The Trump election and the crumbling of the capitalist world order

What can the world expect from the new Trump Administration in the USA? Whereas the traditional political elites across the globe are full of anxiety, the Russian government and the right-wing populists in America and throughout Europe see history on their side. And while big world-wide operating companies (such as in the car industry) fear reprisals now if they do not produce in the United States, the stock exchanges and economic institutes were initially confident, expecting increased growth for the US and even the whole economy under Trump. As for Mr. President himself, he regularly contradicts not only his own new administration, but also himself. Thus NATO, free trade or the European Union can in one sentence be “essential” and in the next “obsolete”.

Instead of joining in with this crystal ball gazing about the near future of American state policy, we will try here first of all to analyse why Trump was elected president, although the traditional established political elites did not want him. Out of this contradiction between what Trump represents, and the interests of the US ruling class as a whole, we hope to win former ground for giving some first indications of what can be expected from his presidency, without falling into too much speculation.

The dilemma of the Republican Party

It is no secret that Donald Trump is looked on as a foreign body in the Republican Party which nominated him for election to the White House. He is neither religious nor conservative enough for the Christian fundamentalists who play such an important role in that party. His economic policy proposals, such as a state organised infrastructural programme, protectionism, or the replacement of “Obamacare” by a state-backed social insurance for everyone – are anathema to the neo-liberals who still play a central role in Republican circles, as they do in the Democratic Party. His plans for a rapprochement with Putin’s Russia pit him against the military and intelligence lobby which is so strong both in the Republican and Democratic parties.

The presidential candidature of Trump was made possible by an unprecedented revolt of the Republican membership and supporters against

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Russia 1917 and the revolutionary memory of the working class

Delegates to the 4th Congress of Soviets, Venevsky district, April 12, 1918

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The working class needs to rediscover its own voice 3

Bilan in the 1930s and Internationalism in the 40s, began the enormous task of drawing the ‘balance sheet’ of the revolution. First and foremost, against all its denigrators, they reaffirmed what it had confirmed the capacity of the working class against itself, by the hate-filled demagogy of the populists on the right, and on the left by clamorous appeals to defend ‘democracy’ against this new authoritarianism.

But this is also a moment for us to recall the work of our political ancestors, the left communist factions who survived the terrible defeats of the revolutionary movements sparked off by the events in Russia 1917 and tried to make sense of the resulting degeneration and demise of the very communist parties which had been formed to lead the working class against itself, by the hate-filled demagogy of the populists on the right, and on the left by clamorous appeals to defend ‘democracy’ against this new authoritarianism.

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We, Daniel Blake

Ken Loach’s latest film, I, Daniel Blake, has already won considerable critical acclaim, but because it is the work of a very expressive film-maker who is well-versed in criticising the contemporary world, the film has been described as a second Palme d’Or at the Cannes film festival, to widespread surprise. Surprisingly, there have been numerous articles in the press praising or attacking the film, seeing it either as a real social rom- 1 estor or as an alarmist tear-jerker.

Loach has long been a new Eisenstein1, or his film as a new equivalent to the Communist Manifesto, or to see it as a senti- mential apology for the British Labour Party, as one who needs to be shown how the real qualities of the film and how this really effects the quality of the film: it sometimes happens that a work of art escapes its author and takes on a life of its own.

In this film, Loach inveighs against the destruc- tion of whole sectors of the economy and sides with those who are told to go out looking for non-existent jobs. This reality of de-in- dustrialisation and this approach by the state are certain realities. Ken Loach has the merit of showing this while going beyond observing how miserable everybody is, pushing his audience to- wards a real indignation against the current state of affairs. He has the rather rare quality of provid- ing a lucid and dynamic image of the consequenc- es of the capitalist crisis in Britain – consequences which can easily be transposed elsewhere – and of exposing the totalitarian face of the state through its practice of social exclusion, repression, and demonisation.

