



# world revolution

## Corbyn campaign

# The great Labour tradition of defending capitalism

Despite it being anticipated in all the preceding polls, there were still many expressions of 'surprise' at the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party. Previous leaders Kinnock, Blair and Brown had all warned that the election of Corbyn would mean that Labour would lose the 2020 general election and could be out of power for a generation. After Corbyn's speech to the Labour Party Conference he was accused of only speaking to the 'activists' and it was widely claimed that, under his leadership, Labour would only be a party of protest.

The elevation of Corbyn was not an accident, but it can only be understood in terms of the overall political needs of British capitalism.

### The myth of anti-austerity

In the General Election in May the distinction between the varieties of austerity on offer from the major parties was even less clear than usual. Against the policies undertaken by the Conservative/LibDem Coalition, Labour offered little more than 'Austerity Lite'. After the election Labour in parliament proceeded to support new cuts in welfare introduced by the new Tory government. It was against this background that Corbyn stood as an opponent of austerity who puts forward fairness and equality, along with growth and state intervention, as an alternative to the brutality of a government that favours the few, not the many.

Comparisons were justifiably made with the Greek populist government of Syriza. Syriza



also advertises itself as being against austerity, although it should be recalled that, after winning a clear majority against the bailout conditions proposed by the 'troika', Syriza then accepted an even more stringent programme of austerity than had been agreed by previous governments of right and left. However, the idea that Corbyn's emergence expresses a similar rejection of austerity as that trumpeted by Syriza, and by Podemos in Spain, remains popular. It is tied up with the notion that austerity is a political choice, and not

something imposed on all capitalist governments by the reality of the capitalist economic crisis.

While state capitalism is at the heart of the governing regime of every country in the modern world, Corbyn and the shadow Chancellor John McDonnell have made explicit their commitment to the strengthening of the role of the capitalist state in all aspects of economic and social life in the UK. Plans for state investment, for 'peoples' quantitative easing', for the nationalisation of banks, the re-nationalisation of the railways, and

similar policies, show that the domination of capital in Britain is safe in their hands. It's true that the shadow energy minister has said that Labour "don't want to nationalise energy. We want to do something far more radical. We want to democratise it." But this apparently means that "There should be nothing to stop every community in this country owning its own clean energy power station" - which still seems to be a populist green variation on the same basic theme.

To prove that they are not 'deficit deniers', the new Corbyn leadership has signed up to Chancellor George Osborne's fiscal charter and insists that Britain must 'live within its means'. Corbyn and McDonnell have also appointed an economic advisory panel including Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, fashionable author Thomas Piketty, and former Bank of England monetary policy committee member Danny Blanchflower, to provide ideas for the reforming of the role of the capitalist state. This can only mean minor modifications in an economic system that is based on the exploitation of the labour power of the working class.

At the level of British imperialism Corbyn has been much criticised for saying that, if he were to be Prime Minister, he would not use nuclear weapons. This should be put into context. In his speech to the Labour Conference he did say that "Britain does need strong, modern military and security forces" and that "British values ... are the fundamental reason why I love this country and its people." There can be no challenging his patriotism. His support for "the authority of international law and international institutions" demonstrates a support for the imperialist set-up that is

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## Syria: Russian intervention escalates the chaos

Why are millions fleeing Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, and other countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa? Because the population there is desperate to escape a permanent state of war, an infernal spiral of two, three, even five way conflicts between equally murderous antagonists, whether official government armies or terrorist gangs. Syria is the most 'advanced' expression of this descent into chaos. The Assad government, which has shown itself ready to bomb Syria to ruins rather than relinquish power, now only controls about 17% of the country. Whole areas of the north and east of the country are under the control of the fanatical jihadis of

Islamic State. Other areas are in the hands of what the western media sometimes calls "moderate" oppositionists, but which are themselves increasingly dominated by jihadi forces like al-Nusra, which is an affiliate of al-Qaida: the "secular and democratic" rebels of the Free Syrian Army, which has been noisily supported by the US and Britain, seem to have become increasingly marginal. Between the anti-Assad forces themselves there is a never-ending game of alliances, betrayals and armed battles.

But Syria, like the other wars in the region, is also a confrontation between international powers, a fact brought home by the direct intervention

of Russian war planes. From the start, Russia has backed the Assad regime with arms and "advisers". Today its fighters are bombing "terrorist" targets because the Assad regime has its back to the wall and there is a threat that IS will overrun Russia's base at Tartus, its only naval outlet to the Mediterranean. But for Russia, all the opposition forces, including those backed by the US, are terrorists, and its recent strikes have hit more of the non-IS rebels than IS itself. The US, which might have welcomed Russian aid in its bombing campaigns against IS in Syria and Iraq, can see very clearly that Russia's number one aim is not

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# Sylvia Pankhurst

## Why revolutionaries are against the Labour Party

In the struggle to form a Communist Party in Britain during the revolutionary wave of 1917-23 it was the Left, led by the small group around Sylvia Pankhurst and the *Workers' Dreadnought*, that was clearest about the danger posed by the Labour Party to a workers' revolution.

After some initial hesitations in 1914 the Labour Party had joined the ranks of the 'social patriots' and became a supporter of British imperialism in the slaughter. This excerpt from an article written by Pankhurst in 1920 still refers to Labour as 'reformist' rather than a capitalist party but it is very clear in denouncing its counter-revolutionary role for the capitalist state.

In opposition to the programme of the social patriotic Labour Party the *Dreadnought* group defended the need for the overthrow of capitalism and the dictatorship of the working class exercised through the soviets as a step towards the abolition of the wages system and communism.

*"The social patriotic parties of reform, like the British Labour Party, are everywhere aiding the capitalists to maintain the capitalist system; to prevent it from breaking down under the shock which the Great War has caused it, and the growing influence of the Russian Revolution. The bourgeois social patriotic parties, whether they call themselves Labour or Socialist, are everywhere working against the Communist revolution, and they are more dangerous to it than the aggressive capitalists because the reforms they seek to introduce may keep the capitalist regime going for some time to come. When the social patriotic reformists come into power, they fight to stave off the workers' revolution with as strong a determination as that displayed by the capitalists, and more effectively, because they understand the methods and tactics and something of the idealism of the working class.*

*The British Labour Party, like the social patri-*

*otic organisations of other countries, will, in the natural development of society, inevitably come to power. It is for the Communists to build up the forces that will overthrow the social patriots, and in this country we must not delay or falter in that work.*

*We must not dissipate our energy in adding to the strength of the Labour Party; its rise to power is inevitable. We must concentrate on making a Communist movement that will vanquish it.*

*The Labour Party will soon be forming a Government; the revolutionary opposition must make ready to attack it."*

Excerpt from 'Towards a Communist Party', *Workers' Dreadnought*, 21 February 1920.

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## Once more on decadence: some questions for the 'deniers'

is 'decadent' when there are so many signs that capitalism has continued to grow since 1914?

There are certainly phenomena to be explained – for example the spectacular growth of China since the 1980s – but in general we can say that because capitalism is a global system, it enters into its epoch of decay as a global system and not on a country by country basis; no national economy or region can escape from capitalism's trajectory.

There is a strong tendency among our critics to see *any* sign of growth since 1914 as a refutation of decadence and to offer a whole list of new developments to show that capitalism has in fact continued to grow vigorously in its epoch of decay: telecommunications, consumer goods, aviation, computers, data/web services...

But decadence has never meant a total halt to the growth of the productive forces, even in previous modes of production, and capitalism is the first mode of production to be based solely on the extraction of profit; if the growing accumulation of capital cannot be ensured then the whole system would simply grind to a halt.

### Is capitalism a socially regressive system?

Flowing from the Marxist theory of capitalism as a historically transitory system, the real question we need to answer is: are the productive forces definitively and irreversibly in conflict with bourgeois relations of production? In other words, does capitalist growth since 1914 demonstrate that it is now a socially regressive system?

At the *quantitative* level, it is possible to show the braking effect of bourgeois relations of production since 1914 by comparing the growth of industrial production in the period of capitalist decadence with what it *would* have been without this braking effect. Taking the rate of growth in the last phase of capitalist ascendancy and applying it to the whole of the period of decadence, industrial production in decadence reaches only 60% of what it could have been, although even this is likely to be an overestimation.<sup>6</sup>

But this still doesn't show the crucial *qualitative* changes to growth in decadence. Since the conditions for capitalism's abolition already exist, this growth is increasingly characterised, in Marx's poetic phrase, as "*development as decay*".

Having reached the geographic limits of its expansion, with remaining extra-capitalist markets insufficient for its further progressive growth, capitalism's hereditary disease of overproduction becomes chronic and irreversible. As Marx forecast in the 1848 *Manifesto*, it is forced to destroy parts of its own body and adopt a series of increasingly drastic palliatives to prolong its life and ensure growing accumulation.

We can see this process at work since 1914:

- the periodic destruction of the produc-

6. See 'Understanding capitalism's decadence, Part 4', 1988, [http://en.internationalism.org/ri/054\\_decadence\\_part04.html](http://en.internationalism.org/ri/054_decadence_part04.html)

tive forces on an increasing scale through global wars (20 million dead in WW1, 60+ million in WW2);

- the massive increase in the role of the state to shore up the economy against collapse and to control a proletariat which has become a permanent threat;

- the growing burden of unproductive costs (state bureaucracy, arms production, welfare, marketing, etc.);

- the huge growth of debts that realistically can never be repaid.

