarians can never really find their place in bourgeois society. The proletariat and the bourgeoisie are two antagonistic classes. This is why, as an organisation of the proletariat, we could never have taken our complaints about these thefts to the police (who would have laughed in our faces!). The material stolen was not the private property of an individual but belonged to a political group and had been bought with money from militants' contributions. It was thus a duty, based on proletarian moral principles, to recuperate our material in order to reject the habits of gangsterism inside a communist organisation.

The debates at the Congress highlighted the fact that, in order to continue defending this body alien to capitalist society, the revolutionary organisation has to struggle against localism and make its international unity a living reality in the face of the attacks aimed either at destroying it or creating a 'cordon sanitaire' around it, aimed at preventing new elements searching for a class perspective from approaching it.

We know that the campaigns of slander against the ICC are not going to stop, even if they may be put under wraps for a while. These have been the classic methods of the ruling class against the revolutionary movement since Marx showed that the proletariat is the gravedigger of capitalism. From the slanders of Herr Vogt (an agent of Napoleon III) against Marx to the calls for a pogrom against the Spartacists, which culminated in the cowardly and bestial murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, history has shown that repression against revolutionary organisations has always been prepared by slander. The hatred directed against the ICC (in a small philistine milieu animated by a 'fellowship of former ICC members') is the hatred of the bourgeoisie for the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, the hatred of Thiers, MacMahon and Galliflet for the Paris Commune, of Noske, Ebert and Scheidemann for the threat of the Russian revolution spreading to Germany.

Faced with the real development of a pogromist mentality against the organisation, the 21st Congress put forward a clear orientation for the defence of the organisation in the framework of the moral and intellectual dimension of the proletarian struggle.

*"...as Engels said, the working class alone has today preserved an understanding of and interest in theory. The workers' craving for knowledge is one of the most noteworthy cultural manifestations of our day. Morally, too, the working-class struggle denotes the cultural renovation of society"* (Rosa Luxemburg, 'Stagnation and Progress of Marxism' 1903). **Révolution Internationale**

*to the domination of capital; in decomposing, its cadaver continues to pollute the atmosphere that the proletariat breathes. For the dominant sectors of the bourgeoisie, the final collapse of Stalinist ideology, the 'democratic', 'liberal' and nationalist movements which are sweeping the eastern countries, provide a golden opportunity to unleash and intensify their campaigns of mystification.*

*The identification which is systematically established between Stalinism and communism, the lie repeated a thousand times, and today being wielded more than ever, according to which the proletarian revolution can only end in disaster, will for a whole period gain an added impact within the ranks of the working class. We thus have to expect a momentary retreat in the consciousness of the proletariat... While the incessant and increasingly brutal attacks which capitalism can't help but mount on the proletariat will oblige the workers to enter the struggle, in an initial period, this won't result in a greater capacity in the class to develop its consciousness. In particular, reformist ideology will weigh very heavily on the struggle in the period ahead, greatly facilitating the action of the unions"* ("Theses on the economic and political crisis in USSR and the eastern countries", *International Review* 60<sup>1</sup>).

The quarter of a century which has gone by since then has amply confirmed this prediction and, in particular has confirmed that there is a very heavy weight of democratic illusions and a strengthening of the grip of the unions, which had been more and more put into question during the workers' struggles of the 80s. Thus, the strikes launched by the unions in the transport sectors in France, Belgium and Germany in 1995 had clearly resulted, as we said at the time, in a revival of the influence of these organs for controlling the working class. Furthermore, the retreat in class consciousness was also accompanied by a very marked retreat in its militancy and self-confidence, of the sense of class identity, a phenomenon aggravated by the disappearance of many large industrial sectors which had traditionally been among the most combative in many western European countries (for example, steel, engineering and cars). Finally, the difficulties met by the working class, both in the development of its consciousness and in its self-confidence, were also aggravated by the growing weight of the decomposition of capitalist society which has instilled in an increasingly damaging way the sentiment of despair, the feeling that there is no future, the flight into 'everyman for himself' and atomisation.

3. In 1989 we also established that *"the rhythm of the collapse of western capitalism... will constitute a decisive factor in establishing the moment when the proletariat will be able to resume its march towards revolutionary consciousness.*

*By sweeping away the illusions about the revival' of the world economy, by exposing the lie which presents liberal' capitalism as a solution to the historic bankruptcy of the whole capitalist mode of production - and not only of its Stalinist incarnation - the intensification of the capitalist crisis will eventually push the proletariat to turn again towards the perspective of a new society, to more and more inscribe this perspective onto its struggles"* (ibid).

