



world revolution

Pandemic, global warming, economic crisis, war No future without the overthrow of capitalism

A global pandemic that has killed millions and which is very far from over; a spiral of climate catastrophes – wildfires, droughts, floods – with the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicting that the world faces the real threat of a runaway acceleration of global warming; three, four, or five sided wars from Afghanistan to Africa, and sharpening tensions between the two most powerful imperialist states, the USA and China; a world economy which was already locked in a near permanent crisis since the end of the 1960s and is now further convulsed by the pandemic and the lock-downs, resulting in rising inflation and an apparently paradoxical combination of unemployment and labour shortages. Little wonder that apocalyptic moods have become more and more widespread, whether expressed in overtly religious terms through the rise of Islamic, Christian and other fundamentalisms or through a variety of dystopian science fiction visions of Earth's future.

At one level, such visions are part of the growth of nihilism and despair, or express the vain hope of overcoming despondency by returning to a past that never existed, or escaping into a “New Heaven and a New Earth” (Revelation 21:1) given to the faithful by powers outside ourselves and outside of nature. But these ideologies are also a distorting mirror reflecting what is really happening in present day civilisation.

In the past, prophecies of the “Last Days” became widespread above all in periods of the decline of an entire mode of production, as during the decadence of Rome or the waning of the Middle Ages. The Book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, with its symbolism of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, actually points to the essential characteristics of a society in its terminal phase: led by Death, the other horsemen are War, Pestilence, and Famine – the last one carrying a scale which shows that the price of bread has become prohibitive for the poor. And in the long downward slide, both ancient slave society and feudalism were indeed devastated by incessant wars between factions of the ruling class, by plagues such as the Black Death, by famine and – even if these were not fully commodified systems like capitalism – by inflation and the devaluation of the currency¹.

It's not hard to see that the Four Horsemen are

1. See our pamphlet *The Decadence of Capitalism*, in particular 2. Crisis and decadence | International Communist Current (internationalism.org)

abroad again. In a way, they are interbreeding. War gives rise to famine, as in Yemen and Ethiopia. The destruction of nature gives rise to new plagues like Covid, and also threatens terrible famines and wars over dwindling resources. And all of these spectres react back on the underlying contradictions of capitalist accumulation, intensifying the global economic crisis to a degree not seen since the 1930s.

The “end of the world” foreseen in ancient and mediaeval apocalypses really signalled the end of a particular mode of production, which was to be replaced by a new mode of production, a new form of class rule. But capitalism is the last class society, and its headlong drive towards the abyss faces humanity with the single alternative: communist revolution or the destruction of humanity. Capitalism is the most dynamic, the most productive, but also the most destructive system in history, and with its terrifying nuclear arsenals and its inability to curb the devastation of the natural environment, capitalism can truly bring about the end of the world, of the human species and perhaps all life on the planet.

Capitalism cannot be controlled

Some parts of the ruling class retreat into denial: Covid is just a little flu (Bolsanaro), climate change is a Chinese hoax (Trump). Its more intelligent factions see the danger: hence the enormous sums sacrificed in the lock-downs and pumped into the race for vaccines; hence the numerous international conferences on climate change, like COP26 due to be held in Glasgow in November, where few will openly dispute the grim scenarios that will be presented to them by the report of the IPCC.

And within the population as a whole, there is a growing concern about these problems, even if, for the moment, the danger posed by war and militarism has been eclipsed by the threat of Covid and climate change. But the protests organised by organisations like Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Youth for Climate are a dead end because they can never go beyond demanding that the governments of the world start acting sensibly, put aside their differences, and come up with a serious global plan.

But the governments, the world's states, the ruling class, are themselves only expressions of the capitalist system, and they cannot abolish the laws which drive towards war and ecological destruction. As in the days of the Roman Emperors and



Albrecht Dürer The Four Riders of the Apocalypse

the Absolute Monarchies, the decadence of capitalism is also marked by a grotesque hypotrophy of the state machine, aimed at submitting the laws of capitalist competition to some level of control (as well as repressing all those who question its rule). But in the end capital cannot be controlled. By definition it is a power which, though created by human hands, stands above and against human needs. By definition, it is an essentially anarchic social relation which can only thrive through competition for the highest profit. And the state machines which some see as holding the answer to the world's problems have been swollen to their present size above all by the need to compete with other states on the world market, both at the economic and the military levels. Capitalism can never become an “international community”, and in the terminal phase of its decline the tendency towards disintegration, towards every man for himself, towards chaos, can only get stronger.

In 1919, the platform of the Communist International insisted that the world imperialist war of 1914-18 announced capitalism's entry into the “epoch of the breakdown of capital, its internal disintegration, the epoch of the communist revolution of the proletariat”. But it also emphasised that “The old capitalist ‘order’ has ceased to function; its further existence is out of the ques-

tion. The final outcome of the capitalist mode of production is chaos. This chaos can only be overcome by the productive and most numerous class – the working class. The proletariat has to establish real order – communist order”.

The capitalist apocalypse is not inevitable. Bourgeois society has unleashed the productive forces that could be transformed and put to use in order to realise the age-old dream of a true human community and a new reconciliation with nature. While previous class societies foundered on crises of underproduction, capitalism suffers from a crisis of *overproduction*, an absurdity which points to the possibility of overcoming scarcity and thus eliminating once and for all the exploitation of one class by another. And in the proletariat, the international working class, it has created the “productive force” which has a material interest in the creation of a society without classes.

There is an immense gap between the present state of the working class, which has largely forgotten its own existence as a force antagonistic to capital, and the revolutionary class movement which gave birth to the October revolution of 1917 and the Communist International, the most advanced political expression of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave. The only way to bridge this gap lies in the capacity of the working class to struggle in defence of its own material interests. In this sense, of all the horsemen of capitalist doom, it is the economic crisis and the resulting attacks on workers' living and working conditions which contains the possibility of compelling the proletariat to unite in defence of its own class demands, to recognise its common interests, and to develop the perspective of overthrowing its enemy. **Amos. 9.10.21**

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The humiliation of British imperialism in Afghanistan

The withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, agreed by President Trump and confirmed by Biden, demonstrated the further decline of the world's only remaining superpower. US imperialism, following the exit from Iraq and Afghanistan, can no longer pose as the world's cop, militarily intervening at will to defend its strategic interests. While this has global implications, it also demonstrates the further decline in the position of British imperialism. In Afghanistan the UK was completely entangled with the US invasion of 2001. Twenty years later the failure of the US is also a disastrous failure for the UK.

As Boris Johnson admitted in the parliamentary debate after the fall of Kabul:

"In view of the American decision to withdraw, we came up against this hard reality that since 2009, America has deployed 98% of all weapons released from NATO aircraft in Afghanistan and, at the peak of the operation, when there were 132,000 troops on the ground, 90,000 of them were American. The West could not continue this US-led mission—a mission conceived and executed in support and defence of America—without American logistics, without US air power and without American might."

Ever since the Blair government agreed to join Bush's coalition, the British ruling class has claimed that it was defending specific British interests in the region. The stated intentions of Operation Enduring Freedom were to destroy terrorist camps that the Taliban had allowed to flourish in Afghanistan, and to capture or kill leading members of Al-Qaeda. In practice the US wanted to mobilise other western countries as part of the attempts to contain growing chaos in the world, but they were only partially successful. The days of mobilising against the threat from the Russian bloc were long over. Britain wanted to show itself as the best lieutenant to the US, in contrast to countries like France and Germany. But when it came to the killing of Osama bin Laden, that was done by the US alone. Britain did have a military presence in the region, but had to follow US policy, with no influence on Uncle Sam's strategic goals. But none of the big powers is able to deal with the effects of decomposition through military means. This applies to the US despite its military budget being greater than the next 10 countries' military spending combined. In Afghanistan this meant that when the US realised that it was time to leave, Britain had no choice but to follow with its tail between its legs, even if, as we can see from Johnson's rather bitter speech, it did its best to pin the blame for the debacle on the Americans.

In Germany the debate within the bourgeoisie, following the withdrawal from Afghanistan, concentrated on solidifying European alliances in the light of the unreliability of American imperialism. In British politicians have tried to take up the idea of Global Britain, of somehow being able to masquerade as a major power, able to act independently of the EU, following Brexit, and independently of the US. However, as a Conservative MP pointed out *"The fall of Kabul, like Suez, has shown that the UK may not be able to operate autonomously without US involvement. It may be that our foreign policy is decided as much in Washington as it is in London."*

The idea of Global Britain is a myth that has no basis in the military or economic strength of British imperialism. The reference to Suez is appropriate. In 1956 the US put used its whole propaganda machine and economic pressure to force Britain and France to stop their attack on Egypt.¹ If this confirmed that these old colonial powers had been reduced to a second-rate status, then the retreat from first Iraq and now Afghanistan is a further major step in the descending status of British imperialism.

Ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair has written of his opposition to the withdrawal, and attempted to draw out the consequences: *"For Britain, out of Europe and suffering the end of the Afghanistan mission by our greatest ally with little or no consultation, we have serious reflection to do. We don't see it yet. But we are at risk of relegation to the second division of global powers"*. This is

1. See WR 297: Suez 1956: Britain forced to accept its subordinate role

not only an overestimation of Britain's existing position, it is a classic example of denial, of an unwillingness to grasp the real state of imperialist relations in the world. Following the Second World War Britain already had a reduced status as, in the Cold War period of great imperialist blocs, there were only two superpowers, the US and the USSR.