- systematic attempts to 'cheat' the law of value, for example protectionist policies and the massive use of credit to create artificial markets.

So if capitalism in decadence at certain times or in certain areas has still been able to display impressive growth rates, this still disguises the increasingly 'drugged' nature of this growth, which is at a mounting cost for the future of humanity and the planet itself, and the gigantic waste of the productive forces entailed in these palliative measures.

In other words, it is the growth of a socially regressive system.

### The context for understanding the growth in East Asia

All the palliatives adopted since the entry of capitalism into decadence are now themselves exacerbating its mortal sickness. Capitalism has no choice but to launch a frontal assault on the wages and living conditions of the working class to try to make it pay for its crisis. But even this provides no 'solution'; on the contrary, it can only reduce demand and intensify its chronic crisis of overproduction.

This is the context in which we must analyse the spectacular development of the East Asian economies since the 1980s, especially China which has managed to achieve the most dramatic growth rates in the entire history of capitalism – even during a period of worsening crisis internationally.

A full examination of China's development is clearly beyond the scope of this article,<sup>7</sup> but based on our theoretical framework for understanding the nature of growth in decadence we are led to conclude that the growth of the East Asian economies is not the indication of a new period of capitalist expansion as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather a temporary upturn within a global decline; and in fact we have recently seen China's growth rates fall to their lowest level for 25 years, leading bourgeois pundits to warn of the shock waves hitting an already weak global economy.<sup>8</sup>

7. The ICC has published a substantial study of this question for discussion ('The sources, contradictions and limitations of the growth in Eastern Asia', <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/133/china/part-1>).

8. See for example, *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-gdp-growth-is-slowest-in-24-years-1421719453>.

But we should be cautious about making any forecasts. The return of capitalism's open crisis in the late 1960s dramatically re-affirmed the Communist Left's analysis of the decadence of capitalism and the inability of the system to overcome its fatal contradictions. But the evolution of the crisis over the last five decades is testament to capitalism's extraordinary capacity to adapt and survive – even if this can only mean storing up more problems for itself in the longer term. Just as Marx and Engels at times mistakenly believed capitalism was entering into its final crisis, revolutionaries have on occasions underestimated this capacity of capitalism or to foresee the possibility of an under-developed country like China industrialising quite so spectacularly.<sup>9</sup>

We have now passed the milestone of 100 years of capitalist decadence. Despite massive waves of struggles especially in the late 60s and early 1970s, the proletariat has not yet been able to destroy decadent capitalism. But this failure of the working class to meet its 'appointment with history', especially in the revolutionary wave of 1917-23, does not in any way invalidate the Marxist theory of capitalist decadence.

### Some questions for the 'deniers'

There seems to be common ground that capitalism today is a socially regressive system – although we probably disagree on whether it was ever progressive in the first place – and that a proletarian revolution is both possible and necessary.

There also appears to be broad agreement that capitalism *is* a historically transitory system. But it is entirely unclear what theory the deniers use to determine this, given that they appear to reject the whole materialist conception of history as a succession of modes of production which go through a phase of ascent and decline.

*Why is capitalism a historically transitory system?*

*And if it is historically transitory, what are the seeds of its destruction, the fatal contradictions that will – at least at some point in its development – lead to its historic crisis?*

*And if it has no fatal contradictions – no built-in tendency towards overproduction, for example – why can it not prolong its life indefinitely?*

*Are there any limits – geographic or other – to its ability to continue to create new markets for its commodities?*

*Are there any final limits to capitalism's ability to adapt and survive – for example the degradation of the planet to the point where it threatens the survival of humanity?*

If there are no limits, then it's hard to see why 9. Much was made by some in the discussion of an ICC text from 1980 which refers to the 'impossibility' of new industrialist nations emerging in decadence. This requires revision in the light of 100 years of decadence. But we can still say the saturation of markets *relative to the needs of capitalism to expand* makes it *extremely difficult* for the under-developed nations to raise themselves to the level of the developed economies.

## ICC online

### The bunkerisation of world capitalism

Calls for 'no borders' by well-meaning activist groups are thus entirely utopian. Borders can only be abolished through international proletarian revolution, which will dismantle the anti-human prison of the nation state.

### Tianjin: Verify everything, don't forget anything!

A real proletarian voice is still needed in China, a voice that says clearly: no to the assassination of our class brothers, no to the servile and inhumane factory-cities and no to the shameless logic of capital. There has to rise, finally, a voice that speaks for what is human in man. In the meanwhile we all want to be that voice:

### A contribution towards a balance sheet of the technicians' strike at Movistar in Spain

It is clear that the current struggles are still far away from achieving some key elements: what appears almost intuitively (solidarity and self-organisation) demands further elaboration to deepen what is essential: class identity, class consciousness (historical and international), the extension of the struggle, which help us to move towards the re-appropriation of revolutionary theory by the masses themselves.

### A new front opened by Turkey and NATO will deepen imperialist chaos in the Middle East

Into this mix of irrationality, ethnic and religious rivalry overseen by imperialism and the development of each for themselves, the weakening of US influence and reach has helped force the latter to conclude a nuclear deal with Iran that has much wider consequences and implications.

### 70 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki

When one looks at the military situation of Japan at the time when Germany capitulated, we can see that the former was already virtually beaten. Its aviation, an essential arm of the Second World War, was almost finished, reduced to a small number of machines generally piloted by a handful of adolescents who were as fanatical as they were inexperienced. The navy, merchant as well as military, was practically destroyed. Anti-aircraft defences covered only a small area of the sky, which explains why the B29s were able to carry out thousands of attacks throughout spring 1945 with practically no losses.

### Greece: An attack against the whole working class!

### Max Raphael and a Marxist perspective on art (Part 1)

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

capitalism is not, as the bourgeoisie itself proclaims, essentially an eternal system.

So in conclusion we think the onus is on the deniers of decadence to demonstrate how they prove that capitalism is not, as the bourgeoisie argues, the final finished product of the class struggle that contains no fatal contradictions.

For ourselves, having tested all the links of our theoretical framework, we're confident that the Marxist theory of capitalist decadence remains absolutely valid. **MH 26.9.15**



# Calais

## Bourgeois double talk over the refugees

Refugees and other migrants wanting to come to Britain congregate in the 'Jungle', a shanty town near Calais. For over a decade several thousand people have been living there, or prior to that in the official Sangatte camp that was destroyed in 2002 at the request of the UK. They are there in the hope of being able to get into the UK through the Channel Tunnel. This is where Britain, like so many other countries, has built a barbed wire fence to protect its borders and keep out refugees, except that it only needs to defend the entrance to the Eurotunnel and not a land border. The refugees around Calais returned to the news over the summer when striking French ferry workers blocked the entrance to the Eurotunnel, causing queues of cars and lorries that people desperate to get to the Britain tried to climb onto. Others risked their lives trying to walk through the tunnel. Some nights up to 2,000 people were trying to get through the police lines and fencing. Although the strike and blockade has long finished the media continue to report delays on Eurotunnel and Eurostar due to migrants breaking into their terminal. The UK media in general give greater prominence to the delays than to the deaths of migrants – 13 since late June – taking such a dangerous route, and there is very much less coverage of the utter misery suffered by thousands in the camp.

### The British state keeps out the "swarms"

PM David Cameron responded to the situation created by the ferry strike by talking of "swarms" of people trying to "break into Britain", the answer being to "show that Britain is not a soft touch on asylum". Landlords will have to check tenants' documents proving their right to stay, and evict those living illegally – a policy already piloted in the Black Country. The withdrawal of all financial support from failed asylum seekers will be extended from adults to families with children, except for an appeal to the Home Office with evidence they are unable to leave the country. Now families with children will be forced into the kind of destitution already suffered by single adults denied asylum. Plus the government is tendering an estimated £500 million contract to return failed asylum seekers, which could include some from Calais. 12,460 were forcibly removed last year.

On 20 August home secretary Teresa May visited Calais to organise the increased security with French minister of the interior, Bernard Cazeneuve: Britain is investing in fencing, CCTV, floodlighting, and infrared detection; France is putting in extra police search teams with dogs; Eurotunnel is increasing its guards; and a new integrated control room will coordinate all this security.

According to one view common in the media, it is those who really don't get democracy yet, having grown up under Eastern European Stalinist regimes, who do not understand their responsibilities to the refugees: "The very worst of Europe has been seen in Viktor Orban, the pocket-Putin who serves as Hungary's prime minister. Ignorant of history, Mr Orban sees the refugees as a threat to European civilisation. His answer is to build a 175km razor wire fence. Sadly, he is not alone in such bigotry. The Slovakian government says it will accept only non-Muslim refugees. There is something truly dispiriting about former communist states recently welcomed into the EU slamming the door against refugees from other forms of tyranny."<sup>1</sup> Britain's own razor-wire response, coming from the country that boasts the "Mother of Parliaments", and from the mouths of politicians who would never fall into any such "politically incorrect" bigotry about non-Christians or non-Europeans, makes it harder to maintain this argument, except by saying Cameron is letting down the British tradition of generosity.