In effect, since 1989, the French bourgeoisie, like its European cohorts, has launched growing attacks on the working class, pushing the latter to resist and to throw off the dead weight that has been bearing down on it since the end of the 80s. One of the moments of this tendency for the proletariat to raise its head was constituted by the social movements which took place in 2003, in particular the struggles around the defence of pensions in France and Austria. These movements were marked by a revival of solidarity, especially in the car industry in Germany and in public transport in New York. These workers' struggles were obviously only a small step, still very insufficient, in a dynamic towards overcoming the profound retreat suffered by the working class after 1989. The slow rhythm of this process of overcoming the reflux in the class struggle (there had been more than 13

1. [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/60/collapse\\_eastern\\_bloc](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/60/collapse_eastern_bloc)

years between the implosion of the eastern bloc and the strikes of spring 2003) can be explained to a large extent by the still slow rhythm of the development of the insurmountable crisis of the capitalist economy, in turn a result of the capacity of the bourgeoisie to hold back the historic collapse of its economic system. Furthermore, these social movements revealed the extreme skilfulness of the political and union apparatus of the bourgeois class, its capacity to push through attacks and to demoralise the working class, to drum into its head that "it's not the street that governs" (as prime minister Raffarin put it in 2003) through a whole arsenal of sophisticated manoeuvres, based on a systematic division of labour and tight cooperation between the government which delivers the blows and the unions who sabotage the response of the working class.

Thus the strikes of spring 2003 in the public sector in France came up against a strategy of the ruling class which had been tried and tested in 1995: alongside a general attack on the whole working class, the bourgeoisie carried out a more specific assault on a particular sector which was thus destined to constitute a sort of 'vanguard' of the movement;

- In 1995, the Juppé plan attacking social security for all wage earners was accompanied by a specific attack on the pension arrangements for the railway workers;

- In 2003, the attack on pensions for the whole public sector was accompanied by a specific attack aimed at the workers of national education.

In the first case, after several weeks of complete blockage of transport and a succession of massive demonstrations, the government withdrew the measures aimed at the special retirement regime of the railway and RATP workers. With the return to work in these sectors, following a concession by the government which the unions presented as a 'victory', a fatal blow had been dealt to the dynamic of the movement, which enabled the Juppé government to push through the general attack on social security.

In the second case, the workers of national education, who had gone on strike massively and represented the 'reference' for the public sector, were led to carry on for weeks with a movement that had been exhausted in other sectors, and this with the encouragement of the most 'radical' unions. This produced a deep feeling of bitterness and discouragement, with a message for all workers: not only 'it's not the street that governs' but also 'there's no point in struggling'.

4. This feeling of powerlessness was however, overcome three years later, in the spring of 2006, in the massive mobilisation of the young generations of the working class against the Contrat Première Embauche (CPE) introduced by the Villepin government. A mobilisation which, this time, was not planned in advance by the government and the unions. The latter had done the minimum possible to oppose a measure aimed at accentuating the precarious nature of employment for young proletarians (and which even the bosses thought was superfluous). It was the educated youth in the universities and high schools who embarked on the struggle, i.e. the huge mass of future unemployed and precarious workers. As we said at the time, this movement against the CPE was exemplary. It was able, thanks in particular to the daily general assemblies open to the whole working class, to massive street demonstrations which were not controlled by the unions, to deal with the different traps laid by the bourgeoisie. The movement threatened to draw in the employed workers, in particular those in industry. This is why, on the advice of Laurence Parisot (the boss of the bosses), the government ended up withdrawing the CPE. This retreat by the Villepin government was a striking refutation of Raffarin's 2003 declaration because this time it was the street that had the last word. As well as the massive and sovereign general assemblies, this movement against the CPE highlighted another essential element of the proletarian struggle: solidarity between different sectors and generations of the exploited class. It was therefore imperative for the French bourgeoisie to

wipe out all the lessons of this movement if it was to prepare the new attacks made necessary by the aggravation of the economic crisis.

5. This process of wiping out the 'bad example' of the anti-CPE movement was composed of two decisive steps that accompanied the attack on pensions:

- The strikes of autumn 2007 against the suppression of the special pension provisions;

- The movement of autumn 2010 against postponing retirement age.

