



world revolution

Egypt highlights the alternative: socialism or barbarism

Everywhere around the world, there is a growing feeling that the present order of society cannot go on as before. After the revolts of the ‘Arab spring’, the Indignados movement in Spain and Occupy in the US in 2011, the summer of 2013 has seen huge movements on the streets of Turkey and Brazil.

Hundreds of thousands, even millions, have come out to protest against all manner of ills: in Turkey, the destruction of the environment by unrestrained ‘development’, authoritarian religious meddling in personal lives, the corruption of the politicians; in Brazil, transport fare increases and the diversion of wealth into prestige sporting events when health, education, housing and transport are left to fester – and the corruption of the politicians. In both cases, the initial demonstrations were met by brutal police repression which served only to widen and deepen the revolt. And in both cases, the revolts were spearheaded not by the ‘middle classes’ (for the media, that’s anyone who has a job), but by the new generation of the working class, who may be educated but have little prospect of finding stable employment, who may be living in ‘emerging’ economies but for whom a developing economy means mainly the development of social inequality and the repulsive affluence of a tiny elite of exploiters.

In June and July it was again the turn of Egypt to see millions on the street, returning to Tahrir Square which was the epicentre of the 2011 rebellion against the Mubarak regime. They too were driven by real material needs, in an economy which is not so much ‘emerging’ but stagnating or even regressing. In May, a former finance minister of the country and one of its leading economists warned in an interview with *The Guardian* that “Egypt is suffering its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. In terms of its devastating effect on Egypt’s poorest, the country’s current economic predicament is at its most dire since the 1930s”. The article goes on to say that

“Since the fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Egypt has experienced a drastic fall in both foreign investment and tourism revenues, followed by a 60% drop in foreign exchange reserves, a 3% drop in growth, and a rapid devaluation of the Egyptian pound. All this has led to mushrooming food prices,



es, ballooning unemployment and a shortage of fuel and cooking gas... Currently, 25.2% of Egyptians are below the poverty line, with 23.7% hovering just above it, according to figures supplied by the Egyptian government”¹.

The ‘moderate’ Islamist government led by Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood (backed by the majority of the ‘radical’ Islamists) has rapidly proved itself to be no less corrupt and cronyist than the old regime, while its attempts to impose its stifling Islamic ‘morality’ has, as in Turkey, created huge resentment among the urban young.

But while the movements in Turkey and Brazil, which are in practice directed against the power in place, have created a real sense of solidarity and unity among all those taking part in the struggle, the situation in Egypt is faced with a much more sombre prospect – that of the division of the population behind rival factions of the ruling class, and even of a bloody descent into civil war. The barbarism which has engulfed Syria is a graphic reminder of what that can mean.

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/16/egypt-worst-economic-crisis-1930s>

The democratic trap

The events of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt were widely described as a ‘revolution’. But a revolution is more than the masses pouring onto the streets, even if that is its necessary point of departure. We are living in an epoch where the only real revolution can be worldwide, proletarian and communist: a revolution not for a change in regime, but for the dismantling of the existing state; not for a ‘fairer’ management of capitalism, but for the overthrow of the whole capitalist social relationship; not for the glory of the nation, but for the abolition of nations and the creation of a global human community.

The social movements we are witnessing today are still a long way from achieving the self-awareness and self-organisation needed to make such a revolution. They are certainly steps along the way, expressing a profound effort by the proletariat to find itself, to rediscover its past and its future. But they are faltering steps which can easily be derailed by the ruling class, whose ideas run very deep and form a huge obstacle in the minds of the exploited themselves. Religion is certainly one of these ideological obstacles, an ‘opiate’ which

preaches submission to the dominant order. But even more dangerous is the ideology of democracy.

In Egypt in 2011, the masses in Tahrir Square demanded the resignation of Mubarak and the ‘fall of the regime’. And Mubarak was indeed forced to go – especially after a powerful wave of workers’ strikes spread across the country, bringing a new level of danger to the social revolt. But the capitalist regime is more than just the government of the day. On the social level it is the whole relationship based on wage labour and production for profit. On the political level it is the bureaucracy, the police and the army. And it is also the facade of parliamentary democracy, where the masses are given the choice every few years to choose which gang of thieves is going to fleece them for the next few years. In 2011, the army – which many protesters thought was ‘one’ with the people – stepped in to depose Mubarak and organise elections. The Muslim Brotherhood, which drew massive strength from the more backward rural areas but which was also the best organised political party in the urban centres, won the elections and has since worked very hard to prove that changing the government through elections changes nothing. And meanwhile, the real power remained what it had always been in Egypt, and in so many similar countries: the army, the only force really capable of ensuring capitalist order on a national level.

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The tentacles of state surveillance

The NSA scandal

The revelations about the extent of ‘cyber-surveillance’ by the capitalist state – the result of the whistleblowing by former National Security Agency operative Edward Snowden – have been piling up in the last few weeks. All the major internet servers, search engines and communication programmes – Windows, Google, Yahoo, Skype, etc etc – are more than willing to put any information required by the state in the hands of the NSA or other state surveillance bodies. Emails, phone calls, encryption codes – none of it is private; and the technology of surveillance is so sophisticated that even without the compliance of these corporations the American state can ‘tap’ almost any form of electronic communication, whenever and wherever it wants.

The surveillance can be aimed at any citizen, whether or not they are involved in subversive or illegal activities. And not just at US citizens: the scandal has exposed the very close cooperation between the NSA and the British GCHQ, and Snowden has claimed that the NSA is ‘in bed’ with a whole number of other western states. But that doesn’t make these states immune from being spied on themselves: the US uses the same techniques of mass surveillance to spy on other states, including those once deemed to be its allies, like Germany and France.

The startling development of electronic communication in the last few decades has of course taken the technical capacities of such spy agencies to a new level. But there is nothing new in any of this, and it’s certainly not limited to the US.

The British state, for one, used to lead the field in international spying technology. When it was the most powerful capitalist country it was the centre of the international network of telegraph lines, a similar position to that of the US in relation to the internet. In the First World War British imperialism used this position to tap into the international

communications networks of German imperialism. It cut the main cables between Germany and the US, but was able to monitor the other networks Germany had to use. It also got its hands on the wireless facilities of the Post Office and Marconi to monitor German wireless traffic. This was done by Navy Intelligence from Room 40 at the Admiralty Building. Following the war it continued to use and develop these abilities. Today, despite no longer being a superpower, it can use its hundred year history of spying through communications systems to punch above its weight in the espionage game.

As for France, which has protested loudly against the violation of its sovereignty by the NSA, the French newspaper *Le Monde* has recently published information about the vast data collection and electronic surveillance operations being carried out by the national intelligence service, the DGSE. The French Republic is almost as hypocritical as Putin’s Russia, which is regularly suspected of assassinating journalists who ask too many awkward questions, posing as the defender of freedom and considering offering asylum to the fugitive Snowden.

In sum: they are all at it, and they are all at it more than ever before. They spy on their own citizens because their rule is fragile, undermined by its own social and economic contradictions, and they live in constant terror of the danger of revolt from below. They also spy on each other because these same contradictions push each nation state towards incessant warfare with its rivals, and in this war of each against all, today’s ally can be tomorrow’s enemy. And only one organ is capable of organising spying and surveillance on such a gigantic scale: the capitalist state, which in the age of capitalist decline has truly become a cold inhuman monster which tends more and more to swallow the civil society it is supposed to ‘protect’. **Amos/Phil 13/7/13**

Raped by the state

“I feel that I have been raped by the state”.

This powerful statement sums up the real nature of the recent revelations concerning the use of undercover police to penetrate and manipulate various protest movements. It was made by one of the women with whom various agents of the Special Demonstrations Squad (SDS) deliberately established relationships in order to gain wider acceptance in the protest movements they wanted to infiltrate. The motto of the SDS was *“by all means necessary”* and this sums up the general attitude of the capitalist state to maintaining its dictatorship. Human feelings and dignity mean absolutely nothing to the ruling class and their servants.

This was further underlined by the revelations concerning the efforts of SDS and Special Branch agents under the direction of the Metropolitan Police to discredit the family of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence. Only weeks after the brutal racist murder of this teenager in 1993, an SDS agent was assigned to uncover anything that could discredit the Lawrence family. Special Branch used the police family liaison officer - who was supposed to befriend the family - to spy on all those who came to the family’s home.

The cold and calculating way in which various state agencies use and abuse people is shocking. However, this is the nature of the rule of capital. Nothing is too sacred to be ground under the iron heel of the state. The Lawrences’ grief and anger at the police’s racism showed the reality behind the image of the police in capitalist democracy. The women used by the SDS, had the audacity to *“want to bring about social change”* as one of them said. A questioning of the system, no matter how mild, is something that the state cannot tolerate.

There has been a whole frenzy from politicians, journalists, and even the police, about ‘rogue’ units, abuses of the democratic system, and the

need for democratic control of the police. We heard exactly the same piteous laments two years ago following the exposure of the undercover activity of the agents of the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOI) who had infiltrated various anarchist, animal rights and environmental groups in the 2000s! Once the noise died down about these ‘abuses of police powers’, it was rapidly replaced by calls for more police powers to carry out systematic surveillance of all telecommunications. It is the same now: despite these revelations, we hear calls for more police powers to ‘fight domestic extremism’.