### Cameron has a change of rhetoric

On 3 September, when the photograph of a dead toddler appeared on the front pages, one of 12 Syrians drowned trying to reach Kos, Cameron was still saying that Britain cannot take more people

fleeing from war: "we think the most important thing is to try to bring peace and stability to that part of the world. I don't think there is an answer that can be achieved simply by taking more and more refugees" (Guardian 3.9.15).

Shortly afterwards he announced that Britain would take a paltry 20,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees directly from the Middle Eastern countries over the next 5 years, and make use of the UK opt out of the EU system of quotas for those arriving in Greece and Italy. Last year Britain had only 31,260 asylum applications, only half the number received by France or Italy, a sixth as many as Germany, and less than Hungary!

### The patriotic opposition

In fact the first Westminster politician to suggest that the UK could take some more Syrian refugees was Yvette Cooper, at the time one of the Labour leadership candidates. Pointing to the scale of the humanitarian crisis she said "we seem paralysed to respond. We cannot carry on like this. It is immoral, it is cowardly and it is not the British way. It is a test of British values, too — of whether we will again be able to reach out to the rest of the world and help as we have done in previous generations, or whether we will turn inwards and turn our backs instead."<sup>2</sup> Her proposal for help was similar to the prime minister's – 10,000 distributed throughout the country.

The winner of the leadership contest, Jeremy Corbyn, sounds even more positive: "There's a very large number of people going over to Calais to take aid and support to them ... Our health service, our education service, much of our industrial development in Britain, has been greatly enhanced by the work done by people who have made their homes here, paid their taxes here,

2. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9cdc551a-521f-11e5-8642-453585f2cfd.html#axzz3nMJiyKp5>

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## Corbyn campaign

### The great Labour tradition of defending capitalism

the basis for international relations. As for nuclear weapons, his favourable words towards the policies of US President Obama reveal no antagonism towards the Commander in Chief in charge of the greatest nuclear force on the planet.

However, opposition to nuclear weapons is, at root, as important a part of Corbyn's appeal as the 'opposition to austerity'. All the attacks on the new Labour leader from mainstream media, saying how 'dangerous' his policies are, only go to boost his radical image. This is reinforced by the claims of the left. At the Labour Conference Matt Wrack, the leader of the Fire Brigades Union, said that Corbyn and McDonnell "represent a serious challenge to the establishment, in reality to the British ruling class" and that "MI5, Special Branch and the CIA are all watching this conference, and watching what is going on in the shadow cabinet, with the aim of undermining it." Socialist Worker (15/9/15) agreed that "Corbyn faces opposition from the vast majority of his fellow MPs as well as from the ruling class and the majority of the media. They will do anything to bring him down." Left and right agree that Corbyn is a threat to the status quo. And many people have been attracted to the Labour party, or persuaded to return to it, because of illusions that somehow Corbyn is a refreshing change or represents a return to socialist basics, rather than being a typical conformist product of the Labour Party machine.

In reality a Corbyn-led Labour Party will perform a useful function as part of capitalism's political apparatus. In the face of deepening cuts in services and other attacks on living standards, the ruling class is aware that there is the possibility of discontent from those who are most affected. This does not need to be on the scale of widespread unrest for it to be a concern for the bourgeoisie. Labour will be able to present itself as a radical alternative for those who are the victims of a continuing programme of austerity and impoverish-

worked very hard here..."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, Britain has been welcoming or resistant to immigration according to the needs not of the migrants or refugees, but of the national capital. After World War 2 immigration was greatly encouraged to make up for a shortage of labour. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, on the other hand, when a huge mass of Asians were expelled from East Africa, it was Labour home secretary Callaghan who rushed through the Commonwealth Immigration Act in 1968 so that people with British passports no longer had the right to settle in the UK unless they could show a personal connection with the country. Nor should we forget how the last Labour government campaigned about "bogus" asylum seekers. Right now Britain's population is expected to rise by more than 10% in the next 20 years, and less than 15% of firms have difficulty filling vacancies, so it has less need of immigration. Germany, by contrast, which has been much more welcoming to refugees, has a falling population and more than 45% of firms report having difficulty filling their vacancies (The Economist 19.9.15).

### Capitalism is the problem

When we look at the number of refugees fleeing war, or even the economic migrants who are seeking somewhere to earn a living, we are presented with a barrage of propaganda and opinions that can be roughly divided between those that say we have to defend what we have, and those who say since we are better off we should be generous with our resources when others are in such a desperate situation. The former is represented by the present conservative government as well as UKIP and similar right wing populist organisations in Europe eg Pegida in Germany, although as the Labour government showed in 1968 they can carry

3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-34362565>

out the same policies. The latter more welcoming attitude is today, more or less weakly, expressed by the Labour Party. However the 1951 Conservative government carried on the same policy of encouraging immigration as the previous Atlee government, because it was required. Both these views take it for granted that we are fortunate to live in stable, free, democratic European countries, surrounded by these dangerous unstable regions that threaten us, and then put forward a policy to cope within the system as it is.

As we show in the series of articles on the problem of refugees starting in this issue (page 4 and 5) capitalism is continually causing both economic migration and waves of refugees from imperialist war. It is the same capitalist system that has created both the better conditions in Europe and the wars elsewhere, just as it was responsible for WW2 and the waves of refugees that followed, and profoundly affected Europe. There is no way out within capitalism so we cannot afford to get drawn into either side in this campaign. It is perfectly true that some of the more xenophobic comments are completely revolting, such as Sun journalist Katie Hopkins likening refugees to cockroaches. Much more dangerous is the hypocrisy of the politicians who pretend compassion for refugees when it suits them while equally prepared to put up fences or change the law to keep them out when they are not needed. No less dangerous is the attempt to turn individual acts of kindness and solidarity shown to refugees, whether in Calais or arriving at German railway stations, into a symbol of patriotism: "we British" are kind hearted, "we Germans" understand the problems faced by refugees. General feelings of solidarity with migrants and refugees can only have a future if they become part of a growing class solidarity among all those that capitalism exploits and oppresses. Alex 3/9/15

of economic and social life, when British imperialism continued to deploy its military forces and tried to develop nuclear weapons, and when Britain was a loyal lieutenant in the American-dominated imperialist bloc.

The subsequent Labour governments of Wilson and Callaghan were able to replace Conservative administrations at key points in history. The 1974 Labour government was brought in against a wave of struggles, promoting illusions that it would be different to its predecessors. In fact, in the 1970s, Labour and the unions held down wages with the imposition of their Social Contract. Under Callaghan began the monetarist policies, the programme of cuts in public spending, that were later taken up by Margaret Thatcher. The strikes and demonstrations of the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79 were against a Labour, not a Conservative government.

In the 1980s Labour in opposition made 'radical' critiques of Thatcherism, providing a so-called 'alternative' at a time when workers were embarking on waves of massive struggles. Subsequently, the governments of Blair and Brown played their part in the management of the capitalist economy; at the level of international relations the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan were further evidence of Labour's commitment to the militarist core of imperialist conflict.

This is the history of the Labour Party's defence of British values over the last century, as a party of government and as a party in opposition. In the period to come, when attacks on the working class could lead to a questioning of the very basis of society, and not just the policies of particular governments, Corbyn's Labour Party will prove a valuable weapon for the bourgeoisie in Britain.

Car 3/10/15

1. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9cdc551a-521f-11e5-8642-453585f2cfd.html#axzz3nMJiyKp5>



# Migrants and refugees: victims of capitalist decline

## Introduction to the series

### Economic migration and refugees from war throughout the history of capitalism

#### From its ascendance ....

For thousands of years people have been forced to flee from war, persecution, famine and forces of nature such as floods, droughts, volcanoes etc. But these movements were not a permanent phenomenon and they mostly involved only a small part of the population. After the beginning of agriculture, with the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals, humanity lived for thousands of years on the same spot. Under feudalism the peasantry were attached to the land and serfs stayed, from the moment they were born until their death, on the same land, which belonged to their feudal lord. But, with the onset of capitalism around the fourteenth to fifteenth century this changed drastically.

Capitalism spread by conquest, by intense and massive violence across the globe. First in Europe, where enclosures drove self-sufficient peasants from communal land into the cities to work in factories. Marx described primitive accumulation as the process of *"divorcing the producer from the means of production. ... great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and 'unattached' proletarians on the labour-market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process"* (Marx, *Capital Volume I*, Chapter 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation). This separation of the peasant from the soil, from their means of production, meant uprooting millions of people. Because capitalism needs *"the abolition of all laws preventing labourers from transferring from one sphere of production another to and from one local production centre to another"* (Marx, *Capital Volume 3*, Chapter 10.)