All the passages in the film showing the “treat- ment”, via the telephone, of the unemployed by “healthcare professionals” who are made to func- tion as the guard-dogs of the system, would be laughable if they were not so realistic. This facet of the democratic state – in fact its dictatorship – is no fiction: the capitalist system, its democratic in- stitutions, including those which are supposed to support or protect vulnerable, elderly, sick or un- employed individuals. Function like police, the clerks are the last line of defence against the prospect of losing the right to exist, and they are based on the easiest sign of the “wrong” attitude, and often end up striving. Daniel’s partner Katie is more or less cornered when she falls hungry on a tin of beans after going to a food bank.

But what’s really at stake in this “social” movie, as with all the others, is whether it can envisage a perspective of resistance, of struggle against crisis and the capitalist Moloch. Is such a struggle possible? Who could lead it? It is on this level that Daniel Blake, our hero, is far behind the same observation of social problems and the reality of unemployment the most awful nihilism is advertised, without a trace of hope, without any perspective, a totally static vision of society, which can give rise to nothing but “no fu- ture”, to death.

Another aspect emerges very strongly from this film: the dignity of the characters, their sense of self-worth. This is definitely one of the qualities of the film. The key to any proletarian’s self-worth is to hold on to moral values, to defend their dignity whatever the circumstances. The defence of this proletarian morality is what reveals the possibil- ity of a future in which humanity can go beyond barbarism, beyond each against-all. Daniel Blake expresses this when he discovers that Katie has had to resort to prostitution to avoid dying of hun- ger. This devastates him more than anything, even more than his own drama. Dignity again when Daniel insists that “When you lose your self-re- spect you’re done for.”

But this proletarian dignity is also contradicted by the words attributed to him and read out at his funeral: “My name is Daniel Blake, I am a man, not a dog…I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more, nothing less”. Daniel sees himself as a citizen rather than a proletarian. But to be a citizen means belonging to a nation, not a social class. The dif- ference is fundamental, above all for the proletar- ians. It’s always in the name of citizenship or the defence of democracy, or the Republic, that the ruling ideology tries to mobilise us for the inter- ests of our exploiters. This can only be the logic of the bourgeoisie. The defence of citizenship is not the logic of the proletariat. It leads to competition and division and the perpetuation of the capitalist world.

As Daniel Blake expresses it, his situation is shared by millions of exploited proletarians, thrown into precariousness, excluded by the capitalist system. Whether it’s in Britain, France, China or anywhere else, the same capitalist laws of wage labour exert their violence on us. Even when it wears a democratic mask, capital divides us, grinds us down, kills us.

Real class solidarity, which is a necessity for the future of humanity, must above all be expressed by struggle: a conscious, collective struggle which goes beyond frontiers. The phrase from the Communist Manifesto, “the workers have no country” is no dream. It’s the key to transforming the world.

Stoplo, 15.12.16

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Russia 1917 and the revolutionary memory of the working class

principles of internationalism and working class autonomy.

At the same time, the revolutionaries of the 1930s and 40s also began the painful analysis of the costly errors made by the Bolsheviks in the teeth of an unprecedented situation for any work- ers’ party, in particular:

- The growing tendency for the party to substitute itself for the state, and the fusion of the party with the post-October state, which undermined not only the power of the Soviets but also the ca- pacity of the revolution to defend itself from the workers, even in opposition to the new state;
- The recourse to the “Red Terror” in response to the “bourgeois side” of the revolution – a process which led to the Bolsheviks implicat- ing themselves in the suppression of proletarian movements and organisations;
- The tendency to see state capitalism as a transi- tional stage towards socialism, and even as being identical with it.

The ICC, from its inception, has attempted to carry on with this work of drawing the lessons of the Russian Revolution and the international revolutionary wave of 1917-23. We have over the years developed quite a library of articles and pamphlets dealing with this absolutely vital era in the history of our class. In our coming year, and beyond, we will be making sure that these texts are more accessible to our readers, by compiling an updated dossier of our most important articles on the Russian revolution and the international revolutionary wave. Each month or so we will headline articles which most directly correspond to either the chronological development of the revolutionary process or which contain responses to the most important questions posed by the at- tacks of bourgeois propaganda or by discussions in the press. In the present month we will be following articles on Lenin’s April Theses, the July days, the Octo- ber insurrection, and so on; and we intend to keep on providing analyses over a long period, precisely because the drama of the revolution and counter- revolution lasted for a number of years and was not limited to Russia, but had its echo all across the globe, from Berlin to Shanghai, from Turin to Patagonia, and from the Clyde to Seattle.