Hypocritical cant from the politicians

The politicians’ talk about abuses of democracy is as devious as the actions of the SDS, because it seeks to hide the true nature of the capitalist state and its democratic window dressing: *“So-called democracy, i.e. bourgeois democracy, is nothing but the veiled dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The much-vaunted ‘general win of the people’ is no more a reality than ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’. Classes exist and they have conflicting and incompatible aspirations. But as the bourgeoisie represents an insignificant minority it makes use of this illusion, this imaginary concept, in order to consolidate its rule over the working class. Behind this mask of eloquence it can impose its class will”* (Platform of the Communist International, 1919).

The imposition of this “class will” is precisely the role of secret police units such as the SDS and the NPOI, along with Special Branch, MI5, etc. The Special Demonstrations Squad was formed in the late 60’s in order to infiltrate the growing protest movements, and then expanded into

1. ‘Methods of infiltration by the democratic state’, <http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201102/4201/methods-infiltration-democratic-state>.

infiltrating animal rights and environmental groups, anarchist and Trotskyist groups in the 80s and 90s. The SDS was part of the Metropolitan Police. In 1999 the NPOI was set up to coordinate and organise nationwide networks of undercover operations and surveillance, The NPOI broadened its remit to include *“campaigners against war, nuclear weapons, racism, genetically modified crops, globalization, tax evasion, airport expansion and asylum law, as well as those calling for reform of prisons and peace in the Middle East”*, all of which are now defined as “domestic extremists”². Thus, anyone who opposes or questions what the state does is now an “extremist” and implicitly linked to ‘Muslim’ extremists and thus terrorism. This expresses the state’s concern about growing social discontent, even when confined to relatively harmless forms of protest. However, involvement in such movements can and does lead to a wider questioning of the system and the state wants to be able to follow and counter such questioning. It also wants to manipulate such movements in order to generate fear of any form of dissent.

The extent that the state is willing to go to manipulate such groups has been demonstrated in the recent book *Undercover: the true story of Britain’s secret police*. It claims that the SDS infiltrated an agent into the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement between 1990-93; two others were sent into the anarchist group Class War, one of them working closely with MI5 who were investigating Class War at the time. The authors say that the NPOI is currently running between 100 and 150 agents. The book also argues that the NPOI has officers or links with police forces in cities and towns across the country, and that they use infiltration in small local protest groups in order to get agents into national groups and movements. The NPOI itself was placed under the management of the National Domestic Extremism Team in 2005, which the Labour government set up to centralise the various domestic forces of repression.

This centralisation was put to full use in 2011 when hundreds of people who had been arrested, stopped or filmed on demonstrations received letters from the Metropolitan Police, warning them that if they attended the November student demonstration in London they would be arrested.

These claims are certainly informative but unless understood in the context of the dictatorship of capital it can lead to paranoia and mistrust.

One of the reasons for the success of these state agencies in penetrating various movements has been the naivety of those involved, a result of the weight of democratic illusions. The idea that ‘the state is not interested in us because we are too small’ is very widespread, not only amongst environmentalists but even amongst revolutionary groups and individuals. There are also illusions that the state would never infiltrate someone for years, even allowing them to live with a militant. There needs to be a conscious effort to understand and draw the lessons from the actions of these agents, not to become paranoid, but to be aware that the state is interested in any organisation or individual who is against this system, and will use any means necessary against them.

This can be seen in the example of a 69 year old GP place on the list of ‘domestic extremists’ because of his involvement in a campaign to stop ash from Didcot power station (Oxfordshire) being dumped in a nearby lake!

Confronted with the state’s complete disregard for the slightest aspect of human dignity, its willingness to violate even our bodies in order to defend itself, we can only express our solidarity with those women who were used by the state but who are now openly talking about what happened to them, even to the extent of meeting their abusers to challenge what they did. But above all we have to be conscious that the ruling class will go to any length to undermine the revolutionary alternative and reject any illusion that their state can be controlled, reformed or made more accountable. It is our main enemy in the class war and our goal is to destroy it once and for all. **Phil 2/7/13**

2. Rob Evans and Paul Lewis, *Undercover: The true story of Britain’s secret police*, Faber and Faber, 2013, p 203

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Mandela: a human face for capitalism

Mandela said he had little time to study Marx, Engels or Lenin, but he *“subscribed to Marx’s basic dictum, which has the simplicity and generosity of the Golden Rule: ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’”* (LWF p137). He might have ‘subscribed to the dictum’, but the history of the ANC has shown it for a century in the service of South African capitalism. Whether in protests or guerrilla struggle, the goals were nationalist, or just for people to let off steam, because *“people must have an outlet for their anger and frustration”* (LWF p725). In government, the faces changed from Mandela to Mbeki to Motlanthe and now Zuma, but there were no changes in the lives of the majority. The only difference in the Presidents was that Mandela had the best image.

Mandela was very aware of the myth of Mandela. He made a point of saying that he was not a ‘saint’ nor a *“prophet”*, nor a *“messiah”* (LWF p676), in a world where most politicians seem to be devoted to self-promotion and enrichment. This modesty was one of the appealing characteristics of Mandela. It could be explained by his Wesleyan background. In his 27 years in captivity he only once missed a Sunday service, *“Though I am a Methodist, I would attend each different religious service”* (LWF p536).

Whatever the origins of Mandela’s modesty and seeming decency, he is clearly going to be the face of the ANC’s 2014 election campaign. And, beyond South Africa, the Mandela myth will continue to be one of the pillars of modern democratic ideology.

In his career as a lawyer Mandela *“went from having an idealistic view of the law as a sword of justice to a perception of the law as a tool used by the ruling class to shape society in a way favourable to itself”* (LWF p309). He did not make a similar critique of democracy. In his 1964 court statement he expressed himself as an *“admirer”* of democracy. *“I have great respect for British political institutions, and for the country’s system of justice. I regard the British Parliament as the most democratic institution in the world, and the independence and impartiality of its judiciary never fail to arouse my admiration. The American Congress, the country’s doctrine of the separation of powers, as well as the independence of its judiciary, arouse in me similar sentiments.”* (LWF p436) Whatever the character of the man, his life’s work was in the service of capitalist democracy. For its part, capital will certainly continue to make use of his better qualities for the worst possible end: the preservation of its decaying social order. **Car 13/7/13**

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When the masses surged back to Tahrir Square in June they were full of indignation against the Morsi government and the daily reality of their lives faced with an economic crisis which is not merely ‘Egyptian’ but global and historic. But, even though many of them would have had the opportunity to experience the true repressive face of the army back in 2011, the idea that the ‘people and the army are one’ was still very widespread, and it was given new life when the army began to warn Morsi that he must listen to the demands of the protesters or else. When Morsi was overthrown in a relatively bloodless coup, there were big celebrations in Tahrir Square. Did this mean that the democratic myth no longer held the masses in its grip? No: the army claims to act in the name of ‘real democracy’ which has been betrayed by the Muslim Brotherhood, and immediately promises to organise fresh elections.

Thus the state’s guarantor, the army, again intervenes to ensure order, to prevent the discontent of the masses turning against the state itself. But this

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Chancellor’s spending review

A careful but relentless development of austerity

The chancellor’s public spending review at the end of June announced that austerity will continue well into the next parliament, to the tune of £11.5bn worth of cuts in 2015/16. And since Ed Balls, Labour’s shadow chancellor, has promised to match the government’s current spending plans after the next election, we should be in no doubt that it will. In that sense the result of the election will be completely meaningless for the working class. We should not forget that the one promise carried out to the letter by the 1997 Blair government was to stick to the spending limits imposed by the previous administration, and that in 2010 the only issue at stake on spending was how quickly austerity should be imposed, with the majority of the coalition’s first cuts having already been announced by the Brown government.

It is one of the ironies of the spending review that when so much of the pain is directed towards benefits, George Osborne should claim that the well-off will suffer most. Next year the chancellor will announce a 5 year benefit cap, excluding pensions. Welfare payments will be harder to claim - for instance anyone losing a job will have to wait 7 days before claiming jobseekers allowance. This will be particularly hard on those on the lowest pay scales or in precarious work. This 7 day wait will save £245m, a very modest amount compared to the £11.5 billion which will be spent on more frequent surveillance of the unemployed (meetings every week instead of less frequently, compulsory English lessons, etc). Ed Balls, by contrast, claims that he would like to spend the money on providing a job for every young unemployed person. While Osborne is reminding us that the point of

laying workers off is to save capital the cost of maintaining them at all, it seems Balls wants us to forget that the whole point of capital employing anyone, young or old, is to extract surplus value, to make a profit.

Public sector workers are also going to suffer from the spending plans: pay will continue to be curbed, pay progression seniority payments ended, and 144,000 can expect to lose their jobs. While the NHS and schools will not have their cash budgets cut, this has to be seen in the context of growing need. Health needs (so-called ‘demand’) increases 4% a year due to demographic changes and innovation. £3bn of the health budget will be shared with local authority social care, and we know how squeezed the local authorities are. Hospital stays and admissions are being cut. Whole layers of health service workers are employed or incentivised to keep people out of hospital as much as possible – while, of course, remaining responsible for admitting them to hospital when necessary. Others have the job of cutting the prescription budgets. At the same time, previous levels of social care - put in place when the economy was short of labour and women and immigrants were being encouraged into the workforce (in the 50s and 60s particularly) - are being dismantled or charged to the recipients, with much more responsibility falling on the relatives whether or not they are capable of taking it on.