At the same time as capitalism in Europe was compelling the peasants to sell their labour power, it began to spread its colonial rule by invasion and conquest around the globe. And for centuries slave-hunters kidnapped millions of people, mostly from Africa to supply cheap labour for the plantations and mines mainly in America. When slavery ended many slaves working on plantations were replaced with indentured labour.<sup>1</sup> All along its expansion capitalism uprooted and displaced people, either from the countryside forcing them to sell their labour power to a capitalist, or by robbing labour power and turning them into slaves to be sold on another continent. In the same way as capitalism needs the biggest, if not unlimited mobility for its commodities and free access to markets, it also imposes the biggest mobility and access to the work-force. Capitalism *"must be able to mobilise world labour power without restriction in order to utilise all productive forces of the globe – up to the limits imposed by a system of producing surplus value. This labour power, however, is in most cases rigidly bound by the traditional pre-capitalist organisation of production. It must first be 'set free' in order to be enrolled in the active army of capital. The emancipation of labour power from primitive social conditions and its absorption by the capitalist wage system is one of the indispensable historical bases of capitalism."* (*The Accumulation of Capital*, Chapter 26; Rosa Luxemburg). Mobility has a particular significance within capitalism. *"Capitalism necessarily creates mobility of the population, something not required by previous systems of social economy and impossible under them on anything like a large scale"* (Lenin *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* "The 'Mission' of Capitalism").

1. Indentured labour means an emigrating worker signs a contract in his county of migration, according to which for a period of 5 or 8 or 10 years he has to work in that country. The wages are fixed, he cannot ask for an increase and he cannot cancel the contract. Between 1830 and 1930 this involved around 5 million Indians and 5-6 million people from other Asian countries – so as many as 12 million people were indentured labourers.

The proletarian is thus forced to move incessantly, always in search for an opportunity, for a place to sell his labour power. Being a wage earner means being forced to move large and small distances, or even to move to another country or continent, wherever a worker can sell his labour power. Whether in violent forms or through 'mere' economic coercion capitalism from its beginning has drawn its work-force from the entire planet, it has been global, international from the start. In other words: the working class – by the nature of the conditions of capitalism, is a class of migrants – and this is why workers have no fatherland. However the distances a worker has to migrate depends on the economic situation and on other factors such as famine, repression or wars.

During the nineteenth century, the ascendant phase of capitalism, this meant migration occurred mostly towards the areas with expanding industries. Migration and urbanisation went together. In many cities in the 1840-80s in Europe the population doubled within a period of 30-40 years. Within a few decades or, often, within an even shorter period, small towns centred on coal mines, iron mines or new factories, swelled into huge cities.

#### To the twentieth century

At the same time, since capitalism always runs into economic crises, a 'surplus' of labour power regularly crops up with masses of unemployed workers looking for jobs. In the ascendant phase of capitalism economic crises were mainly cyclical. When the economy entered into a crisis, many workers could emigrate, and, when a new boom phase began, additional workers were needed. Millions of workers could emigrate without any major restrictions - mainly because capitalism was still expanding - in particular to the USA. Between 1820 and 1914 some 25.5 million people from Europe emigrated to the USA; altogether some 50 million left the European continent. In every year between 1820 and 1915, more than half the increase in the British population simply emigrated.<sup>2</sup> But these waves of mainly economic migration slowed down considerably with the First World War, when the global historical conditions changed and in particular when the economic crisis was no longer just cyclical but became long-lasting, if not permanent. From massive and almost unhampered, migration became filtered, selected and more and more difficult, if not illegal. From World War I a period of stricter border controls began to be imposed on economic migrants.

#### The decadent system produces an endless number of war refugees

And yet we need to distinguish economic migration from wars: every refugee is a migrant, but not every migrant is a refugee. A migrant is someone who leaves his residence in search of a place where he can sell his labour power. A refugee is someone whose life is at stake in an immediate way and moves elsewhere to find a safe place.

Wars and pogroms are not new phenomena. Any war means violence, forcing people to run away from the confrontations to save their life. Thus war refugees are as old as wars themselves, and war refugees appeared a long time before capitalism forced workers into economic migration. However, the number of wars also took on a different size and quality with the First World War. Up until then the number of war refugees was relatively small. And also the number of victims of pogroms as the ones against the Jews in Russia (or elsewhere) began to change with World War I. In earlier centuries the refugee problem was mainly a temporary and limited phenomenon. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, with the onset of the decadence of capitalism, with each world war and, after 1989, with the period of 'local', 'regional'

2. A passage for a European migrant to the USA cost relatively little because it was not illegal,

but often endless wars, the question of refugees has taken on a new dimension. Both the number of war refugees and economic migrants depend on the respective historical conditions – whether there is an economic crisis and how much war has become dominant.

We plan to publish a number of articles on the question of refugees and migration, which look at the questions from different angles. We have already published an article on migration (<http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201509/13409/bunkerisation-world-capitalism>) and plan to take

up this question in more detail soon. We begin this series with the development of the spiral of violence in the twentieth century and the consequences for the scope of flight from wars, taking up in more detail the different phases from the First World War to the Second World War, and its aftermath, before taking up the period from the Cold War up to the present day. In another article we will also look more closely at the policy of the ruling class and what consequences flow from this for the struggle of the working class. **Heinrich 3/10/15**

## Part 1: from the First World War to the victory of the counter-revolution

*"One thing is certain. The world war is a turning point...The tempo of development has received a mighty jolt from the eruption of the volcano of imperialism. The violence of the conflicts in the bosom of society, the enormosity of the tasks that tower up before the socialist proletariat – these make everything that has transpired in the history of the workers' movement seem a pleasant idyll".* Rosa Luxemburg, *Junius Pamphlet*, 1916

The brutal and violent impetus inherent in decadent capitalism, evoked here by Rosa Luxemburg, has been strikingly confirmed by the tragic fate of the civilian populations in the 20th century who have been subjected to imprisonment in camps, to displacement, deportation and liquidation en masse. The combined effect of wars, economic crisis and oppression in declining capitalism gave rise to an irrational dynamic of blind violence, of pogroms, 'ethnic cleansing' and unbridled militarism. The 20th century was one of the most barbaric in history.

#### 1914: a new era of violence against populations

The year 1914 and its chauvinist hysteria opened a whole spiral of violence. In the past of course wars led to massacres and oppression, but this was usually on a local scale; they didn't result in massive exoduses, the displacement of whole populations and the near-paranoid obsession to control them on the part of the state. Modern warfare has become total war. It mobilises, over a period of years, the entire population and the economic machines of the warring countries, reduces to ashes decades of human labour, sacrifices the lives of tens of millions of human beings, hurls hundreds of millions into famine. Its effects are no longer limited to mere conquests, with their train of rape and pillage, but gigantic destructions across the whole globe. On top of the uprooting, the rural exodus brought about by the introduction of capitalist social relations, total war adds the militarisation of the whole of civil society in the service of the battle fronts. This was a real qualitative step. Populations of entire countries, and above all the youth, are forcibly displaced to become soldiers, compelled to engage in a mutual bloodbath with those from rival countries. The civilians at the rear are bled dry by the war effort and the first camps are made up of the prisoners from enemy nations. Although during the First World War there were no extermination camps, we can still talk about mass imprisonments and deportations. Any foreigner immediately became a suspect. In Britain for example foreigners were stuck in the Newbury race course or on the Isle of Man. In Germany, the camps at Erfurt, Munster or Darmstadt were used to imprison masses of civilians. In France, 70 internment camps were in service between 1914 and 1920 on the west coast (in the vicinity of Brest for example) and in the southern departments. At first they were existing buildings or perimeters surrounded by barbed wire and closely guarded. Transfer from one camp to another was done with cattle wagons and any revolt was met with violence. Useless to point out that any communist militant was subject to imprisonment as were women who had "compromised with the enemy". A camp like the one in Pontmain was made

up of Turks, Austro-Hungarians and especially Germans. This was indeed a prefiguration of the concentration camp universe that was set up in the 1930s and reached its summit during the Second World War. At the same time as xenophobic prejudices were being whipped up, the indigenous inhabitants of distant countries were dragged towards Europe by the recruiters, enrolled as sacrificial lambs in the war. From 1917-18, under orders from Clemenceau in France, 190,000 North Africans were sent to the front. 170,000 West Africans, the famous "Senegalese sharpshooters" were for the most part mobilised by force. Chinese people were also mobilised by France and Britain. Britain also sent Africans and Indians to the slaughter (1.5 million from the Indian sub-continent alone). The belligerent powers – and this also included the Russians with their "savage divisions" from the Caucasus – used all these "natives" as specialised cannon-fodder for the most dangerous military operations. As well as the soldiers displaced, more than 12 million Europeans were compelled to flee from the war, to become refugees.

#### The Armenian genocide and the persecution of minorities

This was the case for the Armenian populations, one of the most striking tragedies of the war, and seen as the first real genocide of the 20th century. Even during the 19th century, Armenian aspirations for independence, like that of the Greeks, resulted in persecution by the Ottomans. A political movement known as the "Young Turks", which adopted an extremely nationalist Pan-Turkish ideology, prepared the massacre. Having become scapegoats during the war, especially after the defeat by the Russians, the Armenians were subjected to a well-planned massacre between April 1915 and the autumn of 1916. Having initially arrested a number of intellectuals, the rest of the Armenian population was systematically deported and decimated en masse by the Turkish state. Women and children were transported in boats and many drowned around the coasts or were sold like slaves. The Baghdad railway was used to carry out massive deportations to the desert or to camps, some of which were already being used to exterminate people. A large number of Armenians died of thirst in the Mesopotamian desert. Those who managed to escape the slaughter became impoverished refugees, including thousands of orphans. They were to make up a real diaspora (many for example went to the US where a sizeable community still exists). All this of course was very quickly forgotten by the 'great democracies' not long after this tragic event. And yet over a million Armenians had been killed!