At the same time, we will be seeking to add to this collection with new articles which deal with themes that we have not yet touched upon in depth (such as the onslaught against the revolution by the ruling class at the time, the problem of “Red Terror”, and so on); articles which respond to the current campaigns of capitalism against the revolutionary memory of the working class; and articles which will look at the conditions for the proletarian revolution today – at what they have in common with the time of the Russian revolution, but also and above all at what significant changes have intervened over the past 100 years.

The aim of this publishing venture is not sim- ply to “celebrate” or “commemorate” long-past historical events. It is to defend the view that the proletarian revolution is even more of a necessity today than it was in 1917. Faced with the hor- rors of the first imperialist world war, the revo- lutionaries of the time concluded that capitalism had entered upon a new epoch of decline, poisoning humanity with the alternative between socialism and barba- rism; and the even greater horrors – symbolised in places like Auschwitz and Hiroshima – that followed the defeat of the first attempts to make the socialist revolution stably confirmed their diagnosis. A century later, capitalism’s continued existence poses a mortal threat to the very sur- vival of humanity.

Writing from her prison cell in 1918, and on the eve of the revolution in Germany, Rosa Luxem- burg expressed her fundamental solidarity with the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party, despite all her very serious criticisms of the er- rors of the Bolsheviks, in particular the policy of the Red Terror. Her words are as relevant to our own future as they were to the future she herself confronted:

“What is in order is to distinguish the essential

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1. Eisenstein was a Russian film-maker of the early 20th century, who has had a major influence in the history of cinema. He was a pioneer of montage and was well-versed in criticising the contemporary world.


3. https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/03/russian-revolution/ch08.htm
British capitalism struggling to limit the damage

The contradictions in the British government’s approach to Brexit are now marked by a paradox: on the one hand, its priorities are always to reduce air transport, gas markets, financial services, land transport (excluding rail), insurance, and banking and market infrastructure. Lower prices in some cases, steel construction, oil and gas, telecoms, post, environmental services, water, medical, and education. This is done by a brutal trade war. The British bourgeoisie can only invest money to the advantage of “independence”. The British bourgeoisie will employ any and every manoeuvre it can. It will blame the EU for every difficulty. But it is not starting from a position of strength.

Adapting to crisis

The British bourgeoisie has historically been noted for its ability of political apparatus to act in defence of the interests of the national capital. The result of the referendum showed a growing loss of cohesion within the ruling class, but it also showed the capacity of the British ruling class to adapt its difficulties. This was demonstrated after the referendum when May was quite evidently “selected” as Tory leader to resolve a temporary government crisis. Similarly, subsequent legal and parliamentary battles, and the role of the media, have to be seen in this context. The case brought against the government, to stop it acting on its own and insisting on a role for parliament, produced a wave of populist media rage against the left. This was to show that the government, by branding them as “Enemies of the People”, while the liberal media defended the “independence of the judiciary”.

The British bourgeoisie was being taught as a “constitutional” crisis soon subsided. When the government’s appeal to the Supreme Court was also dismissed there was far less hysteria. The House of Commons performed its duty and rubber stamped the proposals of the executive, despite the majority of MPs voting against them. This is a normal situation in the EU. The Labour Party was particularly helpful. Jeremy Corbyn imposed a three-line whip on MPs to back the government. There is a long tradition of cooperation in the Labour Party. Corbyn was loyal supported by the Trianonists of Socialist Worker (9/2/17) “He had rigorously insisted that Labour agree to a bill that would process the leaving of the European Union”. For all Corbyn’s attempts to pose as a “radical” he remains very conventional political in the battle in Brussels, as he said in a speech on 10 January 2017. “Labour is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle”. Labour principles start from the defence of British capital and the manoeuvres of bourgeois democracy.