How long will these cuts go on?

The UK economy, regardless of quibbles about single, double or triple dip recession, remains to recover from the 2007/8 recession, with GDP still 3 or 4% below the previous peak. This creates a

problem for an economy trying to reduce the proportion of direct state spending – from 46% to 40% as Osborne intends – and pay back debts that were greatly increased at the time of the banking crisis. Hence the IMF reminder earlier in the year that this will not be achieved without growth. This puts any state on the horns of a dilemma, with the need to both rein in spending and ease up the availability of money to encourage growth. It’s a bit like walking in two opposite directions at once. It was left to Danny Alexander to announce the bulk of the capital spending plans for road and rail, housing and schools, while day to day spending is restricted. How well this spending will encourage growth in the medium term we will wait and see. More roads suggest a promising growth in CO₂ emissions at any rate.

Other spending beneficiaries give us more idea of what the state intends. Extra spending for spying suggests an interest in both internal and external security – fundamentally to further Britain’s imperialist interests abroad and to maintain social order at home. Ring-fencing overseas aid also suggests the importance of pursuing the national interest abroad – and in a way less likely to cause unpopularity at home than foreign military adventures such as Iraq.

The latest scapegoats

A few years ago it was the bankers that were blamed for the crisis, pilloried by press and politicians alike for their excessive pay and bonuses. Now it seems it is the unemployed and benefit claimants who are responsible for the national debt. The bankers provided a good scapegoat for the crises, particularly when it took the form of

the credit crunch. They had the advantage of being rich, and right at the centre of the storm, as well as distracting us from asking questions about the nature and role of capitalism itself. But the demonisation of the unemployed, and the lowest paid and most precarious workers who also rely on benefits such as tax credit or housing benefit, has a longer term aim in persuading us to accept attacks on these benefits, with their horrendous effects on the quality of life of an important part of the working class.

The ruling class are playing up any kind of division they are able to impose on the working class, not only between the ‘hard working’ and the ‘skivers’ (i.e. employed and unemployed), but also between public and private sector employees. This divide is important when the state is involved in attacking the pay and conditions of those employed in the public sector, particularly those usually held in high esteem such as teachers and nurses. Hence the media attention to scandals in hospital care, undercover reporters sent to see what abuses they can detect and film. But not a word on the cuts and increasing demands that make humane care so difficult.

These campaigns tell us much of the direction of the austerity measures the ruling class is bringing in, centralised through its state. That they are cautious, that they prepare each attack with a campaign of vilification, shows just how much they are aware of the possibility of working class resistance to further austerity. **Alex 13/7/13**

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time it does it at the price of sowing deep divisions in the population. Whether in the name of Islam or the name of the democratic legitimacy of the Morsi government, a new protest movement is born, this time demanding the return of the regime or refusing to work with those who have deposed it. The response of the army has been swift: a ruthless slaughter of protesters outside the headquarters of the Republican Guard. There have also been clashes, some fatal, between rival groups of demonstrators.

The danger of civil war and the force that can prevent it

The wars in Libya and Syria began as popular protests against the regime. But in both cases, the weakness of the working class and the strength of tribal and sectarian divisions quickly led to the initial revolts being swallowed up by armed clashes between factions of the bourgeoisie. And in both cases, these local conflicts immediately took on an international, imperialist dimension: in Libya, Britain and France, quietly supported by the US, stepped in to arm and guide the ‘rebel’ forces; in Syria, the Assad regime has survived thanks to the backing of Russia, China, Iran, Hezbollah and other vultures, while arms to the opposition forces have flowed in from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and elsewhere, with the US and Britain in more or less covert support. In both cases, the widening of the conflict has accelerated the plunge into chaos and horror.

The same danger exists in Egypt today. The army has shown its total unwillingness to loosen its effective hold on power. The Muslim Brotherhood has for the moment pledged that its reaction against the coup will be peaceful, but alongside Morsi’s ‘you can do business with me’ brand of Islamism are more extreme factions who already have a background in terrorism. The situation bears a sinister resemblance to what happened in Algeria after 1991 when the army toppled a ‘legally elected’ Islamist government, provoking a very bloody civil war between the army and armed Islamist groups like the FIS. The civilian population was, as always, the main victim in this inferno: estimates of the death toll vary between 50,000 and 200,000.

The imperialist dimension is also present in Egypt. The US has made some gestures of regret about the military coup but its links to the army

are very long-standing and deeply implanted, and they are not in the least enamoured of the type of Islamism proclaimed by Morsi or Erdogan in Turkey. The conflicts spreading out from Syria towards Lebanon and Iraq could also reach a destabilised Egypt.

But the working class in Egypt is a much more formidable force than it is in Libya or Syria. It has a long tradition of militant struggle against the state and its official trade union tentacles, going back at least as far as the 1970s. In 2006 and 2007 massive strikes radiated out from the highly concentrated textile sector, and this experience of open defiance of the regime subsequently fed into the movement of 2011, which was marked by a strong working class imprint, both in the tendencies towards self-organisation which appeared in Tahrir Square and the neighbourhoods, and in the wave of strikes which eventually convinced the ruling class to dump Mubarak. The Egyptian working class is by no means immune from the illusions in democracy which pervade the entire social movement, but neither will it be an easy task for the different cliques of the ruling class to persuade it to abandon its own interests and drag it into the cesspit of imperialist war.

The potential of the working class to act as a barrier to barbarism is revealed not only in its history of autonomous strikes and assemblies, but also in the explicit expressions of class consciousness which have appeared within the demonstrations on the streets: in placards proclaiming ‘neither Morsi nor the military’ or ‘revolution not coup’ and in more directly political statements like the declaration of ‘Cairo comrades’ published recently on libcom:

“We seek a future governed neither by the petty authoritarianism and crony capitalism of the Brotherhood nor a military apparatus which maintains a stranglehold over political and economic life nor a return to the old structures of the Mubarak era. Though the ranks of protesters that will take to the streets on June 30th are not united around this call, it must be ours- it must be our stance because we will not accept a return to the bloody periods of the past”².

However, just as the ‘Arab spring’ took on its full significance with the uprising of proletarian youth in Spain, which has given rise to a much more sustained questioning of bourgeois society, so the potential of the Egyptian working class to

2. <http://www.libcom.org/forums/news/we-can-smell-tear-gas-rio-taksim-tahrir-29062013>

However it’s funded the ‘labour movement’ serves capitalism

The familiar arguments over the link between the trade unions and the Labour Party have been wheeled out in the latest episode of a tedious soap opera. A left wing commentator complains that *“every clapped out cliché of anti-union propaganda – from union ‘barons’ and ‘bosses’ to industrial ‘thugs’ and ‘dinosaurs’ – has been dredged up”* (Guardian 9/7/13).

The Unite union was accused of cramming the Falkirk constituency with new members, a little bending of the rules to install one of its favoured candidates. Nine Unite-supported candidates have already been nominated as Labour candidates for the next election, with 19 more selections still to be decided. Labour leader Ed Miliband has said that he intends to end the automatic affiliation of union members to the Labour Party, making it a positive individual decision to join the party. While this might cut down the union funds avail-

able to the party, it is likely that the unions would just increase funding through other means. That’s certainly what the Tories say, and who’s to say that, in this instance, they’re not right?

Miliband’s proposals are supported by ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair. Other proposals, such as the holding of US-style primaries have been saluted as a sound democratic innovation for British politics. Meanwhile, Bob Crow, leader of the RMT transport union, along with various leftists, thinks that there should be a new Left party that represents working class interests. The Unite union claims that its activities are aimed at ensuring that there are fewer middle class and more working class Members of Parliament. Against this, outgoing Falkirk MP Eric Joyce said *“The people that Unite want to put into those seats are of course, guess what? Parliamentary researchers, middle class union officials and exactly the same type. The reality is this is an ideological fight. It’s not between the trade unions and Ed Miliband, it’s between Len McCluskey and a few of his anarcho-syndicalist advisers and the Labour party”*.

All this is good knockabout stuff and guaranteed to fill the columns of the right-wing press, who insist that Labour hasn’t changed, that it’s a monster from the past. The one thing that it isn’t is a dispute over fundamental questions of principle. All the different Labour and union factions are **agreed** on essential policy questions. Some accept the argument for the cuts imposed by the Coalition, while others have different state capitalist measures that they think should be employed in the running of the British economy. But these differences are all a matter of degree, differences in emphasis on what the capitalist state should do in maintaining social order, ensuring the most effective exploitation of the working class, surviving in the cutthroat rivalry of capitalism internationally.