The collapse of the last great empires during this terrible war gave rise to a multitude of nationalist tensions which had equally disastrous consequences for other minorities. The formation of nation states after the First World War was the result of the fragmentation of the old moribund empires. This was particularly the case with the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires that had been composed of a mosaic of populations that were preyed upon by the hungry vultures that were the European imperialist powers. By struggling for their own survival, these ruined empires had tried



to fortify their frontiers, conclude desperate military alliances and carry out population exchanges which gave rise to sharpened divisions and forms of “ethnic cleansing”. The Greek-Turkish conflict, which is often presented as the consequence of the spontaneous reaction of crowds of Turks, was highly orchestrated by the new state run by its modern leader Mustapha Kemal Atatürk. The new state he founded was to wage a long and murderous war against the Greeks. During this conflict, the Greeks also engaged in pillaging, with armed civilian bands burning Turkish villages and committing all kinds of atrocities against their inhabitants. Between 1920 and 1923 the Turkish forces also carried out a whole number of cruel massacres against Greeks and Armenians. From the beginning there were wholesale transfers of populations, of Greeks who had been living in Turkey and vice-versa (1,300,000 Greeks left Turkey and

they had to cooperate. But in contrast to the victorious countries, the bourgeoisie and especially the petty bourgeoisie in the defeated countries like Germany was to develop a deep feeling of having been “stabbed in the back”, of having been humiliated by the “enemy within”. The drastic conditions of the Versailles Treaty precipitated the hunt for scapegoats, leading to the development of anti-Semitism and a real man-hunt against communists, who were also made responsible for everything that had gone wrong. The culminating point was the crushing of the Spartacist uprising in Berlin in 1919 and the series of savage massacres that followed: *“The butchers set to work. Whole buildings collapsed under artillery fire, burying entire families in the ruins. Other proletarians fell in front of their homes, in schools, in stables, shot dead, beaten to death with clubs, pierced by bayonets, most often denounced by anonymous inform-*

*denomination is not important. Thus no Jew can be a citizen”.*

### The central role of the state: towards the totalitarian control of populations

With the preparation and entry into the war, a new epoch had opened up: that of capitalism in decline and its universal tendency towards state capitalism. From now on, each state, led by its executive and its armed wing, would exert a bureaucratic control over the whole of social life. As a result of the war and in the name of the military needs or security of the state, there was a tightening of border controls and increasing control over and exactions against exiled populations and refugees. Unlike the period before the First World War, migrations were now subject to restrictions. It was at this moment that the main tools of administration were put in place. The displacement of populations during the war led states to establish a real police control over identities, to systematically place all foreigners under suspicion and to search them. In France for example, *“the creation of identity cards in 1917 was a real reversal of previous police and administrative habits. Our mentalities have today taken on board this individual stamp whose police origins are no longer seen as such. It is not however neutral that the introduction of identity cards first concerned foreigners, with the aim of surveillance in a full-on state of war”* (PJ Deschodt and F Huguenin, *La République xenophobe*, ed JC Lattès). From the start, armies recognised that the displacement of civilians – whether spontaneous or provoked – was a real threat, an “encumbrance” for troop activity and military logistics. States thus tried to give evacuation orders, instrumentalising

civilians and refugees to use them as weapons of war, as was the case during the Greek-Turkish conflict concluded by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. The “solution” that was resorted to more and more was the multiplication of internment camps, as we saw above. When refugees had to flee from combat zones (as was the case with the Belgians in 1914 when the country was invaded by Germany), even though they sometimes benefited from the help of voluntary associations, a large number of civilians were directly placed under the control of the authorities and ended up in camps. Prisoners were divided up according to nationality and “dangerousness”. These were decisions of states out to defend their sordid capitalist interests, with the most “democratic” ones to the fore, and ready to take entire civil populations hostage.

In the aftermath of the war, following the physical and ideological defeat of the proletariat, the spirit of revenge took a new step and an even more murderous and barbaric conflict was being prepared. Facing a pile of ruins, the states of Europe were in a difficult situation with so much labour power having been destroyed. Accords were signed to allow economic emigration. In the 1920s, France for example recruited Italian, Polish and Czech immigrants, the prelude to new xenophobic campaigns brought about the economic crisis and the terrible depression which followed, opening the course towards a new world war. **WH 28/6/15**

The outbreak of a second world holocaust would take barbarism to unheard of levels for civilian populations and refugees. We will look at this tragic development in the second part of this article.

Continued from page 1

## Syria: Russian intervention escalates the chaos

to beat back IS but to prop up Assad. So the two powers are acting in the same country with opposing ends, even if they are not yet confronting each other head on.

Russia’s actions in Syria clearly mark an escalation, but they are an escalation in chaos. They go against any possibility of the big powers coming to some kind of settlement to the 4-year war in Syria, and thus any hope of stemming the tide of refugees fleeing the country. Like the US invasion of Iraq, the great powers are not bringing stability to the region, but a mounting instability, and their lack of options opens the door further to the ambitions of the regional powers. In Yemen, for example, where the Saudi-backed government has been fighting the rebels supported by Iran, which in turn has sent forces to Syria to support Assad. On the Turkish-Syrian-Iraqi frontier, where Turkey has used the pretext of opposing IS to step up its attacks on the Kurdish PKK; Turkey also supports the Ahar al-Sham group in Syria, while Qatar and Saudi have their own Islamist protégés, some of which have also received CIA support.

For decades after World War Two, the world lived under the threat of nuclear annihilation by the two imperialist blocs controlled by the US and the USSR. But this “Cold War” also brought with it a certain discipline, a certain order, as the majority of lesser countries or nationalist forces had to obey the diktats of one bloc or the other. The break-up of the Russian bloc at the beginning of the 90s led to the rapid unravelling of the US bloc, and subsequent attempts by the US to impose order on the resulting centrifugal tendencies only accelerated them further. Its failures in Afghanistan and Iraq are clear evidence of that, above all today as the Taliban, ousted from power by the 2001 US invasion, grow in strength in Afghanistan, and whole swathes of Iraq fall to IS or are under the influence of Iran, which is no friend to the US despite recent attempts to find a rapprochement. After these very negative experiences the US is reluctant to intervene with “troops on the ground” but the rise of IS has obliged it to resort to air power and to step up proxy support for forces like the PKK – previously considered a terrorist group – which has proved most effective in fighting IS. But this in turn has goaded Turkey to raise the stakes in its war on the Kurds. Attacking IS in Syria also runs the risk of indirectly boosting the Assad regime and thus

Russian ambitions in the region. The contradictions mount up with no solution in sight.

In sum, there are no forces of order on the planet. The irrationality of capitalist war is becoming increasingly apparent: the wars ravaging the planet bring short term profits to a minority of capitalists and gangsters, but overall they are a total drain on capital, and carry with them no prospect of any post-war reorganisation and reconstruction, as was the case after World War Two. And yet, none of the capitalist powers, from the mighty US to the smallest local war-lord, can afford to stay out of this headlong plunge into militarism and war. The underlying drive of capitalist and imperialist competition is too strong. The financial cost of intervening militarily may be formidable, but the worst thing of all is to lose ground to your rivals. And there will always be rivals.

For the population of these regions, the cost is counted in flesh and blood – in the civilians bombed, raped, beheaded by government armies or opposition militias, in the ruin of their homes along with the historic and cultural products of centuries, in the choice between starvation in refugee camps on the edges of the war zones or the perilous journey to the “safety” of Europe. For humanity as a whole, the prospect is the spread of military chaos across the world, dragging us towards a fateful point of no return.

But that point has not yet been reached. If Europe still looks like a haven of prosperity to the refugees of the world, this is not because of the kindness of the European bourgeoisie. It’s because the working class in these countries is still a force to be reckoned with, and the ruling class is not able to grind it down to utter poverty or mobilise it for war as it was in the 1930s when it faced a defeated working class. Syria gives us a picture of the barbarity of the ruling class when the working class is weak and unable to resist the brutality of the state. The problem for the working class in the more central countries is that it doesn’t know its own strength, doesn’t understand its capacity to fight back, doesn’t have an independent perspective that can offer a future to all the world’s exploited and oppressed. But this perspective – of class struggle across all frontiers with the goal of creating a new society – remains the only real hope for humanity. **Amos, 4.10.15**



Belgian refugees in Holland in 1914

385,000 Turks left Greece). In 1923, the Lausanne Treaty put the seal on these violent measures with a number of administrative procedures. Thousands of Greeks and Turks were expelled through this official exchange and good number of them died during the course of this exodus. More generally, in such conditions, with the displacement and concentration of hungry populations across the continent, it was not surprising that pathogenic infections proliferated. Central and eastern Europe was soon hit by typhus. But more spectacularly, the world was swept by the “Spanish flu” which claimed 40 to 50 million victims in populations weakened by the years of war. Before that the worst epidemic had been cholera in the 19th century. You would have to go back to the Middle Ages and the Black Death to find an epidemic on such a scale (30% of the European population was wiped out by the plague).