Blair thinks that the UK-US should have stayed in Afghanistan, but you can see so many examples of the impotence of the British position. Just look at the attempt to organise the evacuation of refugees from Kabul who had British connections. It was obvious that without the US this was impossible. Moreover, thousands were left behind. The so-called "special relationship" between Britain and the US was always enormously one sided, involving the overwhelming domination by the latter of the former. While some right-wing figures in the US still champion the importance of the UK-US alliance, Joe Biden has shown no taste for honouring it, leaving Britain out of intelligence, consultation, and any influence.

Aukus agreement confirms UK's subordinate role

The recently-agreed Aukus agreement², while infuriating French imperialism, will not be on equal terms between the US, Australia and the UK. For Britain this was demonstrated when Boris Johnson went to the States in September. Not only did he fail to come away with a trade deal, but Biden made it very clear that the US was not going to tolerate any interference with the terms of the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland. The Aukus agreement is, however, confirmation of the US's turn toward the growing threat of Chinese imperialism. As we put it in the recent resolution on the International Situation from the ICC's 24th Congress *"there is no doubt that the growing confrontation between the US and China tends to take centre stage. The new administration has thus demonstrated its commitment to the 'tilt to*

2. On the Aukus agreement see Exacerbation of tensions between the great powers and instability of alliances

the east' (now supported by the Tory government in Britain) which was already a central axis of Obama's foreign policy."

In the imperialist situation *"The chaotic departure of the US army from Afghanistan after 20 years, and the return to power of the Taliban, is a further sign of the inability of the great powers to guarantee global stability, particularly in areas where tensions and rivalries between states are rampant."* While the US has *"now become the main vector of the chaos and instability which marks the phase of capitalist decomposition"*,³ the UK has vain hopes of being able to act as an independent force. It is no longer part of Europe and it can't rely on the US. The idea of a Global Britain is completely delusional, a façade behind which the UK desperately attempts to hold onto its position against the cutthroat rivalries of competing imperialist powers. Car 6/10/21

3. See Behind the decline of US imperialism, the decline of world capitalism

The petrol supply crisis: no national solution

Long queues snaking into petrol stations, drivers fighting with each other, the government dumping the responsibility on others and Europe taunting the UK with schadenfreude. But the closure or drying out of a large number of petrol stations is only the most glaring tip of the iceberg. For supply is faltering in several sectors. With restaurants closing as they cannot be supplied, with shelves in supermarkets remaining half-empty, with abattoirs that cannot process meat because of shortages of carbon dioxide¹, large parts of the country have been paralysed.

The government blames the pandemic, as testing for thousands of new HGV drivers had to be suspended over the past year and a half. But it also points to the haulage industry, which does not offer sufficiently attractive working conditions. The Labour Party blames the fuel chaos on Boris Johnson's failure to prepare for the consequences of Brexit. *"The Government has reduced the country to chaos as we track from crisis to crisis."* But what is the truth and how far is all this an inbuilt manifestation of the capitalist mode of production?

The mass desertion of lorry drivers

If there is a general agreement that the failures in supply² are caused by the lack of lorry drivers, this shortage is not a new phenomenon and not limited to the UK³. The numbers of British drivers qualified to drive HGVs have been in decline in the UK for at least five years. Many of those who passed their test choose not to drive commercial HGV vehicles or left the job within a couple of years⁴. So, in the heady days before Covid or Brexit, the UK was already lacking around 75,000 drivers.

On the whole the present shortages on the British labour market, in particular in the food and hospitality industries, are mainly due to Brexit⁵. For the sake of simplicity, the mainstream media attribute the present shortage of lorry drivers to

1. This lack of CO2 is not caused by the shortage of lorry drivers alone. The two main plants of CF Industries, which produce CO2 as a by-product of their fertilisers, have stopped work because of rises in wholesale gas prices.
2. UK inventories are currently 54 per cent full, which is already down from 62 per cent last year and still more from 71 per cent in 2019.
3. Six of the biggest economies in the world are also experiencing a massive labour shortage. In Germany for instance there is a shortage of 60,000 to 80,000 road haulage workers. (*The Guardian*, How the supply chain crisis is affecting six big economies)
4. Richard Simpson, former editor of *Trucking* magazine, explained that: *"There are (...) about 600,000 people holding LGV cat C (rigid truck) or cat C+E (articulated lorry) licences in the UK who do not currently drive trucks for a living."* (Cited in *The Guardian*, HGV driver shortage was inevitable)
5. The total of foreign workers who left the UK with the pandemic and did not return is estimated between 1 and 1.3 million, most of whom worked in the food industry and hospitality.

the Covid pandemic and an exodus of foreign workers following Britain's definitive exit from the EU. But the shortage in the haulage industry was already significant before Covid or Brexit, so it can't be blamed only on the virus or on the return of drivers to the Continent.

Even if the figures do not all tell exactly the same story, it is certain that since the start of the pandemic about 15,000 new candidates for the haulage industry have not been able to do the HGV driver test (and not 40,000 as Transport Secretary Grant Shapps tried to make us believe). It is also certain that between 15,000 and 20,000 European truckers have not returned to the UK up till now. But the main bulk of the shortages are due to the huge amount of (mostly elderly) drivers who retired from this work between spring 2020 and September 2021: in total nearly 50,000.

This has more or less been confirmed by the Road Haulage Association (RHA), which stated that the shortage of lorry drivers is also due to the retirement of drivers and low wages. Its statement is closer to the truth than the explanations about Brexit and the pandemic, because the sector is well-known for its harsh working conditions and relatively low salaries. Mark Seddon, former media adviser to the President of the United Nations General Assembly, expressed it bluntly: the haulage industry is characterised by *"endemic low salaries, long hours, and bad working conditions"*.

The profession of lorry driver in the UK is very demanding and pressurised: drivers are responsible for the roadworthiness of the vehicle, its cleanliness, for understanding the ever-changing tachograph laws, weight limits, emission restrictions, for loading and unloading the cargo, for securing the cargo safely. Moreover, they have to put up with the very worst of living conditions. With Britain among Europe's worst countries for traffic jams, the working hours are very long, while conditions can be rough: living away and sleeping in your lorry, eating in lay-bys, bad food, no place to exercise. The stress, strain and long working hours are rewarded with low wages

Didn't workers protest against these pitiful working conditions? Hardly. In August there was a wavering strike by several hundred lorry drivers and in September one by Argos truck drivers in Rochdale. But the last national lorry drivers' strike took place on January 1979, during the "Winter of Discontent". This fact is already revealing about the state of the haulage sector: instead of organising strikes, drivers have mainly gone for individual "solutions" and are deserting the haulage industry in massive quantities.⁶

6. *"It has been estimated that 150,000 drivers have left the UK driver pool over the last decade"*. See: "Understanding and addressing HGV driver shortages in the UK"; Maja Piecyk and Julian Allen, Westminster University 30 September 2021

Crisis management

In June of this year the Road Haulage Association wrote to Boris Johnson, warning that the country was around 100,000 drivers short. On 20 July 2021 the government announced a package of measures to help tackle the HGV driver shortage, which was immediately criticised by the sector as it would only bear fruit in a year's time. Since then nothing happened until the shortage showed itself in broad daylight in September. While the government loudly denies that the haulage sector is in crisis, the proposed solutions have all the characteristics of a short-term and chaotic approach:

- After the UK had fought for years to close borders to foreigners and finally chose Brexit, it is now compelled to offer temporary visas to 5,000 or even 10,000 foreign fuel tanker and food lorry drivers.
- The Ministry of Defence has prepared 150 qualified military drivers to deliver fuel - and has another 150 personnel ready to support them, which is nothing more than a poor publicity stunt.
- Former HGV drivers are encouraged to return to the profession in a rather desperate-looking letter, signed by Baroness Vere of Norbiton, the Minister for Roads, Buses and Places, together with two representatives of the logistic and haulage sector.
- Ministers called on 40,000 retired HGV licence holders to return to work to help refill petrol stations and deliver supplies to supermarkets. This is unlikely to get many positive responses.

The anarchy of capitalist production

In the international arena the UK can only compete by the super-exploitation of at least a million low-paid foreign workers. But since these are no longer available it is not only facing a shortage of nearly 100,000 lorry drivers but also 500,000 unfilled vacancies in the agricultural and food industry. At the same time 2.5 million workers in the UK are unemployed, and millions more underemployed, struggling on part-time wages. This is the anarchy of capitalist production, which inevitably leads to disharmony and fractures between the different sectors of the economy.

The solution proposed by the various leftist organisations, *"as empty shelves make headlines in the UK"*, is unchanged: *"a democratically planned economy"* on the national level. (Global supply chain chaos & the need for a rationally planned economy, The Socialist Party, section in Ireland of the ISA)

But this fairy tale of the national planned economy brings no solution to the anarchy of the market. Planning by the national state or under "democratic" control of the workers organised

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Behind the decline of US imperialism, the decline of world capitalism

The hasty retreat of US and other western forces from Afghanistan is a stark manifestation of capitalism's inability to offer anything but increasing barbarism. The summer of 2021 has already seen an acceleration of inter-linked events which show that the planet is already on fire: the outbreak of heatwaves and of uncontrollable fires from the west coast of the USA to Siberia, floods, the continuing ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic dislocation it has caused. All of this is "a revelation of the level of putrefaction reached during the 30 last years"¹. As marxists, our role is not merely to comment on this growing chaos but to analyse its roots, which lie in the historical crisis of capitalism, and to show the perspectives for the working class and the whole of humanity.