In the first case, the unions played to the hilt the card of division within the Intersyndicale, a card which had already been played (particularly in 1995 when the CFDT supported the Juppé Plan on social security). This time, we saw an out and out destruction of the movement: initially, the government, while maintaining the whole of the attack, gave in to the demands of the highly corporatist union of the train drivers, which had voted for a return to work. Then, it was the CFDT which called for a return to work, followed by the CGT (which resulted in Bernard Thibault, a former railway worker, being called a traitor by the CGT rank and file). As for FO and SUD, their role was to call for 'continuing the fight' in order to tire out the most militant workers. This defeat was a real blow for millions of workers because the movement had won the sympathy of many sectors of the working class (especially because the railway workers had called not only for maintaining the 37 and a half years as a requirement for their own pensions, but for all sectors). But the bourgeoisie had to pay a price for this victory and for getting the attack pushed through: a powerful distrust with the unions who were widely seen as being responsible for the defeat because of their divisions and quarrels in the meetings of the Intersyndicale.

The second step, the most decisive one, in wiping out the lessons of the CPE, was the decision of the Sarkozy government to attack one of the most significant 'gains' won during the years of the Union of the Left under Mitterrand: retirement at 60. For the French bourgeoisie it was a question of 'unlocking' this symbolic figure and making up for the delay in following the example of other European bourgeoisies in their attacks against the class (mainly because of the fear of returning to a social situation comparable to May 1968). What's more, the French bourgeoisie had to cut the deficits of the state, which, like everywhere else, had been severely aggravated by the measures required to prevent the collapse of the financial system in 2008 and to face up to the very strong recession which had got going since that year. For the French bourgeoisie there were thus both economic and political issues at stake. The tactic employed by the ruling class to push through the economic attack was different from that used on previous occasions. It was above all important that the workers should not come out of the conflict with even more distrust towards the unions. This is why the latter, including the managers' union, the GCG, played up the theme of 'trade union unity', raising the slogan 'all together, all together!'. At the same time, calling successive days of action throughout the autumn of 2010, they polarised attention on an essential theme: the participation of several million workers in the street demos. In the end, the bourgeoisie did not retreat: it was able to carry out the whole economic attack (exchanging a few small improvements for workers who had very taxing jobs) as well as the political and ideological attack, getting across two essential messages:

- 'it's not the street that governs'

- Struggle gets you nowhere, even when millions of workers are demonstrating and even when the unions are united.

This time, the unions succeeded in exhausting the militancy of the working class without losing any credibility. What's more since even 'struggling all together' produced nothing, the very need for solidarity was put into question.

This was a heavy defeat at all levels for the working class in France at the end of 2010. The exhaustion of militancy and the demoralisation of the working class that followed this defeat partly

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# Ukraine: an imperialist war on both sides

Today, in a world fraught with imperialist wars - Iraq, Syria, Libya, East and West Africa, Sudan and Yemen, tensions in the Far East and terror attacks in Europe - Ukraine has become a serious focus of confrontation between Russia and its western rivals. Even if the current war is taking place on the periphery of Europe it nevertheless indicates a striding militarism and a growing threat of war coming to the capitalist heartlands.

## The re-emergence of Russian imperialism and the NATO response

The region around Crimea is crucial for Russian strategic interests, for the protection of its pipelines, an essential part of its economy, but more so for the Russian navy where the Black Sea is its only guaranteed warm-water port, the others being iced up for six months of the year. Crimea, which gives access to the Black Sea, has already been integrated into the Russian Federation. With this move the idea of *Novorossiya* that the Russian bourgeoisie has been talking about since Putin took the presidency in 1999, after his brutal and successful military operation in Chechnya, has become more of a reality. *Novorossiya* is an expression of Russian imperialism from its Tsarist days when it took the region north of the Black Sea from the collapsing Ottoman Empire.

Today its stamp is also been marked in the breakaway Donbass region, in the 'Donetsk People's Republic' and the 'Lugansk People's Republic'. Donetsk airport is a smouldering ruin, littered with corpses. The railway hub of Debaltsevo was fought over during the February 'cease-fire' brokered by France and Germany. The destruction continues with moves towards a land corridor to the Black Sea via the town of Mariupol. The Russian ruling class, with Putin at its head, has no qualms about using force in this region of vital Russian interest against the resistance of Kiev's special forces. Russian imperialism's retreat after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 is well and truly over.

