



world revolution

Aleppo World capitalism's latest crime against humanity

The list of crimes against humanity in the last hundred years often bears the name of a city: Guernica, Coventry, Dresden, Hiroshima, Sarajevo. Today the historic city of Aleppo in Syria, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, has joined the list.

In 1915, the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, defying the wave of nationalism that had swept Germany at the outbreak of the war, recognised that this European-wide conflict had opened up a new epoch in the history of capitalism, an epoch when the ruthless competition built into the system was now posing humanity with the choice between socialism and barbarism. This war, she wrote, with its massacre of human beings on an industrial scale, was a precise definition of what barbarism means.

But World War One was only the beginning and the barbarity of capitalism soon reached new levels. The war was ended by the resistance of the working class in Russia, Germany and elsewhere, through the mutinies, strikes, and insurrections that, for a brief moment, threatened the very existence of the world capitalist order. But these movements were isolated and crushed; and with the defeat of the working class, which is the only real obstacle to capitalism's drive to war, the horror of imperialist conflict took on a new quality.

The first imperialist war was still, like the wars of the 19th century, fought mainly on the battlefields. The scale of the killing, proportionate to the dizzying development of technology in the decades leading up to the war, was a shock even to the politicians and military chiefs who had gambled on a short, sharp conflict, "over by Christmas". But in the wars that succeeded it, the principal victims of warfare would no longer be soldiers in uniform, but the civilian population. The bombing, by German and Italian aircraft, of Guernica in Spain, an event immortalised by Picasso's tortured figures of women and children, set the tone. At first, the deliberate targeting of civilians from the air was a new shock, something unprecedented, and surely only something the fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini could contemplate. But the



war in Spain was a rehearsal for a second world war which trebled the death toll of the first and in which the vast majority of its victims would be civilians. Both sides used the tactic of 'carpet' bombing to flatten cities, destroy infrastructure, demoralise the population, and – because the bourgeoisie still feared the possibility of a working class uprising against the war – smash the proletarian danger. Increasingly, such tactics were no longer denounced as crimes but defended as the best means to end the conflict and prevent further slaughter – above all by the 'democratic' camp. The incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the newly-invented atomic bomb was justified in exactly these terms.

Today, when the leaders of the 'democratic' world condemn the Assad regime in Syria and its Russian backers for their relentless, systematic massacre of the civilian population of Aleppo and other cities, we should not forget that they are

carrying on what is now an established tradition of capitalist warfare. The deliberate destruction of hospitals and other key infrastructure such as the water supply, the blocking and even bombing of aid convoys: this is modern siege warfare, military tactics learned not only from previous generations of 'dictators', but from also from democratic militarists like 'Bomber' Harris and Winston Churchill.

Imperialist interests fan the flames in Syria

That is not to say there is nothing exceptional in what is happening in Aleppo. The 'civil war' in Syria began as part of the 'Arab Spring' in 2011 – with a revolt by a population exasperated by the brutality of the Assad regime. But Assad had learned from the fall of his fellow dictators in Egypt and Tunisia, and responded to the demonstrations with murderous firepower. The deter-

mination of the regime to survive and perpetuate its privileges has proved to be unbounded. Assad is prepared to lay waste to entire cities, murder or expel millions of his own citizens, to remain in power. There is here an element of the tyrant's revenge against those who dare to reject his rule, a plunge into a spiral of destruction which will leave the rulers with little or nothing to rule over. In this sense, the coldly rational calculation behind the terror bombing of Syria's 'rebel' cities has become a new symbol of the growing **irrationality** of capitalist war.

But the insanity of this war is not limited to Syria. Following the mass shootings of unarmed demonstrators, splits in the Syrian army gave rise to an armed bourgeois opposition, and this rapidly transformed the initial revolt into a military conflict between capitalist camps; this in turn provided the opportunity for a whole number of local and global imperialist powers to intervene for their own squalid reasons. The ethnic and religious divisions that aggravated the conflict inside Syria were exploited by regional powers with their own agendas. Iran, which claims to be the leader of the world's Shiite Muslims, supports Assad's 'Alawite' regime and backs the direct intervention of the Hezbollah militias from Lebanon. Sunni Muslim states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar

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have armed the numerous Islamist gangs which aimed to supplant the 'moderate' rebels, including Islamic State itself. Turkey, often on the pretext of striking back against IS, has used the war to step up its onslaught on the Kurdish forces who have made considerable gains in northern Syria.

But in this three, four, even five sided conflict, the world's major powers have also been playing their role. The US and Britain have called for Assad to step down and have indirectly supported the armed opposition, both the 'moderates' and, via Saudi and Qatar, the Islamists. When IS began, like al Qaida in the previous decade, to bite the hand that feeds it and set itself up as a new and uncontrolled power in Syria and Iraq, a number of western politicians have reconsidered their position, arguing that Assad is actually a 'lesser evil' compared to IS. Earlier in the conflict, Obama threatened the Assad regime with military intervention, declaring that the use of chemical weapons against civilians was a line that could not be crossed. But this threat proved empty, and subsequently, the debates in Washington and Westminster have been how to intervene against IS, thus indirectly boosting Assad.

The indecisive US response to the situation in Syria is the product of a long process of decline in its world hegemony, summarised above all by its disastrous interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. The 'War on Terror' unleashed by the Bush administration has only served to foment chaos in the Middle East and has made Islamist terrorism an even greater force than it was before the Twin Towers fell. The war in Iraq proved particularly unpopular in the US and even the gun-toting Trump now proclaims it to have been a disaster. The USA is thus extremely reluctant to get drawn into a new quagmire in the Middle East.

Imperialism abhors a vacuum, and the hesitations of the US provided a resurgent Russia with the chance to reassert itself in a region from which it had been largely expelled by the end of the Cold War. Syria is the last place in the Middle East where Russia hung on to its military bases, and its support for the Assad regime has been constant. But after embarking on a policy – via the wars in Georgia and the Ukraine – of regaining its lost empire in the region of the former USSR, Putin's Russia is now gambling on increasing its status as a world power by directly intervening in the Syrian conflict. The initial pretext was the need to hit back at IS which was gaining ground in Iraq and Syria, even threatening Russia's only remaining outlet to the Mediterranean, the naval base at Tartus. To the extent that it was posed as a response to IS, Russian intervention was quietly supported by the US. Following IS atrocities in Paris, France even carried out some joint operations with Russian forces in Syria. But Russian imperialism has shown little interest in attacking IS bases and every interest in propping up an Assad regime that was showing serious signs of collapse. By the simple trick of branding the entire opposition to Assad as terrorists, it has become a major force in Assad's assault on rebel strongholds, effectively turning the tide of war in favour of Assad. Russian imperialism's answer to the conflict in Syria is a simple one, entirely in accord with Assad's methods, and already applied without mercy in Grozny in 1990-2000 in response to the Chechen nationalist movement: reduce the city to rubble and the problem of rebellion is solved.

Russian imperialism makes no secret of its ambitions in the Middle East. "Over the weekend, marking the first anniversary of Russia's intervention in Syria, state media was full of bold statements such as 'Russia proved that it's nonetheless a superpower' and 'Russia has become the main player in this region ... The United States, on the other hand, lost its status as first fiddle'."¹

The assault on Aleppo, which was raised to new levels following the rapid collapse of the latest cease-fire brokered by the US, has visibly sharpened tensions between Russia and the USA. Reacting to the charge that it is carrying out war

crimes in Syria – which is undoubtedly true – Russia has pulled out of peace negotiations over Syria and also from a process aimed at reducing US and Russian stockpiles of plutonium, with Putin placing the most far-reaching conditions on a resumption of talks, including the dropping of sanctions against Russia and substantial reduction of NATO troop concentrations in eastern Europe.