The historic background to the events in Afghanistan

The Taliban are presented as the enemies of civilisation, a danger to human rights and the rights of women in particular. They are certainly brutal and are driven by a vision that harks back to the worst aspects of the Middle Ages. However, they are not some rare exception to the times we are living in. They are the product of a reactionary social system: decadent capitalism. In particular their rise is a manifestation of decomposition, the final stage of capitalism's decadence.

The second half of the 70s saw an escalation of the Cold War between the US and Russian imperialist blocs, with the US placing cruise missiles in Western Europe and forcing the USSR to engage in an arms race it could less and less afford. However, in 1979 one of the pillars of the western bloc in the Middle East, Iran, collapsed into chaos. All attempts by intelligent fractions of the bourgeoisie to impose order failed and the most backward elements of the clergy took advantage of this chaos to come to power. The new regime broke from the western bloc but also refused to join the Russian bloc. Iran has an extensive border with Russia and had thus acted as a key player in the west's strategy of encircling the USSR. Now it had become a loose cannon in the region. This new disorder encouraged the USSR to invade Afghanistan when the West tried to overthrow the pro-Russian regime that it had managed to install in Kabul in 1978. By invading Afghanistan, Russia had hoped that at a later stage it would also be able to gain access to the Indian ocean.

In Afghanistan we now witnessed a terrible explosion of military barbarity. The USSR unleashed the full might of its arsenal on the Mujahedin ("freedom fighters") and the population in general. On the other side the US bloc armed, financed and trained the Mujahedin and the Afghan warlords opposed to the Russians. These included many Islamic fundamentalists and also a growing influx of jihadis from across the world. These "freedom fighters" were taught all the arts of terror and warfare by the US and its allies. This war for "freedom" killed between 500,000 and 2 million people and left the country devastated. It was also the birthplace of a more global form of Islamic terrorism, typified by the rise of Bin Laden and Al-Qaida.

At the same time the US pushed Iraq into an eight-year long war against Iran, in which around 1.4 million were slaughtered. While Russia ex-

hausted itself in Afghanistan, which contributed strongly to the collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989, and Iran and Iraq were being drawn into the spiral of war, the dynamic in the region showed that the point of departure, Iran's transformation into a "rogue" state, was one of the first indications that the deepening contradictions of capitalism were starting to undermine the ability of the major powers to impose their authority in different regions of the planet. Behind this tendency lay something deeper: the inability of the ruling class to impose its solution to the crisis of the system – another world war – on a world working class which had shown its unwillingness to sacrifice itself on behalf of capitalism in a series of struggles between 1968 and the late 80s, without, however, being able to put forward a revolutionary alternative to the system. In short, an impasse between the two major classes determined capitalism's entry into its final phase, the phase of decomposition, characterised, at the imperialist level, by the end of the two-bloc system and the acceleration of "every man for himself".

Afghanistan at the heart of the imperialist free for all

In the 1990s, after the departure of the Russians from Afghanistan, the victorious warlords turned on each other, using all the weapons and knowledge of war given to them by the West for control of the ruins. Wholesale slaughter, destruction and mass rape destroyed what little social cohesion was left by the war.

The social impact of this war was not confined to Afghanistan. The plague of heroin addiction that exploded from the 1980s onwards, bringing misery and death throughout the world, was one of the direct consequences of the war. The West encouraged the opposition to the Taliban to cultivate opium in order to finance the fighting.

The ruthless religious fanaticism of the Taliban was thus a product of decades of barbarity. They were also manipulated by Pakistan, in order to try and impose some form of order on its doorstep.

The US invasion in 2001, launched with the excuse of getting rid of Al-Qaida and the Taliban, along with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, were attempts by US imperialism to impose its authority faced with the consequences of its decline. It tried to get other powers, especially the Europeans, to act in response to the attack on one of its members. Apart from the UK, all the other powers were lukewarm. Indeed, Germany had already set out a new "independent" path in the early 90s, by supporting the secession of Croatia which in turn provoked the horrible slaughter in the Balkans. In the next two decades, America's rivals became further emboldened as they watched the US getting embroiled in unwinnable wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The attempt of the USA to assert its dominance as the sole remaining superpower would more and more reveal the veritable decline of America's imperialist 'leadership'; and far from succeeding in imposing a monolithic order on the rest of the planet, the USA had now become the main vector of the chaos and instability which marks the phase of capitalist decomposition.

Biden's Realpolitik in continuity with Trump's

The policy of withdrawing from Afghanistan is a clear example of realpolitik. The US has to free itself of these expensive and debilitating wars in order to concentrate its resources on reinforcing its efforts to contain and undermine China and Russia. The Biden administration has shown itself to be no less cynical in the pursuit of US ambitions than Trump.

At the same time, the conditions of the US withdrawal have meant that the message by the Biden administration "America is Back", that America is a reliable ally, has been dealt a serious blow. In the long-term the administration is probably relying on the fear of China to force countries like Japan, South Korea, and Australia into cooperating with the US "shift to the east", aimed at containing China in the South China Sea and elsewhere in the region.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this that the US has simply walked away from the Middle

East and Central Asia. Biden has made clear the US will pursue an "Over the Horizon" policy in relation to terrorist threats. This means that it will use its military bases around the world, its navy and air-force to inflict destruction on states in these regions if they endanger the US. This threat is also related to the increasingly chaotic situation in Africa, where failed states such as Somalia could be joined by Ethiopia as it is ravaged by civil war, with its neighbours supporting either side. This list will grow longer as Islamic terrorist groups in Nigeria, Chad, and elsewhere are emboldened by the victory of the Taliban to step up their campaigns.

If the withdrawal from Afghanistan is motivated by the need to focus on the danger posed by the rise of China and the revival of Russia as world powers, its limitations seem obvious, even offering Chinese and Russian imperialism a way into Afghanistan itself. China has already invested massively in its New Silk Road project in Afghanistan and both states have begun diplomatic relations with the Taliban. But neither of these states can rise above an increasingly contradictory world disorder. The wave of instability spreading across Africa, the Middle East (the collapse of the Lebanese economy being the most recent), Central Asia and the Far East (Myanmar in particular) is as much a danger to China and Russia as the US. They are fully aware that Afghanistan has no real functioning state and that the Taliban will not be able to build one. The threat to the new government from the warlords is well known. Parts of the Northern Alliance have already said they will not accept the government, and ISIS, which has also been involved in Afghanistan, considers the Taliban to be apostates because they are prepared to make deals with the infidel West. Parts of Afghanistan's old ruling class may seek to work with the Taliban, and many foreign governments are opening up channels, but this is because they are terrified of the county descending again into warlordism and chaos which will spill over into the whole region.

The victory of the Taliban can only encourage the Uyghurs Islamic terrorists that are active in China, even if the Taliban did not support them. Russian imperialism knows the bitter cost of entanglement in Afghanistan and can see that the victory of the Taliban will provide a new impetus to the fundamentalist groups in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, states that form a buffer between the two countries. It will take advantage of this threat to strengthen its military influence on these states and elsewhere, but it can see that even the might of the US war machine could not crush such an insurgency if the latter gets enough support from other states.

The US was unable to defeat the Taliban and establish a cohesive state. It has withdrawn in the knowledge that while it has had to suffer a real humiliation, it has left a timebomb of instability in its wake. Russia and China now have to seek to contain this chaos. Any idea that capitalism can bring stability and some form of future to this region is a pure illusion.

Barbarism with a humanitarian face

The US, Britain and all the other powers have used the Taliban bogeyman to hide the terror and destruction they have inflicted on the population of Afghanistan over the past 40 years. The US-backed mujahidin slaughtered, raped, tortured and pillaged as much as the Russians. As with the Taliban they waged terror campaigns in the urban centres controlled by the Russians. However, this was carefully hidden from view by the West. It has been the same over the last 20 years.



The terrible brutality of the Taliban has been highlighted in the Western media, whilst news of the casualties, killings, rapes and torture inflicted by the "democratic" government and its backers was cynically swept under the carpet. Somehow the blowing to pieces of young and old, women and men, by the shells, bombs and bullets of the government backed by the 'democratic', 'human rights' loving US and UK are not worth mentioning. In fact, even the full extent of the terror the Taliban has inflicted has not been reported. It is seen as being not 'news-worthy' unless it could help to justify the war.

The parliaments of Europe have echoed US and British politicians in bewailing the terrible fate of women and others in Afghanistan under the Taliban. The same politicians have imposed immigration laws that have led thousands of desperate refugees, including many Afghans, to risk their lives try to cross the Mediterranean or the Channel. Where is their wailing for the thousands who have drowned in the Mediterranean in recent years? What concern do they show for those refugees forced to live in little better than concentration camps in Turkey or Jordan (financed by the EU and Britain) or sold in the slave markets of Libya? These bourgeois mouthpieces that condemn the Taliban for its inhumanity are encouraging the construction of a wall of steel and concrete around Eastern Europe to stop the movement of refugees. The stench of hypocrisy is almost overwhelming.