While the right-wing media tries to undermine the image of Labour and the unions, the left-wing tries to convince us that there is something to be defended in these capitalist institutions. Don’t be taken in. The differences are only superficial. **Car 13/7/13**

Turkey: the cure for state terror isn't democracy

We are publishing extracts from an article written by our section in Turkey – a young section, both in the history of the ICC and in the age of its members. Both as revolutionaries and as part of the generation that has led the revolt, these comrades have been actively involved in the movement. We encourage our readers to go to our website to find the full article, which is a first report 'on the spot' and a first attempt to analyse the significance of the movement¹. It's this last aspect which we are focusing on here in these extracts: what was the nature of the movement? Was it part of an international dynamic? What were its strengths and weaknesses? These are questions which are at the heart of the current period in the class struggle.

The movement that began against the cutting of the trees as a part of the plans to tear down Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul, and assumed a massive-ness unseen in the history of Turkey so far, is still ongoing (...).

We can only understand the real character of this movement by placing it in its international context. And viewed in this light, it becomes clear that the movement in Turkey is in direct continuity not only with the revolts in the Middle East in 2011 – the most important of which (Tunisia, Egypt, Israel) had a very strong imprint of the working class – but in particular the movement of the Indignados in Spain and Occupy in the US, where the working class makes up a large majority not only of the population as a whole but also of the participants in the movements. The same applies to the current rebellion in Brazil and it is equally applicable to the movement in Turkey, where the immense majority of the movement's components belonged to the working class, above all the proletarian youth. (...)

The widest participation was shown by the strata called the 90s generation. Being apolitical was a label imposed on the demonstrators produced by this generation, some of whom couldn't remember the period before the AKP² government. This generation, who were told not to get involved in the events and to look to save themselves, had noticed that they had no salvation alone and were tired of the government telling them what they should be and how they should live. Students, especially high school students, participated in the demonstrators in massive numbers. Young workers and unemployed were widely a part of the movement. Educated workers and unemployed were also present. In certain areas of the economy where mostly young people work under precarious conditions and it is difficult to struggle under normal conditions – especially in the service sector – the employees organised on a workplace-based way which transcended single workplaces, and participated in the protests together. The examples of such participation were delivery boys in kebab shops, bar employees, call centre, office and plaza workers. On the other hand, the fact that workplace-based participation didn't outweigh the tendency of workers to go to the demonstrations individually was among the significant weaknesses of the movement. But this too was typical of the movements in other countries, where the primacy of the revolt on the street has been a practical expression of the need to overcome the social dispersal created by the existing conditions of capitalist production and crisis – in particular, the weight of unemployment and precarious employment.

But these same conditions, coupled with the immense ideological assaults of the ruling class, have also made it difficult for the working class to see itself as a class and tends to reinforce the protesters' notion that they are essentially a mass of individual citizens, legitimate members of the



'Capitalism will cut down the tree if it can't sell the shadow'

'national' community, and not a class. Such is the contradictory path towards the proletariat re-constituting itself as a class, but there is no doubt that these movements are a step along this path.

One of the main reasons behind the fact that such a significant mass of proletarians discontented about their current living conditions organised protests with such a great determination was the indignation and the feeling of solidarity against police violence and state terror. Despite this, various bourgeois political tendencies were active, trying to influence the movement from within in order to keep it within the boundaries of the current order, to prevent it from radicalising and to keep the proletarian masses who'd taken to the streets against state terror from developing class demands around their own living conditions. Thus while it isn't possible for us to talk of a single demand the movement has agreed on without question, what commonly dominated the movement were democratic demands. The line calling for 'More Democracy' which was formed on an anti-AKP and in fact an anti-Tayyip Erdogan position in essence expressed nothing other than the reorganisation of Turkish capitalism in a more democratic fashion. The effect of democratic demands on the movement constituted its greatest ideological weakness. For Prime Minister Erdogan himself built all his ideological attacks against the movement around the axis of democracy and elections; the government authorities, though with loads of lies and manipulations, often repeated the argument that even in the countries considered most democratic, the police use violence against lawless demonstrations – on which they were not wrong. Moreover the line of trying to get democratic rights tied the hands of the masses when faced with police attacks and state terror and pacified the resistance (...)

The most active element within the democratic tendency which seems to have taken control of the Taksim Solidarity Platform is left-wing trade-union confederations such as KESK and DISK (...). The Taksim Solidarity Platform and thus the democratic tendency, due to the fact that it was made up of the representatives of all sorts of foundations and organisations, drew its strength not from its organic connection with the bourgeois legitimacy, mobilised resources and support of its components. (...)

The bourgeois left is another tendency worth mentioning. The base of the leftist parties who we can also describe as the legal bourgeois left was for the large part cut off from the masses. Generally they tailed the democratic tendency. BDP, while appearing to support the democratic tendency, also tried to prevent Kurds from participating in the movement, though not so successfully in the big cities, giving covert support for the government with which it is involved in a peace process. Stalinist and Trotskyist magazine circles, or the radical bourgeois left, was also for the large part

cut off from the masses. They were influential in the neighbourhoods where they were traditionally strong. While they opposed the democratic tendency at the moment it tried to disperse the movement, they generally supported it. The analyses of the bourgeois left was, for the most part limited to expressing how happy they were about the 'popular uprising' and trying to present themselves as the leaders of the movement. Even the calls for a general strike, a traditionally memorised line of the left, wasn't really felt among the left due to the atmosphere of blind happiness. Their most widely accepted slogan among the masses was "Shoulder to shoulder against fascism" (...).

In addition to the tendencies mentioned above, it is possible to talk about a proletarian tendency or proletarian tendencies within the current movement (...). In general, a significant amount of demonstrators defended the idea that the movement should create a self-organisation which would enable it to determine its own future.

The section of the protesters who wanted the movement to get together with the working class was made up of elements who were aware of the importance and strength of the class, who were against nationalism yet who lacked a clear political stance (...).

The common weakness of the demonstrations all across Turkey is the difficulty of creating mass discussion and gaining control over the movement through forms of self-organisation on the bases of these discussions. The mass discussion that has manifested itself in similar movements throughout the world was notably absent in the first days of the movement. Limited experience of mass discussion, meeting, mass assemblies and alike and the weakness of a culture of debate in Turkey were undoubtedly influential in this weakness. On the other hand, the movement felt the necessity for discussion and the means for such a discussion started to emerge.

The first expression of the feeling of necessity of discussion was the formation of an open tribune in the Gezi Park. The open tribune in Gezi Park did not attract a great deal of attention or continue for long, but still the experience of the open tribune had a certain effect. (...) If we have a look at the movements countrywide, the most crucial experience was provided by the demonstrators in Eskişehir. Through a general meeting in Eskişehir Resistance Square, committees were set up in order to arrange and coordinate demonstrations (...) Finally, from June 17 onwards, in various neighbourhood parks in Istanbul, masses of people inspired by the forums in Gezi Park set up mass assemblies under the name of forums. Among those neighbourhoods setting up forums, there were Beşiktaş, Elmadağ, Harbiye, Nisantapı, Kadıköy, Cihangir, Ümraniye, Okmeydanı, Göztepe, Rumelihisarüstü, Etiler, Akatlar, Maslak, Bakırköy, Fatih, Bahçelievler, Sarıyer, Yeniköy, Sarıgazi,

Ataköy and Alibeyköy. In the forthcoming days, others would be held in Ankara and various other cities. Thereby, in order not to lose control over these initiatives, Taksim Solidarity Platform began to make calls for these forums itself (...)

Although in many ways, the Gezi Park resistance is in continuity with the Occupy movement in the USA, the Indignados in Spain, and the protest movements that overthrew Mubarak in Egypt and Bin Ali in Tunisia, it also carries its own peculiarities. As with all these movements, in Turkey, there is a vital weight of the young proletariat. Egypt, Tunisia and Gezi Park resistance have in common the will to get rid of a regime which is perceived as a 'dictatorship' (...). But contrary to the movement in Tunisia that organised local committees, and in Spain and the USA in which masses generally assumed the responsibility of the movement through general assemblies, in the beginning in Turkey this dynamic has remained highly limited (...). In Turkey, rather than problems about living and working conditions, the practical questions of the movement have occupied a dominant place. The pre-eminent questions were the practical and technical problems of the clashes with the police (...). The similarity with Occupy in the USA was that an actual occupation occurred; yet in Turkey the occupations seriously outnumbered by their massive participation those in the USA. Likewise, both in Turkey and the USA, there is a tendency within the demonstrators that understands the significance of involving the working part of the proletariat into the struggle. In spite of this, despite the movement in Turkey failing to establish a serious bond with the whole working class, even the calls for strikes via social media were met with more work stoppages than in the USA experience.

But despite these particularities, there can be no doubt that the 'Çapulcu' movement was a part of the chain of international social movements (...) One of the best indicators that reveal the movement to be part of the international wave was its inspiring of Brazilian protesters. The Turkish protesters saluted the response from the other shore of the world with the slogans of "We are together, Brazil + Turkey!" and "Resist Brazil!" (in Turkish). And since the movement inspired protests with class-based demands in Brazil, in the forthcoming process it may positively affect the flourishing of class demands in Turkey (...).