Hypocrisy in the west

Faced with the increasingly brutal policies of the Putin regime at home and abroad, with its retrograde nationalist ideology and crudely lying propaganda, the 'democratic' powers in the west do not find it difficult to take the moral high ground. But we have already seen that Russia's use of terror bombing in Syria has a long pedigree in the west. And the hypocrisy of the democratic states applies equally to their recent and current behaviour. America's condemnation of Russia for destroying Aleppo and other cities cannot efface the memory of the bombardment of Baghdad in 2003 or the siege of Fallujah in 2004, which also led to thousands of Iraqi civilian deaths, even if US bombs and missiles are supposedly 'smarter' than their Russian equivalents and thus more focused on purely military targets. Neither should it obscure what Britain has been doing on the quiet in Yemen – supplying the Saudis with weapons in its intervention in a bloody 'civil war'. A recent report in *The Guardian* showed that over a million children in Yemen face starvation as a direct result of Saudi blockades and bombing of areas held by Houthi rebels.²

But western hypocrisy reaches its highest pitch when it comes to the millions of Syrians who have been forced to flee for their lives, and who now suffer from severe malnutrition in ill-equipped refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon; or, if they try to reach the 'haven' of western Europe, they fall into the hands of ruthless human traffickers who push them into perilous crossings of the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats. The European Union has shown itself incapable of dealing with what Cameron once referred to as the "swarm" of refugees from Syria and other conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. While some governments, like the German, brandish their 'welcoming' policy to those whose labour power they need to exploit, the walls and barbed wire fences have gone up all over Europe. More and more European governments and parties are adapting to or openly espousing the politics of exclusion and scapegoating promulgated by the populist currents. We are witnessing sinister echoes of the massacre of the Jews in the 1930s and 40s, when the democracies wrung their hands over the Nazi persecutions and murders, but did everything they could to close their borders to the victims, taking in no more than a symbolic number of Jewish refugees.³

Double-talk and hypocrisy over Syria is not limited to the governing parties. The majority of parties of the 'left' have a long history of supporting Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and the Baathist regime in Syria, alleging that these are, for all their faults, 'fighting imperialism', by which they mean the imperialism of the US, Israel or other western states. The 'Stop the War' coalition in the UK, for example (in which Jeremy Corbyn has played a leading role for many years) will organise massive demonstrations against Israel's military incursions into Lebanon and Gaza, under slogans such as 'We are all Hezbollah'. You will never see them organising an equivalent demonstration against the actions of Assad and the Russians in Syria, which are not only a mirror image of Israeli

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/yemen-famine-feared-as-starving-children-fight-for-lives-in-hospital>

3. This is not to denigrate the sincere efforts of many thousands of volunteers in Europe who have tried to offer aid to the refugees, or indeed the truly heroic work of doctors, nurses and rescue workers struggling to save lives in the most appalling conditions in Aleppo and other besieged cities. Very often these efforts begin as spontaneous initiatives which governments and other official forces then try to take under their own control.

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/03/russia-media-coverage-syria-war-selective-defensive-kremlin>

USA elections Bourgeoisie scrambles to regain control

The following extract is from an article in *International Review* 157 "Brexit, Trump: Setbacks for the ruling class, nothing good for the proletariat". The EU Referendum in the UK and Trump's candidacy in the US show the degree to which the bourgeoisie has lost control of its political apparatus faced with the rise of populism. We can see a growing effort by all the most 'responsible' parts of the bourgeoisie to discredit Trump and strengthen the Clinton campaign. The 'radical socialist' Bernie Sanders has rallied behind Clinton while the Republicans have given birth to 'spoiler' candidates who aim to split the Trump vote; meanwhile day after day, new scandals emerge about Trump, new accusations of tax evasion and abuse of women. In sum, a concerted effort by the 'elite' to put him in his place. But there is also the danger that such attacks will serve to strengthen Trump's image as a man of the people who stands against the privileged few. The instability of the bourgeoisie's political apparatus is not going to disappear.

If Brexit was a referendum that got out of control, Trump's selection as Republican candidate for the US presidency in 2016 is an election that ran off the rails. When Trump's candidacy was first declared it was barely taken seriously: the front runner was Jeb Bush, member of the Bush dynasty, preferred choice of the Republican grandees, and as such potentially a powerful fundraiser (always a crucial consideration in US elections). But against all expectations, Trump triumphed in the early primaries and went on to win state after state. Bush fizzled like a damp squib, other candidates were never much more than also-rans, and Republican Party bosses ended confronting the unpalatable prospect that the only candidate with any chance of defeating Trump was Ted Cruz, a man considered by his Senate colleagues as wholly untrustworthy, and only marginally less egotistical and self-serving than Trump himself.

The possibility that Trump might beat Clinton is in itself an indication of how insane the political situation has become. But already, Trump's candidacy has sent shock waves through the whole system of imperialist alliances. For 70 years, the USA has been the guarantor of the NATO alliance whose effectiveness depends on the inviolability of reciprocal defence: an attack on one is an attack on all. When a potential US President calls into question the NATO alliance, and US readiness to honour its treaty obligations, as Trump has done by declaring that a US response to a Russian attack on the Baltic states would depend on whether in his judgment they had "paid their way", it certainly sends shivers down the collective spines of the East European ruling classes that confront Putin's Mafia state directly, not to mention of those Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines) that are relying on America to protect them from the Chinese dragon. Almost equally alarming is the strong possibility that Trump simply does not know what is going on, as suggested by his recent statement that there are no Russian troops in the Ukraine (apparently unaware that Crimea is still considered part of the Ukraine by everybody except the Russians).

Not only that, Trump has gone on to welcome the Russian secret services hacking into the Democratic Party's IT systems and more or less invited Putin to do his worst. How much, if at all, this will

militarism, but have far surpassed it in levels of death and destruction.

Other activist organisations opt for supporting military action by the USA and the west. The Avaaz group, which specialises in massive online campaigns and petitions, and which opposed the US invasion of Iraq, now argues that the only way to protect the children of Aleppo is to call on Obama, Erdogan, Hollande and May to enforce a no-fly zone in Northern Syria.⁴

Either way, we are asked to support one side or the other in what has become a global imperialist conflict.

The proletarian alternative

For revolutionaries, it is essential to defend the principle of internationalism against every case

4. https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/protect_syrian_civilians_loc/?slideshow

damage Trump is hard to tell, but it is worth recalling that ever since 1945 the Republican Party has been vigorously, if not rabidly anti-Russian, in favour of a powerful military establishment and a massive military presence world-wide no matter what the cost (it was Reagan's colossal military build-up that really sent the budget deficit through the roof).

This is not the first time the Republican Party has fielded a candidate regarded as dangerously extreme by its leadership. In 1964 it was Barry Goldwater who won the primaries, thanks to support from the religious right and the "conservative coalition" – the forerunners of today's Tea Party. His programme was at least coherent: drastic reduction of the Federal government especially social security, military strength and readiness to use nuclear weapons against the USSR. This was a classic far-right programme, but one that fitted not at all with the needs of US state capitalism and Goldwater went on to be heavily defeated in the election, partly as a result of the failure of the Republican hierarchy to back him.

Is Trump just a Goldwater 2.0? Not at all, and the differences are instructive. Goldwater's candidacy represented a seizure of the Republican Party by the "Tea Party" of the time, which was sidelined for years following Goldwater's crushing electoral defeat. It is no secret that the last couple of decades have seen a comeback for this tendency which has made a more or less successful takeover bid for the GOP. However, the Goldwater supporters were, in the truest sense, a "conservative coalition": they represented a real conservative tendency within an America undergoing profound social changes be the same as Goldwater's, the context is not: the social changes he opposed have taken place, such that the Tea Party is not so much a coalition of conservatives as an alliance of hysterical reaction.

This has created increasing difficulties for the big bourgeoisie. It has become a truism that anyone running in a Republican primary must prove himself "irreproachable" on a whole series of issues: abortion (you must be "pro-life"), gun control (against it), fiscal conservatism and lower taxation, "Obamacare" (socialism, it should be abolished: indeed Ted Cruz based a part of his credentials on a publicity-seeking filibuster against Obamacare in the Senate), marriage (sacred), Democratic Party (if Satan had a party this would be it). Now, in the space of a few short months, Trump has in effect eviscerated the Republican Party. Here we have a candidate who has shown himself "unreliable" on abortion, on gun control, on marriage (three times in his case), and who has in the past donated money to the Devil herself, Hillary Clinton. In addition, he proposes to raise the minimum wage, maintain Obamacare at least in part, return to an isolationist foreign policy, let the budget deficit go through the roof, and expel 11 million illegal immigrants whose cheap labour is vital to US business.

Like the Tories in Britain with Brexit, the Republican Party – and potentially the whole American ruling class – has found itself saddled with a programme which is completely irrational from the standpoint of its imperialist and economic class interests.

of imperialist butchery. That means maintaining political independence from all states and proto-state militias, and supporting the struggle of the exploited in all countries against their own bourgeoisies. This principle is not dependent on whether or not the exploited are engaged in open struggle. It is a signpost for the future which must never be lost. In 1914, the internationalists who opposed the war were a very small minority, but stubbornly holding onto class positions, while so many former comrades were rallying to the war effort of their own bourgeoisies, was absolutely essential to the emergence of a massive proletarian struggle against the war two or three years later.

In Syria, there is no doubt that the proletariat is absent from the scene. This is a reflection of

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Brexit result and the rise in xenophobia

Politicians of left and right have condemned the increased xenophobic abuse and physical attacks on immigrants since the referendum, and indeed do not want the tensions in society to explode in ways that disrupt the exploitation of the working class. They may also recognise the role of referendum propaganda in encouraging the increase in these attacks. But they will never acknowledge the extent to which their capitalist system and their state are responsible for the very attitudes which feed xenophobic and racist populism. It is the nation state that defines who is a citizen, or subject, and who is an outsider, an illegal, or to be accepted on sufferance provided their work is needed and sent away afterwards, which encourages immigration when labour is scarce, and turns away refugees when it is not wanted.