The proletariat is the only force able to put an end to this hell

The vista of war, pandemic, economic crisis and climate change is indeed fearful. This is why the ruling class fills its media with them. It wants the proletariat to be subdued, to cower in fear from the grim reality of this rotting social system. They want us to be like children clutching onto the skirts of the ruling class and its state. The great difficulties the proletariat has had in the struggle to defend its interests over the last 30 years allow this fear to take a greater hold. The idea that the proletariat is the only force able to offer a future, a completely new society, can appear absurd. But the proletariat is the revolutionary class and three decades of retreat has not eradicated this, even if the length and depth of this retreat does make it harder for the international working class to regain confidence in its ability to resist the growing attacks on its economic conditions. But is only through these struggles that the working class can re-develop its strength. As Rosa Luxemburg said the proletariat is the only class that develops its consciousness through the experience of defeats. There is no guarantee the proletariat will be able to live up to its historical responsibility to offer a future to the rest of humanity. This certainly will not take place if the proletariat and its revolutionary minorities succumb to the crushing atmosphere of despair and hopelessness promoted by our class enemy. The proletariat can only carry out its revolutionary role by looking the grim reality of decomposing capitalism in the face and by refusing to accept the attacks on its economic and social conditions, replacing isolation and helplessness with solidarity, organisation and growing class consciousness. ICC 22.8.21

¹ <https://en.internationalism.org/content/17042/report-pandemic-and-development-decomposition>

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in unions, does not eliminate private capitalist appropriation and competition since this is itself co-determined by the world market, and by the changing requirements of imperialist competition. This kind of state capitalism only brings mutual competition onto a higher level: instead of the competition between various private companies and sectors comes the trade war between imperialist states. We know only too well what such an economic war leads to... **Dennis, 9.10.21**

1920s-1930s: the Communist Parties and the Left Opposition

In part two of this series on the proletarian struggle against racism in the U.S., we examined the different positions in the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and in the Socialist Party of America (SPA). Central in this struggle stood the "Negro Resolution", ratified at the Founding Congress of the SPA in 1901. Different locals (sections) of this party made serious attempts to fight for the interests of the workers, regardless of the colour of their skin. But in general, the leadership of the Party remained dismissive of any full integration of black workers into the party.

In the third part of this series, we will take a closer look at how the later political organisations of the proletariat tried to further clarify the political-theoretical position on the "Negro question". This had to be done in a period that had fundamentally changed, because capitalism had entered its period of decadence, in which lasting improvements were no longer possible. Every demand of the working class ran up against the objective limits of capitalism. The stakes of the proletarian struggle had risen to the point where every substantial demand faced the ruthless reaction of the bourgeois state.

Therefore, and in contrast to the period of ascendance when demands for "democratic rights" were still backed by progressive fractions of the bourgeoisie, any struggle for specific rights of the black workers had become counterproductive, since it was immediately exploited by the ruling class to put one sector of the working class against the other and to crush any resistance. Any struggle was doomed in advance if it was not based on the unification of the struggle of black and white workers. After the First World War the fight for "equal rights" for black people was no longer part of the programme of the workers' movement. In the new conditions the only perspective was the massive struggle of all workers, regardless of their colour or nationality.

This was the historical context in which we shall examine how far the political organisations of the proletariat, from the revolutionary wave of 1917-1923 onwards, succeeded in deepening their comprehension of the "Negro question" and the way to overcome the divisions that still existed on a large scale between black and the white workers. We will examine in particular the positions of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) and the Communist International (Comintern), Max Shachtman of the Trotskyist Communist League of America (CLA) and C.L.R. James of the Trotskyist Workers' Party (WP).

The Comintern and the "national-revolutionary" struggle

The newly founded Communist Party of America (CPA), one of the two Communist parties formed in the USA,¹ had a clause in its programme concerning African Americans: "*The Negro problem is a political and economic problem. The racial oppression of the Negro is simply the expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other. This complicates the Negro problem, but does not alter its proletarian character. The Communist Party will carry on agitation among the Negro workers to unite them with all class conscious workers.*"²

But this statement posed a methodological problem, because it was not based on a radical critique of the positions developed in the SPA. It seemed to be more a declaration than a political position based on a profound conviction within the party. This was shown already in the discussion on the *Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* at the Second Congress of the Communist International (the Comintern.) When Louis C. Fraina, the representative of the CPA at the Congress, intervened in this discussion he completely ignored the clause in the party programme and the need for a proletarian approach to the "Negro question".

Nonetheless the discussion was very interesting from the point of view of the Communist Parties in the US. Because in his *Theses* Lenin singled out the population of Ireland and black people in

America as examples of the national and colonial question: "*All Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies.*"³ Thus for the first time in the history of the workers' movement black people in the US were compared with oppressed populations elsewhere in the world.

The other Communist Party in the US, the Communist Labor Party (CLP), had delegated John Reed to the Congress. Although his party had no section in its programme on the "Negro question", he made a clear intervention, approaching the subject from the point of view of the interests of working class: "*The only correct policy for the American communists towards the Negroes is to regard them above all as workers. The agricultural workers and the small farmers of the South pose (...) the same tasks as those we have in respect to the white rural proletariat. Communist propaganda can be carried out among the Negroes who are employed as industrial workers in the North.*"⁴ In reply to the *Draft Theses* he also said that African Americans cannot be considered as a nation, like the other populations in the world, since they had never posed demands for national independence.

But his intervention also left room for false interpretations. Reed was right that, in the end, it is "*the social revolution of the proletariat which will not only liberate all workers from servitude but is also the only way to free the enslaved Negro people.*"⁵ But in this same intervention, instead of emphasising the necessity for the unification of the black and white workers in a joint struggle against their exploitation, he referred to "*the Negro movement*" that put forward its own demands. He spoke about the "Negro movement" as if it was a class movement, when black people were a population composed of different classes and not one class, the proletariat.

The example of African Americans and the Irish did not appear in the final version of the *Theses*. But it was clear that the objective of the Comintern was to call upon black people, like other oppressed nations, to ally with "their" national bourgeoisie in a so-called "national-revolutionary" struggle for their liberation from oppression by imperialism. This idea of forming an alliance with the national bourgeoisie raised criticism from at least two non-American delegates at the Congress: Sultan-Zade of the Communist Party of Iran, and Serrati of the Italian Socialist Party.

Both emphasised that at all times the working class must preserve its independence from its exploiters, the so-called "revolutionary nationalists". Both criticised alliances between the Communist Parties and the supposedly 'revolutionary' bourgeois parties in the backward countries. "*Such alliances can only lead to the weakening of proletarian class consciousness [and] run the danger of losing its class position and its class orientation*"⁶; in the end this policy drives "*the masses into the arms of the counter-revolution. The task is to create and maintain a purely communist movement in opposition to the bourgeois-democratic one.*"⁷

Even if they (Serrati and Sultan-Zade) were completely right to oppose the centrist nature of the *Draft Theses*, the intervention of Serrati also expressed a certain ambiguity regarding the national struggle against the oppression of colonial populations, when he said that this struggle for national liberation can be revolutionary if the working class takes the lead. Here is not the place to enter into detail on this particular struggle in capitalist decadence, but at the time communists were far from homogeneous on this point. The only comrades who clearly denounced the struggle for national liberation were Rosa Luxemburg in *The National Question* (1909) and Anton Pannekoek in *Class Struggle and Nation* (1912).⁸

3. Lenin, 'Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions'

4. Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International Fourth Session

5. Ibid

6. Giacinto Menotti Serrati at the Second Congress of the Communist International Fifth Session

7. Sultan-Zade at the Second Congress of the Communist International Fifth Session

8. See also: 'Part 1: The debate on the national question

The CPUSA and the struggle for "equal rights"

The Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), which was founded in 1921 as a merger between the CLP and the CPA, also had a relevant section in its programme. Under the heading "The Race Problem" it clearly explained the "Negro question" from the point of view of the proletariat: "*The interests of the Negro workers are identical with those of the white. It will seek to end the policy of discrimination followed by organized labor [AFL]. Its task will be to destroy altogether the barrier of race discrimination that has been used to keep apart the black and white workers, and weld them into a solid union of revolutionary forces for the overthrow of their common enemy.*"⁹

An important point was the position that "*the interests of the Negro workers are identical with those of the white*" as well as the statement that the task will be to "*weld them into a solid union of revolutionary forces for the overthrow of their common enemy*". But the paragraph also contained the same error as expressed in John Reed's speech at the Second Congress of the Comintern. It did not take into account the changed conditions in decadence, when it made an appeal "*to support the Negroes (...) in their fight for economic, political, and social equality*".¹⁰

As Lenin put forward in his *Draft Theses*, presented at the Second Congress, "*Under the guise of the equality of the individual in general, bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal or legal equality of the property-owner and the proletarian, the exploiter and the exploited, thereby grossly deceiving the oppressed classes.*"¹¹ Thus, instead of strengthening the struggle of the working class, such a demand increases confusion and division among workers and distracts them from the fight for their proletarian goals.

The struggle for economic, political and social equality for black workers was part of the proletarian struggle in the period of capitalism's ascendance. But in the period of decadence such demands can no longer function as a reference point for the mobilisation of the proletariat. In the age of "socialism or barbarism" the goal of the proletarian struggle is not determined by the demand for equal rights. Equal rights or not, oppression and class exploitation continue as the essential conditions of the working class. Moreover, every democratic campaign undermines the attempts of the workers to struggle as an independent force on their own class terrain.

The call for equal rights for black people is not based on a class perspective, but on the interests of a heterogeneous group of people with more or less the same colour, in which members of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and the working class are supposed to struggle side by side. The black civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated that a struggle for equality in the framework of the existing state does not put into question the capitalist system, where one class lives on the unpaid labour of the other. Such a campaign only blurs class antagonisms and confuses workers in their struggle against the exploitation of their labour power.

