



world revolution

Britain

Workers must not take sides in divisions between capitalist cliques

For British populists and Brexiteers, the nostalgic dreams of an Empire that covered a quarter of the land surface of the globe and where the sun never set, are turning into nightmares. The campaign for “Global Britain” will not be able to prevent this.

In 2021 the geopolitical landscape for the UK has fundamentally changed. Britain has lost much of its power. Its relations with the Continent, its position in NATO and its links with the Commonwealth, are all being challenged.

The relationship with the US at least gave the UK an influential role as an intermediary between Washington and Brussels. In cutting itself off from Europe the UK has shot itself in the foot. “We are no longer an irreplaceable bridge between Europe and America. We are now less relevant to them both.” (John Major)

In the Brexit negotiations the UK acted on the assumption that it shared an equal place on the world stage with other international powers. But Brexit has confirmed that the British bourgeoisie is deluded. With the conclusion of the negotiations with the EU it is now operating in a world dominated by the US, China and the EU, where it has isolated itself.

Under the present changed geopolitical conditions the UK will have to re-establish its political relations with the key countries in the world. It will have to fight its way to the diplomatic table, especially now the US administration is starting to re-energise its relationship with NATO, the UN and other multilateral organisations.

In March the British government initiated its strategy for “Global Britain in a Competitive Age”. This project sets out British ambitions for new commercial opportunities and pathways to global influence. But this refurbished version of the “Integrated Review of Security, Defence and Foreign Policy” from 2015 is not going to solve the UK’s fundamental problems after leaving the EU.

Internal tensions and fractures in the U.K.

The decline of its position on the international arena has also led to growing conflicts within the UK itself, for instance with the devolved governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland.



Amazon construction site, Gateshead, June 2021: workers’ solidarity against sacking of electricians

The Brexit referendum of 2016 “gave a huge impulse to Scottish nationalism.” (“Populism leads to growing instability and fragmentation”, page 3) Since then the calls for Scottish independence have become stronger by the year. At the beginning of 2021, 54 per cent of Scots supported an independent Scotland, which was 8 per cent more than in 2014. Recent opinion polls in key EU member states show that support is increasing for an independent Scotland becoming a member state of the EU.

Over the last decade the forces in Northern Ireland looking to break away from the UK have become stronger. The Northern Ireland Protocol only added fuel to the fire, by further isolating Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. The growing tensions in the Six Counties are actually “pulling at the integrity of the British State itself” (ibid) and threaten to make the national fragmentation a reality. In the meantime, the US administration has warned Johnson not to violate the Protocol and to respect the Good Friday Agreement: the open border between the North and the South has to be protected.

In the political establishment in London tensions are also rising to the extent that competing ministers, political advisers and even family members are engaged in a sordid turf war. In the last two months, in an atmosphere of doubt, jealousy and suspicion, accusations between Johnson, Hancock and Cummings have flown back and forth. The last expression was “the heavy artillery against the government” brought about by Dominic Cummings in “a massive campaign on social media”. (“Bourgeois vendettas and the distortion of science”, page 3)

Class against class

These growing tensions and fractures within the UK and the ensuing struggles between bourgeois factions present great dangers for the working class. It presents “workers with a disorientating perspective” (“Populism leads to growing instability and fragmentation”, page 3). But they must resist the pressure to support any of the bourgeois cliques. The ability of workers to resist these pressures can only be realised when they fight “as a class antagonistic to capital” (ibid). The only

prospect is to struggle on a class terrain.

In the past months, workers in the UK and elsewhere have demonstrated that they still possess this ability, as was shown for instance by a recent wildcat strike by 30-40 workers at the Gateshead Amazon warehouse construction site. Workers there protested for two days against their sudden dismissal. Persistence and working class solidarity bore fruit, as all sacked workers were reinstated on the third day of the strike.

The same capacity was shown on 3 July when dozens of marches took place across Britain in protest against the government’s proposed 1% pay rise for NHS workers, which has been widely condemned by health workers.

Such small struggles may not be spectacular, but they are the seeds for the future autonomy of the working class against capital. **WR 4/7/21**

Against the nationalist poison, international solidarity!

The recent demonstrations “in solidarity with Palestine” have given vent to real indignation about the barbarism being unleashed in Gaza. But they are manipulated in the most shameful way by the bourgeoisie. These are demonstrations which call for a false solidarity on a terrain which is not internationalist and proletarian. On the contrary, this is the terrain of **bourgeois nationalism** which feeds all imperialist confrontations. **P.2**

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Against the nationalist poison, international solidarity of all workers!

Israel's military strikes in response to Hamas, its so-called targeted bombardment of the open-air prison that is the Gaza Strip, has provoked hundreds of thousands of people around the world into joining massive demonstrations denouncing the deluge of fire from the Zionist "colonialist oppressor" state launched against the "oppressed Palestinian masses". These demonstrations took place in most European countries, in the United States as well as in Canada, but also in Turkey, Tunisia, Libya and even in Iraq, as well as in Bangladesh, Kenya, Jordan and Japan.

These mobilisations give vent to real indignation about all this barbarism. But they are manipulated in the most shameless way by the bourgeoisie. These are demonstrations which call for a false solidarity on a terrain which is not internationalist and proletarian. On the contrary, this is the terrain of **bourgeois nationalism** which feeds all imperialist confrontations.

Solidarity with the proletarians in Palestine and Israel does not mean defending a bourgeois camp!

For all the Western governments, led by the United States, even if the denunciation of the war or the bombardments is repeated over and over again, calling on Israel to "show restraint", the defence of the State of Israel remains a constant in the face of Hamas and its rockets striking Israeli territory indiscriminately. As always, the same crocodile tears are shed in the face of the atrocities of a conflict that has been going on since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and has cost the lives of tens of thousands of people, particularly in the Palestinian territories.

For all the left-wing forces that have called for demonstrations all over the world, the "No to the massacre!" slogan is above all an opportunity, once again, to call for support for the "just Palestinian cause against Israel's war crimes"! Clearly, behind this "determination" to denounce the war, everywhere in the world, the whole left and the extreme left are calling on the exploited to join a camp, that of Palestinian nationalism, against the oppression of the Palestinian masses by Israeli imperialism. This terrain is that of capital, that of the confrontation between Israeli, Palestinian, European, Iranian and American imperialist powers.

All these confrontations, from the backstage of diplomacy to open military offensives, can only lead to Palestinian and Israeli proletarians paying the price in blood to the imperialist Moloch.

Hamas, a bourgeois organisation...

That Israel is a bourgeois military power of the first rank, without any qualms in its domination of territories occupied for decades, despising and provoking permanently a Palestinian population under the yoke, is only too evident. By imposing systematic colonisation and shamelessly expelling Palestinian families, as most recently in East Jerusalem, the spark which lit the fuse, the Zionist state is once again demonstrating its criminal barbarity and its unscrupulous policy towards the Palestinians as well as towards its own Israeli Arab nationals.

But what about the Palestinian bourgeois factions of the PLO, Fatah, Hezbollah or Hamas? What about the jockeying for position between these different factions to regain political legitimacy and to present themselves as the essential interlocutors between the Palestinians and Israel? The most polite bourgeois experts themselves note that the Hamas strategy of firing rockets into Israel, thus fuelling the IDF's response, is clearly a tactic for discussions and negotiations with Israel for vulgar imperialist interests.

... and so are the leftist organisations!

But for the extreme left of capital, the Trotskyists of Lutte Ouvrière (LO) for example, the analysis is much more specious. Thus, even if LO, using as always a falsely radical language, affirms that "*The Israeli and Palestinian leaders are leading their peoples into a bloody impasse, with the complicity of the imperialist powers*", it hastens, in order to insidiously justify supporting one side (the "weaker" one facing the "stronger" one), to add this: "*To place the two sides back to back, while a supposedly democratic and hyper-armed state is bent on destroying an already devastated territory, is to accept the law of the strongest. And above all, it is to turn one's back on the Palestinians' thousand times legitimate revolt! If the Palestinians have the Israeli state as their enemy, they have Hamas as their adversary*".

The libertarian organisations are not to be outdone and are adding another layer. For the Organisation Communiste Libertaire (OCL), "*Faced with the outburst of violence orchestrated by an Israeli regime in the midst of a political crisis, led by a Netanyahu at the end of his rope and ready to sacrifice the Palestinians to ensure his continuity in power, timid condemnations (or worse, statements that place Israelis and Palestinians back to back) are not enough. International law must be applied. It could not be clearer!*"

This kind of spin calling for "international law" and describing one of these barbaric camps as "the enemy" and the other as "the adversary" or even as a "friend", clearly expresses **their open defence of one imperialist camp against another**. The nationalist logic of all the leftist parties is not only expressed in their calls for a false solidarity via the demonstrations, it continues by calling on the working class to struggle, to strike, "*to demand together the end of imperialism and the right to self-determination of the Palestinians*", that is to say to divert a workers' weapon of struggle against the working class itself. Thus we saw the Italian dockers of the port of Livorno refusing to load a ship with arms and explosives bound for Israel. While this action may appear to be what the working class should be doing in the face of war, in reality the unions and the bourgeois left have entirely driven this action with the avowed aim of supporting the "Palestinian cause".

Proletarians have no homeland!

Nationalist ideology is the very antithesis of the proletarian terrain, of the uncompromising defence of internationalism which asserts the solidarity of all the exploited of the whole world. It was exactly the same logic used by social democracy when it betrayed the working class in 1914: rejection of proletarian internationalism and a chauvinistic call for proletarian participation in the First World War against "German militarism" for some, or "Russian autocracy" for others. The 20th century was thus a century of the most atrocious wars in human history. None of them ever served the interests of the workers. The latter were always called upon to be killed by the millions for the interests of their exploiters, in the name of the defence of "the fatherland", "civilization",

"democracy", or even "the socialist fatherland" (as some presented the USSR of Stalin and the Gulag).

