



workers of the world, unite!

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world revolution

Covid-19 pandemic

Generalised capitalist barbarism or world proletarian revolution



Thousands are dying every day, the hospitals are on their knees, there is a horrible “triage” between the young and the old among the sick, health workers are exhausted, infected, and some are dying. Everywhere a lack of medical equipment. Governments involved in a terrible competition in the name of the “war against the virus” and the “national economic interest”. Financial markets in free fall, surreal heists in which states are robbing each other of deliveries of masks. Tens of millions of workers thrown into the hell of unemployment, a torrent of lies from the state and its media... this is the awful spectacle offered by the world of today. This pandemic represents one of the most serious health catastrophes since the Spanish flu of 1918-19, even though, since that time, science has made extraordinary steps forward. Why such a disaster? How did it come to this?

We are told that this virus is different, that it’s much more contagious than the others, that its effects are much more pernicious and deadly. All that is probably true but it doesn’t explain the scale of the catastrophe. The underlying responsibility for this planet-wide chaos, for the hundreds of thousands of deaths, lies with capitalism itself. Production for profit and not for human need, the permanent search for cost effectiveness at the price of ferocious exploitation of the working class, the increasingly violent attacks on the living conditions of the exploited, the frenzied competition between companies and states – it is these basic characteristics of the capitalist system which have come together to culminate in the present disaster.

The criminal negligence of capitalism

Those who run this society, the bourgeois class with its states and its media, tell us with a concerned air that this epidemic could not have been predicted. This is a lie on the same level as those put forward by the climate change deniers. Scientists have been warning about the threat of pandemics like Covid-19 for a long time now. But governments have

refused to listen to them. They even refused to listen to a report by the CIA in 2009 (“What will tomorrow’s world be like?”) which describes with startling accuracy the characteristics of the present pandemic. Why such blindness on the part of the states and the bourgeois class they serve? For a very simple reason: investments have to produce profits, and as quickly as possible. Investing in the future of humanity doesn’t pay, and just depresses share prices. Investments also have to reinforce the positions of each national bourgeoisie against others on the imperialist arena. If the crazy sums which are invested into military research and spending had been devoted to the health and well-being of the populations, such an epidemic would never have been able to develop. But instead of taking measures against this predictable health disaster, governments have not stopped attacking health systems, both at the level of research and of technical and human resources.

If people are dying like flies today, at the very heart of the most developed countries, it is in the first place because everywhere governments have cut budgets destined for research into new diseases. Thus in May 2018 Donald Trump got rid of a special unit of the National Security Council, composed of eminent experts and created to fight against pandemics. But Trump’s attitude is only a caricature of what all the leaders have been doing. Thus, scientific research into the coronavirus were abandoned everywhere 15 years ago because of the development of a vaccine was judged not to be “cost effective”!

Similarly, It is totally disgusting to see the bourgeois leaders and politicians, on the right and the left, weeping over the saturation of the hospitals and the catastrophic conditions in which health workers are forced to work, when the bourgeois states have been methodically imposing the norms of profit over the last 50 years, and particularly since the great recession of 2008. Everywhere they have been limiting access to health services, reducing the number of hospital beds, and intensifying the work load of health workers. And what are we to make of the generalised scarcity of masks and other protective garments, disinfectant gel, testing equipment, etc? Over the last few years, most states have got rid of stocks of these vital items in order to save money. In the last few months, they have not been anticipating the rapid spread of Covid-19, even though, since November 2019, some of them have been claiming that masks are of no use to non-carers – in order to hide their criminal irresponsibility.

And what about chronically deprived regions of the world like the continents of Africa or Latin America? In Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 10 million inhabitants can count on 50 ventilators! In Central Africa, leaflets were given out giving advice on how to wash your hands when the population doesn’t have enough water to drink! Everywhere the same cry of distress: “we lack everything in the face of this pandemic!”

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Capitalism is the war of each against all

The fierce rivalry between each state in the world arena is blocking the minimum cooperation to contain the virus. When it first got going, the Chinese bourgeoisie judged it more important to do all it could to hide the gravity of the situation, in order to protect its economy and its reputation. The state didn't hesitate to persecute the doctor who tried to sound the alarm, and left him to die. Even the semblance of international regulation which the bourgeoisie has set up to deal with the lack of equipment has fallen apart: the World Health Organisation has been unable to impose its directives while the European Union has been incapable of introducing concerted measures. This division is considerably aggravating the chaos and the loss of control over the evolution of the pandemic. The dynamic of "every man for himself" and the exacerbation of generalised competition have become the dominant feature of the reactions of the ruling class.

The "war of the masks", as the media call it, is an edifying example of this. Each state is grabbing the material it can through speculation, bidding wars, and even out-and-out theft. The US has been nabbing plane-loads of Chinese masks promised to France. France has confiscated cargoes of masks heading by air for Sweden. The Czech Republic has seized at its customs barriers ventilators and masks destined for Italy. Germany has made masks heading for Canada disappear. This is the true face of the "great democracies": thieves and gangsters of the worst kind!

Unprecedented attacks on the exploited

For the bourgeoisie "profits are worth more than our lives" as striking car workers shouted in Italy. In all countries, it delayed as long as possible putting in place measures of confinement to protect the population in order to keep national production going at any cost. It was not the threat of a sharply rising death toll which in the end led to the lock-downs. The many imperialist massacres that have been going on for over a century, fought in the name of the national interest, have definitively proved the contempt that the ruling class has for the lives of the exploited. No, our rulers don't care about our lives! Especially when the virus has the "advantage", as far as the bourgeoisie is concerned, of mowing down the sick and the elderly, those it sees as "unproductive". Letting the virus spread and do its "natural" work in the name of "herd immunity" was actually the initial choice of Boris Johnson and other leaders. In each country, what tipped the scales in favour of the lock-downs was the fear of the disorganisation of the economy and, in certain countries, the threat of social disorder, the mounting anger in response to the negligence and the rising death tolls. What's more, even if they involve half of humanity, the social isolation measures are in many cases a total farce: millions of people have been obliged to crowd together every day on trains, tubes and buses, in the factories and supermarkets. And already the bourgeoisie is looking to end the lock-downs as quickly as possible, at the very time when the pandemic is hitting hardest, trying to find ways to provoke the least discontent by sending workers back to work sector by sector, firm by firm.

The bourgeoisie is perpetuating and planning new attacks, even more brutal conditions of exploitation. The pandemic has already thrown millions of workers into unemployment: ten million in three weeks in the US. Many of them, who have irregular, precarious or temporary jobs, will be deprived of any income. Others, who have some meagre social benefits to live on, are faced with no longer being able to pay rent and the costs of medical care. The economic ravages have started to accelerate the world recession which was already looming: explosion in the food prices, massive lay-offs, wage cuts, growing job insecurity etc. All states are adopting measures of "flexibility" by calling for sacrifices in the name of "national unity in the war against the virus".

The national interest that the bourgeoisie is invoking today is not our interest. It's this same defence of the national economy and this same generalised competition which has, in the past, led it to carry out budget cuts and attacks against the living conditions of the exploited. Tomorrow, it will serve up the same lies when, following the economic devastation caused by the pandemic, it will call on the exploited to pull their belts in further, to accept even more poverty and exploitation. This pandemic is an expression of the decadent character of the capitalist mode of production, of the many expressions of the rotting of present

day society, along with the destruction of the environment, pollution and climate change, the proliferation of imperialist wars and massacres, the inexorable descent into poverty of a growing portion of humanity, the number of people obliged to become migrants or refugees, the rise of populist ideology and religious fanaticism, etc (see our text "Theses on the decomposition of capitalism" on our internet site: https://en.internationalism.org/ir/107_decomposition) It's an indicator of the dead-end that capitalism has reached, showing the direction in which this system is leading humanity: towards chaos, misery, barbarism, destruction and death.

Only the proletariat can change the world

Certain governments and media argue that the world will never be the same as it was before this pandemic, that the lessons of the disaster will be drawn, that in the end states will move towards a more humane and better managed form of capitalism. We heard the same refrain after the 2008 recession: with hand on their hearts, the states and leaders of the world declared "war on rogue finance", promising that the sacrifices demanded to get out of the crisis would be rewarded. You only have to look at the growing inequality in the world to recognise that these promises to "reform" capitalism were just lies to make us swallow a new deterioration in our living conditions.

The exploiting class cannot change the world and put human lives and social needs above the pitiless laws of its economy: capitalism is a system of exploitation, in which a ruling minority draws its profits and its privileges from the work of the majority. The key to the future, the promise of another world, a truly human world without nations or exploitation, lies solely in the international unity and solidarity of the workers in struggle!

The wave of spontaneous solidarity within our class in response to the intolerable situation inflicted on the health workers is being derailed by the governments and politicians of the whole world into the campaign of applause on doorsteps and balconies. Of course this applause will warm the hearts of the workers who, with courage and dedication, in dramatic working conditions, are looking after the sick and saving lives. But the solidarity of our class, of the exploited, can't be reduced to a five minute round of applause. It means, in the first place, denouncing the governments of all countries, no matter their political colouring. It means demanding masks and all the necessary protective equipment. It means, when it's possible, going on strike and affirming that, as long as health workers don't have the material they need, as long as they are being hurled towards their deaths with uncovered faces, the exploited who are not in the hospitals will not work.

Today, while the lock-down lasts, we can't wage massive struggles against this murderous system. We can't gather together to express our anger and our solidarity through massive struggles, through strikes and demonstrations. Because of the lock-down, but not only that. Also because our class has to recover its real source of strength, which it has shown so many times in history but which it has since forgotten: the potential for uniting in struggle, for developing massive movements against the ruling class and its monstrous system.

The strikes that broke out in the automobile sector in Italy or in supermarkets in France, in front of New York hospitals or those in the north of France, the enormous indignation of workers refusing to serve as "virus fodder", herded together without masks, gloves or soap, for the sole benefit of their exploiters, can today only be scattered reactions and cut off from the strength of an entire united class. Nonetheless, they show that the workers are not prepared to accept, like some kind of inevitability, the criminal irresponsibility of those who exploit us.

It's this perspective of class battles that we have to prepare for. Because after Covid-19 there will be the world economic crisis, massive unemployment, new "reforms" which are nothing but further sacrifices. So, right now, we must prepare our future struggles. How? By discussing, exchanging experiences and ideas, on different internet channels or forums, on the phone, as much as possible. Understanding that the greatest scourge is not Covid-19 but capitalism, that the solution is not to rally behind the killer state but to stand against it; that hope resides not in the promises of this or that politician but in the development of workers' solidarity in the struggle; that the only alternative to capitalist barbarism is the world revolution!

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE CLASS STRUGGLE!

International Communist Current, 10.4.20

Covid-19: despite all the obstacles, the class struggle forges its future

Before the tidal wave of the Covid-19 crisis swept across the planet, the struggles of the working class in France, Finland, the US and elsewhere were indications of a new mood in the proletariat, of an unwillingness to bow down before the demands imposed by a mounting economic crisis. In France in particular, we could discern signs of a recovery of class identity that has been eroded by decades of capitalist decomposition, by the rise of a populist current which falsifies the real divisions in society and which, in France, has taken to the streets wearing a Yellow Vest.

In this sense, the Covid-19 pandemic could not have come at a worse time for the struggle of the proletariat: just as it begins to pour onto the streets, to come together in demonstrations to resist economic attacks whose origins in the capitalist crisis are hard to conceal, the majority of the working class has had little choice but to retreat back to the individual household, to avoid any large gatherings, to “self-isolate” under the watching eye of a fully-empowered state apparatus which has been able to issue loud calls for “national unity” in the face of an invisible enemy which – we are told - does not discriminate between rich and poor, boss and worker.

The difficulties facing the working class are real and profound, and we will examine them further in this article. But what is in some ways remarkable is the fact that, despite the omnipresent fear of contagion, despite the apparent omnipotence of the capitalist state, the signs of class combativity that we saw in the winter have not simply evaporated but, in an initial phase and faced with the shocking negligence and unpreparedness of the bourgeoisie, we saw very widespread defensive movements of the working class. Workers across the world have refused to go like “lambs to the slaughter” but have waged a determined struggle in defence of their health, their very lives, demanding adequate safety measures or the closing down of enterprises which are not engaged in essential production (such as car plants).