Despite all the weaknesses and dangers facing this movement, if the masses in Turkey had not succeeded in becoming a link in the chain of social revolts shaking the capitalist world, the result would be a far greater feeling of powerlessness. The outbreak of a social movement on a scale not seen in this country since 1908 is thus of historical importance (...). **Dünya Devrimi, ICC Section in Turkey 21/6/13**

1. <http://www.en.internationalism.org/iconline/201306/8371/turkey-cure-state-terror-isnt-democracy>

2. This is the 'Justice and Development Party', a 'moderate' Islamist faction which has run the government since 2002.

3. This roughly translated means riff-raff – a term of abuse hurled at the movement by Prime Minister Erdogan which the demonstrators took up as a badge of honour

The war in Syria expresses the slow disintegration of capitalism

One of the major characteristics of the decomposition of capitalism is the tendency for society to tear itself apart. This phenomenon occurs at many levels: social, political and at the level of militarism. The insoluble economic contradictions of capitalism lead to universal but general disaggregation - what the Communist International in 1919 called “*the era of disintegration*” is an abiding and deepening feature of global capitalism. In the last twenty years or so, this tendency of capitalism has turned into decomposition: “*The period of decomposition shows more clearly than ever the irrationality of war in decadence - the tendency of its destructive dynamic to become autonomous and increasingly at variance with the logic of profit. The wars of decadence... do not make economic sense. Contrary to the view that war is ‘good’ for the health of the economy, war today both expresses and aggravates its incurable sickness*”¹.

The war in Syria is an example of the decomposition and growing irrationality of capitalism as expressed through its capitalist war machines. We can trace this descent if we go back a couple of decades to the ‘Cold War’ period from 1945 to 1989. The two-bloc system, while threatening incidental nuclear annihilation, was, in a perverse way, the height of geo-military organisation and cooperation of capitalism. All the national states involved were subservient, willingly or unwillingly, to the aforementioned bloc leaders and to the interests of the bloc. This was the apogee of imperialist “stability” even with the brutal carnage that it involved and the risks that it carried.

When the USSR collapsed in 1989, this two-sided bloc “coherence” collapsed with it and the vacuum was filled with centrifugal tendencies, each man for himself and growing tendencies towards the break-up of established nations, a process which goes on to this day. This was evidenced in some of the ex-satellites of the Russian Republic in Europe, Asia and the Caucasus; also in Yugoslavia where, in 1992, the dissolution of this country into opposing fiefdoms, tripped by Germany and manipulated by Britain, Russia, France and the USA, brought the first war in Europe for nearly fifty years. We see tendencies in the same direction today in Libya, Iraq and Syria - all countries war-torn by capitalism. In Africa, Ethiopia is fractious, Sudan split in two, Somalia on the edge and the Congo a death camp of imperialism. The war in Libya has fuelled separatist tendencies in Mali and Niger, with Nigeria affected. Rather than the constitution of viable states we see them splitting into fragments, and further developments of decomposition are expressed in the spread of gangsterism, warlordism, religious fanaticism and that abortion of internationalism - global jihad. All these features have been aroused, fed and inflamed by the wars of the major imperialisms in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria.

Syria: “Every scenario a nightmare...”

According to *The Observer*, 16.6.13, quoting a western official in Beirut (“western official” in this context is either a senior British diplomat or intelligence agent): “*Every scenario is a nightmare now*”. This came after the US said it would provide arms to the rebels now that it was proved that chemical weapons had been used by the Assad regime. This is another Iraq/ WMD farcical lie. The *New York Times* has exposed the case of the chemical weapons “red line” supposedly crossed by the regime which, incidentally, the UN has refused to endorse, in that it rests on the exposure of two individuals to sarin which, as even the White House said: “... does not tell us how or where the individuals were exposed, or who was responsible for that dissemination”. There’s also some doubt amongst experts that it is sarin poisoning, with some suggesting exposure to chlorine gas, which has very similar symptoms.

The subsequent convoluted statement from the White House about directing arms to some of the rebels can be taken with a pinch of salt. The US “chemical weapons red line” is code for getting more fully involved, the consequences of which can only contribute to further bloodshed and cha-

os. The US administration, through its agencies, along with Britain and France, have been providing arms and training (as well as stashes of money) to rebel groups via Turkey and Jordan, including anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, since November 2012 (*Los Angeles Times*, June 20). The US presence in Jordan has been beefed up after military exercises with British forces in June, leaving in place CIA operatives, special forces, a dozen F-16 fighter jets, Patriot missile batteries and one thousand troops on the ground. After this deployment, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said that military assistance, in the form of “training teams”, could be sent to Iraq and Lebanon. The *New York Times* gave some detail about the amount of arms that the rebels have received since the beginning of 2012: possibly as much as 3,500 tonnes of weapons. In Afghanistan, when the west was arming the fundamentalist Mujahideen they were getting one cargo a month - the Syrian opposition has been receiving one every other day. The *Financial Times* in May reported that Qatar alone had supplied \$3 billion worth of weapons, showing something of the role



al-Nusra

of the Muslim Brotherhood in this war, while their rival, Saudi Arabia, has provided shoulder-held anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to its Islamist groups in Aleppo. Weapons have been collected from all over Libya and sent by the Benghazi regime, with their stamp of approval, to the rebels - apparently paid for by Qatar under cover of humanitarian aid. Since the EU arms embargo was lifted in May, there’s been a free-for-all in arms provision with Israel also getting in on the act. And, on the other side of the war, there’s the massive weaponry and support provided by Russia and Iran to the Assad regime.

The “rebels” are a growing part of the imperialist chaos

The western-backed Free Syrian Army described as “*corrupt failure*” by the al-Qaeda linked Jabhat al-Nusra and, more accurately, as “*a rhetorical construct*” by Reuters, 19.6.13, is an opposition manufactured from outside Syria by the west. Many of its fighters have been killed and their units disbanded by al-Nusra and many have deserted to its side. Chechen-dominated Sunni rebel jihadi groups in the north have aired a video showing that they have shoulder-launched SA-16 missiles, capable of posing a threat to most war planes and helicopters. These are precisely the weapons that the CIA has tried to keep out of their hands, blocking them from the Jordanian and Turkish border but the jihadists have clearly got them from somewhere. The Chechen fighters command a large group solely composed of foreigners who see the war as global jihad. Peter Bouckaert, Human Rights Watch emergencies director, says: “*There is increasing evidence that foreign fighters are gathering under a more unified umbrella in Syria and that the umbrella organisation may have a strong Chechen leadership*” (*The Observer*, 16.6.13).

Oliver Holmes and Alexandra Dziadosz wrote up some good research for Reuters on June 18 from on the ground in Aleppo. They talk about there being 2000 fighters there, originally around the leading group of Ghurabaa al-Sham. This “moderate” Islamist opposition group was defeated and disbanded overnight by the hard-line Islamists of

al-Nusra at the end of last April. The jihadists confiscated all their weapons, ammunition and transport. This pattern has been repeated throughout Syria where groups wanting a supreme religious leadership are overwhelmingly the “moderates”, they being no match for the hard-line jihadi units. The Reuters reporters go on to say that: “*on the ground there is little evidence to suggest that the FSA actually exists as a body at all*”. Ghurabaa al-Sham - the so-called democratic resistance - was, in the very words of its leader in Aleppo, made up of “*outlaws and reprobates*”. They had no support from the majority of the population previously involved in protests against the regime - far from it, as they were thieves and looters who were shipping their booty back to Turkey. Similar stories of looting and theft at the beginning of the war are emerging now and increasingly we are hearing that the jihadis have brought “order”, if only their particular kind of capitalist order. And weapons trading and in-fighting goes on between all these groups and particularly the four Islamist brigades running Aleppo including the al-Qaida linked al-Nusra and the Saudi and Qatari backed factions.

The non-jihadi factions, such as the US and the Istanbul-based, Syrian National Council-backed “Falcons of Salqin”, are themselves involved in looting and theft as well as the trading of weapons. The US and the 11 nation “Friends of Syria”, meeting under the auspices of the Muslim Brotherhood government of Tunisia, have now set up the grand sounding “Supreme Military Council” under which to organise, arm, train and direct its rebel forces. The

British and the Americans have put their weight behind the Muslim Brotherhood, but these “friends of Syria” all have their own tensions with each other and their own agendas for the region, particularly the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey. At the moment they look extremely unlikely to forge an effective anti-Assad force.

The “search for peace” charade while the war spreads

On July 2, US Secretary of State, John Kerry, after meeting his Russian counterpart, said that a “Geneva II” meeting would be convened as soon as possible in the search for peace and “*to stop the bloodshed*” in Syria. The meeting had been scheduled for June but is now put off until after August because of the holidays! The chemical weapons red line - a line pushed by Britain and France - was called a step too far by the US administration and the “*clarifying moment*” vaunted after talks with Putin showed that there was no agreement. But the real clarification was made by Hezbollah (“the army of God”) in taking the strategic town of Qusair from the rebels and opening up battle lines from Iran all the way to the Israeli border. This is what is drawing in the Americans. Many Hezbollah fighters have been battle-hardened in fighting against Israel but thousands are regularly sent to Iran for training. It’s this force, as well as Iranian Revolutionary Guards, who have repulsed the rebel push and gone onto the offensive. And, just as they all talk of “peaceful solutions”, the war spreads ever wider: Lebanon is now involved with the highly populated areas of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon affected by RPG and machine-gun fire. Sixteen Lebanese soldiers were killed by Sunni Islamists on June 23 in Sidon, which *The Times of Israel* called a “war zone”. The Lebanese government is weak, the state is faction-ridden and hardly recovered from its own 15-year-old civil war with its hundred thousand dead.