Since then, all the Trotskyists and official anarchists have continued in the same logic: during the Spanish war, the Second World War, the Algerian war, Vietnam, and many others... In this case, during the multiple conflicts which have ravaged the Middle East for more than 50 years, they have systematically called on the proletarians to fight for the "*satisfaction of all the national and democratic rights of the Palestinians*" and to allow for a "just solution" to the conflict. As if the decomposition of the capitalist world, its growing chaos every day, its warlike barbarism at all levels, the growing militarism of the great powers and the regional second-raters, all imperialists, could lead to a "just solution"! In this region of the world, which has been plagued by war for decades, as in every war episode throughout the world, **there can be no solution within the framework of capitalism!**

Where are the interests of the working class, in Israel, Jewish or Arab, in Palestine, in other countries of the world? The Jewish workers exploited in Israel by Jewish bosses, the Palestinian workers exploited by Jewish or Arab bosses experience the same working conditions and have the same enemy: capitalism. Just like the workers of the whole world!

Faced with the warlike madness suffered for decades by the Israeli and Palestinian workers, the proletariat of the "great democracies" must not take the side of one camp against another. The best solidarity they can give them is certainly not to encourage their nationalist illusions but to develop the fight against the capitalist system responsible for all wars. Faced with the growing chaos in the Middle East, the working class can only create a world of peace by overthrowing capitalism through the international struggle of the proletariat.

Against nationalism, against the wars your exploiters want to drag you into: Proletarians of all countries, unite!

Alfred, 7 June 2021.

Polemic

Internationalism means the rejection of both imperialist camps

The outbreak of an imperialist war has always been a test for those who claim to be on the side of the world working class against capitalism. In 1914 it clearly separated those "socialists", and "anarchists" who rallied to the defence of their own ruling class from those who, even at the price of isolation and repression, held firm to the principle that the workers have no fatherland.

At the same time, while these lines of demarcation were very clear, there was also a "centre", a "swamp" made up of elements who were, for diverse reasons, unable to take up an unequivocal position for or against the war – either because they were using empty phrases about peace and justice to hide their own drift towards accommodation with capitalism, or because they were making sincere if confused efforts to head in the opposite direction – i.e. towards the proletarian camp.

In the reactions to the current conflict in Israel/Palestine, we can see similar patterns. In the main cities of Europe and the US, we have seen numerous demonstrations calling on us to choose one camp against the other: mainly those brandishing Palestinian flags and supported by an array of liberals, social democrats, Trotskyists, Islamists, and others. These marches had the function of channelling real indignation provoked by the brutal Israeli onslaught against Gaza into the service of a wider imperialist conflict. The slogans "Free Palestine" and "We are all Hamas" not only declare their support for nationalist gangs aiming to establish a new capitalist state, but also coincide with the imperialist aims of Iran, Qatar, Russia

and China. Opposing them were smaller groups of diehard Zionists for whom Israel can do no wrong and who, if they criticise US policy in the Middle East, merely demand even more blatant US support for Israel's imperialist expansion. In both cases, these were pro-war mobilisations.

But there are also those who reject these rallies in the name of working class internationalism. For example, the website libcom.org provides a space for those – mainly, but not only, groups or individuals who label themselves "class struggle anarchists" – who argue against support for national liberation struggles or the setting up of new bourgeois states. An examination of the thread "Jerusalem and Gaza"¹ provides samples of the range of groups and opinions which say that they do not identify with either camp in the conflict. Or rather, it reveals that among those who lay claim to the internationalist position on this and similar wars, there is again a "centre", a marshy ground in which proletarian positions are mixed up with concessions to the dominant ideology, and thus to justifications for imperialist war.

Today most of the political currents who composed this "centre" in the First World War have either disappeared or made their final peace with the bourgeoisie, many of them returning to the social democratic parties which had by the early 20s clearly become adjuncts of the capitalist state. In today's conditions, the various anarchist groups and tendencies are the most common denizens of the swamp: at one end, openly merging with the

1. Jerusalem and Gaza (libcom.org)

left wing of capital, at the other, defending definite internationalist positions. This was clearly shown in the reaction of the anarchists to the war in Israel/Palestine.

On the one hand, you have anarchist organisations which are almost indistinguishable from the Trotskyists. The article from our section in France identifies the Organisation Communiste Libertaire as an example of this kind of anarcho-leftism: "*Faced with the outburst of violence orchestrated by an Israeli regime in the midst of a political crisis, led by a Netanyahu at the end of his rope and ready to sacrifice the Palestinians to ensure his continuity in power, timid condemnations (or worse, statements that place Israelis and Palestinians back to back) are not enough. International law must be applied. It could not be clearer!*"². An edifying example of anarchists appealing to the fiction of "international law"!

On the libcom thread, the statement from a number of "anarchist communist groups" in Oceania takes a similar stance. While claiming to denounce nationalism it calls on us to take sides with a "Palestinian resistance" which is somehow outside it. "*Israel's occupation is a naked form of colonial oppression, and its Palestinian victims have every right to resist it by whatever means that are in accord with the final goal of liberation. (...) There is no grey area, there are no two equal sides at war. The Palestinian masses are resisting oppres-*

2. Against the nationalist poison, international solidarity of all workers! | International Communist Current (internationalism.org)

sion."³ At the end of the leaflet, there is an appeal for people to participate in a series of "Free Palestine" demos being organised across Australia.

In the US, the Workers Solidarity Alliance also speaks with two tongues: on the one hand: "*We support a vision of Jewish and Palestinian workers, peasants, and oppressed people questioning and ultimately breaking with supremacist, nationalist, and militaristic imaginaries and ideologies, and coming together in joint struggle to overcome power, privilege, and hatred by building mutual aid, inter-communal solidarity, and collective self-management*". And in the next sentence it says: "*externally, we welcome U.S. workers supporting Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel, and publicly protesting against the ongoing violence in Occupied Palestine*". Campaigns to boycott this or that state follow the same logic of "sanctions" imposed by one state against another for flouting "international law" or "human rights".

The choices made by the promoters of such campaigns are significant in themselves. For example, the Syrian regime of Assad, backed by Russia, is directly responsible for the most horrifying massacre of the Syrian population, but you will never find leftists organising marches to denounce this carnage – some Trotskyist groups even see Assad as an anti-imperialist force. Israel, on the other

3. Freedom for Palestine! Statement from Anarchist-Communist Groups in Oceania – Red and Black Notes (redblacknotes.com)

The UK's Northern Ireland problem

Populism accelerates instability and fragmentation

After 15 months of the countries of the G7 trying to push the impact of the pandemic onto each other and their weaker rivals, after millions of deaths from coronavirus, after unprecedented political chaos in the US culminating in the invasion of the Capitol, along with the accelerating climate crisis, worsening international tensions, and the further lurches in the world economy, the G7 Summit, held in Cornwall in June, gave a façade of unity and resolve among imperialist rivals. Behind this charade the G7 is still a thieves' kitchen. The fact that China, the world's second largest economy, was not invited to the Summit, speaks volumes about the depth of tensions between the competing powers. The G7 countries are locked in a life-and-death struggle to carve-up and ravage the planet in a desperate attempt to find and control the vital raw materials for the 'green economy'. The only thing that's changed for the G7 is that the replacement of Trump with Biden means the US has rejoined the united campaign of feigned concern for nature and humanity in an attempt to pull the wool over workers' eyes.

One thing that undermined this pretend unity was the UK government's continuation of the war with the EU over sausages, nuggets and other chilled meats crossing the Irish Sea to Northern Ireland. The row over the Brexit Agreement threatened to expose the hollow nature of all the G7 bonhomie. Boris Johnson chose to ignore Biden's explicit warnings issued before the meeting with the UK's attempt to use the Summit to threaten to rip up of the Northern Ireland Protocol if a petulant British government did not get its own way. That this recalled Trump's antics was no accident. Britain has become the eye of the populist storm amongst the major powers.

Growing tensions with the devolved governments

In the United States the more intelligent factions of the bourgeoisie have, for the moment, managed to remove Trump from power. In Britain similar factions have proved unable to impose a similar measure of control over its political apparatus. Instead of the 2016 Referendum stemming the populist tide it opened the floodgates. The whole political apparatus was paralysed in the struggle over Brexit. This crisis gave birth to the Johnson government, led by a politician hated by much of his own party for his lying, irresponsibility and ready inclination to treachery. The Labour Party under Keir Starmer has spiralled into a cycle of electoral defeats and internecine warfare, leaving the ruling class with no real alternative party, at this stage, to replace or act as a constraint on Johnson.

The cost of this government was clear with its initial incompetent response to Covid. At a much deeper and profound level, the British bourgeoisie's loss of control of its own political game is threatening to accelerate the tensions pulling at the integrity of the British state itself. This is shown in the increasing weight of the Scottish National Party and its calls for independence, and the growing threats of Northern Ireland breaking away or being thrown into violent turmoil due to Brexit.

Before the May local elections, one of the main mouthpieces of the anti-populist factions of the bourgeoisie, *The Economist*, issued this ominous warning:

"Breaking up a country should never be done lightly, because it is a painful process politically, economically and emotionally. Ask the Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis or the Serbs, and other former citizens of Yugoslavia. Few splits happen as peacefully and easily as that of the Czechs and Slovaks. Though it seems inconceivable that the citizens of today's UK would start murdering each other, that is exactly what they did during the Northern Ireland Troubles that ended less than a quarter of a century ago" (The Economist, 17-23 April 2021).

Civil war is not on the agenda, but the dynamic of fragmentation is very real. This is clear in Scotland. The disastrous effort to stem populism with the Brexit referendum not only opened the gates to populism and its infection of the Tory Party but gave a huge impulse to Scottish nationalism.

The nationalist fire has been further fuelled by the Johnson government's provocative statements opposing independence, and by its handling of the pandemic. The prospect of no imminent change of the ruling team in London provides more ammunition to the SNP. Johnson is so toxic in Scotland that his own party banned him from electioneering there because his presence would have increased support for the SNP.