Home secretary Amber “*don’t call me a racist*” Rudd’s announcements at the Tory Party conference are an illustration: on the one hand a work permit scheme for EU citizens who get jobs here, so that capital can bring in the workers it needs, including seasonal fruit pickers; but on the other hand definitely no out of work benefits or social housing, and businesses to be ‘named and shamed’ if they do not make efforts to recruit and train British workers. This is, of course, in continuity with Cameron’s promise to limit net migration, with restrictions on student visas – which upset the universities – and with Gordon Brown’s “*British jobs for British workers*” policy. However it goes further in making concessions to populism in attacking business for employing immigrants when there is unemployment at home, taking up its anti-elitist rhetoric. If holding the referendum was already a sop to populist sentiment, the May government is taking this further by hinting at a hard Brexit and Article 50 by the end of March, even if no details have been given yet. It seems to have rattled some in UKIP with Steven Woolfe, one of its leadership candidates, getting into an altercation with a fellow member after it emerged that he had held talks with the Tory Party.

Even more dangerous for would-be refugees and migrants are the agreements made by the EU to send refugees who arrive in Greece illegally by boat back to Turkey; and in 2014 there was the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Rout Initiative (or the Khartoum process). The latter provides brutally repressive regimes such as Sudan with

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the political and numerical weakness of the Syrian working class, which has been unable to stand up against the Assad regime and its various bourgeois opponents. But we can say that the fate of Syria and of the ‘Arab spring’ as a whole sums up the historic situation facing the world working class. Capitalism is in an advanced state of decay and has no future to offer humanity other than repression and war. This has been the response of the ruling class to the various revolts that swept through North Africa and the Middle East in 2011. But this has only been possible because the working class was unable to take the lead in these revolts, unable to propose a different aim and perspective than the democratic illusions which dominated the social movements. And this was a failure not merely of the working class of North Africa and the Middle East, but of the working class in the central countries of capitalism, which has more deeply implanted revolutionary traditions and a long experience in confronting the obstacle of bourgeois democracy.

It is these battalions of the class who are best placed to revive the perspective of proletarian revolution, which remains the only hope for a human future. This is not just wishing for the best. The Arab spring also served as an inspiration to struggles in the central countries, most notably the Indignados revolt in Spain, which went furthest of all the movements of 2011 in posing serious questions about the future of world capitalism and in developing the means of struggle against it. But this was just a glimpse of the possible, a small indication that, despite the steady advance of capitalist barbarism, the proletarian alternative is still alive. **Amos, 8.9.16**

equipment to police its borders – in the name of humanitarian concern for the victims of people traffickers the desperate are prevented from attempting to flee to safety.

At the end of July, Byron Burgers set up a fake training session (some employees were told it was on health and safety, other that it was on a new burger recipe) to assist immigration authorities in arresting 35 suspected illegal immigrants, and deporting at least 25 including separating some from the families they have in this country. The employer’s excuse for this deception was the 2016 Immigration Act which makes parts of civil society (in this case, employers and landlords) responsible for checking the immigration status of employees and tenants, and so policing immigration controls. This sort of blatant, and mandatory, snitching is currently of limited extent and this piece of legislation only specifies the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, not the working class (although individual workers must undoubtedly be required to carry out some of the tasks involved, whether aware of the motivation behind them or not). It seems likely that the highly publicised application of this Act at Byron Burgers a month after the referendum was an attempt to use the populist mood to get us used to this sort of behaviour, or at least test its acceptability. The state will no doubt have watched carefully not just those expressing indignation about the action of Byron Burgers (there were a number of small demonstrations outside their restaurants), but also those who took the contrary, conformist view that all means are appropriate in arresting illegal immigrants.

Populism and violence

Since the vote in favour of Brexit there has been an increase in reports of “hate crimes” – 57% in the 4 days following the vote and 42% in the last 2 weeks of June, with incidents continuing at over 3,300 in the last 2 weeks of July, which is a 40% increase on the previous year. While most have involved verbal abuse or racist graffiti, in Harlow a 40 year old worker from Poland was killed, in Milton Keynes a pregnant Muslim woman was kicked in the stomach, losing her baby, and in Plymouth a Polish family whose shed was set on fire found a note threatening it would be the family next. This should be no surprise given the nature of the campaign around the referendum which lent heavily on the question of immigration, including UKIP’s infamous poster showing hundreds of refugees in Southern Europe. Nigel Farage’s “*I want my country back*” slogan was very useful in using, and encouraging, a mood of discontent and xenophobia. It is as though some people think they had just won a referendum to rid the country of all ‘immigrants’, no matter whether they came from the EU and no matter how many years - or generations - they had been here.

These attacks show the dark and dangerous nature of the populist upsurge that contributed to Cameron feeling the need to promise a referendum on Brexit, and to the result going against the wishes of all the central factions of the ruling class in the UK, Europe and the USA. It is not hard to understand the reasons for the discontent that feeds populism. The financial crisis of 2007/8 hit people’s savings. Decades of economic crisis and decline have left old industrial areas completely run down with no prospects. This has all been presided over by alternating Tory and Labour governments since Heath and Wilson in the 60s and 70s, all of which have imposed versions of austerity, and thus eroding confidence, and participation, in elections as a way of ameliorating the situation. ‘Elites’ and ‘experts’ are rejected. Meanwhile the perspective of the working class seems absent. Not only are strikes at a historic low, there is even a feeling that the working class no longer exists, particularly when it is seen not as the class of wage or salaried workers, but only as those who do blue collar, manual jobs and live on a council estate. Migrants are not seen for what they are, fellow victims of the same capitalist system, forced to flee war or move to seek work, but as dangerous competitors for dwindling resources. As put forward in the contribution ‘On the question of populism’ “... *when an alternative – which can only be that of the proletariat – is*

*missing, parts of the population start to protest and even revolt against their ruling elite, not with the goal of challenging their rule, but in order to oblige them to protect their own ‘law-abiding’ citizens against ‘outsiders’. These layers of society experience the crisis of capitalism as a conflict between its two underlying principles: between the market and violence. Populism is the option for violence to solve the problems the market cannot solve, and even to solve the problems of the market itself. For instance, if the world labour market threatens to flood the labour market of the old capitalist countries with a wave of have-nots, the solution is to put up fences and police at the frontier and shoot whoever tries to cross it without permission.”*¹ However, while these xenophobic attacks show us the reality that lies behind populism, it is important to understand that they are the actions of a tiny minority, even of those seduced by the illusion of getting their country back, or by the idea that cutting immigration will solve any of the problems of housing, education or health services. There have been many expressions of indignation and solidarity with those attacked, even if these have also been drawn into demonstrations in favour of the democratic state. The fact is that even though the working class alternative appears absent, the class has not been defeated, and overt racists do not have a free hand to run amok and physically attack those they scapegoat for the problems in society.

False friends

With the Tories as well as UKIP making xenophobic speeches about limiting immigration, blaming migrants for all sorts of problems, and the increased verbal and physical attacks on them, how do we answer all this xenophobia and racism, how do we show solidarity? The Greens and the Corbyn faction of the Labour Party appear to be standing against the xenophobic mood, or at least refusing to join in. Corbyn was notably criticised for not taking up immigration in his conference speech and instead proposing financial aid to areas with high levels of immigration. Can we, in other words, oppose the populism of the Brexiters and xenophobes with a sort of left alternative, such as the huge influx of new members of the Labour Party supporting Corbyn, or his supporters in Momentum? Or internationally with the likes of Podemos, Syriza or Bernie Sanders? While it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse these forces (see article on the Labour Party in this issue) there are a few things we can say.

These political forces take the view that they

1. (<http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201608/14086/question-populism>)

should not try to make concessions to populism, not even at the level of propaganda, but oppose it. But they do this on a totally bourgeois basis. Their programmes are all fundamentally based on fighting elections and seeking government office; and where they have a large extra-parliamentary activity this is also based on pressurising or influencing some part of government policy. In other words they base their politics on the nation state and the national interest which they share with all bourgeois forces, however much they disagree on how to defend that national interest. No wonder such parties can completely change policy when they get into office. For instance, the Labour Party has often had a leftwing leader, often considered unelectable, in opposition, but in power it carries on the same old policies. When it comes to demonising migrants we only have to look back to the Blair government and its talk of “*bogus asylum seekers*” and even “*bogus*” gypsies². Similarly, in Greece, Syriza in government found itself carrying out the very austerity it had denounced in opposition; and its positive promises to improve things for immigrants didn’t stop it aligning with the right wing, anti-immigrant ANEL (Independent Greeks).

The working class can only rely on itself

The only way we can oppose the populist idea that keeping immigrants out will protect the citizens at home from the chaos of the world today is to understand that we are all victims of the same capitalist system. It is the same capitalist crisis that has caused unemployment in old industrial areas in the advanced countries, that lies behind imperialist wars in the Middle East sending thousands of refugees fleeing for their lives, and that causes the unemployment and poverty leading to economic migration. That means to see things internationally which is the viewpoint of the working class, which is concretised in the practical unity between immigrant and ‘native’ workers that develops in their struggles, as in the strike at Deliveroo recently. It is the apparent absence of this working class perspective that has allowed populism to develop as a product of capitalism’s decay. But it is only the working class that can provide a perspective to resist capital’s attacks, unmask its rotten ideology, and offer humanity the prospect of a world without states and borders.