The main characteristics of these struggles are as follows.

They have taken place on a global scale, given the global nature of the pandemic, but one of their most important elements is that they have been more evident in the capitalist heartlands, particularly in the countries which have been hit hardest by the disease : in Italy, for example, the Internationalist Communist Tendency mentions spontaneous strikes in Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Puglia¹. It was the Italian factory workers in particular who first raised the slogan “*we are not lambs to the slaughter*”. In Spain, strikes at Mercedes, FIAT, Balay domestic appliances; workers at Telepizza, on strike against victimisation of workers who did not want to risk their lives delivering pizzas, and further protests by delivery workers in Madrid. Perhaps most important of all – not least because it challenges the image of an American working class that has rallied uncritically behind the demagoguery of Donald Trump - there have been widespread struggles in the USA: strikes at FIAT in Indiana, Warren Trucks, by bus drivers in Detroit and Birmingham Alabama, in ports, restaurants, in food distribution, sanitation, construction; strikes at Amazon (which has been hit by strikes in quite a few other countries as well), Whole Foods, Instacart, Walmart, FedEx, etc. We have also seen a large number of rent strikes in the US. This is a form of struggle which, while not automatically involving proletarians, is also by no means alien to the traditions of the class (we could cite, for example, the Glasgow rent strikes that were an integral part of the workers’ struggles

1. <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-03-14/italy-we-re-not-lambs-to-the-slaughter-class-struggle-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>



during World War One, or the Merseyside rent strike in 1972 which accompanied the first international wave of struggles after 1968). And in the US in particular there is a real threat of eviction hanging over many of the “locked down” sectors of the working class.

In France and Britain, such movements have been less widespread, but we have seen unofficial walk-outs by postal workers and by builders, warehouse workers and bin collectors in Britain and, in France, strikes at the Saint Nazaire shipyards. Amazon in Lille and Montelimar, at ID logistics... In Latin America, examples include Chile (Coca Cola), port workers in Argentina and Brazil, packers in Venezuela. In Mexico, “*Strikes have spread across the Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez, which borders El Paso, Texas, involving hundreds of maquiladora workers demanding the closure of non-essential factories, which have been kept open despite the growing death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic, including 13 employees at the US-owned Lear car seat plant. The strikes... follow similar actions by workers at the border cities of Matamoros, Mexicali, Reynosa and Tijuana*”². In Turkey, protest strikes at the Sarar textile factory (against the advice of the unions), Galataport shipyard, and by post and telegraph workers. In Australia, strikes by port and distribution workers. The list could easily be extended.

A number of the strikes have been spontaneous, such as in Italy, in the US car plants and Amazon centres, and the unions have been widely criticised and sometimes frontally opposed for their open collaboration with management. According to an article on libcom, which provides a broad panorama on recent struggles in the US³: “*Workers at Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights (SHAP) and Jefferson North (JNAP) assembly plants in Metro Detroit took matters into their own hands last*

2. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/04/20/ciud-a20.html>

3. <http://libcom.org/news/march-25-workers-launch-wave-wildcat-strikes-trump-pushes-return-work-amidst-exploding-coro>

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night and this morning and forced a shutdown of production to halt the spread of coronavirus.

The work stoppages began at Sterling Heights last night, only hours after the United Auto Workers and the Detroit automakers reached a rotten deal to keep plants open and operating during the global pandemic...The same day, scores of workers at the Lear Seating plant in Hammond, Indiana refused to work, forcing the shutdown of the parts factory and the nearby Chicago Assembly Plant". The article also contains an interview with an autoworker:

"The UAW should be actually fighting for us to get off of work. The union and the company care more about making trucks than about everybody's health. I feel like they aren't going to do anything unless we take action. We have got to band together. They can't fire us all".

These movements are on a basic class terrain: around working conditions (demand for adequate safety equipment) but also sick pay, unpaid wages, against sanctions against workers who refused to work in unsafe conditions, etc. They show a refusal of sacrifice which is in continuity with the capacity of the class to resist the drive towards war, an underlying factor in the world situation since the revival of class struggles in 1968.

Health workers, although they have shown an extraordinary sense of responsibility which is an element of proletarian solidarity, have also voiced their discontent with their conditions, their anger with the hypocritical appeals and praise by governments, even if this has mainly taken the form of individual protests and statements⁴; but there have been collective actions, including strikes, in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Papua New Guinea, and demonstrations by nurses in New York.

The pandemic crisis as a blow to the class struggle

But this proletarian sense of responsibility, which also prompts millions to follow the rules of self-isolation, shows that the majority of the working class accepts the reality of this disease, even in country like the US which is the "heartland" of various forms of denialism about the pandemic. Thus the struggles that we have seen have necessarily been limited either to "essential" workers who are fighting for safer working conditions – and these categories are bound to remain a minority of the class, however vital their role – or by workers who very early on have questioned whether their work was really necessary, such as the autoworkers in Italy and the US; and thus their central demand was to be sent home (on company or state pay rather than being made redundant, as many have). But this demand, however necessary, could only involve a kind of tactical retreat in the struggle, rather than its intensification or extension. There have been attempts – eg among the Amazon workers in North Carolina – to hold struggle meetings online, to picket while observing safe distances, and so on, but there is no avoiding the fact that conditions of isolation and shut down pose a huge barrier to any immediate development of the struggle.

And in conditions of isolation it is harder to resist the gigantic barrage of propaganda and ideological obfuscation.

Hymns to national unity are being sung by the media every day, based on the idea that the virus is an enemy which does not discriminate: in the UK the fact that Boris Johnson and Prince Charles were infected by the virus is presented as the proof of this⁵. The reference to war, the spirit of the "blitz" during World War 2 (itself the product of a major propaganda exercise aimed at hiding any social discontent) is incessant

4. See for reactions by health workers in Belgium and France: <https://fr.internationalism.org/content/10107/covid-19-des-reactions-face-a-lincurie-bourgeoise>. The statement by the Belgian worker can be found in English on our internet forum, post 59: <https://en.internationalism.org/forum/16820/coronavirus-more-evidence-capitalism-has-become-danger-humanity>

5. This refrain has been to some extent undermined by growing evidence that the poorest elements in society, including ethnic minorities, are being much harder hit by the virus.

in the UK, notably with the plaudits given to a 100 year old air force veteran who raised millions for the NHS by completing 100 lengths of his large garden. In France, Macron has also presented himself as a war leader; in the US, Trump has been at pains to define Covid-19 as the "Chinese virus", diverting attention from his administration's woeful handling of the crisis and playing on the habitual theme of "America First". Everywhere – including in the Schengen area of the European Union – the closing of borders has been highlighted as the best means to contain the contagion. Governments of national unity have been formed where apparently insoluble division once reigned (as in Belgium), or opposition parties become more than ever "loyal" to the national "war effort".

The appeal to nationalism goes hand in hand with the portrayal of the state as the only force that can protect the citizens, whether through the vigorous enforcement of the lock down or in its kinder, gentler guise as the provider of aid to those in need, whether the trillions being handed out to maintain laid off workers as well as the self-employed whose businesses have had to close, or the health services administered by the state. In Britain, the "National Health Service" has long been a sacred icon of almost the whole bourgeoisie, but above all of the left which sees it as its special achievement, since it was introduced by the post-war Labour government which presents it as somehow outside the capitalist commodification of existence, despite the evil encroachments of private entrepreneurs. This vaunting of the NHS and similar institutions are supported by the weekly rituals of applause and the incessant praising of the health workers as heroes, above all by the same politicians who have been instrumental in running the health services into the ground in the last decade and more.

According to the left wing Labour politician Michael Foot, Britain was never closer to socialism than during the Second World War, and today, when the state has to set aside concerns about immediate profitability to keep society together, the old illusion that "we are all socialists today" (which was an idea commonly expressed by the ruling class during the revolutionary wave after 1917) has been given a new lease of life by massive spending sprees being imposed on governments by the Covid-19 crisis. The influential leftist philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in an interview on Youtube titled "Communism or barbarism"⁶, seems to imply that the bourgeoisie itself is now being obliged to treat money as a mere accounting mechanism, a form of labour time voucher, totally detached from actual value. In sum, the barbarians are becoming communists. In reality, the increasing separation of money from value is the sign of the complete exhaustion of the capitalist social relation and thus the necessity for communism, but the flouting of the laws of the market by the bourgeois state is anything but a step towards a higher mode of production: it is the last rampart of this decaying order. And it is the function of capitalism's left wing above all to conceal this from the working class, to divert it from its own path, which demands breaking out of the grip of the state and preparing its revolutionary destruction.

But in the age of populism the left does not have a monopoly on fake criticisms of the system. The undoubted reality that the state will everywhere use this crisis to ramp up its surveillance and control of the population – and thus the reality of a ruling class which ceaselessly "conspires" to maintain its class rule – is giving rise to a new crop of "conspiracy theories", according to which the real danger of Covid-19 is dismissed or denied outright: it is a "Scamdemic" backed by a sinister cabal of globalists to impose their agenda of "One World Government". And these theories, which are particularly influential in the US, are not limited to cyber space. The Trump faction in the US has been stirring the pot, claiming that there is evidence that Covid-19 escaped from a Wuhan laboratory – even if the US intelligence services have already ruled this out. China has responded with similar accusations against the US. There have also been large protests in the US demanding a return

6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXC1n8OexRU>

to work and an ending of the lock-down, egged on by Trump and often inspired by the ambient conspiracy theories (as well as by religious fantasies: the disease is real, but we can beat it with the power of prayer). There have also been some racist attacks on people from the far east, identified as being responsible for the virus. There is no doubt that such ideologies affect parts of the working class, particularly those who are not getting any kind of financial support from employers or the state, but the back-to-work demonstrations in the US seem to have been led mainly by petty bourgeois elements anxious to get their businesses running again. As we have seen, many workers have fought to go in the opposite direction!

This vast ideological offensive reinforces the objective atomisation, imposed by the lock-down, the fear that anyone outside your household could be a source of illness and death. And the fact that the lock-down will probably last for some time, that there will be no return to normal and that there may be further periods of confinement if the disease goes through a second wave, will tend to exacerbate the difficulties facing the working class. And we cannot afford to forget that these difficulties did not begin with the lock-down, but have a long history behind them, above all since the onset of the period of decomposition after 1989, which has seen a profound retreat both in combativity and consciousness, a growing loss of class identity, an exacerbation of the tendency towards “each for themselves” at every level. Thus the pandemic, as a clear product of the process of decomposition, marks a new stage in the process, an intensification of all its most characteristic elements⁷.

The necessity for political reflection and debate

Nevertheless, the Covid-19 crisis has also focused attention on the political dimension to an unprecedented degree: daily conversation as well as the incessant chatter of the media is almost entirely centred on the pandemic and the lock-down, the response of the governments, the plight of the health and other “essential” workers and the problems of day to day survival for a large part of the population as a whole. No doubt the market of ideas has to a large extent been cornered by the various forms of the dominant ideology, but there are still corners where a significant minority can pose fundamental questions about the nature of this society. The question of what is “essential” in social life, of who does the most vital work and yet is paid so miserably for it, the negligence of governments, the absurdity of national divisions in the face of a global pandemic, of what kind of world will we live in post-Covid: these are issues that cannot be completely hidden or diverted. And people are not entirely atomised: the locked in are using social media, internet forums, video or audio conferencing not only to continue wage labour or keep in touch with family and friends, but also to discuss the situation and ask questions about its real significance. Physically (if at the required social distance...) meeting residents from the apartment block or neighbourhood can also become an arena for discussion, even if we shouldn't confuse the weekly ritual of applause with real solidarity or local mutual aid groups with struggling against the system.