Brexit also exposed a profound problem for the British state in relation to Northern Ireland: its lack of full control over one of its own regions. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement, imposed on British imperialism by US imperialism, was based on the understanding that the UK would continue being part of the EU. It gave British capitalism's rivals in the EU an influence within its own territory: they supplied money and were the final arbiter in disputes between the British state and the various forces of Irish nationalism. Among them, Sinn Féin, and, above all, its armed wing, the IRA, welcomed the Agreement because it gave them a share of political power in the North, and left its control of nationalist areas untouched. The unionist bourgeoisie (and its paramilitaries) was forced to share power, and the British state was faced with its rivals, the US, Germany, France and the Irish Republic encroaching on its control of part of its own territory.



"When Johnson signed the Protocol it sabotaged the DUP's political influence..."

Brexit has opened up this wound in the side of the British state, leaving it even more exposed to its rivals' interference. The British bourgeoisie was held over a barrel by the EU from the beginning of Brexit negotiations. Unless they agreed to Northern Ireland remaining in the Customs Union until a full trade deal could be agreed, a hard border would be imposed, which would have threatened to reignite the troubles. This was at the heart of Teresa May's famous Irish Backstop. Johnson and the hardline Brexiters torpedoed this, but were then faced with the same problem and were forced to sign an even worse deal.

In this Johnson had recklessly betrayed the Democratic Unionist Party and the rest of the unionist forces in Northern Ireland. When the DUP backed his leadership bid in 2018, he told them no Prime Minister could sign a deal to erect a sea border between Northern Ireland and the mainland. So, when Johnson signed the Protocol it sabotaged the DUP's political influence, undermined its credibility with the loyalist factions, including paramilitaries, and increased tensions within the DUP. This has led to the ousting of Arlene Foster as First Minister, the brief leadership of Edwin Poots, and his replacement by Jeffery Donaldson.

This sense of being sold down the river by the British state has already led to riots by loyalists, and the loyalist marching season over the summer could give rise to flashpoints and the possibility of wider violence. Loyalist paramilitaries have issued warnings about attacking trade between the South and the North, because they see this year's increase in trade between the Irish Republic Ireland and Northern Ireland as a step towards unification.

In May, the Brexit minister and the Northern Ireland secretary had talks with loyalist paramilitaries and may have encouraged their threats of violence against EU customs officials at Northern Irish ports. But they are playing with fire. The paramilitaries do not trust the government and feel increasingly isolated.

The Irish nationalist bourgeoisie has been emboldened by the obvious weakness of the British

state and the weakening of the unionist parties. The Good Friday Agreement contains the possibility of a referendum on unification with the South. The integration of a population of armed and very angry Loyalist paramilitaries into its territory would place the Irish state in the same situation as the British. However, the growing irrationality and chaos in society could lead nationalists in the North to demand a referendum and open up a whole new can of worms.

Dangerous developments for the working class

The ridiculous posturing of the Johnson government over the export of chilled meats from Britain to Northern Ireland sums up just how weakened and humiliated the British ruling class has been by Brexit. It has been reduced to threatening to tear up an international treaty in order to be allowed by rivals to move sausages in its own territory. Johnson may have been very inept in the way he tried at the G7 Summit to upstage Biden over this issue, but no matter which faction was in power they would be faced with the same dilemma: risk reigniting the Northern Ireland powder keg by breaking the Protocol, or accept the interference of imperialist rivals within national borders.

The irreconcilable contradictions of this situation will generate massive tensions. Given the

political irresponsibility and short-termism that characterises the measures of the Johnson government, the possibility of this situation getting out of hand is very real. It could lead to the unification of Ireland. It could ignite a new cycle of sectarian terror and warfare in Northern Ireland, and this could overflow to the British mainland.

The proletariat in Britain is in a difficult situation. The accelerating centrifugal forces which express the depth of the economic crisis and the bourgeoisie's increasing loss of control over its political life present workers with a disorientating perspective. Among the major nations, only the proletariat in Spain is confronted with similar pressures leading to national fragmentation. The ability of the working class to resist these pressures depends upon it putting forward its class interests, as a class antagonistic to capital: solidarity as a class across all divisions against the growing attacks of capitalism, understanding that the capitalist system is our enemy and not workers of other nationalities, recognising the need to spread strikes beyond boundaries of sector, industry or region are the only means to overcome these growing pressures. Only by understanding that it is an autonomous social force that contains the unique revolutionary alternative to capitalism can the proletariat eventually overthrow the system spewing forth all these divisions. **Phil 30/6/21**

Cummings "revelations": Bourgeois vendettas and the distortion of science

The resignation of Health Secretary Matt Hancock after breaking rules that he had himself formulated, the revelations of connections to board members at the Department of Health, and the use of private mail accounts and WhatsApp communication all show the hypocritical disregard for the code of conduct in the political apparatus in the UK. The range of attacks instigated by Boris Johnson's former advisor Dominic Cummings are further signs of the decomposing political life of the bourgeoisie. Cummings' revenge in a vendetta from a so-called 'outsider' against 'the establishment' is another illustration of the impact of populism on British politics.

Since Johnson sacked him last November, Dominic Cummings has made all sorts of efforts to scandalise his former boss. At the end of May, he brought in the heavy artillery against the government when giving testimony to an inquiry by two Commons committees. Cummings, himself accused of being an advocate of the policy of 'herd immunity' at the beginning of the pandemic – until his famous trip to Durham, when he changed position on the lockdown – has launched a massive campaign on social media, accusing the government of incompetence and not acting fast enough in implementing the lockdowns in March and, later, in September. Cummings reports a meeting where Johnson said that he would rather "let the bodies pile high in their thousands" than impose another lockdown. The latest Cummings blog posted on the Substack platform, an essay of more than 7000 words, revealed classified mailings and protocols that show the incompetence of Hancock and the rest of the government. This has been further spun by outbursts by Cummings on Twitter.

Whatever motives Cummings may have for his vendetta with Johnson, this 'revelation' of the policy of herd immunity is nothing that surprises us: neither the handling of the elderly, moving to the care homes without being tested for the virus, nor the lack of PPE for the staff of the NHS. As we have written previously in the ICC press, the bourgeoisie has showed both cynicism and a criminal negligence of the effects of the SARS-Cov-2 virus since its beginning. The modelling based on the earlier experience of influenza viruses was not applicable and therefore, the idea of a quick spread through the population and the development of a supposed 'herd immunity' in a matter of months

was soon abandoned – although scientists, both in the UK and in Sweden, where a policy of "soft lockdown" was adopted, were still advocating this concept at the beginning of the pandemic. Of course, they deny it now. "But the eugenics-based policy of herd immunity continued, was refined and became more directed. Thus Whitehall came up with its policy of the "Stiff Broom" in order to clear the old and the sick out of hospitals and "back into the community" if they were "medically fit" i.e. into care homes that were already creaking under the weight of decades of cuts, poor wages, inadequate supervision and lacks of protective equipment." (ICC online 1 May 2020)

Herd immunity is not a 'policy': it is an epidemiological concept. Normally, herd immunity, or when an infection gets endemic, is a process that can take generations. The only other way to develop widespread immunity is through mass vaccinations. In March last year, the world population was as naïve to the virus as the indigenous people of Hispaniola when the Spanish conquistadores exposed them to measles. The assumption that SARS-Cov-2 would behave like an ordinary influenza virus was a fatal mistake for the different modellers, as the prognosis for 'herd immunity by September 2020' clearly showed. But is this the 'fault' of the experts, the scientists, the mathematicians that tried to model the scenario? Biological systems are notoriously unpredictable, but the chaotic handling of coronavirus by the different governments only exacerbated the situation. Scientists were taken hostage: basically, they were told that if one conclusion doesn't work, you have to find another that suits the policy decided. In some mathematical models made by the Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team (ICCRT), the different parameters were changed afterwards to fit the desired conclusion that lockdown was the best option (*Nature*, Spring 2020).

Scientists working under the yoke of capitalism must comply with the short-sighted considerations determined by the chaotic policy of the bourgeoisie. The fast development and collaboration in the development of vaccines shows the potential of science, but the full power of scientific research and development can only be realised in a communist society. **Erik 1 July 2021**

USA: the struggle of the workers' movement against slavery and racism (Part 2)

In the first part of this series we sketched out the first steps of the workers' movement in dealing with the aftermath of a 350 years history of the enslavement of African Americans in the United States. From the American Workers' League to the Knights of Labor, the first organisations of the working class tried to integrate black workers into their ranks. Free black people existed already before the legal abolition of slavery, but, in 1863, four to five million more African Americans were freed, and a small number started to look for work as wage labourers.

In this part we will examine how the political parties of the proletariat at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century took up the political defence of the interests of black workers in the mines, the factories and in agriculture. Although African Americans were only one of the many "nationalities" (next to the Irish, Germans, Italians, Chinese, etc.) they were subjected to a special regime, where the culture of slavery persisted, in particular through the so-called Jim Crow codes, a racial caste system based on the segregation of black and white people.

In order to make a correct assessment of the evolution of the political positions in the American workers' movement in respect of this system of racism, it is necessary to understand that, until the First World War, capitalism had a period of ascendance where real improvements for the working class were still on the agenda. In this period the workers movement throughout the world fought for a shorter working day, for the right to organise in trade unions, the right to vote, the abolition of child labour, etc. In the US the stakes of the struggle were the same as elsewhere, but there was one additional demand to be raised and that was the abolition of the system of two classes of workers, in particular the division between white and black workers.

The Socialist Labour Party on the position of the black worker

After the disappearance of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) was founded in 1876, primarily comprised of German immigrants. At the end of 1877 Peter H. Clark became the first black worker elected to the national leadership of the SLP. And in 1879 the SLP adopted a platform in which advocated political equality "without regard to creed, race or sex", and appealed to working people, "regardless of color", to unite against the southern landlords and the northern capitalists.