The House of Commons, a government source said “If the Lords don’t want to face an overwhelming public call to be abolished they must respect the democratic wishes of the British people and get on and protect democracy and pass this bill”. If the Lords don’t want to face an overwhelming public call to be abolished they must respect the democratic wishes of the British people and get on and protect democracy and pass this bill. If the Lords don’t want to face an overwhelming public call to be abolished they must respect the democratic wishes of the British people and get on and protect democracy and pass this bill.

The Cameron government had no measures prepared. Right after the referendum performed its duty and rubber stamped the proposals of the executive, despite the majority of MPs voting against them. But it mostly achieved, and which need more serious backing. The contradictions in the British government’s approach to Brexit are now marked by a paradox: on the one hand, its priorities are always to reduce air transport, gas markets, financial services, land transport (excluding rail), insurance, and banking and market infrastructure. Lower prices in some cases, steel construction, oil and gas, telecoms, post, environmental services, water, medical, and education. This is done by a brutal trade war. The British bourgeoisie can only invest money to the advantage of “independence”. The British bourgeoisie will employ any and every manoeuvre it can. It will blame the EU for every difficulty. But it is not starting from a position of strength.

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4 Populism

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Their leaders. The other candidates, whether they concerned themselves with the fate of the old political party structures, the neo-libels or the Tea Party movement, had all been discredited by their participation in or support for the Iraq war, which spearheaded that which preceded that of Obama. That fact, in the face of the economic and financial crisis of 2007/8, a fact which the mainstream media helped to galvanize millions of small property owners and aspiring small property owners – who in many cases lost not only home and savings at one go – while bailing out banks with taxpayer funds, had greatly contributed to being able to traditional Republican voters. Moreover, none of the other candidates had anything else to propose. It was a question of the same of what had not prevented the 2008 disaster.

Indeed, the rebellion of the traditional Republican voters directed itself not only against their leadership, but against some of the traditional “values” of the party. In this way, the candidate of Trump was not only made possible, it was actually imposed on the party leadership. Of course, the latter could have prevented it – but only at the risk of estranging the voters from their mass basis and even of dividing the party. This explains why the attempts to foil Trump were but half-hearted and ineffective. In the end the “mainstream” was obliged to try and make “a deal” with the intruder from the East Coast.

The dilemma of the established political parties

The Democratic Party is a country founded by settlers and populated by waves of immigration. The integration of the different ethnic and religious groups and interests into a single nation is the historically evolving task of the existing constitutionals and political system. A particular challenge for such a system is the involvement of the leaders of the different immigrant communities in government, since each new immigrant wave begins at the bottom of the social ladder and seeks, “to climb up”. The alleged American melting pot is in reality a highly complicated system of (not always peaceful) co-existence between different groups.

Historically, alongside institutions such as the religious organisations, the formation of criminal groups in the United States created new political groups to gain access to power. The American bourgeoisie has a long experience with the integration of the best racketeers from the underworld into the ruling elite. This historical fact has not changed: the father a gangster, the son a lawyer or a politician, the grandson or granddaughter a philanthropist and patron of the arts. The advantage of this system is that the violence it relied on was not overtly political. This made them compatible with the two-party system where the Italian, Irish or Jewish vote went depended on the given constellation and what Trump would offer. They were considered a foreign element when they stake a claim for candidacy at the Oval Office. Whether until the 2008 crisis or Barack Obama, contemporary Democratic presidents combine a social welfare touch with fundamentally neo-liberal economic policies. A liberal intervention state economic policy of a strong “Keynesian” character (such as that of FD Roosevelt before and during World War II) is as anachronistic to the Democratic presidential leadership today. This explains why Sanders never made a secret of the fact that on some issues his policies are closer to those of Trump than to those of Hillary Clinton. After the Trump election, Sanders immediately offered him his support in the implementation of his “insurance for all” policy.

However, as opposed to what happened to the Republicans, the revolt in the Democratic Party was successfully crushed, and Clinton safely nominated instead of Sanders. This succeeded, not only because the DP is the better organised and controlled of the two parties, but also because the elite of this party had been less discredited than its Republican counterpart.