Alex, 7.10.16

2. In fact the Corbyn led Labour Party has had its own problems with anti-semitism, particularly among his followers, see <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201605/13931/labour-left-and-jewish-problem>

Deliveroo, UberEats Struggles by precarious and immigrant workers

One of the fears about workers in very precarious casual jobs, with a large proportion of immigrants among them, is that they will not be able to struggle, and so will be nothing but a competitive pressure to lower wages. Firms such as Uber and Deliveroo like to claim their workers are self-employed (so not getting minimum wage, holiday or sick leave). The recent strike at Deliveroo, which spread to UberEats drivers, has answered both questions. They are most definitely part of the working class, and most definitely able to struggle to defend themselves.

Threatened with a new contract that would change from hourly pay plus a bonus for each delivery (£7 and £1) with pay only for each delivery, despite their apparent isolation from each other and their precarious circumstances, Deliveroo delivery workers organised meetings to run their struggle, a protest moped and cycle ride through the streets in London, and a 6 day strike. They insisted on collective negotiation against the

managing director’s ‘offer’ to speak to them individually¹. In the end the threat that they would lose their jobs if they did not sign up to the new contract was withdrawn, but it is being trialled by those who opt in. A partial victory.

Some UberEats delivery workers came to Deliveroo meetings. They face similar conditions, being falsely given self-employed status; pay has fallen so they barely make the minimum wage, with no guaranteed pay, only getting £3.30 per delivery. After a wildcat strike one worker was sacked (or “deactivated” since he is not protected by employment law), underlining the courage needed by workers who struggle in such precarious industries.

These small strikes by workers in such difficult circumstances demonstrate that they are fully part of the working class and its struggle. **Alex 8.10.16**

1. See the video of this event at <https://libcom.org/news/deliveroo-drivers-wildcat-strike-12082016>

Reply to the Communist League of Tampa

Why communists oppose participation in bourgeois elections

We are publishing here a critique of the article 'Towards a communist electoral strategy' which recently appeared on the website of the Communist League of Tampa (in Florida, USA). We have already published previous correspondence between ourselves and the CLT, in which we welcomed their recognition of the necessity for a world communist party, while also highlighting some of the key differences between our Current and the CLT regarding the conception of the 'mass party', the question of whether the communist party takes power, and the relevance of the old social democratic programmes to the communist project today¹. With the publication of the article 'Towards a communist electoral strategy' by Donald Parkinson², these differences seem to have widened, or at least become clearer. A comparable process seems to be underway in the relationship between the Tampa group and its Miami affiliate, which has now changed its name to the Workers' Offensive Group and has adopted a statement of positions which are much more in line with those of the communist left. At the same time, the Miami group has declared that it wants to maintain the discussion with the group in Tampa³. We support this decision and want the discussion between ourselves and Tampa to continue as well: hence the present contribution, which we hope will stimulate a response from the Tampa group and others.

We think that this debate on elections is particularly important, not least because in the present political climate in the USA, there is a tremendous pressure on all those who see themselves as being opposed to the capitalist system to set their principles to one side and use their vote to keep Donald Trump from getting his hands on the presidency. In this article, we explain why participation in bourgeois elections in general no longer serves the interests of the class struggle, but directly opposes it.

1. <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201510/13503/communist-league-tampa-and-question-party>; <https://communistleagueta.com/2016/01/11/debate-on-the-world-party-a-response-to-the-icc/>; <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201604/13893/once-again-party-and-its-relation-class>
2. <https://communistleagueta.com/?s=communist+electoral+strategy&submit=Search>. We understand that this is a signed article and may not represent the views of all members of the CLT, but posts by CLT member Pennoid on a thread on libcom, broadly agreeing with the article's approach, and the absence of any counter arguments by CLT members on their website, seems to indicate that DP's article has wider support within the group. See <http://libcom.org/forums/organise/communist-electoral-strategy-22082016>
3. <https://workersoffensivegroup.wordpress.com/points-of-unity/>; <https://workersoffensivegroup.wordpress.com/category/official-statements/>. On elections, the Workers' Offensive Group says in its points of unity: "All elections are a sham. Political power is fundamentally a question of violence, not votes. The ritual of mass self-delusion that forms part of electoral politics acts as a safe outlet into which the grievances of the exploited class can be harmlessly redirected. Participation in elections helps maintain capitalists' mental dominion over the working class by reviving the great lie that workers have any voice within this system. Begging pathetically at the feet of the exploiters and entrusting a tiny minority to fight all its battles does not produce independence and assertiveness in the working class, only weakness and submission".

The text by DP begins by asserting that "participation in electoral politics, and therefore an electoral strategy, are essential if communists are going to gain public legitimacy as a serious political force". The text recognises that electoral cycles are "endlessly nauseating, particularly this year's in the USA with the obnoxious Trump vs the neo-liberal imperialist Clinton". But it refers to passages written by Marx and Engels to support the view that, nevertheless, communists should put up their own candidates, as Marx put it in his 1850 address to the Communist League, "in order to preserve their independence, to count their forces, and to bring before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint". DP is aware of the existence of communists like Pannekoek and Bordiga who, in the new conditions created by war and revolution after 1914, rejected all parliamentary activity, but his main concern here is to deplore the fact that their views have had an inordinate influence on a contemporary 'left' which is to a large degree "purely based on direct action". He admits that the appeal of such an approach is understandable, given that "the bourgeois state presents itself as a Leviathan of sorts", but we should not conclude that "anything that touches it is therefore doomed". The text then outlines the main elements in the revived communist electoral strategy:

"Yet the question of whether we must smash the state and whether we participate in elections are two different questions. The bourgeois state can be smashed, yet we can still participate within its institutions with the purpose of propagandizing and politically training the working class. Election campaigns, even when lost, serve the purpose of forcing Communists to engage the public at large and argue their positions. However what if Communists actually win elections? Would we not just be managing the bourgeois state?"

The first clarification to make is that we would not come to power unless we had the mandate to operate our full minimum program and essentially smash the bourgeois state and create the dictatorship of the proletariat. The party would be a party in opposition and would not form coalition governments with bourgeois parties. Unlike other organizations like Syriza, who act as if they can-

not accomplish anything until they are in power, a properly Marxist party would remain in opposition and not form a government until conditions for revolution are ripe.

Another clarification is that we are not going to aim for executive powers we can't realistically win. The extent to which communists are responsible for managing the state is the extent to which they will be forced to make compromises with bourgeois legality. Rather than running for offices like governor or president, we should aim for offices in the legislative branch such as the federal House Representatives, but also state Houses and Assemblies. In these positions we can vote for and against legislation (as well as abstain) and establish our party as a "tribune of the people" that uses its seat of power to propagandize against the bourgeois state and capitalism. By voting against reactionary laws, even if we are outnumbered by the Democrats and Republicans, we can demonstrate that our party stands firmly against the interests of the bourgeois state and develop mass legitimacy for radical positions".

Changing historical conditions and the real history of the communist movement

What is immediately striking about this passage is that it appears to exist outside of history. There is a complete absence of any idea of the profound changes that have taken place in the life of capitalism and the working class since the days of the Second International when such dilemmas about how workers' representatives should conduct themselves in parliamentary bodies had a real significance. But with DP's text, we are taken to a universe where there has been no tendency for the mass parties and unions of the working class to be absorbed into the capitalist state; no qualitative growth of the totalitarian state Leviathan in response to the new epoch of wars and revolutions; no traumatic decades of Stalinist, fascist and democratic counter-revolution which corrupted or exterminated a whole generation of revolutionaries, leaving only a few small internationalist groups fighting against the tide; no tendency, in the generations that emerged after the receding of this counter-revolution, towards a deep suspicion



1918, the German revolution: the placard reads: 'All power to the workers' and soldiers' councils'. But in December 1918 the national congress of workers' and soldiers' councils committed suicide by handing power to the new German parliament

of politics and political organisation of any kind. The result of this real historical process has been palpable: the communists, who by definition must always remain a minority in the confines of capitalist society, have become a minuscule force, even if you are fairly wide-ranging in your definition of what constitutes the political forces of the working class today. In this actual universe, there is no party of the working class, let alone a mass one.

The CLT don't, of course claim to be a party and don't think the communist party is close to being formed; neither do they envisage "running any candidates anytime soon, as we are a small sect with little support and limited resources". But the divorce from reality we saw in relation to the past also applies to a possible electoral strategy in the future, because there is no attempt whatever to consider what changes would have to take place that would make it possible for today's "small sects with little support and limited resources" to form themselves into a formidable communist party capable of winning a respectable number of seats in Congress or similar parliaments, and even, possibly "winning a mandate to smash the bourgeois state and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat"¹. Such a transformation could only be the result of a massive upsurge in the class struggle on a world-wide scale, of a movement that would give rise not only a whole new generation of revolutionaries and a serious strengthening of the communist minority, but also engender new forms of mass organisation based on the principles of general assemblies and workers' councils. This perspective has been validated not only by the soviets of the first international revolutionary wave, but in more recent mass movements – for example the inter-factory strike committees that emerged in Poland in 1980, or the general assemblies that were the focus of discussion and decision-making in the struggle against the CPE in France in 2006 or the Indignados movement in Spain 2011.