In France, a slogan that became popular was “*capitalism is the virus, revolution is the vaccine*”. In other words, minorities of the class are taking discussion and reflection to their logical conclusion. The “vanguard” of this process is made up of those elements, some of them very young, who have clearly understood that capitalism is totally bankrupt and that the only alternative for humanity is the world proletarian revolution – in other words, by those who are moving towards communist positions, and thus the tradition of the communist left. The appearance of this generation of people “in research” for communism poses the existing groups of the communist left with an immense responsibility in the process of constructing a communist organisation which will be

7. We have examined some of these difficulties in the class in various texts, most recently <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16707/report-class-struggle-formation-loss-and-re-conquest-proletarian-class-identity>

able to play a role in the future struggles of the proletariat.

The defensive struggles we have seen in the early stage of the pandemic, the process of reflection which has been going on during the lock-down, are indications of the intact potential of the class struggle, which may also be “locked down” for a considerable period but which in the longer term could mature to the point where it can express itself openly. The inability to re-integrate large numbers of those laid off at the height of the crisis, the necessity for the bourgeoisie to claw back the “gifts” it has been handing out in the interests of social stability, the new round of austerity which the ruling class will be obliged to impose: this will certainly be the reality of the next stage of the Covid-19 story, which is simultaneously a story of capitalism's historic economic crisis and its advancing decomposition. A story too of sharpening imperialist tensions, as various powers seek to use the Covid-19 crisis to further disrupt the global pecking order: in particular, there may be a new offensive by Chinese capitalism aimed at challenging the USA as the world's leading power. In any case, Trump's attempts to blame the pandemic on China already heralds an increasingly aggressive attitude on the part of the US. Workers will be asked to make sacrifices to “re-construct” the post-Covid world, and to defend the national economy against the threat from the outside.

Again we must caution against any immediatism here. A probable danger – given the current weakness in class identity and the growing misery affecting all layers of the world population – will be that the response to further attacks on living standards could take the form of inter-class, “popular” revolts in which workers don't appear as a distinct class with their own methods and demands. We saw a wave of such revolts prior to the lock-down and, even during the lock-down, they have already reappeared in the Lebanon and elsewhere, highlighting the fact that this kind of reaction is a particular problem in the more “peripheral” regions of the capitalist system. A recent UN report warned that parts of the world, especially in Africa and in war-ravaged countries like Yemen and Afghanistan, will experience famines of “biblical proportions” as a result of the pandemic crisis, and this will also tend to increase the danger of desperate reactions which offer no perspective⁸.

We also know that massive unemployment can, in an initial period, tend to paralyse the working class: the bourgeoisie can use it to discipline those at work and to create divisions between employed and unemployed, and it is in any case intrinsically harder to fight the closure of enterprises than it is to resist attacks on wages and conditions. And we know that, in periods of open economic crisis, the bourgeoisie will always look for alibis which get the capitalist system off the hook: in the early 70s, it was the “oil crisis”; in 2008 “the greedy bankers”. Today, if you've lost the job, it will be blamed on the virus. But these excuses are needed precisely because the economic crisis, and in particular mass unemployment, is an indictment of the capitalist mode of production, whose laws, in the end, prevent it from feeding its slaves.

More than ever, revolutionaries must be patient. As the Communist Manifesto puts it, communists are distinguished by their ability to understand “*the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement*”. The mass struggles of our class, their generalisation and politicisation, is a process that develops over a long period and goes through many advances and retreats. But we are not merely engaging in wish-fulfilment when we insist, as we do at the end of our international leaflet on the pandemic, that the “*future belongs to the class struggle*”⁹. **Amos, 12.5.20**

8. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/22/africa/coronavirus-famine-un-warning-intl/index.html>

9. <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16830/generalised-capitalist-barbarism-or-world-proletarian-revolution-international-leaflet>

Solidarity with healthworkers - against their employer, the capitalist NHS

There are many articles and programmes that detail the inadequacy of the NHS preparation for the current pandemic. *Panorama* (BBC documentary) told us that the stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) contained no gowns, the Kings Fund (a think tank on the UK health service) how few doctors, nurses, hospital and intensive care beds there are in the UK compared to other developed countries, the *Economist* how in April the testing for the coronavirus in the UK stood somewhere between the USA and Ecuador

At the same time we are called on, not just to applaud the NHS once a week, but to love it, to identify with it as our institution, as a model for health services everywhere. But the real NHS is an institution of the capitalist state which sends its employees to look after infectious patients without the necessary PPE, deports elderly patients from hospitals to care homes without testing for Covid during this crisis. The real NHS which for years before this crisis has habituated us to long waits in casualty and interminable waiting lists for surgery.

This coronavirus pandemic has shown up the inadequacies and failures of all health services under the capitalist system. Despite the very real differences in their resources, or lack of resources, the degree of organisation by the state and the degree of involvement of private firms, they are all based on two essential aspects of capitalism: the nation state and the need to extract as much value from those who work in the sector for as little money as they can get away with.

“Protect the NHS” ... from patients

In mid March hospitals were ordered to discharge 15,000 mainly elderly patients, either sending them home, or parking them in care homes, to free up beds needed for the Covid-19 patients. The NHS coped at the expense of these patients, and the care home residents and staff who caught coronavirus from them: thousands died of it.¹ It is not as if the world had not been warned of the need to prepare for a pandemic, the WHO, virologists and epidemiologists having been watching for pandemics for decades. It is not as if the British government had not been warned of the degree of unpreparedness for a pandemic in Exercise Cygnus in 2016 which showed the NHS was unable to cope, and was therefore never published as too frightening.²

Throughout the history of the NHS there has been constant pressure on the resources available. In 1949 the NHS had 10.2 hospital beds per 1000 of population, essentially what was taken over from the voluntary hospitals, by 1976 it had fallen to 8.3 per 1000.³ In this time antibiotics had made a great difference and the old TB and fever wards could be largely closed. However beds have continued to be lost so that by 2017 there were only 2.5 per 1000 population with acute and general beds having fallen 34% since 1987/88. More to the point bed occupancy has risen from 87.1% in 2010/11 to 90.2% in 2018/19, regularly going over 95% in the winter, which is a dangerous level, as the Kings Fund shows: “Arguably, NHS hospitals have never been under greater strain than they are today. Population growth, combined with an increasing proportion of older people more likely to need health care, is driving greater demand for NHS hospital treatment ... The NHS is only now coming to the end of a prolonged funding squeeze and is in the midst of a staffing crisis. Adult social care has seen staffing and demand pres-

1. <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16848/british-governments-herd-immunity-policy-not-science-abandonment-most-sick-and>

2. <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16834/profound-impact-covid-19-crisis-britain>

3. <https://en.internationalism.org/wr/303/nhs-reforms>

ures rise and is still waiting for the fundamental financing reform it urgently needs. Current levels of occupancy mean the average hospital in England is at risk of being unable to effectively manage patient flow leaving it vulnerable to fluctuations in demand.”⁴ One result of this austerity has been the well-publicised number of deaths above the average for the time of year, which to date have reached nearly 60,000, particularly in hospitals and care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

For international comparisons, Sweden with a similarly low level of hospital beds at 2.2 per 1000, has also been able to protect its health service at the expense of care homes, with half the deaths of those over 70 in care homes. Germany’s health service is better resourced, 8 beds per 1000, but still subject to austerity cuts. The fall in the number of hospital beds is an international tendency.

“Protect the NHS” ... from foreigners

A “child presented with leukaemia required intensive care treatment and to start chemotherapy. ... Hospital unwilling to start chemotherapy until deposit funds provided therefore treatment delayed”. For those reaching retirement age, especially those working in the health service, this is exactly the sort of thing we were told would never happen here with the NHS. This is what happened in the USA with private medicine. Let’s read on: “case needed to be reviewed by a specialist centre to determine treatment options, but they refused to see her as ‘not eligible for NHS care’ ...”⁵ And it is not only foreign children who have been denied treatment. Part of the Windrush scandal⁶ was that we saw a number of patients denied treatment when they could not prove they had a right to it, even after living in the country since childhood— and even if they had life threatening conditions.

These days we hear more about the ‘need’ to protect the NHS from “health tourism”. This xenophobic campaign does not just date to Boris Johnson’s populism, nor to Theresa May’s “hostile environment” for migrants: we can see the same arguments put forward by the last Labour government when home secretary Jack Straw castigated “*bogus asylum seekers*” who might be coming here and using ‘our’ public services.

However, the ruling class are having a little difficulty with their propaganda about protecting the NHS from these ‘health tourists’ who keep taking NHS resources, when so many of them are in fact working in health or social care and putting their lives at risk in the NHS. The surcharge for migrant workers is due to increase from £400 to £624 in October and until the recent government U-turn on the issue, the many immigrant health and social care workers would have had to pay it with only medics excluded.

In fact the NHS, and the welfare state more generally, was never a “free gift” nor a reform won by the workers. Its aim was “to secure income for subsistence on condition of service and contribution and in order to make and keep men fit for service” in the words of Beveridge⁷. To keep workers fit for work, or for military service.

4. https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/nhs-hospital-bed-numbers?gclid=EAlalQobChMI18eT1r7-6AIVWeN3Ch2RLAXkEAYASAAAEgKCw_D_BwE#how-does-the-uk-compare-to-other-countries

5. <https://bmjpaedsopen.bmj.com/content/4/1/e000588>

6. In which many who had arrived, legally, in the UK in childhood were treated as illegal immigrants, see <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16763/windrush-scandal-nationalist-campaign-orchestrated-bourgeoisie>

7. The economist and Liberal politician whose report during World War 2 for the coalition government formed the basis of the ‘Welfare State’ put in place by the Atlee government after the war.

Capitalism is based on the nation state, and in this global pandemic which affects the whole world, each state, each national health service, is scrabbling in a spirit of ‘every man for himself’ against every other for PPE, for resources, for testing. The USA is threatening the WHO to withdraw funds. Several countries have accused China of industrial espionage into work on a vaccine. Instead of the cooperation needed to face a global threat, to produce a vaccine, each nation protects its health service, its profits, its imperialist interests. The limited cooperation they have managed in the past is giving way to national self-interest – to the detriment of their ability to limit the danger of this pandemic.

“Protect the NHS” ... at the expense of health and social care workers

A survey by the Royal College of Nursing found that the vast majority of nursing and midwifery staff felt they and their families were at risk because of their jobs, and that if redeployed they were not adequately trained. More than half worked beyond their contracted hours and the majority did not expect any overtime payment for this.⁸ Meanwhile government spokespeople were lying about the availability of PPE and testing, and calling on the population to applaud on Thursday evenings and put up rainbows in our windows to support the NHS – the very NHS that is neglecting the safety of nurses and other workers in the face of a deadly infection! Like soldiers on the front line, like cannon fodder! In fact Belgium threatened to conscript health workers, much to their indignation.

This is not just some aberration during the pandemic but the way health services, just like any other capitalist concern, treat their employees. There has been an increase in the intensity of work in hospitals, with the number of beds having halved, while the number of patients treated increased. There are increasing vacancies for qualified nurses, with the gap plugged by support staff such as health care assistants. This has been worsened since 2016 with a drop in the number of nurses from the EU coming to the UK. In these circumstances there is always a moral blackmail on health workers to “go the extra mile” for patient care. It all adds up to an increase in exploitation, just as we see in every health service worldwide and in every sector of the economy.

Solidarity with health workers doesn’t come through weekly applause for their employer, but through proletarian solidarity, solidarity with them as exploited workers whose interests conflict with the NHS, and whose struggle for better pay and conditions is inevitably a struggle against their employer, the capitalist state.

8. <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/2326580-research-highlights-concerns-of-uk-nurses-and-midwives-over-covid-19>

Nationalised or privatised, the NHS is still a capitalist institution

Those on the left would have us protect the NHS from privatisation, or even claim that a nationalised health service is somehow socialist. This is a left wing version of the lie that it is “our NHS” because it is run by the state. We are talking about an institution of the capitalist state: “*The wage itself has been integrated into the state. Fixing wages at their capitalist value has devolved upon the state organs. Part of the workers’ wages is directly levied and administered by the state. Thus the state ‘takes charge’ of the life of the worker; controls his health (as part of the struggle against absenteeism) and directs his leisure (for purposes of ideological repression)*”⁹. So the state takes charge of part of the wage for maintaining the health of workers, and employers do not have to pay health insurance, in the same way that the state pays a part of wages through universal credit or housing benefit so that capitalists can pay lower wages. Nationalised or privatised, health workers are exploited by capital, either through the state for the benefit of the national capital as a whole, or through a company which sells its services to an insurer or the state. This is why state and privatised health services carry out the same policies, above all the same policies of exploitation.