The German and French led Minsk cease-fire of 12 February has already broken down, like the failure of the cease-fire last September. To a certain extent, the separatist rebels in the East are a wild card, independent of Russia but, overall, and for the reasons above, it is Russia that is pulling the strings and providing the overwhelming fighting force and material. Latest reports suggest that much of the deadly artillery shelling comes from within Russian territory.

At the same time we have been seeing the manoeuvring of the western countries, particularly the US, to give backing the Kiev regime. The western leaders and their media gave their support to the Maidan 'revolution' which was nothing more than a military coup replacing the Russian-backed gangsters in Kiev with those supported by the west. Russia cannot allow this regime to be incorporated into NATO with its forces right up to its borders. The war could thus become a long-term affair, giving Russia a sort of buffer zone and providing it with the ability to turn it on and off, thus gradually destabilising the western-backed Kiev regime. It's a dangerous game. The US threat to provide Kiev with lethal weaponry is more than bluff and, at any rate, these events tend to take on their own irrational dynamic. In respect of supporting Kiev with arms there have been contradictory statements from various western ministries which probably represent both a genuine uncertainty and a campaign of disinformation. What is clear is that NATO has begun arming Eastern European countries with more modern weapons and military systems along with the creation of a NATO rapid reaction force.

There's a contradiction here: on the one hand this is a period marked by the overall weakening of US imperialism, but at the same time NATO forces rely very heavily on US military assets. There's a contradiction too within the alliance of the western countries, because while there's no such thing as a 'European' foreign policy and certain centrifugal tendencies hold sway, including a weakening of the 'transatlantic bond', even down to arguments over the meaning of NATO's Article 5 on mutual defence, these events have

nevertheless promoted a more unified response. Thus NATO is doubling its rapid reaction force to 30,000 with units stationed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. According to NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, this is "*The biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War*" (*The Guardian*, 5/12/15). Germany is taking the lead in NATO's Response Force (NRF) in 2015, through the rotation system. And according to last November's *Die Welt*, a paper well-connected with NATO intelligence circles, Germany is playing a particular role in organising elite response forces.

United States military instructors are due to arrive in Kiev in March in order to train local forces how "*to defend themselves against Russian artillery and rockets*" (*The Times*, 12/2/15, citing the senior military US commander in Europe). This is a far cry from 'US disengagement' that some parts of the press talk about. In relation to the question of disinformation raised above, it seems that the armies of the west are now using the Russian expediency of *Maskirovka*, i.e., putting out general information through the media in order to mislead the enemy.

## A different situation to the wars in the Balkans in the 1990's

Russia's strategy in Ukraine is based on exploiting the divisions and uncertainty within Europe and NATO. This was made clear by its foreign minister Sergei Lavrov in a speech a couple of weeks ago: "*The events in the past year (in Ukraine) have confirmed the reality of our warnings regarding deep, systematic problems in the organisation of European security*" (reported in *The Guardian*, 13/2/15).

The present war is entirely different from the Balkan Wars of the 1990s which were more expressive of the imperialist tensions between western bloc countries and the US in the 'New World Order'. These tensions, which translated on the ground into mass rape, massacres (Sarajevo, Srebrenica...) and the total fragmentation of ex-Yugoslavia and its provinces, were not a confrontation between Russia and the west but rather saw the imperialist interests of Germany, Britain, France and the US in a proxy war of each against all. A concrete example of this occurred at Pristina airport, June 1999 in the aftermath of the Kosovo War where Russian troops occupied the airport ahead of a NATO deployment. US overall NATO commander Wesley Clarke ordered the airport to be taken by British troops under his command. British military commander, Mike Jackson, refused Clarke's orders saying: "*I'm not going to start World War III*".

The current war is less like the Balkans of the 90s and more like the war in Georgia in 2008, where the latter, supported by the US, agitated to join NATO. Russia gained ground here and with the US engaged elsewhere the latter was forced to swallow the 'European' (i.e., dictated by Moscow) plan for a cease-fire<sup>2</sup>. Now it's Russia v the others in continuity with its imperialist interests dating back to Tsarist days. Russia is pursuing this strategy with reduced means and ambitions compared to the Cold War, but it's still pushing for a new front line in Europe. All this is very dangerous for the working class across this continent and beyond.