Two antagonistic poles: bourgeois parliaments vs. workers' councils

It is already significant that the text says nothing at all about the question of the councils, and even appears to hold out the prospect of the communist party coming to power via bourgeois elections. But what is even more significant is that the text doesn't examine the role of parliament and elections in cases where workers' councils were being formed and the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat was being directly posed, such as in Germany in 1918, where democratic elections

1. The air of unreality also hovers over DP's view of how the mass party will engage in the field of direct action: "A mass party will have to engage large amounts of workers through "extra-parliamentary" means before it will even stand a chance winning in an electoral campaign. Building class unions, solidarity networks, unemployed councils, mutual aid societies, gun clubs, sports teams, etc. is not to be rejected in favor of electoral action". This looks very much like more nostalgia for the good old days of social democracy when the working class could maintain its own economic, political and cultural organisms for a lengthy period without them falling into the hands of the bourgeois state.

were used as a weapon against the councils, a means of trapping workers in the idea that parliamentary democracy and workers' councils could in some way co-exist (providing the latter were reduced to tame trade unionist type bodies limited to the individual workplace...). In sum: communists will only be able to act as a party, an organisation which has a real impact on the development of the class struggle, in a pre-revolutionary upsurge, and then it will be more evident than ever that their energies should be directed towards the strengthening of the councils or council-type organisations against the deadly mystifications of bourgeois democracy.

And we should be aware of just how deeply these mystifications have implanted themselves in the minds of the working class, including its revolutionary minorities. The idea that the triumph of democracy and the political victory of the working class amount to the same thing is already present in the 1848 Communist Manifesto. The experience of the Commune enabled Marx and Engels to understand that the working class could not use the existing parliamentary bodies to come to power...and yet how fragile this understanding was, when shortly after writing *The Civil War* in France, which drew out the lessons of the Commune with magnificent clarity, Marx could still envisage the working class coming to power 'peacefully' in certain democratic bourgeois countries like Britain or Holland. And when, in the phase of social democracy which made it seem that the working class could step by step build up its parties and its unions inside the framework of bourgeois society, theoreticians like Kautsky could see no other 'road to power' except the parliamentary road². Those within the marxist movement who began to challenge the Kautskyite orthodoxy had a hard battle trying to develop the implications of the new forms of struggle appearing as capitalism's ascendant epoch drew to a close: the mass strikes in Russia, the appearance of the soviets, the development of wildcat strikes in western Europe. It was through examining these new forms and methods of struggle that Pannekoek, Bukharin and eventually Lenin were able to break through the social democratic consensus and base their programme on the most lucid insights of Marx and Engels – on the recognition that the bourgeois state had to be dismantled, and not by parliamentary decree, but by the new organs of proletarian political power created by the revolution itself. These theoretical developments took place alongside, and in the case of Pannekoek were deeply influenced by, Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of the mass strike, which put into question the old social democratic (and, by extension, anarcho-sindicalist) practice of step by step forming the mass organisations that will eventually take over the running of society; in the new conception of Luxemburg and Pannekoek, the **revolutionary** mass organisation of the work-

2. See our article on the parliamentarist errors of Engels and Kautsky: <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/199701/1619/revolutionary-perspective-observed-parliamentary-illusions>

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ing class is a product of the mass movement, and cannot be fabricated by the communist minority in the absence of such a movement.

Anti-electoralism as an “eternal principle”?

DP wants us to drop the idea of “anti-electoralism as an eternal principle”. But none of the militants of the social democratic, and then the communist, left fractions considered anti-electoralism as an eternal principle. They were marxists, not anarchists, and they recognised that, in a previous epoch, the period that included the Communist League and the first two Internationals, the strategy of standing workers’ candidates in bourgeois elections could indeed serve what is an “eternal principle” for revolutionaries: the necessity to develop the autonomy of the working class from all other classes. Thus in the mid to late 19th century, marxists advocated participation in bourgeois elections and parliaments because they considered that parliament could still be a field of battle between parties which were tied to an outmoded feudal order, and those which expressed the forward movement of capital, and could thus be critically supported by the workers’ organisations. In this period, it was possible to consider that such alliances could be in the interests of the working class and even a moment in the development of its political class independence. As capitalism reached its limits as a factor of progress, the distinction between progressive and reactionary bourgeois parties became increasingly meaningless, so that the role of revolutionaries in bourgeois parliaments had to be focused more and more on opposing all the different bourgeois factions – on playing the ‘tribune’ role as a lone voice in a purely bourgeois arena. But it was precisely during this phase, the phase of mature social democracy, that the leading currents within many of the workers’ parties were drawn into all kinds of compromises with the capitalist class, even up to the point of accepting posts in government cabinets.

For the left communists, the advent of a period of open revolutionary struggle, and the concomitant triumph of opportunism within the parties of the old International – definitely completed by their role in the war of 1914 and the ensuing revolutionary wave – meant that all the old tactics, even the limited use of elections and parliament as a tribune, had to be thoroughly reassessed. Pannekoek, writing in 1920 when he was still firmly convinced of the necessity for a communist party, accepted that participation in parliament and elections had been a valid strategy in the previous era, but pointed to its pernicious effects in the new conditions:

“Matters change when the struggle of the proletariat enters a revolutionary phase. We are not here concerned with the question of why the parliamentary system is inadequate as a system of government for the masses and why it must give way to the soviet system, but with the utilisation of parliament as a means of struggle by the proletariat. As such, parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. People used to believe that leaders could obtain important reforms for the workers in parliament; and the illusion even arose that parliamentarians could carry out the transformation to socialism by acts of parliament. Now that parliamentarianism has grown more modest in its claims, one hears the argument that deputies in parliament could make an important contribution to communist propaganda. But this always means that the main emphasis falls on the leaders, and it is taken for granted that specialists will determine policy – even if this is done under the democratic veil of debates and resolutions by congresses; the history of social democracy is a series of unsuccessful attempts to induce the members themselves to determine policy. This is all inevitable while the proletariat is carrying on a parliamentary struggle, while the masses have yet to create organs of self-action, while the revolution has still to be made, that is; and as soon as the masses start to intervene, act and take decisions on their own behalf, the disadvantages of parliamentary struggle become overwhelming.

As we argued above, the tactical problem is how we are to eradicate the traditional bourgeois mentality which paralyses the strength of the proletar-

ian masses; everything which lends new power to the received conceptions is harmful. The most tenacious and intractable element in this mentality is dependence upon leaders, whom the masses leave to determine general questions and to manage their class affairs. Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution. Fine speeches may be made in parliament exhorting the proletariat to revolutionary action; it is not in such words that the latter has its origins, however, but in the hard necessity of there being no other alternative.

Revolution also demands something more than the massive assault that topples a government and which, as we know, cannot be summoned up by leaders, but can only spring from the profound impulse of the masses. Revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action – and this is only possible if first the vanguard, then a greater and greater number take matters in hand themselves, know their own responsibilities, investigate, agitate, wrestle, strive, reflect, assess, seize chances and act upon them. But all this is difficult and laborious; thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws – the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive”³.

Here Pannekoek gets to the root of why the fight for the councils is diametrically opposed to parliamentary activity in all its forms. To make a revolution, the proletariat has to make a fundamental break with old habits of thinking and acting, with the very idea of alienating its own forces through the election of representatives in bourgeois parliaments. For him, the tactic of ‘revolutionary parliamentarism’ adopted by the parties of the Communist International (which is very similar to the electoral strategy advocated by DP) could only serve to reinforce the prevailing and paralysing illusions in bourgeois democracy. And we can add that, even though the statutes of the Communist Parties contained a number of precautions against corruption by parliamentary politics, these rules did not prevent the official parties from transforming themselves rather rapidly into vote-chasing machines.