But paradoxically, the success of the party leadership only paved the way for its defeat at the presidential elections. By eliminating Sanders, the Democrats set aside the only candidate who had a good chance of winning. The DP is too late that Trump would be the adversary, and that they were underestimating his electoral potential. The DP is the more extreme in the degree to which Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. This was above all due to her image as representative of Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. This was above all due to her image as representative of Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. This was above all due to her image as representative of Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. This was above all due to her image as representative of Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. This was above all due to her image as representative of Hillar

The problem of all the Republican candidates who tried to oppose Trump, and then of Hillary Clinton herself was discredited. But the problem of the vote for Trump was not just a new version of the old nationalism. Trump’s Americanism is of a new kind. It contains the clear admission that America is no longer “as great” as it used to be. It is not even able to prevent the rise of China. Militarily it has suffered a series of more or less humiliating reversals. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, America is a power discredited. It remains economically and above all militarily and technologically by far the leading country. But not only this. America is not an exception in an otherwise flourishing world. Its decline has come to symbolise that of capitalism as a whole. The vote for Trump is an expression of an economic and political crisis, which the DP is unable to reverse it.

In the face of this decline, and also of growing class, racial, religious and ethnic divisions, Trump wants to unite the capitalist nation behind its ruling class in the name of a new American “Great Again”.

The Trump election and the crumbling of the capitalist world order

Trump wants to reverse the process of what is called “globalisation”. But this is not possible. America is the only country whose internal market is so big that it can threaten its rivals with protectionist measures on such a scale. The summit of the rationality of the policy of Trump is its calculation that the political leaders of his mass base are less brain dead than he is, i.e. that they will not risk a protectionist trade war. But should his measures succeed in reviving the American market, the result can be a fragmentation of the world market comparable to what happened during the Great Depression.

The second example is NATO. Already the Obama administration had begun to pressure the European “partners” to bear a greater brunt of the costs of maintaining the alliance in Europe and beyond. The difference now is that Trump is ready to threaten the disbanding or side-lining of NATO if Washington’s will is not respected. This is not only because NATO is not a threat, but also because it was set up as a NATO tracing of Russia’s. One of the main problems of the Russian economy today is that it has to pay a “protection” fee to the US government, a fee to a Stalinist command regime to a perfectly functioning capitalist order. This transformation was, during the Nixon administration, the result of a Putin regime of preventing strategically important raw materials or the armaments industry being bought up by foreign capital. The necessary process of privatisation was done half-heartedly, so that a large part of Russian industry still functions on the basis of an administrative allocation of resources.

During a second phase, the plan of Putin was to tackle the privatisation and modernisation of the economy in collaboration with the European bourgeoisie, first and foremost with Germany. But this plan was successfully foiled by Washington, essentially through its policy of economic sanctions against Russia. Although the occasion of these sanctions was Moscow’s annexation policy towards the Ukraine, it additionally aimed at preventing Russia from becoming a major power of the economies of both Russia and of Germany.

But this success – perhaps the main achievement of the Obama presidency towards Europe – has negative consequences for the world economy as a whole. The establishment of more classical private property in Russia would create a cluster of new credit-worthy economic players who can vouch for the loans they take with land, raw materials or anything else. To control the economic difficulties of the world economic order, where even in China, the economy is growth is slowing down, can capital afford to renounce such “deals”?

Not according to Trump. His idea is not that Germany and Europe, but America itself should become Putin’s “partner in transformation”. According to Trump (who of course also hopes for lucrative deals for himself), the Russian bourgeoisie, which is obviously unable to tackle its modernisation on its own, can choose between three possible partners, the third being the Chinese. If the latter are the biggest threat to America, it is vital that America should have all three.