One advantage of a privatised health service for the state is that it is directly subject to the laws of the market, and so can go bankrupt, because there is no government there to bail it out. This is why everywhere there have been moves to make hospitals and other health care institutions keep strictly to their budgets and put services out to tender particularly since the 1980s, under the Thatcher government and in the Blair years. Because the British bourgeoisie relies so much on the ideology of the NHS it has put a lot of emphasis on state control of what should be done – and also what should not be prescribed or carried out because it is not ‘cost effective’. As we note in an article on the response of the German health service “*what is more important is that the management of the hospitals has been very heavily submitted to the laws of the capitalist economy for all the funding bodies (including the public and church authorities). This applies, for example, to the rationalisation of work processes ... the employees are squeezed like lemons to push the accumulation of value in the health care industry to the highest possible level. The patient faces the carer for whom he becomes a commodity, the social relationship becomes a service, the work process is subject to enormous time pressure and compulsion. This perversion describes very well what Marx analysed as objectification, dehumanisation and exploitation*”.¹⁰ **Alex, 23.5.20**

9. *Internationalisme* 1952: ‘The evolution of capitalism and the new perspective’, https://en.internationalism.org/ir/21/internationalisme-1952#_ftnref1

10. <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16842/german-bourgeoisies-instinct-power>

The profound impact of the Covid-19 crisis in Britain

In Britain, the round-the-clock propaganda of the bourgeoisie about the Covid-19 pandemic has a number of themes, but none so repeated, and untrue, as “*We are all in this together*”, “*We’re all in the same boat*”. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has even gone so far as to reject a cornerstone of Thatcherism and say “*One thing I think the coronavirus crisis has already proved is that there really is such a thing as society.*” In reality, while anyone can get the virus, including Johnson, and the Health Secretary, and the Chief Medical Officer, and Prince Charles, class society continues, and the crisis impacts on the health service, on the political life of the bourgeoisie, on the economy, and on the proletariat in profound, but different ways.

The pandemic is a disaster for the economy, it will further deepen the disorientation of the working class and worsens its conditions, and has

stimulated propaganda for national unity, which the bourgeoisie will try and run with as it blames everything on Covid-19. The one thing that they should not be allowed to get away with is the responsibility of the ruling class for letting the coronavirus rip through the population. There are no reliable statistics because there has been so little testing done; far more people will have been affected than the official figures show. But responsibility lies with the bourgeoisie, as already there are predictions that Britain will have the greatest number of deaths in Europe, despite having advance warning when the death toll was mounting in China, Iran, Italy and Spain.

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The health crisis was predicted

The health service has not been able to cope with the developing crisis. Back in January the medical journal *The Lancet* said “*Preparedness plans should be readied for deployment at short notice, including securing supply chains of pharmaceuticals, personal protective equipment, hospital supplies and the necessary human resources to deal with the consequences of a global outbreak of this magnitude.*” (20/1/20). This was not done and the *Lancet*’s editor attacked this failure “*It failed, in part, because ministers didn’t follow WHO’s advice to ‘test, test, test’ every suspected case. They didn’t isolate and quarantine. They didn’t contact trace. These basic principles of public health and infectious disease control were ignored, for reasons that remain opaque. The result has been chaos and panic across the NHS.*” And as for the measures that were put in place “*This plan, agreed far too late in the course of the outbreak, has left the NHS wholly unprepared for the surge of severely and critically ill patients that will soon come*” (27/3/20).

The failings of the NHS are not new. Over the last 30 years the number of hospital beds has gone down from 299,000 to 142,000. Germany has 621 hospital beds per 100,000 people where Britain has 228 beds per 100,000. Germany has 28,000 intensive care beds - soon set to double - compared with Britain’s 4,100. In Britain one in eight nursing posts is vacant. Among developed countries Britain is second lowest of all developed countries for doctors and nurses per head of population—2.8 and 7.9 per 1,000.

One question that is asked over and over is “*How come Germany can test 500,000 a week but the UK can’t even do 10,000 a day?*”. There is a growing storm over this as it becomes more and more clear how ill-prepared the health service is. Also, the question of personal protective equipment has become a major concern for health and social care workers. It’s not only the lack of provision but the downgrading of the level of PPE to be worn when nursing Covid patients. Initially the NHS was using PPE recommended by the WHO but then changed to their own criteria which has led to a widespread distrust. There’s also the scandal of the PPE that was sent by Britain to China early on in the outbreak, despite supplies in Britain being seriously limited.

And the conversion of exhibition centres in London and Birmingham to become temporary hospitals, the return of retired health workers, along with the volunteers who will perform non-medical tasks, only goes to show the holes in the NHS

The NHS’s lack of readiness was known about well in advance. In 2016 the government ran a 3-day exercise (Exercise Cygnus) to see how prepared hospitals, health authorities and other various government bodies would be seven weeks into dealing with a novel respiratory flu pandemic. The NHS failed the test and the report was never published. The *Daily Telegraph* (28/3/20) described the results of the exercise: “*The peak of the epidemic had not yet arrived but local resilience forums, hospitals and mortuaries across the country were already being overwhelmed. There was not enough personal protective equipment (PPE) for the nation’s doctors and nurses. The NHS was about to ‘fall over’ due to a shortage of ventilators and critical care beds. Morgues were set to overflow, and it had become terrifyingly evident that the government’s emergency messaging was not getting traction with the public.*” Among the reasons given for not publishing the report was that the results were “*too terrifying*” and there were “*national security*” concerns.

Among the gaps identified were the shortage of intensive care beds and of personal protective equipment, but government austerity measures prevented any action. Although the report has not been published, its implications were taken on by a number of bodies, for example it appears that, if NHS senior management are unable to work, the military will be brought on to coordinate the healthcare system. As the NHS

becomes more and more stretched both military and volunteer resources are already being used as it struggles to cope. It also needs to be said that it is not just the NHS that is being stretched, the whole system of social care is being tested severely. The fact that the number of deaths in care homes has been massively underestimated is a reminder that it is not just the NHS but a whole range of institutions that are at breaking point.

After letting it happen, the bourgeoisie was helpless in response

While the ruling class of most countries responded in similar ways to the growing pandemic, Britain, while not behaving like Trump in the US, or Bolsonaro in Brazil, was different. As an article in the *Observer* (15 March 2020) put it: “*Rather than learning from other countries and following the WHO advice, which comes from experts with decades of experience in tackling outbreaks across the world, the UK has decided to follow its own path. This seems to accept that the virus is unstoppable and will probably become an annual, seasonal infection. The plan, as explained by the chief science adviser, is to work towards ‘herd immunity’, which is to have the majority of the population contract the virus, develop antibodies and then become immune to it.*”

This was the idea, linked to the government’s Brexit ideology, that Britain could go it alone, with its own experts, ignoring WHO guidelines. In particular this idea that Covid-19 could be let loose, and a “*herd immunity*” would develop among those who survived, would be at the expense of those who would die. This utterly cynical approach would supposedly protect the economy and, if a lot of pensioners were to die, then, “*too bad*”. Whether those last two words were ever uttered, they certainly summarised the attitude of those in government. The government, guided by its chosen experts, had a policy of the survival of the fittest, which would be a death sentence for the most vulnerable, the old, the overweight and those with underlying medical conditions. In February Johnson had criticised “*bizarre autarkic rhetoric*” and defended “*the right of the populations of the Earth to buy and sell freely among each other*”. However, after an Imperial College report suggested that the government’s policy would mean 250,000 dead, the government retreated from this position. On 16 March Johnson appeared on television saying that all non-essential contact with others should stop and that people should now stay at home. The fact that some close to the government were then saying that fewer than 20,000 deaths would be “*a very good result*” for the UK shows how the bourgeoisie was still playing with people’s lives as though it was all some macabre sport.

Critics of government policy have attributed this to the specific negligence of the Tories, without any recognition that the response of the bourgeoisie internationally has been inadequate and overwhelmed, regardless of what has been said in praise of Germany, South Korea etc. As time has gone on the British state’s response has more come to resemble that of other countries. However, populism still has its influence. For example, the UK was in negotiations with the EU to buy 8,000 ventilators, but walked away because (said a spokesman for the Prime Minister) the UK is “*no longer a member*” and is “*making our own efforts*”. Later the EU was blamed for a “*communication problem*”. The implications of this will soon be seen. For the old or those with pre-existing conditions, the approach of the bourgeoisie, in the light of the backlog in ventilator production, will be to treat the young and leave the rest.

Many of those same critics of undoubted government complicity and arrogance during the current crisis invite us to focus ire on the newly elected Tory government, as well as its right-wing predecessors. This ignores the historic and continuing role of ‘Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition’, the Labour Party, in reducing ‘public services’, for example by vastly expanding the Private Finance Initiative policy which saw an

estimated £80 billion drained from NHS resources between 1997-2010, accounting for up to one sixth of local health authority (Trust) budgets and leaving debts to be paid up until 2050.

For all the past antagonism from Johnson/Cummings towards the civil service it is clear that the role of the state has been accepted in this time of crisis, in the measures that have been adopted. The slogan “*Protect the NHS*” has been touted at the same time as blaming ‘selfish individuals’ for stockpiling food, hand sanitiser, or toilet rolls, or going to work if it’s not essential, or going too far for exercise. In the spirit of the war-time campaign against the black market, the attacks on petty profiteering will distract from the real culprits - the capitalist class.

One foreign import that the British bourgeoisie has supported is the round of applause for health workers. This has been taken on and institutionalised for 8 pm every Thursday. It costs nothing and adds to the “*Protect the NHS*” campaign. But what is the NHS that is being protected? Its inadequacy has been exposed from the start. The unprotected staff are treated with contempt, the shortage of ventilators, PPE, testing etc all show how limited a service the NHS is capable of providing. The fact that the government had to appeal for volunteers shows the enormous gaps in the NHS. When 750,000 people responded to the call this was greeted in the popular press with praise for their humanity: “*A people’s army of kindness*” “*a nation of heroes*” “*An army of kindhearts*”. For the volunteers it is no doubt an expression of a desire to help out in a time of need. In practice, the need to draw on the resources of the army and masses of volunteers shows that it’s the myth of the NHS that’s being protected. There are no heroes, only a seriously overstretched workforce that is compelled to work in hopelessly inadequate conditions

While in other countries the imagery of war has been employed, in Britain the spirit of the Blitz during the Second World War is evoked. The UK is under attack from an invisible enemy and everyone is supposed to be ‘doing their bit’. Whether in the NHS or volunteering or undertaking some other essential work or just staying at home, we’re all supposed to be pulling together ... behind the bourgeoisie that is responsible for thousands of tragedies.

The state rushes to the rescue of the economy

With the closing of all non-essential operations and people told to stay at home, all sorts of businesses are faced with going bust, and workers are faced with unemployment and trying to claim benefits, pay the rent, and keep up payments on debts already accumulated. Predictions for the increase in unemployment include Nomura’s of 8 percent which suggests an additional 1.4 million, making a total of 2.75 million by June.

As for GDP Nomura suggests it will crash by 13.5 percent, others are looking at a 15 per cent decline. The government has allocated the huge sum of £266 billion this year to tackle all eventualities stemming from Covid-19. This could mean borrowing at least £200 billion and that rate UK debt could reach £2 trillion within 12 months, something the March 11 budget had not expected to happen until 2025. This level of borrowing, equivalent to 9 per cent of GDP, would wipe out almost all the debt reductions from the last decade of austerity.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has speculated that the UK economy could shrink by 35% this spring, with unemployment at 10%, and, with public borrowing rising at the fastest rates since the Second World War, debt to grow beyond 100% of GDP. The deepest recession in more than 300 years has been predicted.

The Bank of England has cut interest rates twice to a marginal rate of 0.1%. The Bank’s quantitative easing programme, which basically means printing money to stimulate the economy, has been extended to £645 billion.