For Pannekoek and other left communists, the same problematic applied to the trade union form, which, while originally emerging as a form of working class self-organisation, had become hopelessly enmeshed in the bourgeois state and its bureaucracy. The counter-revolutionary role played by the old parties and unions in the imperialist war and the proletarian revolution that followed made it clear that the new forms of organisation would develop not inside the shell of the old society, but through an eruption that would shatter the shell itself. In a sense, this was a return to Marx’s observation that the working class is a class of civil society that is not a class of civil society, an outlaw class that by definition can never gain “public legitimacy” in the normal operations of capitalist society. The idea of seeking public legitimacy, of looking for ‘popularity’ and the biggest possible share of the vote, is a gross deformation of the role of communists, whose task is always to defend the future goals in the movement of the present, to speak the truth however unpalatable it may sound, even when this means going against the stream, as revolutionaries like Lenin and Luxemburg did in the face of the wave of nationalist hysteria which temporarily swept over the working class in 1914. Bordiga, who in the debates in the Third International actually considered the question of abstentionism to be a tactic, nevertheless further illuminates the reasons why the ‘electoral’ mentality ties us to bourgeois society. In *The Democratic Principle*⁴, for example, he shows that the principle of bourgeois democracy, the principle of one citizen one vote, is rooted in the very operation of commodity relations, of a society founded on equivalent exchange. A movement for communism is by definition a movement that overcomes the notion of the atomised citizen exercising his rights through the polling booth, as part of a wider struggle against the reified social relationships im-

3. ‘World revolution and communist tactics’, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/tactics/index.htm>

4. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1922/democratic-principle.htm>

posed by the commodity form.

We think that the comrades of the CLT should go back to these theoretical contributions and engage much more deeply with the reasons why these militants rejected all forms of electoral participation. It’s true that DP’s text accepts that there is a danger, confirmed by the German SPD’s vote for war credits in 1914, that party representatives will develop interests independent from the working class. But his answer is that this problem “can be addressed without having to abstain from electoral activities. For example, electoral reps can be required to donate a certain percentage of their salary to the party and be subject to recall by popular vote”. Leaving aside the speculative, even fantastic nature of this whole scenario, this remains a purely formal response which does not get to the heart of the criticisms raised by the likes of Pannekoek and Bordiga.

The danger of falling into leftism

As we have noted, the CLT is not in any immediate danger of plunging into electoral practices. But its reluctance to consider the real historical conditions facing the communist minority today seems to be pushing it towards a kind of syndicalist activism on the one hand (having said they won’t be running any candidates as yet they say that “our energy right now is being put into making ourselves a more effective organisation and helping get a General membership branch of the IWW started”⁵). More dangerously, its ambiguities about the nature of the ‘left’, which can be seen in the early part of the text, seems to be opening doors to alliances with openly left-capitalist organisations like the Red Party, which looks like an American equivalent of the Communist Party of Great Britain/*Weekly Worker* in the UK⁶, an organisation which has never put into question its historic origins as a faction within Stalinism. 5. Again, the Points of Unity published by the Workers’ Offensive Group take a clear position on the union question: “Labor unions, regardless of their internal structure, are not workers’ organizations but organs of the capitalist state that smother and contain the resistance of the working class against the exploitative system through the negotiation and enforcement of contracts with capital. In the heat of the class struggle, the workers must destroy the unions and form their own mass and unitary organizations to direct and carry out their struggle against capitalism”.

6. <http://red-party.com/>

Perhaps the CLT sees such alliances as a means of breaking out of its situation as a “small sect without support”, but it is more likely to drown the group in a sea of leftism.

DP’s article, as we have seen, deplors the fact that “large sections of the left” favour direct actionism to the exclusion of a viable electoral



Anton Pannekoek in the 1920s

strategy. In reality, in a period of considerable difficulty for the working class, where strikes and ‘the movement in the street’ have gone into retreat, many newly politicised elements are being mobilised in support of a ‘new Look’ left in the shape of Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, Corbyn in the UK and Sanders in the US. These currents all represent a clear attempt to pull militant energies into the dead end of elections and the ‘long march through the institutions’. Communists can only stand against the false hopes they offer by offering a clear critique of bourgeois democracy and its insidious influence within the revolutionary class. Amos, October 2016

Amadeo Bordiga, May 1920

From the ‘Theses of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party’

From the participation in elections to the representative organs of bourgeois democracy and participation in parliamentary activity, while always presenting a continuous danger of deviation, may be utilised for propaganda and for schooling the movement during the period in which there does not yet exist the possibility of overthrowing bourgeois rule and in which, as a consequence, the party’s task is restricted to criticism and opposition. In the present period, which began with the end of the world war, with the first communist revolutions and the creation of the Third International, communists pose, as the direct objective of the political action of the proletariat in every country, the revolutionary conquest of power, to which end all the energy and all the preparatory work of the party must be devoted. In this period, it is inadmissible to participate in these organs which function as a powerful defensive instrument of the bourgeoisie and which are designed to operate even within the ranks of the proletariat. It is precisely in opposition to these organs, to their structure as to their function, that communists call for the system of workers’ councils and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Because of the great importance which electoral activity assumes in practice, it is not possible to reconcile this activity with the assertion that it is not the means of achieving the principal objective of the party’s action, which is the conquest of power. It also is not possible to prevent it from absorbing all the activity of the movement and from diverting it from revolutionary preparation

40 years after the foundation of the ICC

Questions from comrade Link and some replies

First of all I must say that I am very surprised that the very important text in IR 156 from January 2016 still has not prompted responses from comrades. These documents are significant signposts for the future of the ICC yet have neither been applauded nor criticised - just ignored.

I would like to applaud the approach of self-criticism in preparing the balance sheets contained in the latest IR. In particular, the identification of an underestimation the capacity of capitalism to maintain itself, globalisation and the restructuring of the working class, some limited recognition of the weakness of Luxemburg markets theory and responses to elongated period of decline in working class struggles since wave of period 60s to 80s.

I would criticise the text in IR however as a balance sheet that lacks incisiveness and is too keen to self congratulate itself. In saying that I do recognise the major contributions that the ICC has made on issues such as decadence, the historic course, the working class movement and more generally on the body of work and the range of issues raised for discussion in the workers movement. There has been a growing tendency nevertheless to prepare overlong texts on organisational and behavioural issues, and self-analysis that just tend to disguise weaknesses, obscure issues and self justify. Frankly I'm left with the impression that the concern demonstrated is for ICC militants not today's working class movement as a whole.

I would like to put forward some obvious questions that the texts avoid:

1 Why the ICC has all these periodic internal confrontations?

2 Why no critical analysis if the ICCs approach to internal discussion? Yes I'm happy to reject the extreme criticisms of Stalinism but it is still the case that internal discussion has been criticised from many quarters. Has the ICCs approach, this determination to reach a conclusion and the determination to make swingeing criticisms of others contributed to these breakups?

3 Has orientation of international organisation in distinction to federal approach been successful? The approach was identified uncritically in the texts but given that the organisation has given up on being a pole of international regroupment and appears to be withdrawing from intervention in favour of a fraction's role of analysing past events. Why shouldn't this approach be questioned through a serious discussion? If the new period changes the focus of militant activity should it not also change the organisational structure?

4 Why have obvious points of political disagreements over the past 40 years not been addressed in the balance sheets? i.e. left as natural party of opposition, 80s as years of truth, parasitism, Decomposition and the idea that we are in the final phase of capitalism, an increasingly problematic understanding of the historic course, economic analysis and problems with Luxemburg's analysis of role of extra-capitalist markets.

5 Why is there such an inability to provide clarity in the explanations of certain issues? The ICC does not appear to be able to produce definitive statements on what it thinks on proletarian morality, proletarian culture and centrism and the new role as a fraction appears now to join that list (it's certainly not clear to me from the text).

6 Why has there not been a real attempt to draw a balance sheet of the period of the past 8 years of crisis in the ICC? This has been the explanation for withdrawing from public interventions and reducing publications so, was it crisis and has it been resolved or was it actually just the start of this new practice? Is it continuing or is it over.

7 How have these issues/weaknesses affected ICC political analysis in the recent period? I am particularly interested to hear how early, major criticisms of CWO and IFICC relating to their alleged adoption of academicism and rejection of intervention and lack of understanding of historic course, can be squared with the ICC's new approach. The ICC has adopted what it was criticising these organisations for yet has not either revised criticisms nor apologised.

WR Reply

Thank you very much for your comments and questions posted on the ICC online forum about the critical balance sheet of 40 years of the ICC from *International Review (IR)* 156¹. As we indicated to you then we needed more time and reflection to give your questions the answers they deserve. In order to do so in a little depth we won't take up all the questions in one go - there are a lot - but in installments, with this first reply answering mainly the first two questions of your first post above, leaving the other questions on the fraction from the first and second post to a later date. We hope that the answers we give to your questions will not be seen as our last word on the subject but as only the beginning of a discussion with you.

In recognising the importance and seriousness of this self-critique by the ICC you firstly express your surprise that there has been no public response to it from comrades. By this we assume you refer to the wider milieu of groups and individuals sharing the general internationalist communist left tradition with the ICC. In answer to this point it was said on the ICC forum in reply that there had been an initial reaction to the critical balance sheet from one of our contacts on the ICC forum. We have also had responses from other contacts verbally or by email. But as far as the proletarian milieu as a whole is concerned we have hardly seen any public reaction. Your surprise is understandable, since the fate of the ICC, a significant organisation of the communist left for the past 40 years, is surely of concern for those who espouse the politics of the communist left, even if they disagree with many of our political positions and analyses. More: one would think surely that many of those who disagree with the ICC on whatever question would want to express themselves publicly on the subject as you have done.