The Comintern and the "right of Negroes to self-determination"

In January 1921 the Comintern published a first position on the "Negro question" in "An Appeal of the Executive Committee of the Communist International to the Working Class of North and South America". In this appeal it explained that "*The Negro is exploited as a race and also economically - but this in no way alters the fact that the Negro problem constitutes a phase of the social problem, it only invests this problem with a peculiar form. The militant mood of the Negro must attain expression through the proletarian revolution and not independently of it. (...) The toiling Negro must everywhere (...) be joined together with the proletariat and be convinced that his racial struggle*

at the dawn of decadence', *International Review* 34

9. William Z Forster, *On the history of the Communist Party on the U.S.*; 13. 'The Workers' Party'; 1921

10. Ibid

11. Lenin, 'Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions'

must fuse itself with the revolutionary struggles of labor against capital."¹²

In the same way as John Reed, this Appeal considered the "Negro question" as a particular form of the exploitation of the working class. According to the Appeal the toiling Negroes belong to the working class and as such their struggle must be integrated in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. However, the Appeal still contains certain ambiguities, such as the expression that "*his racial struggle must fuse with the revolutionary struggles of labor*". Even if all people in this struggle are workers, racial struggle takes place on the bourgeois terrain for equal rights and therefore it cannot fuse with the workers' struggle, and certainly not on an equal footing.

The Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922 was the first to adopt a special resolution on the "Negro question". This resolution contained no new points and was mainly based on the anti-imperialist position adopted at the Second Congress as laid down in the *Theses on the national and colonial question*. Only this time, black people in the U.S. were assigned a highly dubious vanguard role. "*The American Negro, by reason of his higher education and culture and his greater aptitude for leadership, and because of the urgency of the issues in America, will furnish the leadership for the Negro race.*"¹³

At the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, in 1924, the focus was on the self-determination of American black people. But John Pepper, a Hungarian-born delegate from the US, said that the African Americans had no interest in self-determination, as John Reed had already said before him. Fort-Whiteman, another delegate from the U.S., agreed but stressed that black people in the U.S. had to be organised in "*a specialised way*". Dmitri Manuilsky, from the Programme Commission also rejected the idea of self-determination for African Americans with the argument that, in the US, it "*cannot solve all national questions with its extraordinary mixed population*"¹⁴

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern, in 1928, raised the question of self-determination again, referring to Lenin's book *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, written in 1914. And this emphasis on self-determination did not happen by accident, because in 1926 the Bolshevik Party had already adopted "socialism in one country" as official state policy. At this Congress the Comintern ratified this position, which marked its death as the political vanguard of the world proletariat. After "socialism in one country" was adopted as a realistic option, the fight for the establishment of a "socialist" nation for black people in the US was a logical consequence.

What was new was the fact that now the Comintern considered the "Negro struggle" not only as an expression of national liberation, but also as an expression of the efforts of black people to free themselves from the deep-rooted racist prejudice that condemned them as inferior creatures. "*The Negro race everywhere is an oppressed race. Whether it is a minority (U.S.A., etc.) majority (South Africa) or inhabits a so-called independent state (Liberia, etc.), the Negroes are oppressed by imperialism. Thus, a common tie of interest is established for the revolutionary struggle of race and national liberation from imperialist domination of the Negroes in various parts of the world.*"¹⁵

In this framework the tasks defined for the CPUSA were the following: "*While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes, which much remain the central slogan of our Party for work among the masses, the Party must come out unreservedly for the right of Negroes to national self-determination in the Southern States.*"¹⁶ This

12. 'An Appeal of the Executive Committee of the

Communist International to the Working Class of North and South America'. Cited by: Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*

13. Israel Amter, *The Black Victims of Imperialism*

14. Cited in: *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London*

15. The 1928 Comintern Resolutions on the black national question in the United States

16. Ibid

1. The ICC aims to come back to the problems of the formation of the CP in the US in a future article

2. The Program of the party, *The Communist*, 27 September 1919

Continued from page 4

resolution had not yet mentioned a specific area for this independent nation of African Americans. But the 1930 Comintern resolution explicitly mentioned the so-called "Black Belt", a region in the South-East of the US with a large black population.

In its strategy towards the struggle of African Americans, the Comintern seemed to consider the US more or less as a world in miniature, with a semi-colonial rule in the South and the oppressing imperialist rule in the North. Invoking the *Theses on the national and colonial question* from the Second Congress, the CPUSA was therefore called upon to give direction to the 'national-revolutionary' struggle for the self-determination of the toiling black masses in the South against the landowners, and to organise massive support for this struggle among the workers in the other parts of the U.S.



Louis Fraina

The CPUSA was thus ordered by the Comintern to fight for a separate nation for African Americans. In the party and even in the leadership of the party there was a considerable resistance and many members had to be won over to this policy. But this opposition to the Comintern resolution was not openly expressed. The critique would be expressed some years later by Max Shachtman, one of the militants expelled from the CPUSA because of his critique of the theory of "socialism in one country".

Trotsky's defence of "national self-determination"

What was the position of Trotsky, who had not taken part in the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, on the strategy decided by the Comintern on the situation of black people in the US?

In 1923 Trotsky had already explained his position on the "Negro question" in a letter to Claude MacKay, who was present at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. "In North America the matter is further complicated by the abominable obtuseness and caste presumption of the privileged upper strata of the working class itself, who refuse to recognize fellow-workers and fighting comrades in the Negroes."¹⁷ This concept was reminiscent of Lenin's idea of the "labour aristocracy", whereby the U.S. was divided into an "advantaged western proletariat" and a "disadvantaged black population", and where the former supposedly benefited from the fruits of the super-exploitation of the latter.

In 1933 Trotsky even defended the position that, in their relation to black people, the white workers in the US are fully part of the oppressive system. In his discussion with Swabeck and Weisbord he therefore argued in favour of the "democratic" demand for self-determination as the only way that the black people could free themselves from semi-slavery: "Negroes are a race and not a nation", but they can become a nation since "the suppression of the Negroes pushes them toward a political and national unity."¹⁸ He rejected the struggle for equal political, economic and social rights as being a liberal demand.

We agree that the demand for social, political and economic equality is a liberal demand. Such

17. Leon Trotsky, *On the Negro Question*

18. Leon Trotsky, *The Negro Question in America*

a demand lacks a clear proletarian class basis, and since the working class is the only revolutionary class in capitalism this demand can never put into question the rule of capital, which is the source of the oppression of black people. But what were the arguments of Trotsky for rejecting this demand? Actually, he gave only one argument and this was that black people can much easier be misled by such a liberal demand than by what he called the democratic demand for self-determination. But even with this argument to hand we remain in the dark, since Trotsky gave no further explanation for his defence of self-determination in his discussion with the members of the US Trotskyist groups.

In order to acquaint ourselves with the Trotsky's other arguments in support of self-determination for black people in the U.S. we have to go back to his *History of the Russian Revolution*, which he had finished only one year before his discussion with Swabeck and Weisbord. In this book he unconditionally defended Lenin's position: "Lenin early learned the inevitability of this development of centrifugal national movements in Russia, and for many years stubbornly fought – most particularly against Rosa Luxemburg – for that famous paragraph 9 of the old party programme which formulated the right of nations to self-determination – that is, to complete separation as states."¹⁹

When Trotsky pleaded for the self-determination of the "Negro people" he must have been convinced that centrifugal forces in the U.S. were getting stronger, and that an independent African American nation was the only solution. He did recognise that this demand could undermine the unification of the struggle and separate: "the colored workers from the white," in cases where "common actions existed between the white and the colored workers", and "the class fraternization had already become a fact". But, as he said, since this is not the case in the US and since "the white workers in relation to the Negroes are the oppressors" the demand for self-determination "would undoubtedly mean a greater progress."²⁰

The thesis on "the rights of nations to self-determination" was already highly ambiguous in the year that Lenin wrote his book. And not long after its publication it was criticised within the Bolshevik Party. Like the argument that Serrati would develop at the Second Congress of the Comintern, this criticism denounced unification with bourgeois forces in the oppressed nations: "Partial tasks of the 'liberation of nations' within the limits of capitalist society diverts proletarian forces from the true solution of the problem and unites them with the forces of the bourgeoisie of the corresponding national groups."²¹ In this debate Lenin had to admit that the proletariat could give no guarantees, and that self-determination for one nation could easily lead to conflict with another.

Trotsky had rejected the criticisms of the position of Lenin as he did with the criticism of the political practice of the Bolshevik Party in the revolution by Rosa Luxemburg. While the Bolsheviks expected that the policy of secession would turn the new-born nations into allies of the Russian "semi-state" "we have witnessed the opposite spectacle. One after another, these 'nations' used their freshly granted freedom to ally themselves with German imperialism against the Russian revolution as its mortal enemy, and under German protection, to carry the banner of counter-revolution into Russia itself."²²

The Trotsky of the 1930s seems to have swept all these critiques under the carpet of his concept of "permanent revolution", which was his *deus ex machina* against all the counter-revolutionary forces that emerged as a result of the "self-determination of nations".