This whole barbaric reality was only possible because the working class had been dragged on by nationalism and soiled by patriotism. But faced with these atrocious conditions, the proletariat did raise its head, demonstrated that it alone was capable of blocking the war machine and putting an end to the carnage. It was after the mutinies of 1917 and the revolutionary wave which began in Russia and with workers’ uprisings in Germany (the sailors’ mutiny at Kiel and the revolts in big cities like Berlin) that the main belligerents were forced to sign the armistice. Faced with the threat of world revolution, the war had to be brought to a rapid end.

### The counter-revolution: manhunts and pogroms

The ruling class had one obsession faced with the problem of desertions, demobilisation, and above all the risk of social conflict: it was vital to crush the focal points of the communist revolution. The Entente Powers, driven by powerful class hatred, encircled Bolshevik Russia. The terrible civil war was launched by the “White” armies, backed up by the armies of the capitalist states of Europe and the USA. All this resulted in countless victims. An economic blockade provoked a major famine in Russia. But to crush the proletariat, a new wave of violence had to be unleashed. The proletariat had become the common enemy of all the capitalist powers. Faced with the proletarian danger,

*ers. They were put up against the wall singly, in twos, in groups of three or more, or finished off with a bullet in the back of the neck, in the middle of the night, on the banks of the Spree. For weeks, the river was throwing up corpses.”*<sup>1</sup>

A succession of defeats for the working class was punctuated by the murder of great figures of the movement, the most celebrated being Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. In the 1920s, ferocious repression against any form of opposition was made all the easier because the Stalinist counter-revolution was carrying out expulsions and murders, creating labour camps and prison camps, the Gulags, hunting down revolutionaries and systematically locking up workers suspected of “sedition”.

In the framework of decadent capitalism and of the counter-revolution, hatred of communism and its assimilation with the rootless Jew led to a qualitative change in anti-Semitic pogroms. In the 19th century, there had already been a series of pogroms against the Jews, especially in Russia after the annexation of Poland. Outbursts of violence against the Jews had already been recurrent in Odessa in the early part of the 19th century. But between 1881 and 1884 pogroms led to real massacres. Local populations were incited and encouraged to pillage, rape and murder. In 1903 a terrible series of pogroms struck the city of Kishinev. In a totally irrational and obscurantist manner, the Jews were accused of practising ritual murders. Between 1879 and 1914 nearly 2 million Jews became refugees. At the beginning of the 1920s, there was a new upsurge of pogroms. During the civil war in Russia, thousands of Jews were massacred by the White Armies, especially those led by Denikin. Following these pogroms, our comrade MC, for example, had to take refuge in Palestine with part of his family (see *International Review* 65 and 66). During this period, pogroms in Russia resulted in 60,000 deaths.

The defeat of the proletariat in Germany generated growing tensions against the Jews, as in other parts of Europe, producing a fresh wave of refugees. The programme of the Nazi party, dated 24 February 1920 had already stated that *“To be a citizen, you must have German blood, religious*

1. Frölich, Lindau, Schreiner, Walcher, *Révolution et contre-révolution en Allemagne, 1918-1920*, Ed Science marxiste



# 1915, 1945: the development of internationalist opposition to imperialist war

On 10 October 2015, the ICC is organising a day-long public meeting in London. In order to facilitate discussion, we are publishing the article that will form the basis of the afternoon presentation. We hope this will give a flavour of the topic of the meeting and also give participants the opportunity to prepare comments and counter-arguments in advance.

1915, 1945: two rather contrasting anniversaries. On 1915, the ruling class and its mouthpieces don't have anything like as much to say as they did on 1914. The unutterable slaughter of the Somme might come in for a mention: regrettable for the right, but part of the necessary sacrifice for king, country, or resistance to German aggression; for the left, proof of the futility of this particular imperialist war.

1945 is also an anniversary of horrors: the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the opening of the Nazi death camps. But on this particular imperialist war, both left and right are in agreement. After the scandal of not singing the National Anthem at a Battle of Britain memorial, Jeremy Corbyn hastened to say, in a statement issued by Labour HQ, that his parents, "like that whole generation... showed tremendous courage and determination to defeat fascism". This was a Good War, not only toppling Hitler, but also bringing us post-war "socialism" in the shape of a Labour Government and the NHS.

For revolutionaries, these dates have a rather different significance. 1915 was the beginning of proletarian resistance to the imperialist massacre, opening the road to the revolutions of 1917 and 1918 and ultimately forcing the bourgeoisie to bring the war to an end. This resistance was expressed both through mass actions such as demonstrations against the war in Berlin and strikes on the Clyde, and through the revival of the political organisations of the working class, which had been hit hard by the shameful betrayal of mainstream social democracy at the outbreak of the war<sup>1</sup>.

1945, by contrast, was a year that indeed brought horror and not hope, because it was a low point in the defeat of the international working class after its revolutionary attempts at the end of the first war. The "victory over fascism" in 1945 also meant the victory of the Stalinist counter-revolution in the east and the democratic counter-revolution in the west.

In this discussion, we want to recall what has made it possible for revolutionaries today to defend a proletarian position on both these wars and on all the innumerable wars that have ravaged the world since 1945. In other words, we want to focus on the combat waged by internationalist political organisations in the two world wars, which was certainly connected to the mass struggles of the class, but which also has its own dynamic and importance.

In 1915 there were two highly significant moments in the revival of marxist political organisation: the Zimmerwald conference, and the publication of Rosa Luxemburg's Junius Pamphlet.

## The Zimmerwald conference

Zimmerwald is a small town in Switzerland, and it was host to a small conference: 38 delegates from 12 countries - all the internationalists transported there in a couple of coaches, as Trotsky joked. And even among these few, only a small minority defended a really revolutionary position against the war. The "classic" centrist tendency, incarnated in the likes of Kautsky and the future leaders of the USPD, was on the right at Zimmerwald<sup>2</sup>. Kautsky had argued that the International, which had indeed collapsed in 1914, was not an

instrument that could be used in war, but only in peacetime, so for him and his ilk the priority was to call for peace, appealing to the good sense of the world's rulers rather than the class struggle. The centre here was represented rather by Trotsky and by Luxemburg's comrades in the Spartacus group, who were for the methods of class struggle to end the war, but who also called for peace without annexations as the goal of the struggle. Only the Bolsheviks around Lenin and some of the other German groups stood for revolutionary methods and revolutionary goals: transformation of the imperialist war into civil war, the destruction of capitalism as the source of all wars.

## Analysing imperialism

The result of the fierce debates at Zimmerwald was a manifesto to the proletarians of the world which was in many ways a compromise between the left and the centre, since it did not take up the Bolsheviks' revolutionary slogans. Nevertheless its ringing denunciation of the war and its call for class action against it still enabled it to articulate and politicise the anti-war sentiments that were growing among the mass of the working class. And within two years the theoretical standpoint of the left was to be put into practice by the workers of Russia, whose revolt against the war led them to seize political power through the soviets.

But if Luxemburg lagged behind Lenin on the question of the goals of anti-war action, she had leapt ahead of him when it came to providing a more general theoretical understanding of the origins of the war, and its consequences for certain key elements of the revolutionary programme. In a series of works published around 1915 or the year after, all the revolutionaries were agreed - unlike the former "pope of marxism", Kautsky - that imperialism was not a policy, whether good or bad, freely decided on by capitalism, but a historical necessity, a whole new epoch in the life of the bourgeois economy, which had unified the planet under the reign of capital, but in doing so had brought not peace and harmony but war and catastrophe. Lenin's *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy* were both important landmarks in the elaboration of this outlook. But just before the war Luxemburg had already published *The Accumulation of Capital*, which went deeper than either of them in locating capitalism's imperialist drive in the historical conditions of accumulation, and it was on this theoretical foundation that Luxemburg, writing from prison, was able to put forward the most thorough-going analysis of the motives behind the different imperialist antagonists in the push towards war. And at the same time she was able to draw the most radical conclusions from an understanding that imperialism "is not the creation of any one or any group of states. It is the product of a particular stage of ripeness in the world development of capital, an innately international condition, an indivisible whole, that is recognisable only in all its relations, and from which no nation can hold aloof at will." (*The Junius Pamphlet*). In sum: all nations are imperialist: every small nation acts under the aegis of a larger power but has its own imperialist appetites. Hence the epoch in which revolutionaries could support struggles for national independence was over once and for all. Even then this profound breakthrough was not entirely without limitations: Lenin, who continued to hold on to the old slogan of the "rights of nations to self-determination" criticised the Junius Pamphlet for its curious concessions to the idea of national defence, which he understood was impossible in the context of this war. But for the whole of the coming century, which was to witness an endless proliferation of proxy imperialist conflicts fought under the slogans of national liberation, it was above all Luxemburg's approach that has made it possible for revolutionary minorities to maintain an internationalist stance against these wars.