State intervention in the economy is not some sort of ‘left turn’ as claimed by the leftists, but capitalism’s inevitable response to each twist

of the economic crisis. Among the measures the government has taken are:

- The government will cover 80 percent of employers’ wage bills in order to keep employees, up to £2,500 per month.
- Similar arrangements for the self-employed
- VAT invoices worth £30 billion to be deferred
- £7 billion increase in welfare benefits
- £1 billion increase in housing assistance to help tenants;
- A budget stimulus of £30 billion, including £2 billion directly for the fight against coronaviruses, with more money for the NHS
- Government-backed loan guarantees worth £330 billion, or 15% of GDP
- £20 billion package for business, including 12 months leave for all businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality industries, and cash grants up to £25,000 for small businesses;
- Three-month mortgage leave for homeowners;
- Three-month ban on evictions of tenants.

This is just the start. The Johnson government had already begun a spending regime that had not been costed; now a whole raft of measures is being added. The economy is taking a big hit, with no concern for where the money will come from. What is certain is that the working class will have to pay the bill. Whatever form they take; the austerity measures of the last 10 years will seem insignificant in comparison. But whereas previous attacks could be blamed on ‘the bankers’ and ‘neo-liberalism’, future attacks will be put down to the impact of the pandemic.

Condition of the working class

It should be said that work – and exploitation - hasn’t actually ceased in GB. Hospitals and care homes have become like factories facing speed-ups in demand for their services. Public transport bus drivers have been notable victims of the virus and hauliers continue to bring in supplies. Food and clothing distribution centres have seen protests against insufficient protection. Defence workers – on the Clyde and elsewhere – have been asked to return to ‘sanitised’ work stations with only 2-metre ‘distancing tape’ for protection in the name of ‘national security’ while supermarket staff have been hailed as ‘proud patriotic proletarians’ doing their bit for Queen and country.

However from the point of view of immediate survival, many millions more workers have little alternative than to go along with the instruction for everyone, except for ‘essential workers’, to stay at home, and, when out, to practice ‘social distancing’. But at the same time these conditions function as a great barrier to the development of any open resistance to the system. This enforced atomisation for millions goes along with the heroification of those who work in the NHS. While association is part of the condition of the working class, currently a great part of the work force is stuck at home subject to the 24-hour media propaganda. We’re constantly told that it’s all the fault of a coronavirus, not something that stems from the decomposition of a mode of production that’s been in decline for more than a century.

Workers are likely, understandably, to be preoccupied with their immediate interests. Should I travel? Where can I get food? How do I keep distance between me and others who might be carriers? If laid off, where’s money going to come from?

Universal Credit is the benefit to apply for, but applications have overwhelmed the DWP. In a fortnight 950,000 workers applied for UC. Workers have rung the DWP up to 100 times without being able to speak to anyone. The vast majority failed to get through because of the volume attempting the same thing. And for those who do succeed there’s a wait of at least five weeks.

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In surveys 1.5 million adults say they cannot get enough food, and 3 million say they have had to borrow money because of a change of circumstances brought on by the crisis.

Everything that flows from the shutdown and social distancing will – for the time being – make it harder for workers to develop a collective response. It will increase a feeling of atomisation and create a real barrier to a sense of class identity. Instead, we are being turned into an army of individual, applicants for credit from the capitalist state.

All these basic concerns of workers are likely to come first, before reflecting on the nature of the social crisis or the need to overthrow capitalism. And the leftists still exist to contribute to the disorientation of the working class. The SWP, for instance, criticises Corbyn, Labour and the TUC for expressing their agreement with government measures while demanding that the state “*take over essential services from private bosses to make sure people get what they need*”. There is also the attempt to identify individuals as being responsible, as in Alan Thornett (Socialist Resistance) who said the “*The depth and severity of the crisis we are about to face in Britain was made in Westminster by Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings*”. Others have called for the resignation of the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock. Looking for a culprit amongst the ruling class – as if the replacement of some of these ‘leaders’ would change anything – only serves to detract from a reflection on the underlying crisis of capitalism as a world system.

The head of the International Red Cross has said that as millions have either seen a fall in their income or are reliant on state benefits, that “*civil unrest*” is “*weeks*” away. He said that unrest is about to “*explode at any moment*” as the largest cities across Europe are struggling with either no or low incomes due to the pandemic. “*This is a social bomb that can explode at any moment, because they don’t have any way to*

have an income.” “*In the most difficult neighbourhoods of the biggest cities I am afraid that in a few weeks we will have social problems.*” In Britain, there have been some disputes over workers’ safety, notably wildcats by postal workers concerned about safety in Scotland and both northern and southern England¹ while binmen in Kent threatened strike action over similar concerns. But to our knowledge these actions are not on the scale of the strikes that have been witnessed in Italy, Spain, or the USA for example. And we should be aware that ‘social unrest’, particularly because of the characteristics of the period of social decomposition, could take any form, not necessarily that of workers’ struggle on a class terrain.

On the other hand, we are seeing a certain amount of reflection on the situation. While the squabbles among the bourgeoisie continue over who is to be blamed for shortages, the state of the NHS, or changing government policy, there is a searching minority that understands that capitalism as a system lies at the basis of the pandemic, and is open to discussion on the nature of capitalism and beyond. The issue of the pandemic is something that can’t be avoided as every aspect of social life has been affected and profound questions have been raised about the reality of capitalist society. And this reflection goes together with a great deal of anger over the way that workers have been treated, old people left to die, health workers left unprotected. There is the prospect that these elements could combine in future struggles. For the moment the need for discussion is paramount – not, at present, face-to-face, but in online forums and channels. Capitalism is exposed for what it is, and tries to cover itself with lies. Workers can develop the capacity to see through the propaganda and realise that only the working class can halt capitalism’s passage to annihilation. **Barrow, 19 April 2020**

1. <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Going-Postal-spring-2020.pdf>

The movement against “pension reform”: Drawing the lessons to prepare for future struggles

The Covid-19 crisis and the lockdown have not made the class struggle disappear: we have already referred to workers’ strikes demanding proper safety equipment and working conditions in a number of countries, and we will be coming back to this in future articles. There is no denying however that the lock-down creates particularly difficult conditions for the development of the open, massive struggle. But we also know that we are going to be faced with unprecedented attacks on our living standards, and we have to prepare our response. This necessarily entails drawing the lessons of previous struggles, and this is the aim of the article we publish here, written by our section in France, which examines the important strikes of railway workers, health workers and others in France last autumn and winter.

“*Today’s vanquished, will be tomorrow’s victors. They will learn from their defeat.*”¹

“*Revolution is the sole form of ‘war’ (...) in which the final victory can be achieved only by a series of ‘defeats’! What does the whole history of modern revolutions and of socialism show us? The first flaring up of the class struggle in Europe ended in defeat. The 1831 revolt of the silk-weavers in Lyon, ended in a heavy defeat. The Chartist Movement in England also ended in defeat. The rising of the proletariat in Paris in June 1848 ended in an overwhelming defeat. The Paris Commune ended in a terrible defeat. The whole road to socialism (as far as revolu-*

1. Karl Liebknecht, *Against all the odds!* (1919)

tionary struggles are concerned) is paved with defeats, pure and simple. And yet this same history leads irresistibly, step by step, to ultimate victory! Where would we be today without the ‘defeats’, from which we have drawn historical experience, understanding, power and idealism! Today (...) we stand upon these very defeats, none of which we could have done without, each of which is part of our strength and our clarity of purpose (...) These inevitable defeats virtually pile guarantee upon guarantee of the future success of the final goal. To be sure there is one condition! We have to analyse the circumstances of each respective defeat.”²

Yes, the strikes and demonstrations in the autumn of 2019 and the winter of 2020 ended in defeat. Pension “reform” is now behind us. But the ties that were forged during this struggle, the experience that was gained and the development of consciousness are all victories. There are many lessons we can draw from this drawn-out social movement to prepare for the future struggles. To be able to do so, we need to come together, to discuss and to write our analysis of it. This article is intended as a contribution towards this work of collective reflection.

The working class recovers its combativity

To understand the importance and significance of the movement against the pensions’ “reform” in France, we have to situate it in the

2. Rosa Luxemburg, *Order reigns in Berlin* (1919)

context of the class struggle of the recent decades. From 1968 to the end of the 1980s, the struggle of the proletariat developed internationally: May '68 in France, the Hot Autumn of Italy in 1969, the highly combative strikes in Britain throughout the 1970s, the massive strike in Poland in 1980, etc. For nearly twenty years, workers would accumulate a vast experience from their involvement in struggle, from mass meetings and general assemblies and through extending their struggles and, above all, by witnessing the trade unions constantly sabotaging all attempts by the workers to take the struggle into their own hands.

However, this generation was not able to politicise the movement. If the working class's commitment to the struggle showed its strength, its reflection on the nature of capitalism and the state, its capacity for self-organisation remained weak. In this context, the collapse of the Eastern bloc, fraudulently presented as the "bankruptcy of communism", inflicted a terrible shock to class consciousness. Through this iniquitous lie, the barbarism of Stalinism - in reality a caricature of state capitalism - was made to appear as the inevitable outcome to the proletarian revolution. The bourgeoisie could thus declare the "end of History"³ and the disappearance of the working class. So, with its self-confidence low, and made to feel ashamed of its history, the working class gradually, throughout the 1990s, lost all memory of its past struggles and experiences. At the global level, our class experienced a major retreat in consciousness and combativity across this decade, to the extent of denying its own existence which led to the proletariat losing its class identity.

But, of course, there is no brake on History, regardless of the hopes and declarations of the bourgeoisie. The economic crisis continued to worsen and hence living and working conditions deteriorated along with it. This intolerable situation gave rise to a growing anger that transformed into combativity, particularly inside the national education systems of France and Austria in 2003. The mood went beyond confrontation and there was a real reflection on the future of capitalism, particularly on the future of global capitalism. It helps explain why organisations like ATTAC developed the theory of anti-globalism (which would become "another world is possible"). Although limited in scope, this broad social confrontation signalled an end to the retreat of the 1990s. Once again, the working class had expressed a level of combativity and from this its consciousness developed, if only weakly.

Three years later, in 2006, a new generation appeared on the scene. Faced with a new governmental attack, with the manufacture of an even more precarious status for young workers starting work (le Contrat Première Embauche, the CPE), the students facing this insecurity reacted, they organised themselves in general assemblies that were open to all and extended the struggle by calling for solidarity from all sectors and all generations ("*Young lardons, old croutons: all in the same salad!*" was chanted repeatedly). The French bourgeoisie was worried at the dynamic of extension of the struggle and it was this that made it suddenly withdraw the CPE (renamed "Contrat Poubelle Embauche" or "Rubbish Hiring Contract").

However, the development of the struggle of the proletariat is not linear. In 2010, the proletariat would suffer a hard blow. Having been mobilised weekly for sterile protests over a 10-month period by the unions, several million demonstrators from this movement were left exhausted and discouraged and with a deep-rooted sense of powerlessness. The defeat it inflicted stamped its mark on the whole decade from 2010 onward when the social atmosphere was characterised by apathy, despondency and resignation.

Again we would see that the forces at work underlying society had not gone away, particularly the global economic crisis, which leads to unemployment, precariousness and poverty... but also anger and reflection. This is what the movement against the pensions' "reform" at the end of 2019 heralded: the re-emergence of workers' combativity! Through the months of mobilisation, the weeks of strikes and the demonstrations that brought hundreds of thousands of people together,

3. This is an expression of Hegel's taken up by the ideologist Francis Fukuyama.



this struggle revealed the proletariat's desire to fight back and signalled the end of a long period marked by workers' bowed heads and a class retreat. It gave a glimpse of a future in which the proletariat would once again refuse to accept the bourgeoisie's unceasing attacks without giving a response. It is therefore all the more crucial to learn the lessons of this movement in order to prepare for the future.

Solidarity

In the struggle, the workers once again demonstrated the characteristic solidarity of our class. If the bourgeoisie tried to promote the cause of every man for himself, based on division and competition, by opposing railway workers (said to be "privileged") to the other workers, the old against the young (using the infamous "grandfather clause", for example), strikers versus non-strikers and wage earners who do "hard" work against those who, supposedly, have "cushy jobs", etc., the working class responded by all staying together, by supporting the railway workers, by keeping alive the old rallying cry: "*One for all and all for one*" and by fighting to defend their future and that of the new generations of workers who are faced with entering the labour market... The slogan "*we choose to all fight together*" is indicative of the glue that has bound the workers together in struggle: solidarity, the fundamental condition behind the social power of our class.