Trotsky actually made a caricature of Lenin's thesis, as he mechanically applied it to the situation of the US in the 1930s, where the conditions were completely different from the years 1917-1923 in Russia and Europe, when the international proletariat had unleashed a massive revolutionary wave. For Lenin the right to self-determination was an "occasional" policy, depending on the particular conditions of the moment; in the hands of Trotsky it turned into "a constant rule, and the

19. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution, Volume Three: The Triumph of the Soviets*, Chapter 39 'The Problem of Nationalities'

20. Leon Trotsky, *The Negro Question in America*

21. Yuri Pyatakov, Yevgeniya Bosh, and Nikolai Bukharin, *Theses on the right of nations to self-determination*

22. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Chapter 3 'The Nationalities Question'

possibility of the proletariat finding support in the national struggles of colonial countries was transformed into unconditional support by the proletariat of national and nationalist struggles."²³

In the revolutionary wave the international proletariat was a source of inspiration for millions of oppressed people in the world. The fact that the proletariat in the central countries was shaking the capitalist system also set in motion various oppressed layers in the countries on the periphery of capitalism. For Lenin, it was only in these specific conditions, and not in the US of the 1930s, that "the proletariat, concentrated in the most developed capitalist countries could find, in its assault on the capitalist world, support in the underdeveloped countries, which has been exposed to the oppression of the major powers."²⁴ Since these oppressed layers were not able to develop a perspective on their own, they needed the leadership of the proletariat if they wanted to be freed from the oppression by the colonial powers or even from oppression altogether.

Critique of the slogan of "national self-determination"

In 1931 the Trotskyist Communist League of Struggle (CLS) had already adopted a point on "The struggle for Negro emancipation" in its general platform published in its journal *Class struggle*. In this point it rejected the theory that African Americans were a nation and that they should fight for national independence. In 1933 this criticism was further developed by Max Shachtman, a member of the Communist League of America (CLA), in his book *Communism and the Negro*. On the basis of Kautsky's definition of a nation, as formulated in his letter to the Seventh Congress of the Bund (31 August 1906), Shachtman examined in his book whether black people in the US did fit such a definition.

In his study he came to the conclusion that the black population were not a nation. The black people of America possessed no common culture or language of their own; no separate religion and institutions, which demarcated them as a distinct nationality and as having a separate national culture. And even the caste status of black people, a consequence of his previous state of chattel slavery, did not place them in the category of a nation. Moreover, as other marxists had already stated before him: African Americans had never posed demands for self-determination.

Against the idea of the "Black Belt" he argued that African Americans have no historically defined frontiers: they were spread across the US and their distribution over different parts of the country was constantly shifting. Moreover, economic and political development caused great migrations from the rural South towards the industrial centres in the North. Black people "have never felt a national attachment to this particular section of the country as the Irishman feels for Ireland, the Pole for Poland, the Catalan for Catalonia."²⁵

The conclusion of his examination was that there was no basis whatsoever for self-determination of the Negro people as a separate nation in the "Black Belt". According to Shachtman the slogan of self-determination was even dangerous for the struggle of the American working class: "The Stalinists have introduced radical change in the communist position on the Negro question, which is just as radically wrong and guaranteed to produce the most harmful results in the fight to liberate not only the American Negro but the whole American working class."²⁶ In the end Shachtman rejected not only the "Black Belt" and black nationalism, but also the idea of black people having their own independent fighting organisations.

If we are in agreement with the arguments of Shachtman against the positions of the Comintern

23. The Mexican Left 1938 On the national question, *International Review* 20. The Mexican Left consisted of the Marxist Workers Group (Grupo de Trabajadores Marxistas) and made its first appearance after the crushing of the May 1937 insurrection in Spain. Paul Kirchhoff, Johanna Faulhaber and three or four Mexican militants published a leaflet denouncing "the massacre in Barcelona". It called upon the workers to break from the repulsive alliance of classes represented by the antifascist war front. The group disappeared in 1939. But, in the short two years of its existence it made an effective contribution to the defense of fundamental communist positions, in particular on the national question.

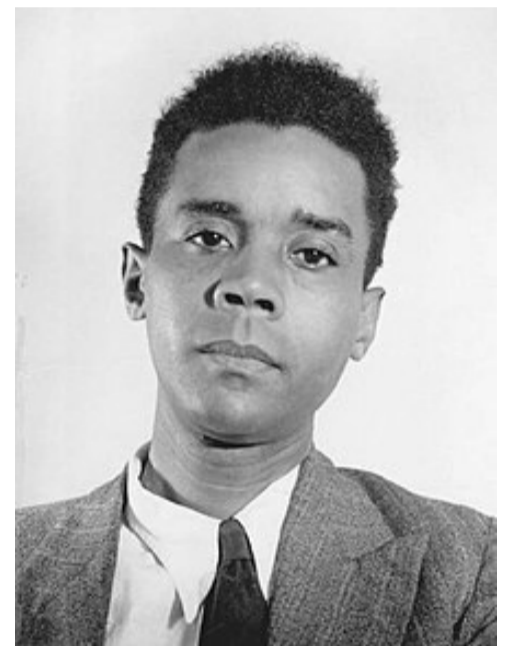
24. Ibid

25. Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*. The original title of the book was: *Communism and the Negro*.

26. Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution*

and Trotsky, on self-determination, we must also note that his criticism did not go to the roots, because he did not argue against the constitution of new nations as such. For a new nation, even if it is constituted by an oppressed national minority, such as the black people in the U.S., cannot and will never be a real community of all oppressed people, workers and poor farmers alike. Under the conditions of decadent capitalism, every nation state is imperialist and will immediately turn itself, not only against rival nations, but also against the most oppressed parts of the population and against the working class in particular.

Already in the period of the ascendance of capitalism nations were never a unified social body. They contained insuperable property divisions that, like its wider social divisions, had to be managed and often by means of state violence. Nevertheless, Marx and Engels supported the struggle for national independence, but only if it brought the struggle of the working class for its emancipation closer. But in the period of decadence any national unity comes under enormous pressure by the aggravation of its inner contradictions. This tendency compels the national bourgeoisie to increase its grip on society by the development of a state totalitarian rule, whether "democratic" or "dictatorial".



CLR James in 1938

C.L.R. James and his incomplete break with Trotskyism

Five years after the publication of the book by Max Shachtman C.L.R. James arrived in the U.S. and gave a new impetus to the discussion on the "Negro question" in the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). He published dozens of articles and discussed with Trotsky on the issue in April 1939. Raising more or less the same objections as Max Shachtman did in his book in 1933, in this discussion he did not present himself as a protagonist of self-determination for black people. He considered "the idea of separating as a step backward so far as a socialist society is concerned."²⁷

His most important and most elaborated contribution on the "Negro question" was written four years later, in 1943, when he had broken with the SWP after a disagreement on the proletarian nature of the Russian state and on the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union, which led the majority of Trotskyists to support the Allied imperialist camp. Defending an internationalist position during the Second World War, he became a member of the Workers' Party²⁸. In this contribution, "The Historical Development of the Negro in the United States", he explains his position on "the developing relation of the Negro struggle to the general struggles of the proletariat as the leader of the oppressed classes in American society".

In his analysis of the perspectives for the struggle of the Negroes, C.L.R. James explicitly referred to Lenin's *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up* (1916), in particular to chapter 10,

27. C.L.R. James and Leon Trotsky: *Self-Determination for the American Negroes*, Mexico, 4 April 1939

28. The Workers' Party (WP) was a third Trotskyist group in the U.S. It was founded in April 1940 by members who disagreed with the SWP on the defence of the Soviet Union as a "degenerated workers state".

The necessity for a transition...to communism

20 years ago, in 2001, the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlighted a document from the Global Scenario Group, convened by the Stockholm Environmental Institute, outlining three possible scenarios for humanity's future resulting from the climate crisis:

"The GSG framework includes three broad classes of scenarios for scanning the future: 'Conventional Worlds', 'Barbarisation' and 'Great Transition' – with variants within each class. All are compatible with current patterns and trends, but have very different implications for society and the environment in the 21st century... In 'Conventional Worlds' scenarios, global society develops gradually from current patterns and dominant tendencies, with development driven primarily by rapidly growing markets as developing countries converge towards the development model of advanced industrial ('developed') countries. In 'Barbarisation' scenarios, environmental and social tensions spawned by conventional development are not resolved, humanitarian norms weaken, and the world becomes more authoritarian or more anarchic. 'Great Transitions' explore visionary solutions to the sustainability challenge, which portray the ascendancy of new values, lifestyles and institutions". from p. 140 of the 2001 IPCC, Working Group 3 report on mitigation

In 2021, following or accompanied by unprecedented heatwaves from Canada to Siberia, floods in northern Europe and China, droughts and wildfires in California, new signs of Arctic ice melting, the first part of the IPCC report, the part which concentrates on the scientific analysis of climate trends, has made it plain that the "conventional" continuation of capitalist accumulation is driving us towards "barbarisation". With an eye of the October-November COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, the report argues forcefully that without drastic and concerted global action to reduce emissions over the next few decades, it will not be possible to limit temperature rises to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, a threshold seen as necessary to avert the worst consequences of climate change. Not only that: the report refers to a series of "planetary boundaries" or tipping points which could see an uncontrollable acceleration of planetary heating, rendering large parts of the Earth incapable of sustaining human life. Accord-

ing to many of the experts who are cited in the report, four of these boundaries have already been crossed, notably at the level of climate change, biodiversity loss and unsustainable agricultural methods, with several more, such as the acidification of the oceans, plastic pollution and ozone depletion, threatening to result in mutually-reinforcing spirals with the other factors¹.

The report also makes it perfectly clear that these dangers derive above all from "human intervention" (which, in essence, means the production and extension of capital) and not from natural processes such as solar activity or volcanic eruptions, explanations which are often the last resort of the increasingly discredited climate change deniers.

The part of the report dealing with possible ways out of the crisis has not been published yet, but from all previous reports we know that, however much it may talk about "transitions" to a new economic model which will cease pumping out greenhouse gases at totally unsustainable levels, the "Intergovernmental Panel" has no other answer than to appeal to governments, i.e. the capitalist states, to come to their senses, work together, and agree on radical changes to the operation of their economies. In other words, the capitalist mode of production, whose remorseless drive for profit is at the very heart of the crisis, must become something which it can never be: a unified community where productive activity is regulated not by the demands of the market but by what human beings need to live.