Although the SLP formally supported equality for people of colour, it did not give the struggle for the emancipation of black workers much weight. When Daniel De Leon became the main leader of the SLP, in 1891, this tendency was only reinforced. The early writings of De Leon were almost free of any reference to the struggles and hardships of the black people.

For Daniel De Leon "there was no such thing as a race or "Negro question" . . . there was only a social, a labor question, and no racial or religious question so far as the Socialist and labor movements were concerned". In those years De Leon had a very blinkered view. Though correctly denying the assertion that the black workers were fundamentally different human beings or even inferior, he didn't see that marxism had every interest in fighting the institutionalised segregation of white and black workers.

In the Platform of June 1896 the Party had taken up various demands that were also put forward in the programs of social democratic parties throughout the rest of the world. "Reduction of the hours of labor in proportion to the progress of production; equalization of women's wages with those of men where equal service is performed; school education of all children under 14 years of age to be compulsory, gratuitous and accessible to all by public assistance in meals, clothing, books, etc."² But the platform had no specific demands relating to black workers.

It was only in the first years of the 20th century that De Leon publicly formulated his position

about black workers, recognising "a special division in the ranks of labor". (...) "In no economic respect is he different from his fellow wage slaves of other races. Yet by reason of his race, which long was identified with serfdom, the rays of the social question reached his mind through such broken prisms that they are refracted into all the colors of the rainbow, preventing him from appreciating the white light of the question"³.

From that moment De Leon fought in a determined way against racism and for class solidarity. For instance, when Van Koll from Holland advocated the restriction of the immigration of "inferior" races at the Amsterdam Congress in August 1904, De Leon reacted furiously: "Socialism knows not such insulting, iniquitous distinctions as 'inferior' and 'superior' races among the proletariat. It is for capitalism to fan the fires of such sentiments in its scheme to keep the proletariat divided."⁴

The Socialist Party of America and the "Negro Resolution"

The SLP was not the only marxist organisation at the beginning of the 20th century. The other party was the Socialist Party of America (SPA), formed by a merger between the Social Democratic Party of America and disaffected elements of the SLP that had split from the main organisation in 1899. At its founding Convention the SPA adopted a very important "Negro Resolution" which was meant "to invite the Negro to membership and fellowship with us in the world movement for economic emancipation by which equal liberty and opportunity shall be ensured to every man and fraternity". And, more significantly, it recognised that "The Negroes of the United States, because of their long training in slavery and but recent emancipation therefrom, occupy a peculiar position in the working class and in society at large."⁵

This resolution was a big step forward for the workers' movement in the defence of the interests of the black exploited population and for their integration in the organised workers' movement. In 1901 only 15 per cent of African Americans worked as wage labourers. Nevertheless it was an important document, because for the first time in the history of the workers' movement in the US a political party of the proletariat had adopted a resolution in which it proclaimed loud and clear "to the Negro worker the identity of his interests and struggles with the interests and struggles of the workers of all lands, without regard to race, or color, or sectional lines"⁶.

The resolution also clearly defined the stakes of the debate within the SPA, between the right wing that said that black people belonged to a lower race and were inferior to white people, and those who declared that the interests of the black worker were identical with those of the working class as a whole. However, the main struggle was against the centrist position of Eugene Debs, a member of the party leadership, who advocated the fight for economic freedom for black workers (the abolition of wage labour), but said that as long as this was not achieved any social equality would be impossible.

In the years that followed, the "Negro resolution" was the subject of a bitter struggle within the SPA against the centre that actually defended the right wing against the criticisms of the left. In this struggle the issue was not putting "race before class" or "class before race", as is often suggested by modern leftists, but the need to fight for better living conditions of black workers, when capitalism still played a historically progressive role. In order to make any unified struggle between white and black workers possible, it was of the utmost necessity to overcome the deep divisions between them.

In November 1902 Debs wrote the first article on the "Negro resolution", which was published in the *International Socialist Review* (ISR). The article started with a paragraph that recalls the famous

words of Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy* about the cotton industry: "As a matter of fact the industrial supremacy of the South before the [civil] war would not have been possible without the Negro, and the South of today would totally collapse without his labor. The whole world is under obligation to the Negro, and that the white heel is still upon the black neck is simply proof that the world is not yet civilized."⁷

In the article Debs distanced himself also from any racial argument in defining the place of the black worker in the workers' movement in the US: "In capitalism the Negro question is a grave one and will grow more threatening as the contradictions and complications of capitalist society multiply, but this need not worry us. Let them settle the Negro question in their way, if they can. (...) As a social party we receive the Negro and all other races upon absolutely equal terms. We are the party of the working class, the whole working class, and we will not suffer ourselves to be divided by any specious appeal to race prejudice."⁸

In fact, Debs did not really defend the "Negro resolution" but limited himself to some simple statements such as "The class struggle is colorless." and that there is "no Negro question outside of the labor question"⁹. At the end of his article Debs even expressed "the hope that the next convention may repeal the resolutions on the 'Negro question' with the argument that "The Negro does not need them and they serve to increase rather than diminish the necessity for explanation."¹⁰ He even advocated stopping any further debate on the "Negro resolution" since the SPA had "nothing special to offer the Negro" anyway.¹¹

In Debs' view the SPA was not to succumb to the temptations of the bourgeois parties who were trying to win over African Americans for their cause by promising them social equality. He disavowed the call for equal rights for black workers such as equal opportunities for work, education and cultural activities. He systematically evaded the issue of the wretched social position of the black workers as corollary of their past as chattel slaves, by pointing to the future of socialism: "The Negro, given economic freedom, will not ask the white man any social favors; and the burning question of 'social equality' will disappear like mist before the sunrise."¹²

By reducing racism to a mere reflection of class exploitation, and arguing that everything would be solved with the abolition of wage labour, Debs actually defended in a more sophisticated way the same position as the right wing in the SPA, while upholding the extraordinary obstacles for the unification of the struggle between the white and the black workers. It was only the left wing in the party who defended - in line with the "Negro resolution" - the idea that as long as black workers were seen as second-class workers there could be no question of the unification of the American working class. Debs' position would become the subject of severe criticism in later years.

The Industrial Workers of the World in support of the "Negro resolution"

In the meantime, in June 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded in Chicago with representatives of 43 groups. In a period of major strikes internationally (the revolution in Russia of 1905 for instance) and in the US, the convention was a festival of combativity. The IWW came out in support of the "Negro Resolution" of the SPA, when its Preamble openly rejected not only the organisation in craft unions in favour of industrial unionism, but also racist segregation, declaring itself in favour of organising every race and creed. Its welcome to all workers into the same organisation, with a special emphasis on the mostly unskilled black workers, was its most important contribution to the labour movement.

In the first five years of its existence however

7. Eugene V. Debs, The Negro In The Class Struggle; *ISR*, November 1903

8. *Ibid*

9. *Ibid*

10. *Ibid*

11. *Ibid*

12. Eugene V. Debs, The Negro and His Nemesis; *ISR*, January 1904

the IWW accomplished little in organising black workers. At the beginning of 1910 it therefore made a determined effort to recruit more of them. A massive educational campaign was launched to convince black workers that "There is only one labor organization in the U.S. that admits the colored worker on a footing of absolute equality with the white - the IWW (...) In the IWW the colored worker, man or woman, is on an equal footing with every other worker. He has the same voice in determining the policies of the organization, and his interests are protected as zealously as those of any other member."¹³

The campaign had a certain success, as the IWW was able to recruit large numbers of black dockers along the Atlantic coast waterfronts and timber workers in Texas and Louisiana. As we've previously said: "Within the U.S., the IWW pioneered in bridging the gap between immigrant and native-born, English speaking workers in the U.S., and welcomed blacks into the organization on an equal basis with white workers, at a time when racial segregation and discrimination was rampant in society at large and when most American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions denied admission to blacks."¹⁴

The critique of the neglect of the "Negro question" in the SPA

In the early years of the 20th century the majority of African Americans were still facing many forms of neo-slavery such as indentured servitude, convict labour and sharecropping. Because of segregation even freed black workers were condemned to inferior treatment and lived on the fringes of society (unemployment was highest among black workers). Most blacks were disenfranchised by changes in state law across the South, which raised huge barriers to voter registration. The mass of black people still living in the South, were, forty years later, treated as though the slaves of 1863 had still not been 'freed'.

On top of that, black workers were often portrayed as scabs because of their role as strike breakers in industrial conflicts. "The years immediately following the turn of the century marked the dramatic emergence of African Americans as a formidable strikebreaking force. (...) Northern corporations recruited 'armies' of African Americans, largely from the Deep South and border cities, to break the national packinghouse strike in 1904 and the Chicago teamsters' strike of 1905"¹⁵.

Starting in February 1908 SPA member I.M. Rubinow, under the pseudonym I.M. Robbins, wrote a series of 15 articles in the *ISR* on the "The Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem", with the aim of shaking up the "rigid, cast-iron conception of the great doctrine of economic interpretation" in the party¹⁶. In his series, Rubinow took on Debs himself.

In his last contribution of June 1910 he criticised the centrist wing in the party for making unambiguous statements about "the full enjoyment of the product of his labor" once socialism was achieved, but completely neglecting the daily practice of disenfranchisement and the slave-like existence of black workers. These statements of Debs sounded very radical, but did not address the fight for the improvement of the daily conditions of black workers. Rubinow defended the view that the Party should not only strive for economic equality, but also for political and social justice in its broadest sense, if it wanted to truly work towards a socialist future.