## An irrational situation

None of this is rational, even from a capitalist point of view. Russia and European countries are suffering enormously over US-imposed sanctions. Sanctions on Russia were introduced in March 2014 and compounded by Russian countersanctions banning food imports. Gas and oil price falls of 40% have also hit the Russian economy. While the Rouble has plummeted, many businesses ceased trading in Russia due to its volatility, and the working class and population as a whole is hit by soaring food prices. Meanwhile Putin calmly

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incident\\_at\\_Pristina\\_airport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incident_at_Pristina_airport).

2. <http://en.internationalism.org/wr/318/russia-georgia>. Ex-Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, the US's man, on the run from authorities in Georgia, is now an official advisor to the regime in Kiev.



## Is this the eve of World War III?

A frequently asked question, the answer to which is no... but. From the point of view of the attack on class consciousness and the rise of nationalism, feeding into the decomposition of the capitalist system in general, the all-pervading destructiveness could do almost as much damage to the prospects of communism as a world war. But for the latter, for a truly

global conflict, there is a need for more or less coherent military blocs. Such do not exist. Even if they are against the renewed push of Russian imperialism there is little unity amongst NATO countries where centrifugal tendencies still dominate. All countries are wary of a German-dominated force as are many of an American domination and this gives an opening to Russia. As for the latter, it has taken steps to get China onside for its 'Asiatic bloc' and is making advances to other countries unwilling to bow to US pressure: Egypt, Hungary and Greece for example, but there is no prospect of a military bloc on the horizon.

On the other front, the social front, for a world war to be prepared the working class of the central countries needs to be mobilised and ready to give 'blood, sweat and tears' for the national, i.e., imperialist interest just as the proletariat marched off to war and slaughter in 1914. Despite the present reflux in the struggles in the west, this is still not the case.

## The victory of nationalism on both sides

In Kiev large numbers of the population, egged on by the west and its media foghorns, voted for nationalist and fascist goons who then terrorised what genuine demonstrators there were in Maidan. Kiev's new president, Poroshenko, already at his inauguration last June, promised war and austerity and he is now talking about introducing martial law and 'reforms' in order to pursue the war and further attacks on the population. The IMF, which has already given billions of dollars to Kiev, is talking about another \$17.5 billion with \$40 billion more over the next 4 years. This will be in exchange for 'reforms' such as cutting the social wage even further and substantially increasing basic prices. This will happen whether the war intensifies or not. And, particularly affected and caught up in all this, the working class is unable to provide any realistic opposition.

This is not to say that there has been no resistance to the war. In the East of the country, outside of the armed gangs of separatists and nationalists there seems very little support for the war. There was some action from miners in the Donbass at the beginning which seemed independent, but it was quickly recuperated by the 'rebels' who used as a show-piece for their 'support'. In fact the rebel factions have complained about the lack of support from the population.

In the West of the country there has been more open resistance, particularly in the light of Poroshenko's heavy hint about martial law and the proclaimed draft of 100,000 more soldiers from 16 to 60 years old - a mobilisation that is reminiscent of the Nazis in the last days of World War II, where the Volkssturm was enacted calling up the youth and old of similar ages. Documents hacked from the office of Kiev's chief military prosecutor, Anotoli Matous, show a far greater number of war casualties than the official figure of 5,400 (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8/2/15, quotes German military intelligence as estimating 50,000 killed). The leaks also show over ten thousand desertions, the latter including senior military personnel and desertions from special military units and this to the point that the regime has set up special military units to track down deserters from the special military units - amongst others.

In Kiev-controlled territory there have been demonstrations and meetings in the provinces of Odessa and Zaporozhia where women particularly have been addressing crowds denouncing the war and the regime and getting a deal of support. But this resistance, though welcome, is by no means sufficient to spark a wider anti-war movement or anti-austerity fight. While generally not supporting the war, the working class of East and West Ukraine have not enough force, not enough political maturity to really oppose it on a class basis.

Perspectives

We should remember that in World War I, while anti-war movements broke out almost immediately, it took more years of destruction and carnage until 1917 bought a qualitative change in the working class that forced the ruling class to end the war. The conditions in Ukraine are very different today in that the war doesn't entail mass mobilisations and the role of the big powers is more indirect and hidden. There is the danger of a 'hidden' war here, one that just rumbles on, becoming entrenched like other war zones in this period. In this key strategic area between Europe and Asia, with the direct participation of Russia and NATO forces, even if the latter are not totally united - along with other conflicts going on in the world - the catastrophic descent into decomposition is graphically illustrated.