That's not to say that capitalist institutions are totally oblivious to the dangers posed by climate change. The proliferation of international climate conferences and the very existence of the IPCC is testimony to that. As the resulting catastrophes become more and more frequent, it is evident that this will have enormous costs: economic, of course, through the destruction of homes, agriculture, and infrastructure, but also social: spreading impoverishment, increasing number of refugees in flight from devastated regions, and so on. And all but the most deluded politicians and bureaucrats understand that this will place huge burdens on the coffers of the state, as the Covid pandemic (which is also linked to the environmental crisis) has clearly shown. And individual capitalist

1. Planetary boundaries - Wikipedia

enterprises are also responding: virtually every business now parades its green credentials and its commitment to new, sustainable models. The car industry is a case in point: aware that the internal combustion engine (and the oil industry) is a major source of greenhouse emissions, nearly all the major car manufacturers are switching to electric cars over the next decade. But what they can't do is stop competing with each other to sell as many of their "green cars" as possible, even if the production of electrical cars has its own significant ecological consequences - most notably due to the extraction of the raw materials, such as lithium, needed to produce car batteries, which is based on massive mining projects and the further development of global transport networks. The same applies at the level of national economies. Already the COP conference is anticipating considerable difficulty in persuading "developing" economies like Russia, China and India to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels in order to reduce emissions. And they resist such pressures for perfectly logical capitalist reasons: because it would severely reduce their competitive edge in a world already glutted with commodities.

The world is no longer big enough for capitalism

Since the days of the Communist Manifesto, marxists have insisted that capitalism is driven by its crises of overproduction and the search for new markets to "conquer the earth", to become a world-wide system, and that this "universalising tendency" creates the possibility of a new society in which human need, the full development of the individual, becomes the goal of all social activity. But at the same time, this very tendency also contains the seeds of the dissolution, the self-destruction of capital, and thus the imperious necessity for a transition to a new human community, to communism². And at the time of the First World War, marxists such as Bukharin and Luxemburg showed more concretely how this threat of self-destruction would play out: the more capitalism became global, the more it would be consumed in deadly military competition between imperialist

2. See the quote from Marx's *Grundrisse* in our recent article 'Growth as decay' | International Communist Current (internationalism.org)

nations bent on carving out fresh sources of raw materials, cheaper labour power, and new outlets for their production.

But although Marx, Engels and others could see early on that the capitalist system was poisoning the air and exhausting the soil, they could not have seen all the ecological consequences of a world in which capital had penetrated almost every region in the four directions, subordinating the entire Earth to its rampant urbanisation and its toxic methods of production and distribution. Capitalist expansion, motivated by the economic contradictions contained in the relationship between capital and wage labour, has pushed to the extreme the alienation of humanity from nature. Just as there is a limit to capitalism's ability to realise the surplus value it extracts from the workers, so the profit-driven spoliation of the Earth's natural resources creates a new obstacle to the capacity of capitalism to feed its slaves and perpetuate its reign. The world is no longer big enough for capitalism. And far from making the capitalist states see reason and work together for the good of the planet, the depletion of resources and the consequences of climate change will tend to further exacerbate military rivalries in a world where every state seeks to save itself in the face of the catastrophe. The capitalist state, whether openly despotic or covered with the veneer of democracy, can only apply the laws of capital which are the source of the profound threats facing the future of humanity.

Capitalism, if it is allowed to continue, can only plunge the world into accelerating "barbarisation". The only "transition" that can prevent this is the transition to communism, which in turn cannot be the product of appeals to governments, voting for "green" parties or protesting as "concerned citizens". This transition can only be taken in hand through the common, international struggle of the exploited class, the proletariat, which will most often be the first victim of the climate crisis as it is already in the case of the economic crisis. The workers' struggle in the face of attacks on its living conditions alone contains the seeds of a generalised revolutionary movement that will call capitalism to account for all the miseries it is inflicting on the human species and the planet which sustains it. **Amos, 28.9.21**

Continued from page 5

USA: the struggle of the workers' movement against slavery and racism (Part 3)

1920s - 1930s: the Communist Parties and the Left Opposition

"The Irish rebellion of 1916", and showed the implications for the struggle of black people in the U.S. In this text James found "a very concrete illustration of the applicability of the method to environments and classes superficially diverse but organically similar".²⁹ Paraphrasing what Lenin had written about the Irish rebellion, which was "capable of going to the lengths of insurrection and street fighting", James wrote inter alia that

- "Within the United States the socialist revolution will ultimately consist of a series of battles in which the discontented classes, groups and elements of all types will participate in their own way and form a contributory force to the great culminating struggles which will be led by the proletariat.

- In the United States social revolution is impossible without the independent mass struggles of the Negroes, whatever the prejudices, the reactionary fantasies, the weaknesses and errors of these struggles.

- Blows delivered by an oppressed national minority, so entangled in the social structure of the United States as the Negroes, possess a political significance of greater importance in this country than a blow delivered by any other section of the population except the organized

proletariat itself."³⁰

The merit of his contribution was that he pulled the struggle of black people out of the mire of the "Black Belt", and put it again in the centre of the American capitalist society. "The Negroes do not constitute a nation", but their problems have "become the problem of a national minority".³¹ He defended, although not without any ambiguity, the position that the struggle and the organisation of black people should take place under the direction of the proletariat and that the struggle of organised labour (which means the unions) would be decisive for the fight against their status as second-class citizens.

C.L.R. James never openly criticised Trotsky or Lenin, and also in this case he referred to Lenin's contribution without making a critical analysis. Basing his analysis on Lenin's contribution to the workers' movement and marxism, he did not take into account the positions of Trotsky and Radek, who had already expressed strong reserves regarding any working class support to the Irish rebellion. And they were right, because when Ireland became independent in 1921, the new nation state did anything but join the fight of the oppressed against imperialism. Instead, it took help from British imperialism against the incipient so-

30 Ibid
31 Ibid

cial revolution. Thus Lenin's method in 1916 had proven not to be the right one, as was also demonstrated two years later in Russia.

Another weak point in Lenin's text was his emphasis on the importance of the struggle for "democratic rights" for black people as an end in itself. For James it was "absolutely impossible for the Negroes to gain equality under American capitalism". Therefore, he was convinced that the struggle of the African Americans for "democratic rights" brought them "almost immediately face to face with capital and the state" and from there he concluded that: "in the United States today this struggle is a direct part of the struggle for socialism."³²

But his conclusion was too hasty, because a confrontation with the state does not automatically mean a confrontation with capitalist society. Just like farmers' protests, protests by black people as such, even when they come up against state repression, do not carry within them the seeds of another society. Moreover C.L.R. James had not read or understood Lenin properly. As we already demonstrated earlier in this article, Lenin did not support the struggle for equal rights as an end in itself. For him this struggle was inseparably linked to the struggle for socialism: "The real meaning of the demand for equality consists in its being a

32 Ibid

demand for the abolition of classes."³³

As we showed earlier, the struggle for "democratic rights" is a trap for the working class, because it distracts the workers from the proletarian terrain into the fight for an equal place in bourgeois society, which is the terrain of the ruling class. Some black people were already part of the ruling class in the 19th century and many more became part of it in the 20th century.

The demand for "democratic rights" obscures the fact that capitalist society is divided into classes and disarms the working class in face of exploitation and oppression by the ruling class. In this false approach, all black people, whatever the class they belong to, working class, middle class or ruling class, are called upon to join forces in one and the same struggle, drowning the black workers in an amorphous mass of black people. This means that "the demand for 'democratic rights' is in general an excellent way of drowning class demands and preventing the proletariat from affirming its class identity".³⁴

33. Lenin, *Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions*

34. Democratic rights and the proletarian struggle today, *International Review* no.129

29. C.L.R. James, *The Historical Development of the Negro in the United States*

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ICC online public meetings

Covid, Climate, Afghanistan – world capitalism’s advancing decay

Saturday October 16th for participants from Asia /Europe, starting at UK time 11.00am, and on Sunday October 17th for participants from Europe/USA, starting at UK time 6.00pm.

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Resolution on the international situation adopted by the 24th ICC Congress.

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In our **Report on the international class struggle to the 24th ICC Congress** we try to offer a detailed analysis of the present state of the class struggle. (All are available on our website).

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ICC online

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UNAM teachers’ strike in Mexico: The need to relearn the lessons of the past

20 Years since the attack on the Twin Towers: The bitter fruits of the “War on Terror”

Continued from page 6

Only the working class struggle can abolish all oppression

At the time of the Second World War the workers’ movement still had no unambiguous and clear-cut position on how to intervene towards the resistance of black people against particular oppression and structural prejudice. The theoretical clarification of this issue from the point of view of the proletariat appeared to be a difficult task. It has shown to be more difficult than the elaboration of a position on the struggle against the oppression of women, which was much earlier recognised as being part of the working class struggle. Nonetheless we can draw some conclusions – if in a negative sense - from the theoretical efforts, undertaken in the 20 years between the Second Congress of the Comintern and C.L.R. James’ 1943 article.

Under the conditions of decadent capitalism:

- The demand for “equal rights” as an end in itself was not a class demand and was turned against the working class, against white as well as black workers.

- The notion of self-determination for black people in the “Black Belt” proved to be a complete misjudgement: any movement for national liberation is destined to be counter-revolutionary.