He observed that the existence of socialism would not be the cure-all of racial prejudice. "The connection between race justice and socialism [is] not self-evident. (...) A special appeal to the Negro is necessary, for the special grievances which he suffers. (...) The Socialist Party must take a defi-

13. Philip S. Foner, American Socialism and Black Americans

14. The IWW: The failure of revolutionary syndicalism in the USA, 1905-1921; *International Review* 124

15. Stephen H. Norwood, Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-century America

16. I.M. Robbins, The white man's point of view; *ISR* March 1909

1. Cited in Marxism In United States History Before the Russian Revolution (1876-1917)

2. Socialist Labor Party Platform

Continued from page 4

nite attitude on the Negro problem (...). And this attitude must include, if it is to be logical and honest, a clear, unmistakable demand for the entire abolition of all legal restriction of the rights of the Negro."¹⁷

In defending the "Negro resolution" Rubinow followed in the footsteps of Marx and De Leon, since he was also convinced that as long as black skin was still branded, the obstacles to the emancipation of labour in the white skin would be insurmountable. Therefore, he insisted that the SPA should make "an earnest and energetic effort to convince the American labor movement, as expressed in labor and trade unions, that in resisting the economic and civic growth of the Negro it is simply building obstructions in its way."¹⁸

The "Negro resolution" left no doubt about the theoretical positions of the SPA. But examining the basic texts and official statements of the party since 1901, Rubinow came to the conclusion that the word "Negro" failed to appear in either platform: in that of 1904 and much more so in the platform of 1908. He pointed to a serious weakness in the policy of the SPA. He stressed that the failure to give the "Negro question" a central place, at least since the contributions of Debs in the *ISR*, made the famous resolution a dead letter.

This tendency to neglect the "Negro resolution" and to formulate specific demands for black workers was affirmed again in the 1912 platform of the SPA. This platform had taken up a point on the abolition of child labour, but not on the abolition of convict labour and other forms of semi-slavery, which is inconsistent, since there is no fundamental difference between the two. In both cases there is question of an inhuman subjection of a particular group of workers to the rules of capitalism.

The reason for the neglect of the "Negro resolution" by the SPA leadership was the growth of opportunism, the fear that campaigning for "equal rights" for about ten per cent of the US population would alienate the growing number of members and voters of the Party. This opportunism was clearly shown when the right wing in the party wanted to adopt a report that opposed the immigration of non-whites (from China and Japan), while favouring immigrants from "civilised" Europe. It was clear that Rubinow's critique did not gain adherents in the leadership, it was only defended by a small left wing minority and among some black socialists such as Hubert Harrison and, to a lesser extent, W.E.B. Du Bois.

The theoretical contribution of Afro-American socialist militants

Until 1910 the discussion on the position and the role of the black workers in the papers of the SPA was entirely conducted by non-black socialists, with the articles of Rubinow as the last ones published in the *ISR*. Given the lack of further theoretical elaboration, black militants in the SPA, from 1910 onwards, began to develop and propagate their analysis of the "Negro question", with more attention to the African American part of the American population.

W.E.B. Du Bois became a member of the SPA in 1910, but his position towards socialism was highly ambiguous. While a member of the SPA for about two years, he remained a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a bourgeois civil rights organisation, in which he edited the monthly magazine *The Crisis*. During his membership of the SPA he was hardly engaged in the theoretical struggle on the position of the Afro-American workers.

After leaving the SPA in 1913, he wrote "Socialism and the Negro Problem" in which he criticized the SPA for not taking seriously the fight for the equality of the black workers. According to Du Bois the party put off the solution for the structural subordination of the coloured people to the distant future: "The general attitude of thinking members of the party has been this: we must not turn aside from the great objects of socialism to take up this issue of the American Negro; let the question wait; when the objects of socialism are achieved, this problem will be settled along with other problems."¹⁹

17. The Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem; *ISR* June 1910

18. Ibid

19. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Socialism and the Negro Problem*; 1 February 1913



Hubert Harrison

Hubert Harrison was not the same as Du Bois. He was a radical black militant, whose aim was not just fighting against the repression of African Americans but against the exploitation of the working class, with special attention to the conditions of black workers. Harrison therefore turned to the SPA in 1911. After joining, he immediately started to champion the cause of black workers within the party and to challenge the leadership. Soon he became the leading black theoretician in New York and a prominent supporter of the IWW. Likewise, in opposition to the leadership, Harrison saw socialism not as a matter of reform but as a matter of revolution.

Moreover, he defended the view that the workers' movement should speak to the particular concerns of African Americans. "The mission of the Socialist Party is to free the working class from exploitation, and since the Negro is the most ruthlessly exploited working class group in America, the duty of the party to champion his cause is as clear as day."²⁰ He repeatedly pointed to the policy of the IWW, organising thousands of black and white timber workers in "mixed" Louisiana locals in 1911. This type of unionism, he observed, "wants Negroes - not because its promoters love Negroes - but because they realize they cannot win if any of the working class is left out."²¹

In his articles in the *New York Call* Harrison added a new dimension to the marxist position on racism. While underlining the class nature of racism, he developed the idea that racism is not a mere reflection of class exploitation. In "The Negro and Socialism I", written in November 1911, Harrison rightly explained that certain forms of racism, while originating in class oppression, still took on a life of their own, not directly reducible to class or economic considerations. "Systems of racial oppression had their own histories much as the class struggle and the system of production have theirs"²².

Although racism cannot exist without class exploitation, ideology is relatively independent from the material base that gives rise to it. Despite the fact that the original material conditions under slavery that gave rise to racism had already been transformed, racism as an ideology did not die away:

- After the abolition of slavery, racist ideology served to conceal the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour and to divide the working class by setting black and white workers against each other.

- Since the former slave-owners feared that the freed slaves might threaten their economic and political pre-eminence, the absence of a legal racial oppression was compensated by the establishment of an equally racist system, imposed by the Jim Crow laws.

Harrison's lack of confidence in the capacities of the working class to overcome the racial divide remained his main weakness. While recognising the force of the working class he was never really convinced that class exploitation is at the root of racism. Instead, he continued to oscillate between class struggle and race struggle. A few years later Harrison's wavering on this question came into broad daylight when he adopted a position in which the "race question" took the upper hand. He emphasised that a new leadership would not emerge from the working class, but from the black masses. It was only in the logic of his evolution that Harrison became the principal editor of the *Negro World*, the publication of the bourgeois Universal Negro Improvement Association

20. Hubert Harrison, *Socialism and the Negro*; *ISR* July 1912

21. Cited in *American Radical Movements*; Chapter Three: Hubert H. Harrison, the father of Harlem radicalism

22. Ibid

(UNIA) of Marcus Garvey.

In 1915 the theoretical clarification of the "Negro question", which the workers' movement in the US had reached - not, incidentally, set down in any official document of the SPA - was that

- the structural subordination of the African Americans in the US, even after the official abolition of slavery, was determined by fundamental class antagonisms;

- the ruling class used the racial differences between white and black people to divide the working class, for instance by using black workers as scabs;

- the particular fight for equal rights for black workers, above all in education and employment, was of fundamental importance to prevent the employers from driving a wedge between black and white workers;

- in order to take decisive steps towards the emancipation of the working class in the US there was only one way and that was the united fight of all workers, regardless of the colour of their skin or their nationality.

- and, even then, racism as an ideology will not disappear automatically, but will persist

Appendix

Solidarity between black and white workers

"On Thursday [July 5, 1906] New York was treated to the extraordinary spectacle of white union men striking to compel a company of contractors to recognize the Afro-American members of the union.

The Cecelia Asphalt Paving company, which has the contract for paving the square around Cooper Union, began by filling the places of the Afro-American pavers and rammersmen with Irish and Germans. Immediately Mr. James S. Wallace, the Afro-American agent of the International Union of Pavers and Rammersmen, reported to the officers of the union that his men were not getting a square deal.

"Then we'll call out all of our union members," replied the officers; and in a short while nearly all the white workmen laid down their tools.

The superintendent of the company hustled to the spot post-haste and tried to persuade the white men to go back to work.

"Beat it," replied they, "unless you give us a written guarantee to recognize all the members of our union, black as well as white."

"I'll give you the letter tomorrow at 10 o'clock," conceded the contractor.

"Then we'll go back to work tomorrow at 10 o'clock," said the union men.

The next day the letter was forthcoming, and all the men triumphantly went back to their tools."²⁴

"Dramatic examples of Southern inter-racial union organising in this period came in the coal mines. In Birmingham, Alabama, the United Mine-workers (UMW) maintained blacks and whites to launch a strike in 1908. To be sure, union leaders organised blacks and whites in separate locals, bowed to segregation and denied that the strike would bring 'social equality' for black and white miners. Coal operators whipped up a racist frenzy in the Birmingham press and tried to use blacks as strike breakers. Nevertheless, black miners aligned themselves with whites in the armed battles with company guards and strike breakers that have always characterised coal strikes in the US. In "Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class and Community Conflict 1780-1980" R.L. Lewis tells that "the attention of the entire white power structure, and the white populace generally, was focused on black strikers who were violating social norms by assuming a militant stance within a bi-racial working-class organisation ... Furthermore, that these black unionists were 'conspiring' with white unionists presented the explosive possibility of a class uprising."²⁵

24. *New York Age*, July 12, 1906. Cited in: *The Black Worker From 1900 to 1919 - Volume V; Chapter II Organized labor and the black worker before World War I*

25. Lee Sutar, *The roots of multi-racial labour unity in the United States*; Summer 1994

for some time in the minds of workers as an exploited class. As Marx wrote: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living"²³.

In the third part of this series, we will take a closer look at how the later political organisations of the proletariat tried to develop and deepen the political-theoretical positions of the SPA on the "Negro question" in a period that had fundamentally changed. For their political struggle against racism had to take place in the context of decadence, when reforms were no longer possible and only one goal remained: the unification of the struggles of all workers, regardless of race or nationality, in the fight for a world revolution. This is the framework in which we shall examine how far they succeeded in their task on the basis of the positions of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), the Trotskyist International Communist League (ICL) and, in a later period, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), with C.L.R. James as one of the most important theoreticians in this field.