## Perspectives

This will tend to further demoralise the working class in the main industrial heartlands, just as the repression of the 'Arab Spring', with the knowing complicity of the bourgeoisie of the major powers, has been a factor of demoralisation and an opening for the nationalist left (e.g. Greece and Spain). But despite these considerable difficulties in the class, the task of revolutionaries, communists, around the world is to speak with one voice against imperialist war, something that they have singularly and pathetically been unable to do. For all their talk of 'internationalism' their responsibility in deeds towards it has been shamefully ducked, making it nothing more than one empty word amongst all others.

We have to bear in mind that it was only a very small number of revolutionaries, true internationalists, that stood up for the proletarian cause prior to and during World War I, just as more workers were being mobilised to massacre each other. We need to debate, come together and denounce the war highlighting the responsibility of the workers in the west. We need to maintain our analyses in the spirit of Zimmerwald and Kienthal and stand as a beacon against capitalist decomposition and imperialist war. **Boxer 18/2/15**

Continued from page 5

## Resolution on the social situation in France

explain the social calm of the last four years, and the very weak involvement of the young generation in France in the movement of the Indignados which took place a few months later in the whole of Spain and which also spread onto the international level.

Obviously, in this offensive against the working class in France, the bourgeoisie of this country was able to benefit from the full support of its European cohorts, particularly the German bourgeoisie, above all because they are all aware of the historic experience of the proletariat in France (June days of 1848, Paris Commune of 1871, and May 68).

6. As we have often pointed out, the Indignados movement was the main proletarian reaction to the convulsions of the world capitalist economy after 2008. This reaction did not take the 'classic' form of workers' strikes or even of street demonstrations, with the exception of the European countries most violently hit by the economic crisis, like Greece or Portugal. This brutal aggravation of the capitalist crisis has led to a dizzying rise in unemployment, which has continued to act as a factor paralysing the strike weapon: what's the point of stopping work when the enterprise has shut down? Furthermore, the ideological campaigns which accompanied the 'sub-primes' crisis were another factor in confusing the exploited and increasing their feeling of powerlessness. In fact, the wave of panic about the financial crisis in 2008-9, widely stirred up by the media and fuelled by the discourse of the economic experts, had the consequence, even when it was not its direct aim, of making the working class feel dumbstruck. The essential message was this: 'you have to tighten your belts, accept sacrifices, because that's the only way out of the crisis'. This went along with the key message that the real responsibility for the crisis lay with 'international finance' and not the capitalist system itself. Président Hollande, shortly before his election, put it like this: "my main adversary... is the world of finance" (speech at Bourget, 22/1/12). The Indignados movement, for all its democratic illusions and its confusions about the financial system being responsible for all evils, still contained within it a radical rejection of bankrupt capitalism and clearly raised the necessity to replace it with a new society (this is why the movement was prey to the 'alternative world' reformists like ATTAC with their mystifying slogan 'another world is possible'). It ex-

pressed the fact that class consciousness and class identity are not exactly the same. The Indignados, with their call for another society, were not aware that this demand belongs to the only class capable of constructing this other society – the proletariat. The majority of them didn't even feel that they belong to the working class. However, this movement was an important step on the road towards the world proletariat become conscious of itself, a step which has left traces in the minds of millions of young proletarians. And it was precisely this step which the proletariat in France was not able to take, given the defeat inflicted on it by the bourgeoisie and its unions through the days of actions and demonstrations in the autumn of 2010.

7. At present, the attacks descending on the working class in France, which are now being directed by a left government, are encountering practically no resistance, despite the existence of a very strong social discontent. This is also the case in nearly all countries. For the moment, the bourgeoisie is managing to conserve a certain control both over its economic apparatus and over the social situation, thanks to the unions recovering their grip and imprisoning the workers in fake, insignificant and highly corporatist struggles (which are often even extremely unpopular since they set one group of workers of against another, as in the case of last June's SNCF strike for the defence of the railway workers' status). There will have to be a serious degradation of general living and working conditions for the working class to be able to overcome its paralysis. With the aggravation of the economic crisis, new attacks are inevitable and so are new reactions from the proletariat. The working class has to confront some major obstacles, which are posed on the scale of the historic stakes facing today's society. It has to face a bourgeoisie which is very experienced in confronting the working class; it has to overcome the democratic illusions which are still very strong in the class despite the fact that the official institutions of bourgeois democracy have been profoundly discredited as can be seen, among other things, from the increasing rates of abstention at elections, the miniscule popularity of Président Hollande and the success of the Front National at the last European elections.