## The struggle for internationalism needs political organisation

The example of Zimmerwald demonstrates that, for revolutionaries, the struggle against war takes place at three distinct but interconnected levels:

- **Organisational:** the betrayal of the majority of the old parties demanded that the minority of internationalists had to work as an organised fraction, to work either for the expulsion of the traitors or, when this proved impossible, as it did in the majority of cases, to fight to win over the maximum number of healthy elements and to prepare the ground for a new party, a new International. This demanded a relentless battle against centrism and opportunism, against the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Thus the Zimmerwald left in particular was the driving force behind the formation of the Third International in 1919. In a situation of war or impending revolution, the heroism of individual militants like Luxemburg, Liebknecht, John Mclean or Sylvia Pankhurst was certainly vital, but could never be enough on its own. It could only have a real meaning in the context of collective organisation around a clear political programme;

- **Theoretical:** the necessity to understand the characteristics of the new epoch demands a patient work of theoretical elaboration, an ability to step back and reassess the whole situation in the

themselves but on behalf of a definite political tendency within the class movement.

## The dark road to 1945

In 1915 the working class was beginning to throw off the heavy weight of its ideological defeat in 1914, which had been prepared by decades of growing opportunism in the movement. By 1917 the period was directly revolutionary. This rapid shift in the historic course was, however, also reversed very rapidly: by 1923, the post-war revolutionary wave was over and the Russian revolution was sinking into isolation and internal degeneration. By the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 30s the counter-revolution was triumphant all along the line: Stalinism in Russia, fascism in Germany and Italy were its most evident forms, but as the world lurched towards another war, the ideology of democracy and anti-fascism was to prove indispensable to the bourgeoisie in mobilising the working class for a second world war within 20 years.

Class struggle did not cease during this dark period, and there was still a proletarian political

## ICC public meeting World wars, capitalism's decline, and the internationalist response

The International Communist Current is organising a day-long public meeting in London on 10 October 2015. There will be two sessions:

- 11am to 1 pm: We will be showing a new film produced by a close sympathiser, Mark Hayes, whose film 'How the working class put an end to the First World War' was shown at last year's meeting. The new film will show that the so-called 'Good War' of 1939-45 was in reality another imperialist massacre in direct continuity with the one in 1914-18. The film will be followed by a short presentation and a period of discussion which we hope will draw out its main themes - in particular, what the two world wars tell us about the historical epoch in which we live. For us, the barbarity of the Second World War provides clear confirmation that capitalism has, for the past century, been a socially regressive mode of production, a system in decline. However we are aware that many who identify themselves as revolutionaries reject this analysis and we encourage them to come to the meeting and put forward their point of view.

- 2pm to 5pm: 2015 is not only the 'anniversary' of the end of the Second World War but also the centenary of two key events in the development of an internationalist struggle against the 1914-18 war: the Zimmerwald Conference, which brought together the different political tendencies of the workers' movement opposed to the war, and the publication of Rosa Luxemburg's Junius Pamphlet, which in our view represents the clearest analysis of the origins and significance of the world conflict. Our presentation will look not only at the internationalist opposition to World War One, but also at those rare groups who remained loyal to proletarian principles in the period leading up and during the Second World War, in contrast to those former working class currents - in particular a large part of the Trotskyists and the anarchists - who failed this crucial test. The discussion will also seek to examine the tasks facing revolutionary internationalists today.

Venue: The Lucas Arms, 245A Gray's Inn Rd, London, WC1X 8QY

The event is free but we welcome contributions to the cost of the room and food.

light of the past and of the perspectives for the future. Hence Lenin, at the outbreak of war, "retreating" to the Zurich library to read Hegel in order to grasp the dialectic of social change, which can make what was valid in one period entirely reactionary in another. This reinforced Lenin's ability to reply to the traitors and opportunists who used Marx's words from a different period to justify, for example, their advocacy of a war to defeat Russian Czarism. The work of Lenin, Bukharin, Luxemburg, Pannekoek and others enabled the re-emerging political movement of the class to understand that a new epoch had dawned, one in which the class struggle would take on new forms and new methods to achieve directly revolutionary objectives;

- **Propaganda and agitation:** armed with a lucid theoretical framework, the intervention of revolutionaries in the new situation could avoid unthinking activism and make thought-out, concrete proposals to fortify the resistance against war and the struggle for revolution. Hence Lenin's study of the marxist theory of the state in *State and Revolution* underpinned the Bolshevik slogan "all power to the soviets". The regroupment of revolutionaries into political organisations enabled them to develop their propaganda and agitation through the medium of a regular press and mass-produced leaflets, and to speak in the workers' assemblies and councils not as individuals representing only

opposition to the advancing counter-revolution. But it was extremely weak, facing police repression and endless defections and betrayals. It was weak above all at the theoretical/political level, with the majority of forces within Trotskyism and anarchism more and more succumbing to the siren calls of anti-fascism and thus incapable of standing against the march towards war. Rather than seriously examining the balance of forces between the classes and the programmatic changes demanded by the new epoch, Trotskyism in particular threw itself into an unprincipled quest for growth at any cost, culminating in the formation of an abortive Fourth International in 1938.

This process of degeneration left the clearest elements of the political movement - the heirs of the left communists who had first begun to recognise the decline of the Russian revolution and the opportunist course of the Third International - extremely isolated. The capacity of the groups of the German/Dutch left to maintain political activity was further undermined by the drift towards "councilism", the denial of the necessity for political organisation - in effect a concession to anarchist ideology. This meant that the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left was almost alone in advocating a course of activity appropriate to a highly unfavourable historical juncture, where the

Continued on page 7

<sup>1</sup> Anarchism also split in 1914 between those like Kropotkin who called for support for Anglo-French imperialism, and those who remained true to internationalism. This rupture was to reproduce itself throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But whereas in the first war the majority of anarchists were internationalists, only a small minority were by the time of the second. It would take a separate article to trace this evolution in any depth.

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201508/13354/zimmerwald-and-centrist-currents-political-organisations-proletarian>

## Continued from page 6

priority was to draw the lessons of past defeats and prepare the programmatic basis of the party of the future.

The most decisive test for the political milieu of the day came with the war in Spain in 1936. The initial military coup led by Franco in July was halted by a real working class uprising, but this was almost immediately led onto the terrain of anti-fascism and the defence of the bourgeois republic; with the intervention of the fascist powers and Stalin's USSR, the conflict was also transformed into a rehearsal for the next imperialist world war. The Trotskyists and anarchists, with a few exceptions, threw themselves into the anti-fascist camp, leaving a minority of left communists denouncing the war for what it truly was: not a civil war, but an imperialist war, not a revolution, but a new step in the world-wide counter-revolution. The Italian Fraction distinguished itself by its ability to situate the war in its real historical and global context, and to remain loyal to the needs of the class struggle against both capitalist camps. And even then the pressures of the period did not spare the Fraction, which suffered a serious split soon after the war began, with a minority enrolling in the militias of the POUM in Spain.

The outbreak of the world war in 1939 increased these pressures, not only because of the brutal repression that revolutionaries faced under conditions of military occupation, but also because the enormous force of imperialist ideology strengthened confusions within their own ranks: the Italian Fraction, for example, was thrown into disarray when the war began because some its leading figures had developed the revisionist "theory of the war economy" which in the late 30s suddenly began to argue that world war was not on the agenda, and, when the war in fact began, insisted that it proved the social disappearance of the proletariat and thus the impossibility of any organised political activity. This theory was vigorously opposed within the Fraction and in particular by comrades in France who managed to regroup and carry out organised, clandestine work in both the "Vichy" zone and the area directly occupied by the German army. This work involved both internal debates about the theoretical problems posed by the war, and political propaganda calling for class struggle against both warring blocs, with no concessions to the patriotic ideology of the Resistance.

The definitive betrayal of internationalism by the Trotskyist organisations and many of the anarchists had already been prepared by the events in Spain, although there were some important minorities in both who rejected the ideology of the anti-

fascist war: for the Trotskyists, the Stinas group in Greece, Munis in Spain and Mexico, the RKD in Austria and so on. In Britain, while the Trotskyists almost unanimously declared for participation in the war to defend democracy and the "workers' state" in Russia, small groups of revolutionaries from the councilist and anarchist traditions stuck to their internationalist principles.

Before and during the war, many revolutionaries had clung to the hope that the end of the war would bring about another revolutionary situation, as in 1917. And indeed there were some important class movements towards the end of the war, most notably in the factories of northern Italy in 1943, which led the ruling class to drop the Mussolini regime like a hot potato. This created a wave of short-sighted optimism among revolutionaries, especially comrades of the Italian left, many of whom returned from exile to join the Partito Comunista Internazionale which was formed in considerable haste from different oppositional groupings.

In a situation of considerable confusion it was again the French Fraction of the Communist Left (constituted in 1942) which was best able to carry on the political tradition of the Italian Fraction, now dissolved into the PCInt. Having initially thought that the strikes in Italy announced a change in the historic course, they soon understood that the bourgeoisie had learned the lessons of 1917 and was well-prepared to prevent any re-run of the revolution at the end of the Second World War. The terror bombing of German cities, Churchill's policy of "letting the Italians stew in their own juice" in 1943 – halting the advance of the allied armies from the south of Italy to allow the Nazis to crush the class movement in the north – expressed the ruthless determination of the bourgeoisie to wipe out the least sign of resistance to its rule in the potentially dangerous closing phase of the war.