Dennis, 15 May 2021

23. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

"During a 1910 strike by the Brotherhood of Timberworkers (BTW), the lumber operators' association tried to use blacks as strike breakers and baited the BTW for violating the norms of Southern society with its 50 percent black membership.

"These association tactics, more than any other factors, drove the BTW's leaders to preach integration with Negroes and affiliation with the IWW ... Hence, they advised the black worker: 'The BTW ... takes the Negro and protects him and his family along with the white wage worker and his family on an industrial basis.' To the white worker they proclaimed: 'As far as we, the workers of the South, are concerned, the only 'supremacy' and 'equality' they [the employers] have ever granted us is the supremacy of misery and the equality of rags ... No longer will we allow the Southern oligarchy to divide and weaken us on lines of race, craft, religion, and nationality.'"

The strike ultimately led to the BTW's affiliation to the IWW. Wobbly leader Bill Haywood and the white Southern IWW leader Covington Hall convinced BTW's members to hold an integrated mass meeting at the union's 1912 convention in Alexandria, Louisiana. This inter-racial solidarity prevailed in an even more bitter strike the next year."²⁶

"In the morning of 11 November 1912, 1,200 union men struck against the American Lumber Company [for firing fifteen union men] and the Brotherhood of Timber Workers began the last battle. Phineas Eastman, a Wobbly who helped to organize black workers, claimed that racial solidarity in the Brotherhood reached its strongest point at Merryville [Louisiana]. "Although not one of the fifteen men fired by the company was a Negro", he wrote, "our colored fellow workers showed their solidarity by walking out with their white comrades and no amount of persuasion or injection of the old race prejudice could induce them to turn scab or traitor". In the first months of the struggle at Merryville, the workers held their own; they even formed a communal organization (Hall called it the "first American Soviet") that attracted considerable attention in radical circles throughout the country. In the strike's third month, after the mill had reopened with "scab" labour, the corporation mobilized its community power to crush what was left of the Union. On 16 February 1913, the Merryville Good Citizens' League struck. Organized by the "leading citizens" in the town, led by the company doctor and staffed by Santa Fe gunmen, the League destroyed the Union headquarters, attacked and "deported" several Wobblies, and burned the soup kitchen staffed by female BTW members."²⁷

26. Lee Sutar, *The roots of multi-racial labour unity in the United States*; Summer 1994

27. James R. Green, *The Brotherhood of Timber Workers 1910-1913: A Radical Response to Industrial Capitalism in the Southern U. S. A.* 1973

Growth as decay

A reader wrote:

“How can the ICC maintain that capitalism is a decadent system since 1914 when there has been such enormous growth in the capitalist system since then?”

We have been asked this question many times, in different ways: what about the enormous growth after World War Two? What about the enormous growth of China in the last few decades? Doesn't all this argue against the idea that capitalism is a system in decline, in decay, in decadence?

We think that these questions are wrongly posed, but that it is important to answer them precisely because they are posed so often and so widely.

In order to do this, let's look at a rather significant passage in Marx's *Grundrisse*¹:

“... Thus, while capital must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e. to exchange, and conquer the whole earth for its market, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another. The more developed the capital, therefore, the more extensive the market over which it circulates, which forms the spatial orbit of its circulation, the more does it strive simultaneously for an even greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time..... There appears here the universalising tendency of capital, which distinguishes it from all previous stages of production. Although limited by its very nature, it strives towards the universal development of the forces of production, and thus becomes the presupposition of a new mode of production, which is founded not on the development of the forces of production for the purpose of reproducing or at most expanding a given condition, but where the free, unobstructed, progressive and universal development of the forces of production is itself the presupposition of society and hence of its reproduction; where advance beyond the point of departure is the only presupposition. This tendency – which capital possesses, but which at the same time, since capital is a limited form of production, contradicts it and hence drives it towards dissolution – distinguishes capital from all earlier modes of production, and at the same time contains this element, that capital is posited as a mere point of transition”

This passage can of course be interpreted in different ways, and the *Grundrisse* was anything but a finished work. But in our view, this is a magnificent anticipation of the point at which capitalism becomes a decadent system. First, Marx insists on the drive of capital to conquer the entire planet, and it does so through a formidable development of the productive forces, in this case its increasing capacity to transport goods as fast as possible from one end of the Earth to the other. This dynamism, this potential for very rapid extension and technological development, distinguishes capital from previous modes of production, which tended to be more static and more isolated to particular regions of the globe. This universalising tendency of capital also necessarily creates a world proletariat, an international revolutionary class, and is thus a vital precondition if human society is to attain a qualitatively new stage in its history. As Marx puts it in a different section of the same chapter of *Grundrisse*:

“It will be shown later that the most extreme form of alienation, wherein labour appears in the relation of capital and wage labour, and labour, productive activity appears in relation to its own conditions and its own product, is a necessary point of transition – and therefore already contains in itself, in a still only inverted form, turned on its head, the dissolution of all limited presuppositions of production, and moreover creates and produces the unconditional presuppositions of production, and therewith the full material conditions for the total, universal development of the productive forces of the individual.”²

Thus, for Marx, in so far as capital develops the productive forces to the point where global communist production and distribution becomes pos-

sible, its supplanting of previous modes of production, though brutal and ruthless, can be seen as the mark of an ascending or progressive social system. But once it reaches this point, the further “development of the productive forces” must take on an entirely different meaning, in which wealth is no longer measured in stolen time, but in free time; no longer in monetary terms, or the piling up constant capital, or the abstractions of “value”, but as the development of the creative capacities of each individual in association with others.

But this is not just a question of looking at the history of capital beyond a certain point and lamenting that things could have been so much better. Marx also argues that this culminating moment is precisely the point at which the contradictory manner in which capital universalises itself “drives it towards dissolution”. Historical evolution since the beginning of the 20th century has made it clearer what form this process of “dissolution” takes: from this point onwards, capital could no longer continue to develop the forces of production without unleashing a spiral of destruction, a succession of world economic crises, global wars, and, as has become increasingly evident over the last few decades, the devastation of the natural environment. We can even say that as long as capital continues to grow, to accumulate, in an epoch where it has become obsolete, the more this very growth increases the danger that it will destroy humanity and end any possibility of a communist future. This is evident when we look at the perfection of military production which has become such a central part of the capitalist economy in the last century and more. It is equally obvious when we see the ecological consequences of capitalist expansion into the very last corners of the planet. We also need to recognise that the very means used to continue growth in an era in which the economic crisis has tended to become permanent attest to the obsolescence of the system. This is the case in particular with the resort to gargantuan infusions of debt to create a kind of artificial market. Capital grows by flouting its own laws.

This is what we think Marx is getting at when he continues the first passage we cited by stating: *“The highest development of this basis itself (the flower into which it transforms itself; but it is always this basis, this plant as flower; hence wilting after the flowering and as consequence of the flowering) is the point at which it is itself worked out, developed, into the form in which it is compatible with the highest development of the forces of production, hence also the richest development of the individuals. As soon as this point is reached, the further development appears as decay, and the new development begins from a new basis”*.

China's growth over the past few decades is a classic illustration of this “development as decay”: managed by a ruthless totalitarian state apparatus; financed by astronomical levels of debt, protected by a vast army and an array of nuclear weapons, building new industrial centres and megacities at a terrible cost to the environment, both local and global: we can confidently say that these are all the hallmarks of a decadent system.

Why 1914 as the definitive turning point? Let's recall that this is not the ICC's retrospective conclusion, but the position adopted by the revolutionaries who formed the Communist International, and who recognised that capitalism had indeed entered its epoch of “inner disintegration”, the epoch of wars and revolutions. The 1914-18 war showed that capitalism was being driven inexorably towards imperialist wars of increasing ferocity, confronting humanity with the alternative between socialism and barbarism. And the response of the international working class from 1917 onwards demonstrated that the new epoch was indeed the epoch of the “communist revolution of the proletariat” (Platform of the Communist International, March 1919).

Again, let's stress, the war did not signify that capitalism had run out of all further possibilities of expansion. In 1913, in her book *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg pointed out that capital still directly dominated only a small part of the planet, and that objectively speaking there would still be many remnants of the pre-capitalist

milieu to absorb and new markets to conquer. But she also insisted that there is no purely economic collapse of the system. *“The more ruthlessly capital sets about the destruction of non-capitalist strata, at home and in the outside world, the more it lowers the standard of living for the workers as a whole, the greater also is the change in the day-to-day history of capital. It becomes a string of political and social disasters and convulsions, and under these conditions, punctuated by periodical economic catastrophes or crises, accumulation can go on no longer. But even before this natural economic impasse of capital's own creating is properly reached it becomes a necessity for the international working class to revolt against the rule of capital”*. (*Accumulation of Capital*, chapter 32).

In summary: we have always rejected the idea that capitalism can only be in decline or decadence once there has been a complete halt in the development of the productive forces³. Even in the descending epochs of slavery and feudalism, there could be significant moments and centres of growth, not least the cancerous growth of the state power, swollen to monstrous proportions in order to attempt to hold down the contradictions tearing society apart. But these remained societies where the crisis of the economy took the form of underproduction, in contrast to capitalism where the crisis appears as a crisis of overproduction (or, what amounts to the same thing in the end, a crisis of overaccumulation). Less than any previous mode of production can capitalism cease “revolutionising” the productive forces. But revolutionaries who lay claim to a scientific method must be capable of recognising the point at which the perspective of communism unites the realms of possibility and of necessity; in other words, when the existing forces of production are turned more and more into forces of destruction⁴, and when humanity can only maintain itself if it carries out a fundamental change in the social relations of production, so that the development of the productive forces now coincides with “the total, universal development of the productive forces of the individual.” **Amos**

Annex on China

China is a very good example of the relative increase in wealth, and of the enormous destructive forces set in motion to achieve this relative wealth.

- China is believed to be “the world's most prolific executioner” (Amnesty International), executing thousands of people every year. Every year it executes more people than the rest of the world combined.