The war is also deepening in the US and British-made disaster of Iraq. Paramilitaries and militias rule the streets of this country where, despite its oil wealth, there’s no constant water or electricity and poverty, terror and insecurity reigns. The busiest places in Iraq are the emigration offices where

many, mostly unsuccessful, are trying to get out of the country. Prime Minister Malaki has been accused of working with the Iranians (which he does) and of opening up a land corridor with Iran in order to channel fighters and weapons into Syria (which he probably has). Hundreds of Iraqi civilians are being killed and mutilated by car bombs weekly in Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk and Tigris, mostly set by Sunni Islamists and related to the war in Syria. Both pro- and anti-Assad forces are moving backwards and forwards from Iraq and into Syria and have been for some time now.

The human cost in Syria grows ever greater. US news agencies report one hundred thousand dead - a third of them civilians; 40% loss of GDP; 1 in 5 schools and 1 in 3 hospitals closed; lack of power and water; 2.5 million unemployed; millions unable to buy enough food and refugees, internal and external, running into millions. Billions of dollars are spent on the means of destruction but the Geneva I meeting promised \$1.5 billion in “humanitarian” aid, most of which will not appear and a large slice of which will go directly to the military factions. There’s half-a-million refugees in Lebanon alone. Some refugees have been forcibly turned back from the Jordanian border straight into Syrian gunfire. At the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan many have returned to Syria because they would rather live in a war-zone than these filthy, crime-ridden camps bearing the logo UNHCR which are run by mafias, smugglers and people traffickers.

Capitalism's New World Chaos

This is the new world order of decomposition and imperialism, where a militarily resuscitated Russia aligns with China in order to protect Iran and all their interests, economic and strategic, in the Middle East. Unlike the conflicts of the cold war, limited, confined, understood by the two blocs, this is a war of decomposing capitalism, with more variable components and thus more dangerous. As well as the major players, there are the diverging interests of Iran, Turkey, Israel, along with Qatar, Saudi and Egypt. As well as irrationality the war also shows the weakening of US power - as great as it still is and, on an imperialist level, this will only contribute to the chaos. As much as they say that they don’t want it, there is the danger here of the US, Britain and France getting drawn in behind the jihadists - if this hasn’t already happened. This is not a war of Sunni against Shia, but a war of capitalism taking over these religious strains and playing up sectarianism, feeding, prolonging and spreading the conflict. Iran for example has used the Shia brand for its own purposes and it’s Iranian imperialism, not Iranian religion, that is in play here. The defence of national capitalist interests in an increasingly contested world arena is the essence of imperialism and it applies to Iran, to the rest of the local states, and their big power backers.

Against the imperialist carnage in Syria, contrast the protests in Turkey and Egypt which, though part of an international phenomenon, are important local expressions that carry the seeds of a movement away from and against imperialist war. These movements are not immune from attempts to open up another path to imperialist chicanery and butchery, but at the moment such mass protests - which have economic considerations at their basis - are not welcome by any side². These mass movements, at the moment lacking a clear class consciousness and organisation, begin to pose an alternative to imperialist war in Syria, a war that is tending to get more dangerous and out of control.

Baboon. 5/7/13

2. Though opposing sides like the Saudi’s and the UAE on one hand, and the Assad regime on the other, have expressed their pleasure at the overthrow of the Morsi clique, they have done so for different imperialist reasons. For the former this is a blow to their rival Qatari Muslim Brotherhood enemies, and for the latter, particularly just after Morsi had declared for the largely MB dominated anti-Assad opposition, this represents a setback for their rival. But no powers involved here, the local powers, the USA, Britain, France, nor Iran, nor its most important backer, Russia, nor China from a distance, want to see millions of protesters on the streets, expressing their deep indignation.

1. ‘Floundering of American imperialist hegemony’, en.internationalism.org/inter/127_floundering.htm

War before civilisation, by Lawrence Keeley

The study of warfare in archaic and prehistoric societies has enjoyed something of a fashion in recent years, even including the thesis that warfare played a critical role in the evolution of humanity.¹ In the scientific literature (or at least in the literature of scientific vulgarisation), Lawrence Keeley’s book *War before civilisation* has achieved a certain status as a work of reference.²

Keeley begins by situating two opposing views of primitive human society that have emerged in Western social theory since the Renaissance: on the one hand that of Hobbes, who famously described the primitive condition of man before the emergence of the state as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”, and on the other that of Rousseau, who was one of the first and most influential exponents of the idea of the original “noble savage” corrupted by civilisation.

As Keeley points out, the Hobbesian view of man provided a useful subtext for European colonial powers who argued that by policing the inter-tribal relations of primitive peoples they were bringing peace where none had been before. This situation changed radically after World War II: the two world wars shattered the confidence of intellectuals in the old colonial powers in the superiority of Western civilisation; the unparalleled barbarity of Nazism, arising in one of the greatest and most cultured European nations, as well as the disintegration of the colonial empires in bloody conflict (Dien Bien Phu, the war in Algeria, the suppression of the Mau-Mau revolt in Kenya) made the Rousseauesque view suddenly far more attractive. As a result, anthropological and archaeological studies tended to ignore or misinterpret the evidence for violent conflict contained in ethnographic studies or archaeological fieldwork: fortified settlements, for example, were interpreted as religious sites and the frequent appearance of weapons in burials as mere symbols of prestige. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Keeley does not ask whether the new approach to violence in archaic societies might be related to the current fashion for justifying the old colonialism and even proposing a return to a new *pax americana* (see especially Niall Ferguson’s *Empire* and *Colossus*).

This said, Keeley’s statistical approach, both in living archaic societies and in the archeological record, leaves little doubt that warfare has been prevalent throughout human history, and that it has often been every bit as bloody and cruel as the battles of World War II, or the martyrdom of Vietnam. He demystifies the relatively “harmless” nature of archaic societies’ “set-piece” battles which generally end with a minimum of casualties, pointing out the far more murderous, and frequent, nature of ambushes and surprise attacks which can sometimes result in the extermination of entire settlements or even societies. The statistical approach, while it can open our eyes to the basic facts, nonetheless has definite limits when it comes to understanding them: the *reductio ad absurdum* of this approach can be seen in his remark that in one of the “peaceful” societies that he mentions – a polar Inuit group of 200 people who, until they were contacted at the beginning of the 19th century, were so isolated that they believed themselves the only humans in existence – a homicide every 50 years would equal the homicide rate of today’s United States. The mere fact that archaic and modern warfare both involve killing by no means makes them identical. As Marx remarked in another context: “Hunger is hunger; but the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth. Production thus produces not only the object of

consumption but also the mode of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively.”³ For one thing, archaic societies are classless, there is no constraint involved in the decision to go to war and military aggression is not undertaken by forced armies of conscripts;⁴ the very nature of primitive communist societies means that warfare depends entirely on volunteers. Nor is there anything like the privileged officer caste which remains safely behind the lines, as was notoriously the case in World War I, and indeed in all modern warfare: archaic war chiefs lead from the front and share the same risks as those they lead. Nor does the “primitive” warrior experience the depersonalisation of much modern warfare: nowhere in archaic societies, for obvious reasons, will we find the equivalent of the B52 bomber pilot in Vietnam or Iraq who rains death with impunity on an entire population, much less the modern drone pilot in a Nevada military base whose experience of warfare resembles nothing so much as a video game. Indeed, one of the reasons Keeley evokes for the low rate of casualties in primitive set-piece battles is that they often set face to face warriors related by marriage or blood – a warrior will take his place in the battle line with the deliberate intention of avoiding the risk of injuring or killing a relative. Primitive warfare, in short, is less “inhuman” in the proper sense of the term.

For us, the main interest in Keeley’s book is twofold:⁵ first, in his analysis of the reasons for the “peaceful” or “warlike” nature of different archaic societies, and second in his exploration of the attitudes of these societies to war and to warriors themselves.

One point to emerge clearly from Keeley’s study is that, while wholly peaceful archaic societies may be rare, all are by no means equally violent. We cannot do justice here to Keeley’s interesting discussion of the various anthropological theories advanced to explain why war breaks out between different groups – the issue of vendetta, for example, would merit a study in itself – rather we will limit ourselves to highlighting the role of “disaster-driven warfare”: “it is becoming increasingly certain that many prehistoric cases of intensive warfare in various regions corresponded with hard times created by ecological and climate changes” (Chapter 9, “Bad Neighbourhoods”). In other words, archaic societies tend to resort to warfare when the carrying capacity⁶ of their local environment changes for the worse and they are unable to adapt to the change quickly enough through the development of technology.

One thing often missed in studies of archaic warfare is the question of how war is viewed by the participants themselves, and this to our mind is one of the most interesting aspects of Keeley’s book, so much so that we will quote it at some length. Keeley’s discussion of this topic can be grouped under the following headings:

- 1. People’s view of the activity of war itself,
- 2. The attitude towards warriors and killing,
- 3. The warrior chief.