However, none of Trump’s projects have provoked such bitter resistance within the US ruling class as the two World Wars. The election of Trump and his arrival in office was dominated by the joint attempts of the “intellectual and political” classes to prevent the Obama administration from sabotage the envisaged rapprochement with Moscow. Here they all think...
that the willingness and ability of the US to target minorities and associate itself with the rest of the world had decreased considerably. The US is now a country with a much more isolationist and protectionist stance, which is reflected in its recent foreign policy. This is partly due to the rise of right-wing populism in the US, which has been gaining momentum in recent years. The US is now more likely to act in its own interests, rather than considering the interests of its allies or the rest of the world. This is reflected in its recent decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement that was aimed at promoting free trade and investment in the region. The US is now more likely to pursue its own economic interests, rather than considering the interests of its trading partners. This is reflected in its recent decision to impose tariffs on imports from China, which is seen as a way to protect US jobs and industries.
The first part of our reply to Link’s ICC frustration is that there is no balance sheet of its existence. The second part concentrates on the problem of the Fraction and the ICC’s inability to set out an orientation for future activities. The ICC appears as an organisation statement that significant changes to the revolutionary programme have to be made at the current congress. It changes the way the organisation is to behave in the coming period. Yet it has been ignored by sympathisers and has not been elaborated by the ICC (organisations) and the ICC recognizes the inefficiency of its position and analyses. More: one would think surely that many of those who disagree with the ICC on an important question would want to express themselves publicly on the subject as you have done.

Is this a political point of view the silence about our self-critique is surprising and regrettable, from the vantage point of the past for our decades, such indifference has not been that unusual. Ever since the re-emergence of the left communist milieu internationally since the end of the 1970s, the ICC has been a commonplace which it has, if it had occurred, despite the disagreements within it, would have strengthened this whole milieu and accelerated the process of making revolution possible. But I don’t think much more than it actually has. In hindsight the three Conferences of the Communist Fraction in the ICC have been the goal of confronting these often profound disagreements at the necessary theoretical and political level; the ICC’s statements on current political situations and on the working class facing the working class, was a high water mark. The collapse of these Conferences means that the period of counter-revolution has ended 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 back- turn to the death of response to the 40 year self-critique of the ICC.6

The reasons for this indifference are also related to the interpretation of the responsibilities of the ICC.6

2) It’s safe to say that the article ‘ICC as a fraction’ has left Link confused. He asks whether it means that the ICC is completely changing course. If so what will be its new tasks? Will it mean an end to intervention and reorganisation? Does it mean that the working class is now defeated as far as the ICC are concerned? Has the historic course therefore changed fundamentally? Let’s try and clarify some of these questions.

The article ‘Report on the role of the ICC as a fraction’ was written in the middle of the year 2002 and published in the final issue of the ICC press at the end of the year. The ICC’s perspective is that of a revolutionary organisation which, Link doesn’t express himself on these questions of the ICC as a fraction, and the ICC is entitled to say what it means that the ICC is completely changing course if it so wishes. An end to intervention would mean that the working class has been completely defeated and there is no need for intervention any more. The ICC’s statement is that the working class has not been defeated.

In response to Link’s points about the balance sheet of the ICC’s 21st Congress’ the comrade is surprised by the dearth of responses from others who, he assures us, have read the article and is dark about the article. The ICC’s view is in line with the original vision of the ICC in order to respond to the new problems that have arisen. Is this not one of the guiding parts of the Marxist method to judge new situations according to fundamental principles, means the new circumstances with the facts of the past and thus developing those principles?

This is why the article recapitulates the history of the ICC in a particular way and the question ‘fraction of party’ is an important part of this recapitulation. It would seem perhaps that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective’. The ICC has simply avoided explaining or clarifying the meaning of the term ‘fraction’ at the top of our webpages and then announcing that Link is not that interested in ‘long historical perspective'.

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February 1917: The workers’ councils open the way to the proletarian revolution

The decisive activity of the Bolsheviks had the central axis of developing consciousness in the capacity, based on confidence in the masses’ capacity for bad also drilling analysis, confidence in the capacity for unity and self-organisation. The Bolsheviks never pretended to make the masses submit to a preconceived “plan of action”, raising the masses as one raises an army. “The chief strength of Lenin lay in his understanding the inner logic of the movement, and guiding his policy by it. He did not impose his plan on the masses: he helped the masses to recognize and realise their own plan.” (Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution, “Reforming the Party”).

From September the Bolsheviks clearly posed the question of the inscription in the assemblies of the workers and soldiers, “The insurrection was decided, so to speak, for a fixed date, the 25th of October. It was not fixed by a secret meeting, but openly and publicly, and the triumphant revolution took place precisely on the 25th of October” (ibid). It raised an unequalled enthusiasm among the workers of the entire world, becoming the “beacon” which lit the future for all the exploited.