- It is estimated that there are more than a thousand internment camps in Xinjiang, and that in these camps there are up to 1.5 million people detained and subjected to forced labour.

3. See in particular the following chapter from our original series on decadence, published in *Révolution Internationale* in the early 70s and produced in English (and other languages) as a pamphlet: 4. Decadence: A total halt to the productive forces? | International Communist Current (internationalism.org)

4. Here we are only confirming what Marx already anticipated in one of his earliest works, *The German Ideology* of 1845/6, in a passage summarising the basic conclusions flowing from the materialist conception of history. The first of these conclusions is that “in the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money); and connected with this a class is called forth, which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class...”

We do not blame Marx and Engels, in this work as in the Communist Manifesto a few years later, for making the error that this epochal shift had already taken place, that the proletarian revolution was already on the immediate agenda. To a very considerable extent, Marx was able to recognise this error himself in the period of retreat that followed the heroic events of 1848.

- The People's Republic of China is the world's leading annual emitter of greenhouse gases and mercury. Since 2000, more than 30 million people have died from air pollution in China, according to *New Scientist*.

- Poverty: 600 million Chinese people still subsist on the equivalent of \$5.50 US a day.

- Ruthless exploitation of the workforce: extremely long hours, physical punishment, fines and non-payment of wages are among the abuses suffered by millions of Chinese workers.

- China has a long history of industrial accidents, ranging from factory explosions and mudslides to mine collapses.

A whole article could be added about the huge weight of the military sector in China and the degree to which its growth has been fuelled by debt.

Continued from page 2

Polemic Internationalism = the rejection of both imperialist camps

hand, is routinely defined by the left wing of capital as a state which has no right to exist – as if, from the point of view of the working class, any capitalist state has a “legitimate” right to enforce its exploitation and oppression.

In contrast, the thread also contains statements from the CNT-FAI (UK affiliate, the Solidarity Federation) and from its Russian affiliate, the KRAS, which avoid this call to take sides in the conflict and defend the basics of an internationalist response. The KRAS (whose statements against war in the Caucasus we have published in the past) say that the problems in Israel/Palestine “are generated by the interests of power and property of the rulers and capitalists of all sides, and can only be eliminated together with them - eliminated by joint struggle and, ultimately, by the social revolution of Jewish and Arab workers, ordinary Israelis and Palestinians.

The path to this decision is difficult and long. Too much despair, too fresh the smell of spilled blood, the minds of ordinary people are too much poisoned by Israeli (Zionist) and Arab nationalisms, emotions are too raging today. But there is no other road to peace in the long-suffering region, and there cannot be....

NO WAR! NO TO NATIONALISM, MILITARISM AND RELIGIOUS FANATISM FROM ALL SIDES!

NEITHER ISRAEL, NOR PALESTINE, BUT A JOINT CLASS STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING PEOPLE IN REGION!

The statement of the Anarchist Communist Group in the UK is also relatively clear on the rejection of national solutions:

“Because a solution to the conflict can ultimately only be a common, classless and stateless society in which people of different religious (and non-religious) and ethnic backgrounds can co-exist peacefully. And the way to achieve this can only be through class struggle, with workers uniting on both sides to improve their situation and thereby overcoming long-held resentments. It is the task of the anarchist and libertarian communist movement to push for exactly this”⁴

The idea of the Palestinian “resistance” – an open window to the betrayal of internationalism

As it happens, the libcom thread was not started by an anarchist, but by a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. This group, a semi-fossil-

4. On the crisis in Israel-Palestine – Anarchist Communist Group (anarchistcommunism.org)

Continued on page 7

1. Notebook V, the Chapter on Capital. *Grundrisse* 10 (marxists.org). p540 in Penguin edition.

2. Ibid P 515

Continued from page 8

A year of negligence faced with Covid: Capitalism kills!

- the disorganised rivalry of the imperialist powers, notably among former allies, has turned the reaction of the world bourgeoisie to the pandemic into a global fiasco;

- the ineptitude of the response of the ruling class to the health crisis has revealed the growing tendency to a loss of political control of the bourgeoisie and its state over society within each nation;

- the decline in the political and social competence of the ruling class and its state has been accompanied in an astonishing way by ideological putrefaction: the leaders of the most powerful capitalist nations are spewing out ridiculous lies and superstitious nonsense to justify their ineptitude.

Covid-19 has thus brought together in a clearer way than before the impact of decomposition on all the principle levels of capitalist society – economic, imperialist, political, ideological and social (...) The present health catastrophe reveals, above all, an increasing loss of control of the capitalist class over its system and its increasing

loss of perspective for human society as a whole (...) The fundamental tendency to self-destruction that is the common feature of all periods of capitalist decadence has changed its dominant form in the period of decomposition from world war to a world chaos that only increases the threat of capitalism to society and humanity in its entirety”.

If the appearance of the pandemic has brought a halt to the development of the workers’ struggles in the world, it has not altered the reflection on the chaotic character of capitalist society. The pandemic is another proof of the necessity for proletarian revolution. But this historic outcome depends first of all and before everything on the capacity of the working class, the only revolutionary force, to re-discover the consciousness of itself, of its existence and of its revolutionary capacities. Because the proletariat alone, mobilised and organised around the struggle for the defence of its own interests and class autonomy, has the power to put an end to the tyrannical and deadly yoke of the laws of capital and give birth to another society. **Inigo, May 6, 2021**

Continued from page 6

Polemic

ised survivor from the days when the Second International was a proletarian organisation, maintains its profound illusions in a “parliamentary road” to socialism, but it has never supported capitalist wars or nationalist struggles. The original poster, ajjohnstone, links to the official SPGB blog which makes a telling critique not only of Zionism but also of Palestinian nationalism: “It is easy to see why the poverty-stricken in the Palestinian refugee camps might view the promise of Palestinian self-government as an answer. Sadly, like the Zionists, Palestinians have fallen for a dangerous myth about the past; in their case, the myth that Palestine belonged to them. It was no such thing: most Palestinians struggled along on tiny plots of land, under the weight of massive debts, exploited by a class of landlords. Palestine did not belong to the Palestinians, any more than modern Israel belongs to working-class Israelis. In 1930, the average rural family in Palestine was in debt to the tune of £P27, which was approximately such a family’s yearly income. On 1936 figures, one-fifth of one per cent of the population owned a quarter of the land! Clearly pre-Israeli Palestine did not belong to the Palestinian peasants: in 1948 they were driven off land which was not theirs.

They have yet to realise it, but the workers of the region regardless of the national boundaries where they now live — have an identity of interest. Let’s hope that they come to recognise their common interests and reject the nationalism and religious bigotry that engender false divisions, violence and racial hatred. When it comes to the nationalist and religious fervour, there is nothing at all with which we as socialists can identify, for both are abstractions that have imbued the workers of the region with a false consciousness that prevents them identifying their real class interests”⁵.

At the same time, this comrade’s posts on the libcom thread, having chased Palestinian nationalism out of the door, seem to let it back through the window through the idea that the demonstrations and riots by Palestinians inside Israel during the conflict constitute a “resistance” movement which offers a hopeful sign for the future. The comrade talks about “the significant development of Palestinian-Israelis now participating more fully in the resistance. After all, it is the apartheid-like laws being applied in Sheikh Jarrah and attacks on the main mosque that triggered the present unrest.. If such Palestinian-Israeli anti-discrimination movement grows and begin to exert the political power outside of the Knesset, I can only view it as a positive turn of events to undermine the influence of the Zionist ruling ideology”⁶. It’s true that

5. SOCIALISM OR YOUR MONEY BACK: WAR WITHOUT END

6. Posts 4 and 7 on the libcom thread

many young Palestinians came out onto the street in reaction to the attempted evictions of Arab families in East Jerusalem, or to pogroms by the Zionist extreme right, but given the complete lack of any proletarian response to the war within Israel/Palestine, given the long history of nationalist divisions stoked up by almost continuous warfare, these mobilisations only sharpened ethnic clashes and the pogrom atmosphere inside Israel, and were openly aligned with the military response of Hamas from the Gaza Strip. In no sense do they offer the basis for a future unification of the Arab and Jewish workers against their exploiters.

This dangerous window was also opened by a group like the ACG, whose confusions on the “legitimacy” of the Zionist state we criticised in a previous article⁷. In this case, the ACG sees something positive in the fact that the Palestinian demonstrations and “general strike” were organised by rank and file committees in the neighbourhoods rather than the traditional Palestinian organisations. “The Palestinian masses need to be self-organised and outside of the control of Hamas or the PLO factions – to some extent, this is already happening...” The ACG then quotes from 927 Magazine. “An extraordinary feature of the demonstrations is that they are primarily being organized not by political parties or figures, but by young Palestinian activists, neighborhood committees, and grassroots collectives”

This revives memories of the dominant anarchist reaction to the war in Spain in the 1930s, when the fact that industries and farms were “self-managed” by the workers led anarchists to see a revolution in progress, when the reality was that these structures were entirely integrated into the “anti-fascist” war effort – an imperialist conflict on both sides which prepared the ground for the war of 1939-45.