This power and this spirit was evident in all the demonstrations. On the marches, the mood of solidarity made the demonstrators feel proud, and even joyful. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why, at the end of the movement, far from being downcast by the "defeat" (the formal adoption of the "reform"), the working class emerged stronger and better. This realisation of this fraternity inside the struggle must be cherished and cultivated for the struggles of the future.

Strength in numbers

The shouts of "All together" that were heard on the marches showed an awareness of the need to unite all sectors, both private and public and to mobilise en masse against the government to overturn the balance of forces.

There was a valuable lesson of this movement. One sector alone, no matter how determined it may be, or how crucial a rôle in the national economy, no matter the "power" for disruption to the economy, can defeat the bourgeoisie and the state on its own, as the unions would imply. On the contrary, by pushing the railway workers of the SNCF and the RATP into the leading role, a trap was laid by the government colluding with the unions. The railworkers would be responsible for the struggle on their own, which would reduce the struggle overall to a protest action and an isolated and disarmed strike.

Yet, these workers were instinctively suspicious of this trap without being fully aware of the reason. On the marches, a need was felt everywhere to unite across sectors, to be a force in numbers and there were calls to mobilise and not to leave the railway workers alone and to have the private sector more involved... This growing realisation that to be strong meant being strong in numbers, that the struggle needed to be

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widespread, will be a key lesson for the future.

So, how can we succeed the next time in developing a massive struggle? How can all sectors be brought into the movement? The answer is found in the past experience of the working class, because it has previously demonstrated this capacity to extend the struggle geographically. One of the most impressive examples of this dynamic of extension and unity is undoubtedly the movement that took place in Poland in the summer of 1980:

“Facing news of price rises, the workers’ response spread throughout the country, passing increasingly from town to town, city to city, and not along the channels of the business or industrial sectors. Triggered on 14th August by the strike at the Gdansk Lenin Shipyard when a single worker was sacked, the movement spread inside 24 hours to the whole city and in a few days to the whole industrial region around the same common demands: wage increases and improved social benefits, no Saturday working, a guarantee of no reprisals against the strikers as well as the abolition of the official trade unions... The day after the strike began at the Lenin Shipyard, the news spread across the city. The tram workers stopped work in solidarity but they also decided to keep the trams still running that connected the three major industrial zones of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot. They were vital for spreading the news of the strike and would be a means of communication between the struggling factories throughout the month of the strike. On the same day the strike began at the “Paris Commune” shipyard in Gdynia and spread to almost all the shipyards in the basin, but also to the ports and various companies in the region. The two large Lenin and “Paris Commune” shipyards became meeting places for the strikers, where regular meetings were held, bringing thousands of workers from different factories together. The organisation of the strike was established on the same basis, the same principles, by which it was extended. The assemblies of strikers from the different factories and sectors elected strike committees and sent delegates to the “inter-factory strike committee” (MKS), which drew up a list of the joint demands. All the strikers’ assemblies were informed daily of the discussions and the progress of the negotiations by their delegates who travelled back and forth between their workplaces and the MKS, which was based at the Lenin Shipyard. The attempts to sow divisions by the government, which wanted to negotiate factory by factory and thereby get a return to work sector by sector, came up against this close-knit and united block. Thus, when the government very quickly agreed to the wage increase for workers at the Gdynia Shipyard and a return to work, and some hesitant delegates seemed ready to accept, the delegates from the other factories objected and called for the movement to continue until all the demands, from all the striking factories, were met. Some new delegates would be elected by the strikers.

In the days that followed, the example set by Gdansk would spread to the various regions of Poland. The signal for the mass strike had been received. The subsequent balance of power imposed by the workers was unprecedented since the struggles of the 1920s and would force the bourgeoisie to submit, an outcome no workers’ struggle in the world since then has ever achieved. What’s more, it was a vital experience for workers to live through and an unassailable acquisition of the international proletariat showing the potential power of the working class when it is truly united”⁴.

One passage from this quotation is particularly worthy of our attention: *“The tram workers stopped work in solidarity but at the same time, they also decided to keep the trams running that connected the three large industrial zones of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot. They were vital for spreading the news of the strike, and were a means of communication between the struggling factories throughout the month of strike”*.

4. Extract from our article “Comment étendre la lutte” of February 1989 available on our French language website.

This is the exact opposite of what the trade unions organised during the movement against the pensions’ “reform” in France: the trains didn’t move, especially on the demonstration days. Some people would point to this aberration on the marches, insisting to the contrary that trains should run to Paris and the big cities to allow as many employees, pensioners, precarious students and the unemployed as possible to assemble. A retired demonstrator in Paris even said to us *“I don’t understand why the trains aren’t free to allow us to come here; we have done that in the 1980s”*. This anecdote raises some profound questions about class identity and workers’ memory, about the development of consciousness and the nature of the trade unions.

Class identity

By choosing to fight “en masse”, by expressing solidarity across sectors and between generations, these proletarians have begun to recover their class identity. They show an understanding that in confronting the government, the state, the bourgeoisie, it is necessary to be many, to unite, and it is necessary to create a mass movement. One question to be answered remains: *who* should unite? Who are “We”? One answer: the working class. Admittedly, this realisation has not yet spread to the whole of our class, but it is germinating. Thus, in the demonstrations, many demonstrators sang *“We’re here to salute the workers and for a better world!”* In various discussions, you could hear *“The working class exists! It’s right here!”* or *“We want a general strike like that in May ‘68”*.

This unfolding renewal of class identity in the proletariat inside the struggle fully supports the analysis we made in 2003, when the working class was returning to the path of struggle after the long retreat of the 1990s: - *“The current attacks constitute the basis of a slow maturing of the conditions for the massive struggles that are necessary for the working class to recover its identity. Little by little, they will dispel all the illusions in the possibility of reforming the system. It is the action of the masses themselves that will make possible the re-emergence of the consciousness of being an exploited class that bears within it a different historical perspective for society”*. - *“The importance of struggles today is that they can be the crucible for the development of class consciousness. The basic issue at stake – the recovery of class identity – is an extremely modest one. But behind class identity, there is the question of class solidarity – the only alternative to the mad competitive bourgeois logic of each for himself. Behind class identity there is the possibility of reappropriating the lessons of past struggles, and reactivating the collective memory of the proletariat”*.⁵

Class consciousness

The “constitution of the proletariat as a class”, as the Manifesto of the Communist Party says, is inseparable from the development of class consciousness. Forced to struggle by the blows of the world economic crisis, the proletariat in France has, indeed, begun in this movement to develop its class consciousness. To feel part of a whole that is determined to stick together and unite in a common struggle, but also to recognise the enemy that is organised in defence of its own interests, or, again, to recognise the escalating degradation of living and working conditions, of the lack of a future for the whole of humanity under this system of exploitation (and what better indicator of the bleak future promised by capitalism than this broad attack on the pensions’ system?); these characteristics are all vital elements expressing the development of class consciousness.

One example to show the significance of this is that in the demonstrations at the end of December, a lot of discussions compared the attack on pensions to the fires that were raging across Australia at the time. And the connection? This would have seemed preposterous, even crazy, to almost everyone, just a few months earlier. But there, in the struggle,

5. Extract from our article “Report on the class struggle, 2003” available on our website.

the demonstrators felt that the “reforms” that are destroying living and working conditions in France and the lack of human and material means to contain the fires in Australia were in fact facets of the same underlying problem. Therein lies the germ of an understanding of what capitalism is: a rotting system of exploitation that is driving the whole of humanity to its doom in the name of profit.

Clearly, it is just a beginning of the process for the working class, this movement is one step on “*the road the working class must travel to affirm its own revolutionary perspective [which] won't be straight forward, [which indeed] is going to be long, tortuous, difficult and strewn with pitfalls and traps that its enemy will use against it*”.

In fact, there is one major obstacle where this movement has demonstrated the working class's total lack of consciousness and that it has not recovered its memory of what it experienced throughout the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s: the trap of the trade unions.

The role of the unions

This movement was led from beginning to the end by the trade unions. They led the class to defeat. Totally aware of the combative state of mind of the working class, they were careful in proposing forms of struggles that allowed them to take the lead of the movement and to very clearly keep the workers under their control. They manoeuvred so they could eventually exhaust the movement and sabotage any real unity, and thus lead it to defeat:

- to respond to the surge in workers' combativity, the unions organised multiple struggles that were isolated from each other. While officially taking up the call for “everyone struggling together”, they organised the “extension”... of defeat! They did not stop calling for struggles on the ground, in the localities, sector by sector, taking care not to mobilise inside the big private companies. The “inter-emergency” para-union collective even refused to join the inter-professional demonstrations planned for December on the pretext of not “*submerging their specific demands within the other demands*”.

- in response to the need felt by the workers to debate, the trade unions organised many general assemblies – the so-called the “inter-professional” - completely controlled and manipulated (including by the leftists) where it was difficult and futile to speak⁶.

To-prevent the development of the active solidarity of the workers in the struggle, they introduced solidarity funds all around to help the railway workers (and other strikers) “to hang on”... alone. The success of these collections is the mark of the popularity of the movement, that it was supported throughout the working class. But it was the trade unions (especially the CGT) that set up this financial solidarity, who initiated, organised and supervised it, in order to make it a substitute for real active solidarity through the direct extension of the struggle. By means of these solidarity funds, the unions pushed the working class into the “symbolic strike”, leaving the railway workers alone to lose nearly two months' wages.

To summarise the trade union tactics that have emerged in recent months: when faced with this explosion of combativity, they have gone along with the working class, espousing the needs of the struggle to be able to undermine it and to make people believe that the government's “social partners” are defending the interests of the working class through its ability to organise the struggle and demonstrations.

The working class has not been able to expose this sabotage, as it has

6. When the workers wanted to continue to stay together at the end of the demonstrations, the trade unions organised a series of events to avoid discussions (as happened in Marseille on January 11, 2020) or left the area free for the police to use gas against the demonstrators who resisted, as in Paris. However, in Nantes, on two occasions, at the end of the demonstration, the march went around the city centre again without the trade unions, chanting “*A trade union parade is never a social struggle*”. Beyond a very minoritarian reflection on the action of the trade unions, these events prove the willingness of the workers to stay together and continue discussing. Though the demonstrations would continue, the unions had organised concerts, the loud music preventing any possibility of debate.

been unable to take its struggles into its own hands, to organise sovereign and autonomous general assemblies itself, as well as the geographical extension of the movement by sending massive delegations, step by step, from factory to factory (the hospitals, for example, are often the largest “factory” in the area). This weakness stems from the loss of class identity, the loss of proletarian memory since the 1990s. The confrontation with the trade unions (and trade unionism in general) cannot arise without the cumulative experience of the manoeuvres and sabotage of the struggle. Trade unions are, along with bourgeois democracy, the last ramparts of the capitalist state. It is only in a long process and a series of massive struggles marked by defeats that the working class will gradually develop its consciousness. Confrontation with the trade unions can only take place at a more advanced stage of the struggle.

For the time being, therefore, the working class still lacks the self-confidence to go beyond the trade union framework. It still has many illusions about democracy and bourgeois legality. The road leading to the perspective of revolutionary confrontations is therefore still very long and strewn with pitfalls. But this in no way detracts from the fact that the recent movement in France is, precisely, a first step on this very long road. On the contrary, the very difficult historical context makes any manifestation of a will to struggle and any expression of solidarity particularly significant and revealing of what is happening deep within the core of our class.