While from this political point of view the silence about our self-critique is surprising and regrettable, from the vantage point of the past four decades, such indifference has not been that unusual. Ever since the re-emergence of the left communist milieu internationally since the end of the sixties, it has lacked a significant sense of common purpose which, if it had been pursued, despite the disagreements within it, would have strengthened this whole milieu and accelerated its internationalist impact on the working class much more than it actually has. In hindsight the three Conferences of Groups of the Communist Left in the late seventies which had the goal of confronting these often profound disagreements at the necessary theoretical and political level, and making common public statements on vital current questions facing the working class, were a high water mark. The collapse of these Conferences at the end of the decade has led to a long period of dispersal of the left communist milieu - even if polemics and other limited instances of mutual collaboration have sometimes occurred. The emergence of the phenomenon of political parasitism in 1981 has tended to further exacerbate the atomisation of the left communist milieu and reduce the solidarity between its individuals and groups. The low morale of the left communist milieu in general may help to explain the background to the dearth of response to the 40 year self-critique of the ICC.

In respect of this lack of an effective forum of debate for the whole of the internationalist milieu over the past 40 years, some of your questions seem however to imply that in-depth critiques of our politics and analyses have already been developed within this milieu. But for us it is precisely such profound critiques that are mostly lacking and which still need to be elaborated and deepened. We will point to these below in answer to your questions.

While applauding the self-critique in general you feel that it doesn't go far enough and that it avoids key questions which need answers.

"I would like to put forward some obvious questions that the texts avoid:

1 Why the ICC has all these periodic internal

1. <http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056/link/14012/40-years-after-foundation-icc>

confrontations?

2 Why no critical analysis if the ICC's approach to internal discussion? Yes I'm happy to reject the extreme criticisms of Stalinism but it is still the case that internal discussion has been criticised from many quarters. Has the ICC's approach, this determination to reach a conclusion and the determination to make swingeing criticisms of others contributed to these breakups?"

As you note the 40 year balance sheet is not complete but rather at the beginning and doesn't provide a detailed history of our method of debate nor of the different splits in the ICC over this period and whether they could have been avoided by a better method. We haven't avoided the question though, but so far only concentrated on some key questions like that of the fraction, because the latter is closely related to the fundamental issue of whether we have carried out our initial conception of our own role, and the question of the accuracy of our analyses of the world situation and our consequent intervention.

At the moment we are not yet in a position to present a detailed history of our mistakes made in our internal debates nor the extent to which these errors may have contributed unnecessarily to the break ups. And your questions on this matter of internal discussion aren't very specific. So we can only here try to put this question of marxist debate in the ICC, which of course is not Stalinist, in a wider context.

You commend us for the major contributions of the ICC.

"...I do recognise the major contributions that the ICC has made on issues such as decadence, the historic course, the working class movement and more generally on the body of work and the range of issues raised for discussion in the workers movement."

The politics of the ICC, its class principles or lines of demarcation of the working class from the bourgeoisie, its analysis of the trajectory of the capitalist mode of production, its marxist method and its organisational principles, are all the product of a tradition of stormy debates in the revolutionary movement that stretches back over a century and a half.

The general conceptions of marxism for example would not exist without the blistering polemics of Marx and Engels against the Left Hegelians in their books the *Holy Family* and the *German Ideology*, or the scathing critiques directed against Proudhon's anarchism and Dühring's positivism.

The specific tradition of the Communist Left would not be conceivable without the fierce and repeated polemics of Lenin and Luxemburg against the renegade Kautsky concerning the opportunism and betrayal of internationalism by the German Social Democracy, nor a few years later on without the unrelenting criticism of the likes of Herman Gorter and Amadeo Bordiga against the growing opportunism of the Third International.

"At the time that it was founded the Italian Communist Party, animated by the leadership of the Left and of Bordiga, was always an 'enfant terrible' in the Communist International. Refusing to submit a priori to the absolute authority of leaders - even those it held in the greatest regard - the Italian CP insisted on freely discussing and, if necessary, fighting against any political position it didn't agree with. As soon as the CI was formed, Bordiga's fraction was in opposition on many points and openly expressed its disagreements with Lenin and other leaders of the Bolshevik party, the Russian revolution, and the CI. The debates between Lenin and Bordiga at the Second Congress are well known. At this time nobody thought about questioning this right to free discussion; no one saw it as an insult to the authority of the 'leaders'. Perhaps men as feeble and servile as Cachin believed in their heart of hearts that this was scandalous, but they wouldn't have dared to admit it. Moreover, discussion wasn't seen simply as a right but as a duty; the confrontation and study of ideas were the only way of elaborating the programmatic and political positions required for revolutionary action". IR 33 'Against the concept of the "brilliant leader"'².

2. <http://en.internationalism.org/ir/033/concept-of-brilliant-leader>

The ICC in particular would not exist without the confrontation of ideas with both councilism and Bordigism by the Gauche Communiste de France in the 40s and 50s.

Of course all these polemics were accompanied by very profound study and reflection. Painstaking marxist research has usually been stimulated by the intensive confrontation of ideas in the revolutionary movement.

In the history of the ICC itself the principles and analyses that it has developed from the heritage of the past have required the debating of differences. Most of which have *not* led to splits. The debates on the state in the period of transition, which were not merely internal but also conducted with other groups, or the debates on the reasons for the decadence of capitalism, were both confrontations of important differences that didn't lead to a separation and in fact are still ongoing. Likewise the development of positions on the proletarian political milieu, on terror, terrorism and class violence, on the critique of the theory of the weak link, on centrism towards councilism, on the theses on parasitism and on the period of the social decomposition of capitalism were all elaborated in our press after extensive debate. In the last decade the *International Review* has seen the publication of orientation texts on Confidence and Solidarity, Marxism and Ethics and on the Culture of Debate, which were also the object of intense argument within the organisation. While these latter texts, due to the nature of their subject matter, are not final statements they nevertheless constitute in the organisation's view a valid framework for our approach on these questions and entirely consistent with our marxist method and organisational principles.

All these debates in the history of the ICC which involved, as you might say, 'swingeing' criticism, and the desire to reach a conclusion - to see the discussion through to the end - didn't of themselves lead to organisational break ups.

The decisive reasons that explain the various splits in the organisation, rather than being a result of the debates on general political questions that we mention above, were more to do with political and theoretical questions of *organisational* principle, in particular that of the primacy of the unity and solidarity of the organisation as a whole against the attempt to assert (often in grotesque ways) the sovereignty of the separate interests of individuals or groups within it. The difficulty for the new generations of revolutionaries since 1968 to understand or accept this principle and its implications, which is at the heart of the question of proletarian morality among revolutionaries, has been a common feature of the splits in the ICC. Yet without the acquisition, defence and explanation of this principle there would be no tradition of organised marxist debate within the revolutionary movement. If for example there had been no defence of organisational principles by the ICC in 1981 against the thefts of the Chenier Tendency or the gangsterism and informing of the 'Internal Fraction of the ICC' twenty years later, then there would be no organisational basis for the subsequent theoretical contributions that you recognise. The need to remain united in spite of differences and disagreements is obviously an existential question.

We can also suggest that the same principle of 'freedom of discussion, unity in action' remains a difficult one for the internationalist milieu as a whole to understand and not just the ICC.

We won't speculate here to what extent the mistakes the ICC made in dealing with this question contributed to the schisms. The important thing to recognise here is that matters of organisational life or death were involved.

It should also be noted that after these break-ups, the ICC was not satisfied with the fact that the dissenters had left - far from it - but attempted to draw out the details and lessons of the splits, their origins and their connection to more general weaknesses in the organisation. And it made these findings public.

Continued on page 7

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After the Chenier crisis for example there were significant elaborations in the *International Review* of our conception of the functioning and function of revolutionary organisation which had been forgotten or not fully understood in the ICC in the lead up to this crisis.

After the crisis of 1995 a series of six articles were published in the *International Review* (82-88) on the contemporary significance and relevance of the Hague Conference of the 1st International involving the split between the marxists and Bakuninists.

In light of the theoretical dispersal or indifference of the internationalist milieu that we noted earlier in relation to the ICC's 40 year self-critique, it is nevertheless remarkable that all these crises in the ICC and the extensive publication of the details and general theoretical lessons from them have not led to a serious and intensive theoretical and political debate within this milieu about them.

To tentatively conclude this reply to your first two questions: in explaining the splits in the ICC and the dispersion of the Communist Left milieu it is necessary to take into account the profound difficulty today's revolutionaries find in pursuing the confrontation of differences within a unitary framework.

Some short answers to some of your other points:

"I would criticise the text in *IR* however as a balance sheet that lacks incisiveness and is too keen to self congratulate itself....

There has been a growing tendency nevertheless to prepare overlong texts on organisational and behavioural issues, and self-analysis that just tend to disguise weaknesses, obscure issues and self justify. Frankly I'm left with the impression that the concern demonstrated is for ICC militants not today's working class movement as a whole"

While recognising this is your opinion we do not share it and would like to hear more of your argumentation and evidence for these views in order to answer them usefully.