The French Fraction was able to understand that the formation of a party – in one single country, and in conditions where the defeat of the working class was being further exacerbated both by repression and the ideological poison of "Liberation" and the "victory of democracy" – was an opportunist error that could only result in a programmatic regression in relation to the gains made by the Fraction in the previous period. This was demonstrated by the concessions made by the new party – especially after the fusion with the groups in the south led by Bordiga in 1945 – on such vital issues as the nature of Russia, the trade union and national questions, and even electoralism.

Against the activist attitudes of the new party, the French group (which took the name Gauche

Communiste de France following the split with a tendency that aligned itself with the Italian party) understood that the need for theoretical elaboration was still paramount, and in the post war period produced a considerable body of work analysing such issues as the function of war in the epoch of capitalist decadence, the development of state capitalism as a worldwide phenomenon, the role of the party, and the problem of the state in the period of transition to communism.

Obviously the scale of the activity of revolutionaries during and immediately after the Second World War, and the perspectives for the growth of its influence within the class, was considerably reduced in comparison with the groups that met at Zimmerwald in 1915 and were to meet again at the formation of the Third International in 1919. But the essential dimensions of this activity – organisation, theory, intervention – were as relevant in 1945 as they had been 30 years earlier.

### Internationalism today

One of the clearest signs that capitalism has outlived its usefulness for humanity is the near permanence of war over the last century. Even before the end of the Second World War, the battle lines for the Third were already forming: the primary motive for the atom bomb being dropped on an already defeated Japan was to issue a warning against the imperialist ambitions of the USSR in the east. The 'Cold War' was mainly made up of a series of proxy wars between the new superpowers, but as we said earlier they were often fought under the banner of national independence. A number of the groups of the communist left today were born in the period of the Vietnam war, and they found themselves having to fight against the dominant trend, among those who considered themselves to be revolutionaries, which advocated support for North Vietnam as the "little guy" against the US bully, when in fact Vietnam was backed by the "big guys" of Russian and Chinese imperialism, and this "national liberation" struggle was in reality yet another inter-imperialist confrontation. In the period after the break-up of the two imperialist blocs, marked by a more chaotic series of conflicts, the need for a principled and coherent position on war is as vital as ever: the recent rush of elements within the anarchist milieu to line up with Kurdish nationalism (and the USA) against ISIS in Rojava is proof of that. But a principled and coherent position can only be maintained and developed on the basis of the acquisitions we have inherited from the revolutionaries of the past, those who faced the ultimate test of loyalty to the proletarian cause. **Amos 1 October 2015**

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# Once more on decadence: some questions for the ‘deniers’

*This article is contributed by a close sympathiser who has participated in a number of recent online debates about the question of capitalist decadence*

## Introduction

The ICC has commented more than once on the persistent tendency in the proletarian milieu – especially that part influenced by anarchism – to reject the Marxist theory of capitalist decadence.<sup>1</sup>

Since the main conclusion we draw from this theory is that capitalism today is a socially regressive system, and that its overthrow is therefore both possible and necessary for humanity, you might be forgiven for thinking there would be some common ground on this; especially today, with the daily images of millions of people desperately trying to flee the barbaric wars of capitalism in the Middle East; wars which increasingly reveal the lack of any rational economic motive even from the point of view of imperialism...

Instead, if a recent online discussion on libcom’s forum is anything to go by,<sup>2</sup> at least some in this milieu display outright hostility to the whole Marxist theory of decadence, arguing that it is *at best* unnecessary to explain capitalism as a historically transitory mode of production, and *at worst* a purely ideological construct or pseudo-religious belief.

This goes to prove that ‘decadence-denial’ is a real phenomenon in the proletarian milieu today.

Online discussions certainly have their weaknesses and this one generated as much heat as light at times, so rather than go back over ‘who said what’ instead we want to focus on what seem to us to be the key questions to address: to restate, as clearly and simply as we can, the Marxist position on these questions; to briefly look at the arguments of the ‘deniers’, and pose some key questions for them to answer, so that at the very least we can identify common ground where it exists and try to avoid false arguments in the future.

1. See ‘Decadence of capitalism part XIII: rejection and regressions’, 2012, <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201206/4981/decadence-capitalism-part-xiii-rejection-and-regressions>.  
2. <http://libcom.org/forums/theory/icc-position-decadence-bourgeoisie-developing-nations-01062015>. See also these threads on the ICC website: <http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056/link/13200/issues-decadence-theory>; <http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056/pierre/13423/how-does-century-decadence-explain>

## 1. What method do we use to understand changes in capitalism?

From the beginning of the discussion, the onus was firmly placed on the supporters of “decadence theory” to prove that capitalism has been decadent since 1914.

But before we can answer that we have to decide what theory we’re going to use to determine it; after all, as Einstein said: it is the theory which decides what we can observe.

Our starting point is the Marxist method of understanding history, and like all scientific methods it must be firmly based on the verified discoveries of those who have gone before.

## Capitalism is a historically transitory system

Contrary to popular belief, the main discoveries of the Marxist movement are not the existence of classes or of the struggle between them, or even of the labour theory of value; all of these concepts had already been advanced by bourgeois historians and economists at a time when the bourgeoisie was still a revolutionary class struggling against decaying feudalism.

The first key development in the work of Marx and Engels is that the existence of classes and of the struggle between them is merely a historical phase in the development of the productive forces; capitalism is only the last in a whole succession of modes of production which creates the conditions for its own abolition and – after a successful proletarian revolution – for the abolition of all classes and the creation of a communist society.<sup>3</sup>

This is in a nutshell the materialist conception of history and the core of historical materialism, which is simply the method we use as Marxists to understand the laws involved in this coming into being and passing away of successive modes of production and to analyse the change from one to another.

## The fatal contradictions of capitalism

The second key development in the work of Marx and Engels is the discovery of the specific way these laws express themselves within capitalism. Based on their theoretical framework, Marx and Engels were able to identify, even in the crises

3. See ‘The theory of decadence lies at the heart of historical materialism, part 1’, 2004, [http://en.internationalism.org/ir/118\\_decadence\\_i.html](http://en.internationalism.org/ir/118_decadence_i.html)

of youthful capitalism when it was still expanding rapidly across the planet, the seeds of the fatal contradictions that would eventually create the conditions for its abolition:

*“The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by the enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means by which crises are prevented.” (Communist Manifesto)*

As a dynamic mode of production driven solely by the extraction of profit, capitalism has a built-in tendency to produce too many commodities relative not to social need but the purchasing power of society. It must therefore seek ever-larger outlets for its products, extending its market across the whole world. But as it extends its mode of production throughout the world it progressively reduces the outlets it needs to grow. The trajectory of capitalism is therefore inexorably towards “*more extensive and more destructive crises*” which it is increasingly unable to prevent<sup>4</sup>.

At several times during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Marx and Engels overestimated the speed of capitalism’s trajectory and even thought capitalism was entering into its final crisis. But they were able to revise their perspective and clarify their framework for understanding how and why capitalism would prove to be historically transitory. As long as it had not definitively reached the limits of its progressive expansion a world revolution of the proletariat was not yet possible. Only when the further development of the productive forces came into conflict with bourgeois relations of production (ie. with wage labour, capital and the nation state), would the conditions for capitalism’s abolition exist. When this point was finally reached a whole era of social revolution would be opened, characterised by acute contradictions, crises and

4. ICC note: MH, like the majority of the ICC, defends the particular interpretation of Marx’s crisis theory developed by Rosa Luxemburg and summarised in this paragraph. But accepting that capitalism is decadent does not depend on adherence to Luxemburg’s theory. In particular, within the revolutionary movement and the ICC itself there are those who have focused on the tendency for the rate of profit to fall as the key contradiction that has inaugurated the phase of decline.

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

convulsions.<sup>5</sup>

## Decadence at the heart of historical materialism

It still took several more decades of capitalist development, and in particular the rise of imperialism, to clarify exactly how capitalism’s era of crises, convulsions and class struggles would finally be ushered in. But we can see from the theoretical framework developed by the Marxist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that “decadence theory” is simply the concretisation of historical materialism in the analysis of capitalism as a historically transitory mode of production. It is therefore indispensable for understanding the historical period we are living in, and how to act as revolutionaries.

For the deniers on the other hand, the theory of decadence is *at best* unnecessary to explain capitalism as a historically transitory mode of production, and *at worst* ‘teleological’, a purely ideological construct imposed by Marxists, or even a mystical, pseudo-religious belief...

The main argument of the deniers seems to be that capitalism is essentially a cyclical system and that the manifestations of decadence today can therefore be understood as the symptoms of its ‘normal’ functioning. In other words, rather than having any built-in tendency towards increasingly devastating and irresolvable crises, capitalism is in a sort of stasis where each crisis simply irons out temporary problems and results in a new phase of growth.

But it became very clear in the discussion that this disagreement is not about “decadence theory”, or even the history of capitalism: it’s about the whole materialist conception of history as a succession of modes of production which go through a phase of ascent and decline.

## 2. How do we explain capitalist growth since 1914?

### A total halt to the productive forces?

The online discussion was prompted by a question about growth in the so-called ‘developing countries’ in Asia. How can we say that capitalism

5. See Marx’s *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>. See also <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/134/what-method-to-understand-decadence>

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## Political positions of the ICC

**World Revolution** is the section in Britain of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

\* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

\* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

### OUR ORIGINS

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