Interclassism

One trap, perhaps even more pernicious, that awaits the future struggles is the dead end of interclassism.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the international media highlighted the “Yellow Vests” social protest movement in France⁷. This interclassist movement threatened the proletariat's loss of class identity even further, diluting the workers within the “people”, thus putting them in the grip of petty-bourgeois ideology, with its nationalism, the Tricolour, the Marseillaise, its illusions about democracy and its calls to be heard by “the authorities”, etc. This danger will continue to loom large in the coming years. That said, the movement against pension reform has shown another way forward. The proletariat refused to be mixed up with the “Yellow Vests” who wanted to front the demonstrations with the French flag. On several occasions as they marched, the sounds of the Marseillaise from a handful of “Yellow Vests” were drowned out by sound of the Internationale. In fact, on the contrary, the “Yellow Vests” found themselves diluted inside the demonstrations and behind the proletarian slogans and the proletarian methods of struggle.

Another example of this process indicating the strength of this movement was the lawyers' strike. Also hit hard by the reforms, many lawyers participated on the marches in their black robes. Moreover, hundreds of them hung their gowns on the gates of the ministries and the courts. These strange and dramatic images made the headlines. Obviously, they had joined the movement with their confusions and illusions about the Law, Justice and the Republic. But the important fact is “they joined”. Unlike the “Yellow Vests” movement, it was not the petty-bourgeoisie that gave colour and tone to the struggle. On the contrary, the anger of the lawyers is that of certain strata of the petty-bourgeoisie who are increasingly affected by proletarianisation and who joined the proletarian struggle only temporarily. This process shows the general and historical tendency that Marx and Engels described in the Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1848. It heralds the dynamic of the struggles of the future when the proletariat, in the course of its revolutionary activity, will be at the forefront of the confrontation with capitalism by offering a perspective for the whole of society, thus drawing more and more layers of society into its struggle:

- “*The small-scale tradespeople, shop-keepers and retired tradesmen,*

7. This contrasts with the movement against pensions' “reform”, which was completely blacked out outside France.

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handicraftsmen and peasants, the whole lower echelon of the middle classes, all these sink gradually into the proletariat; partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried out, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by the new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population” (...)

- *“The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shop-keeper, the artisan, the peasant, all fight against the bourgeoisie to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are not therefore revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If, by chance, they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat”.*

The road leading to the victory of the revolution is still very long. The movement of 2019-2020, with the return of workers' combativity and the end to the paralysis on the social terrain over the last ten years, is just the start. To go further, the working class has to go back, to look at where it comes from, to reappropriate the lessons of its past struggles: Poland: 1980, Italy: 1968, Germany: 1919-1921, Russia: 1905 and

1917, France: 1848 and 1871, and many others. The history of the workers' movement is rich in struggles and forms a long, continuous chain right up until the present.

To reappropriate its own history, buried under the mounds of lies of the bourgeoisie, the working class must cultivate debate and develop committees and circles... and patience, because, as Luxemburg explained, being directly confronted with the bankruptcy of this society it is made increasingly difficult to enter into the struggle. Not only does impoverishment make the cost of a strike difficult to bear, but the global economic crisis reveals directly the magnitude of the stakes. However, *“Proletarian revolutions (...) constantly retreat before the sheer immensity of their own goals until they are eventually faced with a situation that makes it impossible to turn back.”*⁸ Hence the development of struggles is slowed down and it becomes more tortuous

But eventually, the same world economic crisis and the attacks on our living and working conditions that come with it, will inexorably lead to the outbreak of new struggles. It is in this process of development of the economic struggles against the impoverishment and the general degradation of all its living conditions that the working class will be able to develop its consciousness and politicise its struggles in confrontation with the bourgeois state and, ultimately, to affirm itself as a revolutionary class. **Pawel, 13 March 2020**

8. Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1851)

Imperialism in the Arctic - How to make a profit from an ecological disaster

While in the summer of 2019 the countries of Europe sweltered under a heat wave, another country suffered from it also with potentially much more dangerous consequences: on July 30 the temperature on the east coast of Greenland hit a record high of 25 degrees Celsius. Scientists from around the world reacted with indignation faced with the breadth of the catastrophe: *“When we go back over several decades, it's better to be sitting down before looking at the results because we are fearful of the speed of change (...) It's also something that affects the whole of Greenland not just the hottest parts of the south”*¹. More than half of Greenland's ice-cap is now reduced to slush. The consequences are immediately preoccupying for the indigenous people; rivers are swelling so much from the melted snow that they have already destroyed several bridges. This situation will become normal in the future as climate experts are forecasting more and more similar developments.

The consequences are enormous and not just at the climatic level: the retreat of the pack-ice, which is becoming permanent, allows all maritime countries to look at exploiting the situation on several levels: access to new natural resources, to new strategic regions and to new commercial routes. The bourgeoisie is thus exploiting the catastrophes that its system has brought about, increasing still more the risks to the environment.

New grounds for the pillage of natural resources

The Arctic is rich in different natural resources which up to now have been frozen in the ice, presenting difficulties of exploitation and the relative disinterest of the maritime powers for this frozen and inhospitable region. All this has evidently changed with climatic heating and the frenetic race by the major powers for accessible mineral resources which are becoming rarer or constitute assets in the economic and industrial war: metals such as zinc, copper, tin, lead, nickel, gold, uranium, diamonds, rare-earth, gas and oil, all are here in the Arctic and that would provide the possibility of exercising a monopoly. The Kara Sea, part of

the Arctic Ocean north of Siberia, holds as much oil as Saudi Arabia and a US study has put 13% of oil reserves and 30% of the world's gas reserves in this region.

All the speeches from the media about safeguarding the environment, the necessary changes in “the way we live and consume” (but nothing about production!) and the indispensable individual “examination of one's own conscience” regarding one's “carbon footprint” and over-consumption are perfectly hypocritical faced with this reality: the bourgeoisie looks for profit everywhere, in the climate disaster unfolding in front of our eyes as in all the rest! If it is possible to exploit (even over-exploit) the melting of the Arctic glaciers in a profitable fashion it will do so and that's only one facet of the problem: as soon as there is the exploitation of natural resources, the inherent risks (pollution, accidents, increased destruction of the environment that collides with local people and destroys their way of life) can only follow, as a representative of the Inuit people said: *“Our culture and our way of life are being attacked. The animals, the birds and the fish on which we depend for our survival are more and more under pressure. We are concerned for our food security”*².

While making workers feel guilty for their “irresponsibility” faced with the climate catastrophe, each national bourgeoisie is organising themselves to draw a profit from it or, better still, draw some strategic advantages.

“New commercial opportunities”

The Arctic is not only a source of potential raw materials; it is also coveted because the melting glaciers allow the opening up of new sea routes, potentially much shorter and thus more profitable than those existing. Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State and ex-director of the CIA, noted that *“the regular retreat of the ice-pack opens up new routes for passage and offers new commercial opportunities”*³. While denying

1. “Greenland hit by a heatwave with temperatures reaching 25C”, *Science et Avenir* (in French, August 1, 2019).

2. “American climatic scepticism upsets regional cooperation in the Arctic” *GEO*, (March 7, 2019).

3. *Idem*

all climatic change, this worthy representative of the American bourgeoisie unashamedly vows to profit from it! And the US is not the only shark swimming in these waters: altogether six countries are directly concerned (Canada, USA, Russia, Denmark, Norway and Iceland) and a certain number of others are directly interested in the question.

In the first rank we find China, observer to the Arctic Council, which has underlined its interest in a route which will allow it to reach the Atlantic ports without having to go around Africa or go through the Panama Canal; it also invested some 90 billion dollars here between 2012 and 2017, according to Pompeo, and has sent specialised ships in order to try out the new route. Russia is evidently highly interested by the possibility of the unrestricted use of its Arctic ports in open waters, contrary to the ports that it usually uses (apart from Murmansk), which would allow it to closely monitor this new sea route. Norway, Canada, Denmark, who are directly concerned, are evidently actively manoeuvring around their interest in the region. But other powers are looking to get their feet in the door, for example France, which has the status of Arctic Council observer and which has set up the post of an “ambassador to the Poles” given a little while ago to Ségolène Royal, who follows on from Michel Rocard. France regularly takes part in NATO exercises in the region.

This interest of diverse powers is affirmed by a very militaristic declaration by the United States, again in the words of Mike Pompeo: *“We are entering a new era of strategic engagement in the Arctic, with new threats for the Arctic and its resources, and for all of our interests in this region”*. According to him, the Arctic passage *“could reduce the times of journeys between Asia and the West by about twenty days”*. He wants the Arctic route to become the *“Suez Canal and the Panama of the twenty-first century”*. As we understand the weight of the Panama Canal for US imperialism, the interest shown in the “North-west passage” takes on a practically historic importance. And we also understand while the US openly tries to exclude China from the Arctic Council!

Beyond the sea routes, global warming opens up the possibilities of making terrestrial routes a long-term practicality, opening the door to the installation of numerous important infrastructures, and consequently the possibilities of easier access to these areas that are normally impossible to work in for three-quarters of the year. This would allow for a better economic exploitation and an opening up of the regions, while lowering the cost of living for the local residents. For example the Canadian government has launched a number of such projects over the years.

“Boot-prints in the snow”

In the logic of imperialism, these developments can only bring an increased military presence in this region where, since the Cold War, few soldiers have been stationed, but where now each power involved has to defend their well-understood interests by baring their military fangs. Pompeo has been clear: *“The region has become a space for world power and competition”*, which here involves a growing presence of the armies of Uncle Sam, adding that *“Russia is already leaving its boot-prints in the snow”*. Denouncing the multiple military provocations of Russia, its blocking of the GPS network, its air incursions into areas it has kept away from up to now and its regular maritime manoeuvres, the countries of NATO have responded: Iceland has re-opened its base on Keflavik to GIs, while Norway has opened up its Grottsund deep-water port to US and British nuclear submarines, and its Bodo aerodrome is regularly used by fighter aircraft for their various exercises in which the countries of NATO participate...

On its side Russia has reactivated its Siberian bases, abandoned since the Cold War, while renovating its old fleet of ice-breakers. Pompeo’s remarks do not lack an element of truth...

These imperialist developments have also given rise to a rather droll event. Trump’s suggestion about buying Greenland from Denmark is not quite absurd and casts a light on the very voracious appetites of the

imperialist powers in the area. Although this vast region, four times the size of France and covered with the largest glacier in the world, costs the Danish state dear, it is quite unimaginable for Copenhagen to give up such a potentially lucrative outpost as Greenland. The United States, which has always guaranteed the defence of this large island since the Second World War, already tried to buy it in 1946; but that came up against all the imperialist logic of capitalism. Situated in the Arctic, rich in numerous unexploited natural resources, strategically well-placed with a route around the American continent to the north and thus so vital for the USA’s security that it occupied Greenland militarily from 1940, the territory has numerous qualities from an imperialist point of view, and others can be added: not only is the port of Thule in very deep waters and can thus accommodate very large civilian or military vessels, but the lay of the airport allows whatever apparatuses to be unloaded.



Moreover, the Exclusive Economic Zone of Greenland allows the state to exploit all resources which are found inside this zone up to 200 nautical miles around the territory. As a bonus, Greenland is associated to the European Union because of Denmark’s guardianship which increases its points of interest... Trump’s own interest in this territory is far from being absurd from the logic of imperialism, much more so when global warming offers unprecedented perspectives to anyone who controls it!

Capitalism has habituated us to the idea of profiting from anything, which is what this most dynamic system of production does. But to take profits by aggravating a major global threat to the ecosystem, that it itself has provoked and which puts the future of humanity into question, in the same way as its criminal deforestation of all regions of the globe, shows to what point this system is decomposing and has no viable future to offer humanity. This is what the ICC said in 1990 in its “Theses on Decomposition”:

“The scale and the proliferation of all these economic and social calamities, which spring generally speaking from the decadence of the system itself, reveals the fact that this system is trapped in a complete dead-end, and has no future to propose to the greater part of the world population other than a growing and unimaginable barbarity. This is a system where economic policy, research, investment are all conducted to the detriment of humanity’s future, and even to the detriment of the system itself.”