"3 Has orientation of international organisation in distinction to federal approach been successful? The approach was identified uncritically in the texts but given that the org has given up on being a pole of international regroupment and appears to be withdrawing from intervention in favour of a fraction's role of analysing past events. Why shouldn't this approach be questioned through a serious discussion? If the new period changes the focus of militant activity should it not also change the organisational structure?"

In a second article, we shall take up this question in relation to that of the fraction. For the moment: we haven't given up on being a pole of international regroupment or on carrying out a communist intervention.

"4 Why have obvious points of political disagreements over the past 40 years not been addressed in the balance sheets? i.e., left as natural party of opposition, 80s as years of truth, parasitism, Decomposition and the idea that we are in the final phase of capitalism, an increasingly problematic understanding of the historic course, economic analysis and problems with Luxemburg's analysis of role of extra-capitalist markets."

Please point more specifically to where the political/theoretical disagreements with all these analyses, that you think we should address, have been made. Or elaborate your own position on them a bit more.

"5 Why is there such an inability to provide clarity in the explanations of certain issues? The ICC does not appear to be able to produce definitive statements on what it thinks on proletarian morality, proletarian culture and centrism and the new role as a fraction appears now to join that list (it's certainly not clear to me from the text)."

See *IR* 127 and 128 on Marxism and Ethics. *IR* 111 and 112 on Confidence and Solidarity, *IR* 131 on the Culture of Debate. And *IR* 43 on centrism. In order to answer your question we need a bit more explanation of why you think these statements are unclear.

"6 Why has there not been a real attempt to draw a balance sheet of the period of the past 8 years of crisis in the ICC? This has been the explanation for withdrawing from public interven-

tions and reducing publications so, was it crisis and has it been resolved or was it actually just the start of this new practice? Is it continuing or is it over."

IR's 154 and 156 already give some serious answers to the explanation of the most recent crisis in the ICC. The 40 year balance sheet is part of this explanation which is ongoing. On intervention and the press, we will take that up more in our reply on the fraction.

"7 How have these issues/weaknesses affected ICC political analysis in the recent period? I am particularly interested to hear how early, major criticisms of CWO and IFICC relating to their alleged adoption of academicism and rejection of intervention and lack of understanding of historic course, can be squared with the ICC's new approach. The ICC has adopted what it was criticising these organisations for yet has not either revised criticisms nor apologized".

You will have to explain more why you think the ICC has 'adopted' academicism and rejected intervention, and where you think we made those criticisms of the CWO, so we can answer more precisely. We don't consider the IFICC as part of the revolutionary milieu.

Looking forward to your reply to all or part of the above while we work on an answer to your questions about the fraction, in the belief that such a discussion between us is a contribution to fulfilling the tasks of revolutionaries in the working class. **WR, 8.10.16**

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Corbyn mobilising discontent behind a capitalist programme

In response to the austerity demanded by the capitalist crisis, the proliferation of imperialist wars, terrorism on the streets, and the dismal prospects offered by the continuation of capitalism, there is much dissatisfaction. This discontent can be expressed in many ways, not embracing any solutions but expressing unhappiness with a reality that's not understood.

In the UK Referendum on membership of the European Union millions voted to leave without any clear idea of what the consequences might be. Some were concerned about immigration, some were worried about a distant EU bureaucracy having control over their lives, some believed the propaganda about the economic prospects for the UK, and some were just expressing a negativity about the existing state of things. Elsewhere people have been attracted by other expressions of populism, like Trump in the US, Le Pen in France or the 'Alternative for Germany'.

But it's not just right-wing populism that people have turned to. Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, Bernie Sanders in the US have all offered a 'new radicalism' on the Left. It's in this context that we can begin to appreciate the re-election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party.

For the Left Corbyn is a hero. For the SWP (*Socialist Worker* 27/9/16) "*His success is a clear sign of the feeling against austerity, racism and war. His victory can be a launchpad for increased resistance in the workplaces and on the streets.*

We look forward to continuing to work with Corbyn and his supporters against the disastrous Tory policies that threaten to destroy key public services, deepen poverty, whip up racism and plunge British armed forces into more imperialist wars."

And yet in the same salute they show how Syriza also "*sent hope across the world*" before "*implementing a worse round of austerity than those imposed by its ... predecessors.*" They present Corbyn as something positive, but when you read the small print the SWP says (*International Socialism* 152) "*the detail of his economic programme is standard post-crash social democratic fare—a £500 billion programme of infrastructure investment, an industrial strategy overseen by a new National Investment Bank, support for cooperatives, a National Education Service...*" And when you see the policies of deficit reduction and borrowing for investment in infrastructure McDonnell lines up with his Labour predecessors with much talk of "fiscal credibility" and "discipline".

For the Right Corbyn is an 'extremist' who, with allies such as McDonnell and Abbott, will raise taxation, increase debt, reinforce state intervention in the economy, be soft on terrorists, undermine defence by not renewing Trident and stifle the 'initiative' of private enterprise.

For a typical right-wing take on Corbyn try the *Daily Mail's* (29/9/16) report of his speech to the Labour. "*Jeremy Corbyn's plan to spend more than £100 billion a year creating a socialist state was condemned yesterday as a blueprint to bankrupt the nation.*" He apparently plans to "*spend more on everything from education to housing.*" There would be investment to increase employment, build homes, keep down rents, ban zero hours contracts, ease the pressure through immigration on public services, provide free education, move to a low carbon economy, renationalise railways, and increase taxes. There would be a "*new National Investment Bank to spend cash on better broadband, railways and energy infrastructure.*"

The *Express* (26/9/16) was a bit less hysterical. Mr McDonnell was reported as promising to work with the "*wealth creators in the private sector*"... He said: "*We think we can get the economy growing very quickly and it will then pay for itself.*" As the SWP would say, this is 'standard social democratic fare' – promises to increase the role of the state when the tendency towards growing state capitalism is one of the dominant trends of the last hundred years, an expression of capitalism's economic crisis, not a solution to it.

The appeal of leftism

So, while the Corbyn/Sanders/Syriza left-wing version of capitalism has no capacity to improve the quality of people's lives, any more than the right-wing plans of Trump or UKIP, it has a big appeal to some workers.

In the history of the workers' movement there have always been currents that emphasise that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself, that the self-organisation of the working class is not only a strength of the struggle, but the basis of a future society based on relations of solidarity, a society where the state has become an anachronism. However, in the period leading up to the First World War the idea grew in social democracy that the capitalist state could provide social order, could eliminate the excesses of capitalist competition, and could guarantee social welfare. In fact this had as much

to do with socialism as Louis XIV's centralised state or Bismarck's 'state socialism'.

Today, despite the experience of a century of state capitalism in all its political forms – social democratic, Stalinist or fascist – the idea that the state can somehow be neutral still has enormous appeal. The 'enemies' of 'ordinary people' are typically deemed to be bankers, hedge fund managers, tax avoiders, multinational corporations, ruthless companies, exploitative bosses, and all the rest. Against this the state is portrayed as being a force above classes that can curtail malevolent greedy individuals who are trying to rip off the rest of us. This personalisation, which in the past would dwell on a bloated capitalist in a bowler hat, now focuses on those who, behind closed doors, make decisions that affect the jobs, lives and living conditions of millions.



So, the Labour Party in the UK, while doing badly in opinion polls, is still putting forward the sort of ideas that others have to imitate. When Theresa May became Prime Minister she indicated her intentions: "*The Government I lead will be driven not by the interests of the privileged few but by you. We won't entrench advantages of the fortunate few. We will do everything to help you go as far as your talents can take you. We must fight the burning injustices. We must make Britain a country that works for everyone*" (*Daily Telegraph*, 13.7.16).

The parties are united in their opposition to privilege and injustice, but, in practice, the Labour Party is seen as being more authentic. In research published in August 2016 by the House of Commons Library, figures were given for membership of political parties. It suggested that the Labour Party's 515,000 members were more than all other political parties in the UK put together. And Labour members are far more likely to be committed activists than the members of other parties. They think they have identified what is wrong with the world and what needs to be done. A conservative, by definition, wants to preserve those things which they think have proved their value over time. But for the Labour activists, whatever their initial motivations, the solution to society's problems lies in the explicit intervention of the state.

The role of Corbyn's Labour Party is to present an alternative plan for the management of capitalism. At present there is no particular call for Labour to be introduced into government; the Conservatives will do their best to try to navigate Britain out of the EU with as little damage to the national capital as possible. The differences in the Labour Party, in particular between Corbynists and the heirs of Blair and Brown, are genuine and we can envisage continued and deepening conflict in its ranks. This in itself will make demands on the energies of activists as different factions try to 'save the Labour Party'.

The bottom line for workers to remember is that Corbyn's programme, far from being a fresh innovation, is a programme for the running of capitalism, not its destruction. **Car, 8.10.16**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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