Today, the destruction of the political and economic power of the ruling class is still an imperative necessity. The dictatorship of the proletariat, organised in sovereign councils, remains the only way to open the way to a communist society. This is what proletarians need to re-appropriate in the light of the experience of 1917. SB (Originally published in WR 203, March 1997, and published again in WR 301, February 2007).

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The conditions since 1989, a period of the de-composition of world capitalism, has created still more difficulties for the advance of the class struggle beyond a defensive posture, indeed the only way to open the way to a communist society. This is what proletarians need to re-appropriate in the light of the experience of 1917. SB

Contemporary life

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February 1917: The workers' councils open the way to the proletarian revolution

The bourgeoisie has made no mistake in quantifying the working class in its Albert Hall. The mistake lies in the Russian revolution in 1917. 100 years after the soviets took power in Russia, the story of the workers' councils continues to sing the same hymn to the virtues of bourgeois parliamentary ‘democracy’ and spew out the works falsifications about the reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. In fact, despite a whole number of quibbles, these historians of the order have not unexpectedly presented the February 1917 revolution as a movement for ‘democracy’, hijacked by the Bolshevik ‘coup d’état’. February 1917 was an authentic ‘demo- cratic’ wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, a communist revolution in an international revolutionary period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. It was the section in Britain of the ICC launched by the Russian workers since 1915 in February 1917: first episode in the world proletarian revolution. In Britain, the workers of St Petersburg launched an insurrection in response to the historic problem presented by the world war. Started by the textile workers – overcoming the hesitations of revolutionary organisations - the strike involved almost all the factories in the capital in 3 days. On the 25th there were 240,000 workers who had stopped work and, far from remaining passive on their shop floors, they went out. Street demonstrations proliferated where their slogans, in the first hours, demanded ‘bread’, soon reinforced by the calls ‘down with the czar’, ‘down with autocracy’.

On the evening of the 27th February, the insurrection, lead by the armed proletariat, reigned supreme in the capital, while strikes and workers' councils in the factories, smelters, in the factories, etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or political, were mutinies, mass desertions, fraternisation etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or political, were mutinies, mass desertions, fraternisation and sabotage and destroy the soviets. These latter, of whom the majority had passed into the bourgeoisie during the war, enjoyed an enormous confidence among the workers at the start of the February revolution. They were natu- rally the chief obstacles that the Bolsheviks had to overcome in order to take power.

The Russian revolutionary movement was not the simple passive product of exception- al circumstances, but an expression of a collective consciousness. The movement of the councils itself carried the means for the futurology of the masses. The workers' councils mingled the economic and political as- pects of the struggle against the established order. As Trotsky wrote: “in that lies its strength. Every week brings something new to the masses. Every two months creates an epoch. At the end of February, the insurrection. At the end of April, a demon- stration of the armed workers and soldiers in Petrograd. At the beginning of July, a new assault. At the end of August, Kornilov's attempt at an overthrow beethoven over the masses. At the end of October, compact of power by the Bolsheviks.

The workers' councils: specific organ of the revolution

The workers' councils, 1917-23. The role of the Bolshevik Party in the workers' councils

Although the Russian proletariat gave itself the means for its combat by forming the workers’ councils, as early as February 1917 it encountered an extremely dangerous situation. The forces of the international bourgeoisie immediately attempted to turn the situation to its advantage. Unable to crush the movement in blood, they tried to orient it towards bourgeois ‘democratic’ objectives. On the one hand they formed an official Provisional Government with the aim of continuing the war. On the other, the soviets were invaded by Menshevik and Social Revolutionaries straight away. These latter, of whom the majority had passed into the bourgeoisie during the war, enjoyed an enormous confidence among the workers at the start of the February revolution. They were naturally the chief obstacles that the Bolsheviks had to overcome in order to take power.

Even if the workers, at least those in Petrograd, were convinced that only the power of the sovi- ets would be able to respond to their aspirations and although they saw that their demands were not being taken into consideration, elsewhere and, among the soldiers, there was still a strong belief in the ‘coalitionists’, in the partisans of a so-called bourgeois revolution.