It comes as little surprise that in general, women have a wholly negative view of war: in the case of defeat they often stand to lose the most with the least chance of resistance, in the case of victory they stand to gain the least, and their economic activity (gardening, etc.) is more vulnerable to pillage. “Representing the unanimous opinion of her sex in a society where land disputes were the most common cause of fighting, one Mae Enga woman protested: **‘Men are killed but the land remains. The land is there in its own right and it does not command people to fight for it’**”. As far as men are concerned, Keeley goes on to note that “At some level, even the most militant warriors recognised the evils of war and the desirability of peace. Thus certain New Guinea Jalemo warriors, who praised and bragged about military feats and

who took great pleasure in eating both the pigs and the corpses of vanquished enemies, readily confessed that war was a bad thing that depleted pig herds, incurred burdensome debts, and restricted trade and travel. Similarly, despite their frequent resort to it, Kapauku Papuans seem to hate war. As one man put it: **‘War is bad and nobody likes it. Sweet potatoes disappear, pigs disappear, fields disappear, and many relatives and friends get killed. But one cannot help it. A man starts a fight and no matter how much one despises him, one has to go and help because he is one’s relative and one feels sorry for him.’**”. An ethnographic study of New Guinea warriors known for bravery found that without exception they suffered from nightmares and exhibited forms of neurosis comparable to those observed in modern combatants.

This negative attitude to warfare is strikingly confirmed by the idea, common the world over according to Keeley, that a warrior who had just killed an enemy was “regarded by his own people as spiritually polluted or contaminated. Often he had to live for a time in seclusion, eat special food or fast, be excluded from participation in rituals, and abstain from sexual intercourse” (Chapter 10, “Naked, poor, and mangled peace”). Keeley goes on to give concrete examples: “Because he was a spiritual danger to himself and anyone he touched, a Huli killer of New Guinea could not use his shooting hand for several days; he had to stay awake the first night after the killing, chanting spells; drink ‘bespelled’ water; and exchange his bow for another. South American Carib warriors had to cover their heads for a month after dispatching an enemy. An African Meru warrior, after killing, had to pay a curse remover to conduct the rituals that would purge his impurity and restore him to society. A Marquesan was tabooed for ten days after a war killing. A Chilcotin of British Columbia who had killed an enemy had to live apart from the group for a time, and all returning raiders had to cleanse themselves by drinking water and vomiting. These and similar rituals emphasize the extent to which homicide was regarded as abnormal, even when committed against the most bellicose enemies”.

Despite these misgivings (to put it mildly) about killing, courageous and skilful warriors were universally esteemed. This is hardly surprising: in a situation of endemic warfare, the warriors’ success could be all that stood between the tribal group and extermination by the enemy. What is more surprising is that, according to Keeley, even warlike societies reserved their greatest esteem not for warriors but for their “peace chiefs”, whose desired qualities had nothing to do with warfare: “The six desired characteristics of an Apache headman, for instance, were industriousness, generosity, impartiality, forbearance, conscientiousness, and eloquence (...) Among the Mae Enga, it was recognized that ‘rubbish men’ – those with the least wealth and the lowest status – were often the most effective warriors”. Where Keeley falls down, is in his (in our view) rather facile comparison with the attitude of modern societies towards returning soldiers: he ignores the class division of modern society, which means that the mass of the armed forces come from the working class and share the contempt and exploitation of the ruling class with their civilian class brothers and sisters.⁷

Is man violent by nature? Perhaps we can be permitted to conclude with a hypothesis. In nature, all animals are contradictory: on the one hand, violence is to be avoided because it puts at risk the individual’s survival, hence its ability to reproduce; on the other, violence is a necessary and inevitable part of life because every animal is in competition with others both to survive and to reproduce. Man shares this natural heritage, but he is also different. Man’s capacity for cultural adaptation, his capacity for mutual solidarity which is one of the foundation stones of his culture, has made him the most successful predator on the planet and to this extent he has freed himself from

7. It is worth pointing out that the examples cited by Keeley, and which we have quoted here, are all drawn from peoples known for being particularly bellicose and frequently engaged in warfare.



nature’s obligation to violence. We are not then surprised, on reading Keeley’s work, to discover this contradiction between on the one hand man’s capacity for violence when confronted with the struggle for survival, and on the other so widespread and so powerful a revulsion at the exercise of violence against his fellows. This contradiction will only be resolved by the removal of one of its terms, by the disappearance of the need to compete with his fellows in a society where the division among different tribes is replaced by the participation in a worldwide human community: in short, in communism. Yet the disappearance of violence will not come about through an ecumenical realisation of our common humanity, but through “the negation of the negation”: “force plays yet another role in history, a revolutionary role; in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one, it is the instrument with the aid of which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilised political forms”.⁸ Jens, 09/05/2013

8. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*

ICC Online: recent additions

Problems of the proletarian political movement:
The ‘Aufhebengate’ affair

Bangladesh factory collapse: the industry of murder

Woolwich attack: false justifications for murder

Ecological crisis: a bee in the bourgeoisie’s bonnet

Brazil: police repression provokes the anger of youth

Film criticism - Hannah Arendt: In praise of thought

1. See for example a study published by Samuel Bowles in the June 2009 issue of *Science*, and reviewed in *The Economist* of the same week. This study is definitely a minority view among scientists since it is based on a group selection theory of evolution as against the “selfish gene” theory which is today the generally accepted evolutionary model.
2. Lawrence Keeley is a professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois in Chicago. His book is also available in French (*Les guerres préhistoriques*) but not in Spanish. His book was first published in 1996 and reprinted in 2001.
3. *Introduction to a critique of political economy*.
4. Or indeed of slaves as under the Egyptian Fatimids, or of levies among a tributary population like the Turkish Janissaries.
5. An important part of the book is devoted to demonstrating the effectiveness of archaic tactics compared to those of state societies, a subject which need not concern us here.
6. For a summary of the notion of carrying capacity, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrying_capacity

Day of discussion

Impressions of a participant

We are publishing below impressions of our Day of Discussion held in London on 22 June, written for her own blog by a comrade who posts on our internet forum but who had not previously met the ICC ‘face to face’. The presentations given on the day can be found on this thread on our forum: <http://www.en.internationalism.org/forum/1056/alf/7391/come-day-discussion>. We intend to group together and publish all the presentations and write ups of the discussions in one file in the near future.

23JUN

Well yesterday I went to the Day of Discussion put on by the International Communist Current. They are a left-communist group. People reading this might not know what that is (and probably don’t tbf) so I will explain quickly what my understanding about the communist left is.

The communist left basically originated in the Russian revolution, supporting Lenin and the Bolshevik Party initially and rapidly getting disillusioned. They didn’t make Lenin particularly happy. They were the ones that Lenin was on about when he wrote his notorious “Left-wing communism – an infantile disorder” pamphlet, because they were complaining that the revolution was degenerating (which it was) becoming more and more like capitalism again and becoming more and more authoritarian – basically coming to resemble, what we know now as state capitalism or “stalinism” betraying the russian workers they claimed to lead and distorting Marxism into an authoritarian doctrine. One of the founders of it was a guy called Herman Gorter who wrote an “open letter to Comrade Lenin”.

They think that the Russian revolution degenerated back before Lenin’s death (and also that nationalisation etc is not necessarily a step on the way to socialism or even necessarily an improvement to “normal” capitalism) rather than the Trotskyist view which was that this only happened after Lenin’s death and that what happened in the Soviet

union and other “communist” countries was that they were “deformed workers’ states” despite the fact that they were a nightmare for huge numbers of working class people. And therefore that despite the criticisms Trotskyists had of them somehow their governments were usually worth defending. Lenin and Trotsky were mates and Trotsky had a high position in the Bolshevik hierarchy and he could never bring himself to see the full extent of the wrongness of the Soviet regime.

The communist left on the other hand were closer to the anarchist position in that they believed that the revolution started going very very wrong within a year or two of 1917. There’s loads of stuff, Kronstadt, the fact that they made it very difficult for workers to go on strike, they introduced one-man management (bringing back the old bosses that the workers had overthrown during the revolution)

“what? why do you want to go on strike eh, we have socialism now and “the working class” are now in power?”

I was really pleasantly surprised by the meeting. I had expected it to be a really small meeting full of party hacks but actually around 20 people were there and probably around half of them weren’t ICC members but from other organisations or not in an organisation at all. And most of them were pretty normal and had a good sense of humour (no offence but you’d have to have a good sense of humour to be part of the communist left!).

The topic of the meeting was “why is it so difficult to struggle against capitalism”. I’ve got my own ideas (some of which were sadly reflected in some of my observations that day, although i don’t think this was intentional) and in my next post I’ll do like a summary of that debate.

The good points were that I didn’t see any sectarianism on the level of what you would get in trot groups (there was one guy who made a dig about the SPGB which was out of order and he was swiftly shouted down), not many weirdo party hacks, most of the participants seemed to want to learn from other people rather than just promoting the views of their own organisation. And people with opposing views weren’t shouted down or told they were wrong.

There was also free food.