- The fight of the African American people for their particular interests (as a distinctive race) is just as inimical to the working class struggle as any nationalist struggle.

- Assigning black people in the US, of

whom 75% still lived under appalling conditions in the South, a vanguard role in the struggle against colonial oppression, as the Comintern did in 1922, was completely at odds with the marxist view that only the international struggle of the working class can provide a perspective for all the world’s oppressed strata.

In contrast to the Trotskyist current, the Communist Left was able to clarify the national question in general and therefore it was strongly opposed to any struggle for national liberation. But none of the Left Communist currents in the 1930s were able to develop a clear position on the “Negro Question” in the US. They didn’t even write about it, except Paul Mattick, who had emigrated to the U.S. In an article, written in 1932, he gave an overview of the history of the oppression of the black people in the U.S. and drew the conclusion that *“this Negro problem will not cease to be a problem until socialist harmony takes hold in society. The liberation of the Negroes is only possible with the liberation of labour”*, but he failed to make any critique of the Comintern’s slogan of self-determination of the Comintern.³⁵

As long as capitalism exists, racism will exist. And only the conquest of political power by the proletariat creates the conditions for its gradual disappearance. In that sense Mattick was right.

The campaign for “equal rights” has resulted in the legal lifting of discrimination and segregation of black people. But changing legal regulations does not mean that things on the ground have

35. Paul Mattick, *Schwarze Amerikaner*, 1932

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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

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Resolution on the international situation adopted by the 24th ICC Congress

Report on the economic crisis for the 24th Congress of the ICC

Report on the international class struggle to the 24th ICC Congress

Report on the pandemic and the development of decomposition

necessarily changed, since laws are unable to change people’s minds. Those who are convinced that African Americans are inferior, and that the intermixing of the races must be banned, simply find new ways to discriminate, including restrictive housing covenants, stiff loan requirements, and new barriers to voting, etc. By these means black people in the US are still subjected to all kinds of restrictions and particular forms of oppression.

Black people experience in a particular way the general oppression to which the working class is subjected. The latter embodies all forms of oppression by capitalism; its mode of existence is the synthesis of humanity’s oppression under capitalism. The struggle of the working class against oppression by the capitalist state is therefore the midwife to the abolition of all oppression. No form of oppression under capitalism can be abolished outside the context of the struggle of the working class for its emancipation. Therefore, black proletarians in the US can only do away with oppression by **joining and supporting** the struggle of all workers, whether white or black, against capitalist rule. **Dennis, October 2021**

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Economic attacks expose the fraud of “levelling up”

For some time now the Tory government has been presenting itself as the “People’s Government”, committed to a programme of “levelling up”, of improving the lot of those sectors of the working class who have been “left behind” by an economic crisis which is blamed not on the capitalist system but on “globalisation” (as if there could be a capitalism which didn’t seek to globalise itself) and its most visible institutional forms, mainly of course the European Union. This populist world view is being revealed in all its poverty and mendacity by the very measures being taken by the government to face up to an economic crisis which has been severely aggravated by the impact of the Covid pandemic. Social benefits, wage levels, and job security are all under attack. As always, the bourgeoisie has no choice but to make the exploited pay for the crisis of its social system.

The end of the furlough and cuts in the social wage

The furlough system introduced during the first lockdown was scrapped at the end of September and replaced by the Job Support Scheme (JSS). At the end of the scheme, nearly a million workers (down from a peak of nearly nine million in May 2020) still relied on furlough, so this meant that they were set to lose their jobs. Under the new JSS, employers are to pay for hours worked, but only 5% for hours not worked, with the government paying 75% of wages for unworked hours. This means that workers who retain their jobs (for how long?), but with a 25% wage cut, still face a 20% cut in overall wages.

It is important to note that although the government provided a furlough subsidy, this was beneficial primarily to ensure that firms could stay open. The new scheme amounts to a direct attack on the living standards of the working class in the coming winter months. It spells poverty for working class families and their children.

The Universal Credit (UC) system was introduced by Iain Duncan Smith in 2016 to ‘streamline’ the benefit system, which meant the effective abolition of some benefits and a capped UC. If you claimed UC, then you were cut off from other benefits. The introduction of UC in itself was already a reduction in the social wage.

The government decision to cut the £20 Covid furlough subsidy and return to the basic £118 a week UC payment on 6 October means a fur-

ther massive assault on the lowest paid workers and claimants. It will cost as many as 6 million families £1,502 a year. Planned rises in income tax, national insurance and the UC taper mean that claimants receive only 37 pence for every £1 earned – as little as £2.24 per hour. As a result, someone working full time on the minimum wage would have to work an extra day’s work a week to make up the shortfall, according to the Resolution Foundation, pushing 800,000 low paid and unemployed workers below the poverty line. An illustration of this fall in living standards: before the period of the pandemic 700,000 people in Britain were using food banks. In 2021 approximately 2.5 million people used a food bank in the United Kingdom.

The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said the figures “underline the scale of the challenge we’re facing”, adding: “I want to reassure anyone that is worried about the coming winter months that we will continue to support those affected”. But even a number of senior Conservatives have not been “reassured” by Sunak’s promise, warning that the cut will immediately undermine Johnson’s pledge to “level up” the country – a sinister claim repeated after his reshuffle at the beginning of September and repeated just on the eve of the Tory Party Conference. A potential backbench revolt has forced some senior Tory ex-ministers to look at other options but plans to tweak the UC taper means that the planned £6 billion cut would only be reduced to £5 billion.

Wages getting cheaper....

“More than 2 million UK employees earned less than the statutory minimum wage in April [2020] because the lowest paid were the most likely to be furloughed. The annual survey of pay and earnings by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) gives a stark illustration of the immediate impact the first Coronavirus lockdown has had on living standards, choking off growth in private sector pay and hitting young, part-time workers in particular. Average annual pay for full-time employees — a measure that was largely unaffected by the pandemic — was £31,461 in the tax year to April 2020, 3.6 per cent higher than the previous year, the ONS said. But in April 2020 during the first lockdown when 8.8m were furloughed, and many more were working reduced hours; average weekly pay across all jobs was 0.9 per cent lower than a year earlier after adjusting for inflation.”

(*Financial Times* 3/11/20). There is also a lock on the Public Sector pay rises of 1% which specifically affects health workers and care workers, the much clapped “lockdown heroes”. This means that even before the pandemic took its devastating effects the attacks were already underway.

...Prices getting steeper

The combination of product shortages, labour shortages and energy price rises, coming on top of gigantic state debts incurred during the pandemic, will combine to push inflation above 4% for the first time since 2013, according to the Bank of England’s monetary policy committee. In March of this year, the rate stood at 0.7% but now it has been raised to 4.7%. Interest rates remain at an all-time low of 0.1%, but even a small rise could be ruinous for millions of people – the average debt burden per household is £62,705, according to The Money Charity. This will further reduce the spending power of workers and their ability to borrow money in response.

Unemployment and shortage of labour power

Demand for workers is at a record high, with 223,000 new job ads posted in the week ending 19 September, according to the Recruitment and Employment Confederation. But even with labour shortages, there is likely to be a mismatch between any newly unemployed people and their skills for available jobs. The opening for jobs has mainly been in the transport industry (50,000 lorry drivers are needed), or in the low paid food industries or crop picking in the South East. This may seem to contradict the perspective of growing unemployment created by the Covid-19 crisis, but if we look at the devastation wrought on the UK and the world economy, we can see a persistent trend with many firms going bust and furloughed enterprises in particular going to the wall.

Unemployment reached 5.1 per cent in the three months to December 2020 - the highest figure for five years. If we look at the figures for 2020, we can see that unemployment is an important manifestation of this crisis. “The UK unemployment rate rose to 4.8 per cent in the three months to September, driven by the largest quarterly number of redundancies on record, official data showed on Tuesday. The figures reflect a wave of job cuts made by employers as they prepared for the phasing out of the government’s furlough scheme.”

(*Financial Times*, 10.11.2020).

In January 2021 2.6 million people were either claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance or Universal Credit because they were looking for work. The figure in March 2020 was 1.4 million.

More than a third of all claims ever made for UC have been made during the pandemic. And things will get worse; those aged 25 to 34 face the biggest risk of losing their jobs. In the three months to November 2020, people in that age group had a redundancy rate of 16.2 per 1,000 - a fivefold increase on the same period a year earlier.

Overall, some 1.72 million were officially jobless, also the highest level in five years. And this is while the furlough scheme is still in place. The ending of the furlough scheme will put hundreds of thousands of jobs at risk.

No choice but to fight

The coming winter months of 2021-22 will see the possibility of a new outbreak of a Covid variant. But, with or without a new lockdown, the attacks on workers’ living and working conditions will undoubtedly increase. This is an international problem for the working class and Britain is not an exception! indeed, the plunge in living standards in Britain will be even more marked given the specific impact of Brexit and the increasingly obvious incompetence of a government mired in populist delusions.

For many years now we have seen a significant retreat in workers’ struggles, in particular from the very low paid, the most vulnerable sectors of the working class. However, these past months have seen struggles in the Uber transport and delivery industries, in the postal sector, in the universities and elsewhere. Although small and generally isolated from each other, they might represent a beginning of the wider and deeper struggle of the class in defence of its living conditions in the face of a system which has no future to offer us. In this struggle the class can only count on its own forces. **M & A 7/10/21**

1. See the Report on the Economic Crisis from the ICC’s 24th Congress

Political positions of the ICC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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