In contrast to these ambiguous attitudes, the positions of the groups of the communist left linked to on the thread – the ICC⁸ and the ICT⁹ – are unequivocal. Whereas few anarchist groups have any real concept of imperialism, both organisations of the communist left denounce the imperialist manoeuvres in the region as well as the war-machines of Israel and Hamas, which can only serve their own or others’ imperialist aims. The ICT statement begins with the slogan “neither Israel nor Palestine” and recognises, like the ICC article, that the pogrom atmosphere exists on both sides of the sectarian divide: “The Israel government’s solution is to let fascist groups like 7. The ACG rejects identity politics but “accepts” a democratic secular state of Israel | International Communist Current (internationalism.org) 8. Wars and pogroms: the future capitalism offers us | International Communist Current (internationalism.org) 9. Neither Israel, Nor Palestine: No War but the Class War | Leftcom

International Review 166

The Covid-19 pandemic reveals the dilapidation of world capitalism

The conservation of health in Soviet Russia (N.A. Semashko) July 1919

International leaflet
Generalised capitalist barbarism or world proletarian revolution

The Biden presidency
The US and world capitalism on the road to nowhere

100 years after the foundation of the Communist International: What lessons can we draw for future combats? (pt III)
1920-21: The retreat of the revolutionary wave

The communist programme in the phase of the decomposition of capitalism
Bordiga and the big city

Fifty years since May 68
The difficult evolution of the proletarian political milieu (part II)

‘La Familia’ rampage through Arab quarters of towns like Lod shouting ‘Death to Arabs’...The Arab youth have fought back and attacked Jewish targets. They echo the call of the fascists by shouting ‘Death to Jews’, a call which has brought the emotionally charged accusation of ‘pogrom’ from the Israeli press. But there are now pogroms on both sides of this ‘communal violence’”.

There is also a statement by the Angry Workers of the World, a “workerist” or “autonomist” group which is rather clear in its internationalist stance and provides a lucid rebuttal of any illusions in the mobilisations in the Palestinian neighbourhoods, and the general strike in particular:

“the general strike called on 18th May ... was lauded by leftists the world over who hadn’t examined its real contents. The mere phrase ‘general strike’ was, for them, enough to demonstrate that a genuine working class action had taken place. But the strike itself was called ‘from above’ and interclassist to the core: While mass numbers of workers did strike (only 150 out of 65,000 construction workers came in, 5000 cleaning workers and 10% of bus drivers were absent, etc.) it was also widely embraced by middle class professionals. It was first called by the Higher Monitoring Committee, the de facto representative of the Arab middle class in Israel, and was enthusiastically taken up by Fatah and Hamas, who ordered their own public sector workers to join in. These parties were not interested in the building of working class power; in fact they have always actively opposed it. The great success of the strike, all its leaders and reporters agreed, was the demonstration of the unity of the ‘Palestinian people,’ but it also had the deeper aim of binding the working class tighter to the bourgeois institutions leading it”¹⁰.

It is noted on the thread that the statements of the ICT and the AWW seem to have stirred a great deal of online abuse and hatred. But internationalists don’t denounce capitalist wars to be popular. Both in 1914-18 and 1939-45 the internationalist minority who remained firm on their principles faced repression by the state and persecution by nationalist thugs. The defence of internationalism is not judged by its immediate results but by its capacity to provide an orientation which can be taken up in future by movements which really do constitute a proletarian resistance to capitalist war. Thus those who stood against the dark tide of chauvinism in 1914, like the Bolsheviks and the Spartacists, were preparing the ground for the revolutionary working class uprisings of 1917-18.
Amos 30/6/21

10. Editorial #3: Palestine – Israel - Angry Workers

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A year of negligence faced with Covid: Capitalism kills!

Since the beginning of April 2020, Covid-19 has rapidly spread to the four corners of the planet. Since November 2020, the pandemic has not ceased to worsen at the international level. If the situation seems somewhat stable in Europe and falling back in the United States after an enormous outbreak of contamination, Latin America and the Indian sub-continent are now suffering the torment. Countries like China, whose population has been massively treated by the Chinese vaccine¹, are being hit by an explosion of infections. The situation is so serious that even within the Chinese authorities some voices have been obliged to recognise the “insufficient” efficacy of the vaccine. Officially, globally, the pandemic has cost the lives of some 3.2 million people and without doubt more given the lying figures provided by countries like China and others.

If a year of research has allowed more to be known about the virus, a better understanding of how it spreads and how to fight against it, the persistent negligence of all states and the irresponsibility of the bourgeoisie works against the implementation of coherent and efficient measures to limit the scale of its spread at the international level. The states, mired in the logic of competition, have not even been capable of a minimum of co-ordination of vaccine policy.

Faced with this absence of co-ordination, each state has had to put into place short-term health measures, with lock-downs coming, going and coming again, mini-lockdowns, warnings from the state, curfews, opening this and closing that. Without the appropriate means to fight against the pandemic after decades of budgets cuts imposed by the crisis, preoccupied by “the economy” and the risks of being outdone by their rivals, the capitalist states have ended up adapting to daily deaths and have continued to adjust their health measures in order to avoid a situation of chaos in hospitals and cemeteries (with more or less success). This is what the dominant class calls “learning to live with the virus”. The result? If some states have delivered rapid vaccination programmes to the population, it still leaves the virus spreading elsewhere by facilitating the emergence of variants of Covid-19 more resistant to vaccines.

1. China and Russia have taken advantage of the situation in order to flood African and Latin American countries with vaccines for their own imperialist ends.

India, Brazil... a vision of the future

But in this *danse macabre*, it's probably in India and Brazil that one witnesses the worst scenes of catastrophe. In Brazil “*the epidemic is out of control*” in the word of a Brazilian scientist: new cemeteries are opening up all over the place, bodies are transported by bus and the sickness carries away thousands of victims daily. Soon the numbers of deaths will reach half-a-million, overtaking the United States in this race to a grim record. Hospitals full, people dying on their stretchers while waiting for a bed; and all this in advance of a new variant coming from Manaus, the largest city in the state of Amazonas where, at the end of 2020, a mirage of herd immunity was being peddled, at the same time as a second wave swept through Brazil. During this time, Bolsonaro, the president of the country, who pretended that the virus was a “little flu” (*gripenzinha*) continued to repeat that “*it's necessary to go back to work and stop complaining*”, while changing his ministers like shirts in a disastrous governmental merry-go-round.



Funeral pyres in India

In Brazil the trafficking of animals from the Amazon and massive de-forestation has exposed humans to viruses which up to now have been “under cover”. The biologist Lucas Ferrante, a researcher in Manaus writes: “*It is in the Amazon that there is the greatest risk of a new virus appearing and this risk is infinitely more important than what we've seen in Wuhan*”². The destruction of the Amazonian forest has taken on catastrophic dimensions these last years and the bourgeoisie, who benefit greatly from its exploitation, are not ready to stop it.

But for a couple of weeks now the situation in India has made it to Number One on the news.

2 “Amazon: point of departure of a new pandemic?”, *France Culture* (April 19, 2021).

It's difficult to find words to describe the horror of the health catastrophe in the country which today is the most populous in the world. Despite its economic development, health services were already underdeveloped prior to the pandemic; health is not a priority for the state. The Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, a kind of messianic *alter ego* of Bolsonaro, boasted in February of having “*beaten the virus*” and that the country “*was an example to the world*”. Modi was even able to tail-end China and the other major powers possessing vaccines, using them for its imperialist influence. Now however the export of vaccines has been forbidden.

Since January, this government, which is very strongly marked by Hindu fundamentalism, has deliberately encouraged a pilgrimage (*Kumbh Mela*) of immense crowds coming from all over the country. During the first two weeks of April, 2.8 million Hindus were packed together, without masks, distancing, tests or temperature control, and immersed themselves in the waters of the Ganges, waters infested by the ritual cremations of infected bodies. Real virus bombs - and on top of this we should not forget the crowded meetings of the electoral campaign!

The backlash from such arrogance and contempt wasn't long in coming. Figures for the contagion and the death rate shot up: 4,000 deaths and around 4 million infections daily, “*statistics much lower than reality*”, according to the press, confirmed by the distressing spectacle of the lack of oxygen, beds occupied by several people, queues in front of the hospitals with people dying on barrows, in motor-cycle sidecars or on the ground!

All this is a payoff in a country which, like Brazil, presents itself as an economic giant. Instead of that we see images of families looking for some empty spaces anywhere in which to bury their loved ones. Funeral pyres lined up over hundreds of metres have sprung up all over the place in order to incinerate the bodies which have piled up, rendering them a last miserable and undignified homage. As in Brazil and elsewhere, it's the most deprived parts of society, the proletariat and the non-exploiting layers, who pay the greatest price for such negligence and the traumas that they engender.

And to think that these two countries, along with South Africa³, have been classed as having the potential of a development similar to that of China and are presented as part of the dynamism of an eternal capitalism.

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

tential of a development similar to that of China and are presented as part of the dynamism of an eternal capitalism.

Capitalism sinks into decomposition

The Covid-19 virus, as other pandemics and scourges that threaten the human race, is not only a product of but also a powerful accelerator of social decomposition at the planetary level. The India of Modi and the Brazil of Bolsonaro, even if they are led by populist governments which make particularly stupid and irrational decisions, are only two extreme expressions of the impasse that capitalism represents for the future of humanity.

Make no mistake: Modi, Bolsonaro, Trump and many other representatives of the powerful growth of populism, despite their erratic and narrow-minded administrations and “anti-elitist” speeches, remain fierce defenders of the national capital and embody the needs of world capitalism: brutal exploitation and pillage of the Amazonian forest encouraged by the soya-importing countries, as well as the extraction of minerals on a massive scale. As for Modi's India, the law on the end of “protected” agriculture has been enacted so as to open still more rural areas to the needs of capital⁴.

As we say in our “Report on the Covid-19 pandemic and the period of capitalist decomposition” (July 2020): “*The Covid pandemic (...) has become an unmistakable emblem of this whole period of decomposition by bringing together a series of factors of chaos that signify the generalised putrefaction of the capitalist system. These include:*

- *the prolongation of the long-term economic crisis that began in 1967 and the consequent accumulation and intensification of austerity measures, has precipitated an inadequate and chaotic response to the pandemic by the bourgeoisie, which has in turn obliged the ruling class to massively aggravate the economic crisis by interrupting production for a significant period;*

- *the origins of the pandemic clearly lie in the accelerated destruction of the environment created by the persistence of the chronic capitalist crisis of overproduction;*

4. <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16997/lessons-indian-farmers-movement-interests-rich-farmers-are-not-those-rural-wage>

Continued on page 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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