The bad points could apply to most left-wing organisations. One of the problems is that they assume a certain level of knowledge about terms like “decomposition” and things like that but they are hardly the only offenders for that. It also wasn’t as well publicised as it could have been and most of the people there (although not all) seemed to have all been involved in the “mileu” for a long time rather than people who had never been involved in politics. There were a few young people there but not many and some of the contributions at times seemed to be a bit vanguardist talking about how “we” will do this and that and “we” will integrate people into productive communism etc. I don’t think that’s exactly what was meant but that’s how it came across but at least they were willing to take criticisms when I and others pointed this out.

I was actually really pleasantly surprised. I have a lot of differences with the ICC, one of them is my opinion about anti-fascism, as they see it purely as a distraction from class struggle. I can see their point but I still think that it is part of the class struggle. that is the main one i guess.

The other criticism I have got is about their papers, as I said they do assume a level of knowledge, it seems a bit stupid but there should be more pictures in the papers and sometimes the print is too small and a bit hard to read because the articles are so long.

I did pick up a lot of their literature, their paper “World Revolution” their theoretical journal “International Review” and a book called “Communi-

nism is not a nice idea but a material necessity”, and a pamphlet called “Trade unions against the working class”. I have read some of the anti-trade union pamphlet online but i find it easier to read books on paper rather than online.

The other left communist organisation that was there. the ICT, printed some articles in their magazine that were about Bordiga and Damen and I think some basic introductions to these people could be useful rather than immediately assuming that everyone knows who they are already (because i know who bordiga is but not really familiar with his writings or that much apart from that really) but that is part of my point about language I suppose.

The other bad thing was the fact that it was in London and therefore cost a lot for me to get to (which i can afford at the moment, but I probably won’t always be able to). I’d love to be able to organise or get involved in something that’s more local but at the moment I don’t have the time and I think a lot of people probably feel the same way.

I am quite wary of getting involved in any organisations these days but I was glad I went to this because it’s very rare that I actually get to discuss anything with people these days apart from the internet. And afterwards we all had a drink together and went for a curry, I thought it was great that we got a chance to talk about stuff afterwards and get to know each other a bit as people!

<http://disillusionedmarxist.wordpress.com/2013/06/23/icc-meeting-on-why-is-it-so-hard-to-struggle-against-capitalism/>

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Mandela: a human face for capitalism

In the latter part of his life Nelson Mandela was widely considered to be a modern ‘saint’. He appeared to be a model of humility, integrity and honesty, and displaying a remarkable capacity to forgive.

A recent Oxfam report said that South Africa is “*the most unequal country on earth and significantly more unequal than at the end of apartheid*”. The ANC has presided for nearly twenty years over a society that threatens still further deprivations for the black majority, and yet, despite having been an integral part of the ANC since the 1940s, Mandela was always seen as being somehow different from other leaders, throughout Africa and the rest of the world.

A true Christian?

His 1994 autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (LWF) is an invaluable guide to Mandela’s life and views. Even though it is likely to portray its subject in a favourable light, it shows the concerns and priorities of the author.

For example, after 27 years of imprisonment, when Mandela was released in February 1990 he showed no sign of personal vindictiveness towards those who had kept him captive. “*In prison, my anger towards whites decreased, but my hatred for the system grew. I wanted South Africa to see that I loved even my enemies while I hated the system that turned us against one another*” (LWF p680). If this sounds like a Christian saying ‘Love the sinner, hate the sin’ it’s partly because it is. When two editors from the *Washington Times* visited him in prison “*I told them that I was a Christian and had always been a Christian*” (LWF p620).

You can also see how this trait in his personality proved useful to South African capitalism. After Mandela left prison one of the main tasks of the ANC was to reassure potential investors that a future ANC government would not threaten their interests. In ‘Mandela Message to USA Big Business’ (19/6/1990)¹ you can read something he said on a number of occasions “*The private sector, both domestic and international, will have a vital contribution to make to the economic and social reconstruction of SA after apartheid... We are sensitive to the fact that as investors in a post-apartheid SA, you will need to be confident about the security of your investments, an adequate and*

1. http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS036&txtstr=private%20sector

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 statified 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

equitable return on your capital and a general capital climate of peace and stability.” Mandela might have spoken as a Christian, but a Christian who understood the needs of business.

Consistent nationalist

Mandela was certainly consistent, able to look at the present in its continuity with the past. When, for example, the ANC sat down for the first official talks with the government in May 1990 Mandela had to give them “*a history lesson. I explained to our counterparts that the ANC from its inception in 1912 had always sought negotiations with the government in power*” (LWF p693).

Mandela often referred to the ANC’s Freedom Charter adopted in 1955. “*In June 1956, in the monthly journal **Liberation**, I pointed out that the charter endorsed private enterprise and would allow capitalism to flourish among Africans for the first time*” (LWF p205). In 1988, when he was in secret negotiations with the government he referred to the same article “*in which I said that the Freedom Charter was not a blueprint for socialism but for African-style capitalism. I told them I had not changed my mind since then*” (LWF p642).

When Mandela was visited in 1986 by an Eminent Persons Group “*I told them I was a South African nationalist, not a communist, that nationalists come in very hue and colour*” (LWF p629). This nationalism was unwavering. When the 1994 election was approaching and he met President FW de Klerk in a television debate “*I felt I had been too harsh with the man who would be my partner in a government of national unity. In summation, I said, ‘The exchanges between Mr de Klerk and me should not obscure on important fact. I think we are a shining example to the entire world of people drawn from different racial groups who have a common loyalty, a common love, to their common country’*” (LWF p740-1).

From the mid 1970s Mandela received visits from the prisons minister. “*The government had sent ‘feelers’ to me over the years, beginning with Minister Kruger’s efforts to persuade me to move to the Transkei. These were not efforts to negotiate, but attempts to isolate me from my organisation. On several other occasions, Kruger said to me: ‘Mandela, we can work with you, but not your colleagues’*” (LWF p619).

The South African government recognised that there was something in his personality that would

ultimately make some sort of negotiations possible. And, in December 1989, when he first met de Klerk he was able to say “*Mr de Klerk seemed to represent a true departure from the National Party politicians of the past. Mr de Klerk ...was a man we could do business with*” (LWF p665).

Ultimately this mutual respect led in 1993 to the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded jointly to Mandela and de Klerk, in the words of the citation “*for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa*”. This long term goal was not something personal to Mandela but corresponded to the needs of capitalism. After the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, “*The Johannesburg stock exchange plunged, and capital started to flow out of the country*” (LWF p281). The end of apartheid started a period of growth for foreign investment in South Africa. Democracy did not, however, benefit the majority of the population. In the fifties Mandela said that “*the covert goal of the government was to create an African middle class to blunt the appeal of the ANC and the liberation struggle*” (LWF p223). In practice ‘liberation’ and an ANC government has marginally increased the ranks of an African middle class. It has also meant repression, the remilitarisation of the police, the banning of protests, and attacks on workers, as in, for example, the Marikana miners’ strike in which 44 workers were killed and dozens seriously injured.

Mandela was able to say that “*all men, even the most cold-blooded, have a core of decency, and that if their hearts are touched, they are capable of changing*” (LWF p549). What might be true of individuals is not true of capitalism. It has no core of decency and cannot be changed. The faces of the ANC government are different to their white predecessors, but exploitation and repression remain.

Means to an end

The ANC in their ‘liberation’ struggle used both violence and non-violence in its campaigns. When non-violent tactics were proving unsuccessful the ANC created a military wing, in the creation of which Mandela played a central role. “*We considered four types of violent activities: sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and open revolution*”. They hoped that sabotage “*would bring the government to the bargaining table*” but strict instructions were given “*that we would*

countenance no loss of life. But if sabotage did not produce the results we wanted, we were prepared to move on to the next stage: guerrilla warfare and terrorism” (LWF p336).

So, on 16 December 1961, when “*homemade bombs were exploded at electric power stations and government offices in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban*” (LWF p338) it did not mean that the goals of the ANC had changed – democracy was still the aim. And after May 1983, when the ANC staged its first car bomb attack, in which nineteen people were killed and more than two hundred injured, Mandela said “*The killing of civilians was a tragic accident, and I felt a profound horror at the death toll. But disturbed as I was by these casualties, I knew that such accidents were the inevitable consequences of the decision to embark on a military struggle*” (LWR p618). These days such ‘accidents’ are often referred to by the more modern euphemism of ‘collateral damage’.

Man and myth

In the 1950s Mandela’s first wife became a Jehovah’s Witness. Although he “*found some aspects of the Watch Tower’s system to be interesting and worthwhile, I could not and did not share her devotion. There was an obsessional element to it that put me off*” (LWF p239). In the arguments they had “*I patiently explained to her that politics was not a distraction but my lifework, that it was an essential and fundamental part of my being*” (LWF p240).

These differences led to “*a battle for the minds and hearts of the children. She wanted them to be religious, and I thought they should be political*” (ibid). And what politics were they exposed to? “*Hanging on the walls of the house I had pictures of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Gandhi and the storming of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg in 1917. I explained to the boys who each of the men was, and what he stood for. They knew that the white leaders of South Africa stood for something very different*” (ibid).

There is an interesting contrast here. On one hand, there are four leading members of the ruling capitalist class (and not so different from the South African bourgeoisie) and, on the other, one of the most important moments in the history of the working class.

Continued on page 2

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 Working-men’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*.