The success of the FN is one of the expressions of decomposition, of capitalist society rotting on its feet, which is an added difficulty the proletariat as to confront on the road to its emancipation. The future is not written in advance: despite the

enormous difficulties facing the working class, in France as everywhere else, it has not suffered a decisive defeat like the one it went through after the revolutionary wave of 1917-23. Even if it is paralysed at the moment, it has not been dragooned behind bourgeois flags as it was in the 1930s when it marched under the banners of nationalism or antifascism. Furthermore, and more fundamentally, both the fight against the CPE and the Indignados movement have revealed that there is a process of reflection going on among the young generations of the working class, a maturation of consciousness about the failure of capitalism, which cannot offer them any perspective except unemployment, the destruction of the environment, war and barbarism in all its forms. This reflection contains the search for another perspective for society, opening the way to the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness, even if the road ahead is still a long one. **Revolution Internationale**

Continued from page 2

### Leftists give credence to Syriza

*began with calls for 'Peace, Bread and Land'*

It is true that the general strikes in Greece have been staged by the various union co-ordinations in Greece, and as such proved an outlet for workers' anger against the austerity measures imposed by the ND/PASOK government. They ensured that opposition to austerity was contained and diverted. The 'political imagination' that Syriza has provided involves taking its place in the apparatus of the capitalist state. It is not a 'challenge to power' but a participation in the domination of capital and the exploitation of the working class.

References to 1917 are potentially risky for any leftists to make. The reality of revolution and the participation of revolutionaries within that process tend to expose the postures of such as Syriza. The Russian Revolution not only threw up demands such as those of 'Peace, Bread and Land', it was also characterised by Lenin's theoretical work on marxism and the state, the *April Theses*, and *State and Revolution*. A cornerstone of marxism is that the state exists because of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. In this it is appropriate for Syriza to take its place in the capitalist state and for other leftists to conjure up illusions in what state capitalism can do. **Car 5/3/15**

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# Proletarian politics against bourgeois electoralism

In Britain, the electoral season is upon us once again. And the ruling class is a bit worried that a growing number of people aren't that interested. That's why, along with the usual arguments about the personalities of this or that political leader, followed (usually in order of importance) by arguments about the policies of the different parties, we are hearing a great deal about voter apathy and even the threat to democracy that it poses. The scandal caused by Russell Brand in his interview with Jeremy Paxman in October 2013 summed it up quite well: after Brand's shocking admission that he has never voted and never will, because he is sick of the lies and dishonesty of the entire 'political class', Paxman came back with the classic response: if you don't vote, you have no right to say anything about the political system. And he was backed up in particular by various celebrities and commentators on the left, who sometimes threw in further arguments about the vote being something that workers and oppressed women fought for to make sure they would have a voice in society. So either you vote and take part in electoral politics, or you are shamefully advocating political indifference and apathy, and even betraying the memory of the fighters of the past.

## The workers' movement and bourgeois democracy

Electoralism, the parliamentary system, is a central plank of bourgeois politics. We know of course that the capitalist class has frequently dispensed with it in times of crisis – fascism being an obvious example – or where it is congenitally weak, as in the stalinist regimes or various military dictatorships in the peripheral countries. But brute repression is not the most effective form of class rule, and in the most developed countries democracy is favoured because it upholds the illusion among the exploited that they really do have a say in how they are ruled. The democratic state is the more subtle mask of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the best framework for preventing class conflict from getting out of control.

But didn't the working class fight for the vote in the nineteenth century, and didn't support for this struggle distinguish the marxists from the anarchists in the workers' movement? And what about the heroic struggle of the suffragettes? Surely we should honour their struggle by exercising the right they secured for us?

It's true that Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg and others argued that the working class, as well

as forming trade unions to defend its interests at the economic level, should organise political parties whose programme would include the right to vote and the fight, inside bourgeois parliaments, for laws that would back up the improvements won through the economic struggle. And when the anarchists attacked them for being reformists and demanded an all-out and immediate fight for revolution, they replied by arguing that capitalist society was still in the ascendant and that the working class was therefore faced with the necessity to develop its class identity and its historical programme inside the confines of bourgeois society.