The future that’s in store for the Arctic that we show above is one that capitalism holds for the entire human species: over-exploitation and the transformation of the environment into an unbearable hell, a search for profit which means selling off the future, military barbarism, everything is here! The alternative to this for humanity is the one proposed by the Third International a hundred years ago: socialism or barbarism, the destruction of this system that has no future, or the slow destruction of humanity. There is no other realistic possibility than the destruction of decadent capitalism and only the working class, the class associated in production, has the means to bring this about. **H.D. April 24, 2020**

An appeal for solidarity with the ICC in the proletarian milieu faced with a new parasitic attack

A close sympathiser of the ICC responds to an attack on our organisation by the so-called “International Group of the Communist Left”

Because of the importance and seriousness of the matter, the ICC has published an appeal for the defence of the proletarian milieu¹ against the activities of an element engaged in a very harmful activity and who systematically refused to clarify his behaviour. A few days after the ICC had published its appeal - in English, French, German and Spanish (at least, to my knowledge) - the “International Group of the Communist Left” (formerly the “Internal Fraction of the ICC”) published a statement in defence of this element² and, above all, as an attack on the ICC.³

As an expression of solidarity, I will give my comments on certain passages of the declaration of the IGCL:

“The same is true of its only ‘political’ reproach: Nuevo Curso has not responded to criticism, including ours, of its historical reference to the Trotskyist Left Opposition of the 1930s. But what authority can the ICC have in this matter, when it stubbornly refuses to respond publicly to those, of which we are also a part, who point to its successive and grave abandonments of Marxist principles?”

This is the logic of an ‘eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’. According to the IGCL, the ICC doesn’t have the right to demand a reply from Nuevo Curso, because the ICC itself does not publicly respond to the IGCL, or others whose name it does not even mention. To begin with, it is a big lie that the ICC has not replied to the IGCL (and you can check this on the ICC’s website⁴), and finally, this ‘eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth’ is a principle completely alien to the working class. It would be very important if elements of the proletarian milieu would call for a debate on certain issues, even if in the logic of their internal approach they, for the time being, refuse to respond to others.

“As we pointed out last summer: “the ICC is now launching a genuine parasitic attack – to use its own words – on these forces, particularly the Gulf Coast Communist Fraction, trying to convince them to discuss

parasitism as a priority. It does not matter for the ICC that the GCCF is opposed to this position, the very fact it has succeeded in getting them to accept a meeting on this theme, instead of political issues related to the Communist Left’s experience and programmatic lessons, is already in itself a trap for new forces without experience.”

The ICC sought to discuss this important issue as a matter of priority in order to clarify a major divergence with the GCCF (without even omitting “political issues related to the Communist Left’s experience and programmatic lessons”, as if there would be any contradiction between the two! This is precisely one of the questions raised by this group!). According to the ICC, the GCCF’s close contact with parasitism is a major threat to the group. The ICC seeks to encourage discussion and clarification, and if the GCCF expressed a disagreement it is not something negative that closes the debate once and for all.

The ICC did not ‘make the GCCF accept’ anything, they decided to accept in principle the discussion and finally closed it. The ICC has neither the means nor the intention to force acceptance or to confuse the debate, but sought to continue it in order to achieve the greatest clarity⁵. The IGCL treats the elements of the GCCF as if they are followers without their own will, without courage or responsibility to be consistent in the defence of their position. This is the ambiguity to which those groups who are in close contact with parasitism expose themselves.

On the other hand, how can a group, which presents itself as “consistent with itself”, use a concept with which it disagrees: “a parasitic attack - to use its own words”? This can only be a childish recourse to the playground principle of “he who says it, is it!”. This falls within the typical parasitic dynamic of accusing others of following their own logic, and projecting onto others what they do themselves. They even say it in the most sophisticated ways, accusing the ICC of the same thing. Perhaps some elements do so in a conscious way, and others are prisoners of the vicious circle of the ‘eye for an eye, tooth for tooth’ logic. **It is important to get out of this circle of easy and unfounded accusations in order to distinguish them from serious and well-founded allegations in defence of the proletarian milieu from slander.**

In this whole smokescreen of accusations, everything could look the same. The ICC, however, does not deny the need for a serious, rigorous, well-founded and courageous denunciation, in defence of the milieu,

1. <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16802/who-who-nuevo-curso>.

2. More than defending this element, the GIGC claims to defend the Nuevo Curso group, seeking to present Gaizka as a kind of bugbear conjured up by the ICC. Its accusations of “personalising the political issues” actually serve to disguise the individual and to hide them behind the group, while distorting and misrepresenting the arguments of the ICC. The GIGC has of course no interest in theorising a distinction between, on the one hand, the rigorous investigation of the honour of individuals suspected of being adventurers in order to defend the proletarian milieu and personal attacks on the other hand. However, it had no scruples in practising, against the ICC, what it now claims to denounce, by revealing the names of militants it sought to discredit. (See: “The real ‘political disagreements’ of the friends of Jonas”: https://en.internationalism.org/262_in-fraction.htm) The ICC has seriously investigated the individual Gaizka by giving him the opportunity to explain himself several times. If he would be honest and considered the ICC’s investigations to be a mistake, it would be his responsibility to clarify his more than suspicious activity, as well as his refusal to explain himself in the past.

3. <http://igcl.org/New-ICC-Attack-against-the>

4. It has replied to the attacks of the IGCL, although it has of course not entered into its game by treating it as a group of the Communist Left. Nevertheless, it has defended itself against their attacks by responding to its slanders and misrepresentations since it created its fake internal fraction of the ICC. One need only type ‘ificc’ or ‘igcl’ in the search engine of the English ICC website to see that the ICC has not ignored the IGCL, but has sought the most profound clarity concerning its behaviour.

5. The ICC, and here one can see the maturity of the resolutions of the last 23rd Congress, understands that the struggle against parasitism is one of the fundamental political struggles in this period of decomposition. This phenomenon is nothing out of the ordinary in bourgeois society; it is far from being a foreign body to it. Faced with this, it is necessary to struggle for the defence of the organisation against groups that pretend to be part of the proletarian political milieu (with diverse, heterogeneous origins) but whose collective activity (in spite of including contradictory elements) is aimed at destroying the real revolutionary organisations as covertly as possible; not necessarily with continuous frontal attacks that would expose themselves. Their origin is not necessarily that of paid bourgeois agents, as the IGCL tends to misrepresent in order to turn the ICC into a bugbear (although it is a good breeding ground for the infiltration of such elements, as well as for political adventurers, and ambitious declassed elements who do not feel recognised by present-day society). Distinguishing these groups from genuine revolutionary organisations is a matter to be addressed methodically and rigorously, seeking clarity and discussion with searching elements for whom it is difficult to go beyond appearances. It is important to distinguish, for example, parasitism from both leftism on the one hand and the swamp on the other, or from searching elements, since the actual confusion within them could be confused with the use and spread of such confusion for their own purposes. The tools to make this distinction are fundamental and are not an ICC invention.

and declares that this is a serious matter not to be taken lightly and that it needs discretion and a thorough investigation. This is not something new for the ICC but comes from the tradition of the working class (against Vogt, Lassalle, Schweitzer, the Alliance of Bakunin, etc.) and it is not a tool to crush people, but to clarify the attitudes that belong to the working class and those that do not, and to seriously investigate elements with a sinister behaviour, in defence of the milieu. The ICC also seeks to distinguish between this approach and the approach of slander and defamation. They are two things that are not part of a vague confusing unity but quite opposite to each other.

The elements of the proletarian political milieu must seek to clarify what is behind this attack by the IGCL not through the method of prejudicial contempt, but through analysis and the search for clarity. Not by taking its words out of context, but by the greatest possible clarity and the careful reading of its text in contrast to the document of the ICC and its overall activity. As well as following the rest of the texts published by the ICC on the IGCL or the IFICC, and those published by the both these groups on the ICC.

This is the only way we can deal with the confusion and the bamboozling in the milieu. Rigour and seriousness are most necessary. This methodical rigour and seriousness leads, in my opinion, to a clear denunciation of this kind of parasitic activity, and to distinguish what is part of the proletarian milieu and what, although it may claim the opposite for other reasons, is not. The search for clarity is fundamental, and this is indispensable for the working class. The ICC does not seek to distort the words of either the parasitic groups or the bourgeoisie.

“It is hard to see what interest the SP and the Spanish state would have in creating from scratch a group like Nuevo Curso whose denunciation of the capitalist character of the SP itself is systematic. And which, on the other hand, has played an active role in the emergence and international regrouping of new revolutionary and communist forces, particularly on the American continent.”

The ICC has never said that the PSOE has created Nuevo Curso. Anyone who reads the ICC article can see it. Therefore, this is a lie⁶. It is not that the IGCL is confused or unable to distinguish things. The IGCL has no other reason for existing than attacking the ICC. Here it puts forward the idea that everyone who talks about bringing together revolutionary forces must themselves be revolutionary. It is against the nature of the IGCL to accept that there are groups that, while denouncing the capitalist system, do not belong to the working class, even if they claim to do so, such as the Alliance of Bakunin, or the IGCL itself and to seek clarity in this respect. Instead they put everything in the same bag, to create a camouflage for itself.

The superficiality with which they defend Nuevo Curso (even though it is not NC, but Gaizka who is the main axis of the investigations of the ICC document) could equally be used even to defend leftism (even though NC is neither part of leftism nor of the Communist Left). What happens then? It doesn't care in the least whether this element is honourable or not. Finding the tools to investigate and understand would help to clear up the smokescreen of confusion behind which the IGCL hides itself. The IGCL adds, with great hypocrisy, that to speak about specific individuals is to enter into “*psychology of individual behaviour*” and that this is by definition a “*nauseating and destructive*” area where it is impossible to verify anything. Once again the IGCL attacks the working class by preventing it from identifying non-proletarian behaviour and by instilling a great fear about seeking to understand individual behaviour.

6. The deformation is very clear for anyone who has read the two texts. The ICC argues that “*he is the main animator of Nuevo Curso*”, and that today Gaizka aims to “*create Nuevo Curso as a ‘historic link’ with the so-called ‘Spanish Communist Left’*”, but at no point does it say that the PSOE created NC. The fact that an individual was in regular contact with the high functionaries of the bourgeoisie (alternating with elements of the right as well) at the same time as he was in contact with the ICC, and was the main animator of NC, does not necessarily mean that the bourgeoisie created this group.

In addition, ICC also clearly alerts “*those involved in the Nuevo Curso blog who do so in good faith*”. The aim of the ICC is to bring these elements back into the proletarian camp with the greatest possible clarity and quality, not to destroy, overthrow or demolish proletarian organisations, as the IGCL claims. In its denunciation of parasitism, the ICC offers a positive perspective.

“Did it not issue an internal resolution calling for the destruction of the ICT (ex-IBRP) at its 16th Congress in 2005? Today it is Nuevo Curso’s turn.”

The IGCL does not provide links to the texts of the ICC on the internet, citing only those parts that are convenient to them and taken out of context. They even want to interfere in the last ICC Congress⁷ but, to begin with, they are totally wrong that the ICC rejects the class struggle. They neither understand nor seek to understand the theory of the historical course; they simply use it as a stick to beat the ICC.

Furthermore, they make allusion to and distort the internal affairs of the ICC since 2005! But the IGCL, formerly the IFICC, was excluded from the ICC in 2003. How would they have got hold of these documents? And they claim that the ICC called for the destruction of the ICT!⁸ In this context, I ask, as a supporter of the ICC and as a member of the Communist Left, the ICT to show its solidarity with the ICC in the name of the defence of the proletarian milieu.

I will not elaborate further on the document, which must be analysed in depth. My intention is to express as soon as possible my solidarity with the ICC.

Fraternally,

TV / 19 February 2020

7. “*In particular the one from its last congress which liquidated the fundamental and central principle of marxism that the class struggle is the motor force of history*”: “*the general dynamic of capitalist society... is no longer determined by the balance of forces between classes.*” (Resolution on the international situation, 23rd ICC Congress).

8. For the ICC, the ICT is an organisation of the communist left! There may have been an internal debate on the ICT at that time (but surely not in the terms advanced by the IGCL!), but if that had been in a resolution of the ICC, it would have been published. Or are we talking about a quote taken out of context? We don't know. I don't know anything about this internal debate, fictional or real, or about its content. What is clear is the malicious nature of the IGCL, which makes the ICC document the equivalent of a secret and internal plot against the ICT: so the question is, why does the IGCL seek to break the necessary solidarity between the two organisations?

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*.