It's also true that this perspective contained serious pitfalls. If the workers' movement got too attached to the struggle for immediate gains, it would lose sight of the long-term goals of revolution and communism, and thus ran the risk that its painfully created organisations would become a functioning part of bourgeois society. And this indeed is what happened – the trade unions and the mass social democratic parties were gradually integrated into capitalism, and a whole new current of thought emerged from within them, justifying this process by revising the fundamentals of marxism, which had always been based on the prediction that capitalism would sooner or later enter into a historical crisis which would make revolution a necessity.

The culminating point of this revisionist or opportunist trend was reached in 1914, when the epoch of crisis dawned and the workers' organisations were faced with the choice: hold onto to what you have achieved inside capitalism by selling yourself to the bourgeoisie and supporting the war, or hold onto your principles by defending the international interests of the working class and opposing the war. In 1917-21, the choice was posed just as starkly: support the ruling class against the threat of revolution, or join the revolutionary struggle.

Revolution, by definition, demands a radical break with the past, and in the first great wave of revolutions provoked by the imperialist war of 1914-18, those who remained loyal to the working class were faced with the necessity to break with the old organisations – trade unions and political parties – that had become part of the capitalist war effort. They were obliged to reject the tactics of the previous period, focused on the fight for reforms, and to participate in the new forms of organisation created by the need for revolution.



Sylvia Pankhurst opposed the 1914 war and called for soviets, not parliamentary votes

## Soviets versus parliament

The question of the vote and of parliament was a key element in this debate about the tactics appropriate to the epoch of revolution. After three years of futile slaughter, the working class had responded with truly revolutionary methods: mutinies and mass strikes. These movements gave rise to forms of organisation that would allow the working class to unite its forces and pose the question of political power: the soviets or workers' councils, based on elected and revocable delegates from general assemblies of workers or soldiers. These organs were directly opposed to bourgeois parliaments, founded on the atomised citizen who votes for a party that can now assume the reins of state and oppress and defraud the population for the next four or five years. And everywhere the councils emerged – especially in Germany – the ruling class did everything it could to get them to hand over power to parliament, above all via the influence of the social democratic parties which still had the majority in the councils.

It was no accident that the right to vote was granted to the majority of the working class precisely when it had gone beyond the parliamentary form and affirmed in practice the possibility of a new form of political power, directly controlled from below and aimed at the complete transformation of society. In Britain, it was also symbolic that the vote was given to women (though still not all of them) in 1918, after the majority of the suffragette movement had pledged its loyalty to capitalism by supporting the war. Having initially opposed granting the vote to the exploited and the oppressed majority for fear that it would result in the overthrow of class rule, the bourgeoisie now rushed to grant universal suffrage as the best way of preserving its threatened system. This deception was denounced at the time by Sylvia Pankhurst, still often presented to us as a famous suffragette, but who in fact broke politically with the suffrag-

ette movement, including her mother Emmeline, for supporting the war; identifying herself with the workers' revolution, Sylvia and her paper *The Workers' Dreadnought* entered the battle for soviets against parliament and bourgeois elections.

## Need for a proletarian perspective

Of course, this all happened a long time ago. The working class may have come close to revolution then, but today the working class hardly recognises itself as a class at all. For decades now it has been told that the attempt to build 'communism' in the USSR and the eastern countries was a total failure, that marxism has been refuted, that the working class doesn't really exist anymore. Certainly the main parties contesting the next election no longer refer to class – including the 'Labour' party; and the ones that pretend to be a radical alternative to the established parties, such as UKIP on the right and the Greens on the left, call on us to vote on the basis of Britishness or as concerned citizens.

But capitalism is even more decrepit than it was in 1914 and the longer it continues, the more it threatens the very survival of humanity. In a world facing economic crisis, war and barbarism from all sides, the national solutions and reforms promised in bourgeois elections are more fraudulent than ever. And despite all the changes in its structure on a global scale since the first revolutionary wave, the working class is still the class that creates the wealth in this system, still the exploited class, and still the only force that can change society from top to bottom. What the working class lacks, above all, is a perspective, a sense not only of what it is today but of what it can become. And this perspective can only be a political one, because it is centred round the question of who will hold power – a minority of exploiters, or the majority made up of the exploited and the oppressed – and what they will do with power – defend their privileges even at the expense of the destruction of society and the natural environment, or create a new society based on solidarity and the satisfaction of human need.

All forms of bourgeois politics are a barrier to the self-organised, self-conscious movement we need if we are to challenge this social order. We are against participating in capitalist elections not because we favour apathy and withdrawal from political engagement, but because we are for proletarian politics and the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state. **Amos 5/3/15**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

## OUR ORIGINS

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