Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt, Syria, the massacres keep spreading. The horror of capitalism accelerates, deaths pile up. A continuous carnage that no one seems able to stop. Capital in utter decomposition is dragging the world into generalised barbarism. The use of chemical weapons as in Syria today is unfortunately only one of the instruments of death among many others. But there is nothing inevitable about this perspective, which left to itself will result in the destruction of humanity. The world proletariat cannot remain indifferent in the face of all these wars and massacres. Only the proletariat, the revolutionary class of our epoch, can put an end to this nightmare. More than ever humanity is faced with one choice: communism or barbarism.

The Syrian population is being sacrificed on the altar of imperialism

On Monday 21 August an attack with chemical weapons left hundreds dead in an area close to Damascus. On the internet, on TV screens and the newspapers there were unbearable images of men, women and children in agony. The bourgeoisie, without any scruple, has seized on this human tragedy to advance its world interests. The regime of Bashar al-Assad, a butcher among butchers, has, as we are told, crossed a red line: you can use any weapons to slaughter people, but not chemical ones. These are ‘dirty’ weapons, as opposed to the ‘clean’ ones like ‘conventional’ bombs and mortars or even the atomic bombs the Americans dropped on Hiroshima or Nagasaki in 1945. But the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie has no limits. Since the First World War of 1914-18 where poison gas was used massively for the first time, killing several hundred thousand people, chemical weapons have been continuously ‘perfected’ and used. The superficial agreements about their non-utilisation, especially after the two world wars and in the 1990s, were just empty declarations, which were not meant to be applied. And many theatres of war since this time have seen non-utilisation, especially after the two world wars. Only the proletariat, the revolutionary class of our epoch, can stop these horrors.

Syria: it’s decadent capitalism which is responsible

Syria is currently at the heart of the imperialist tensions and conflicts which are extending from North Africa to Pakistan. If the Syrian bourgeoisie is tearing itself apart inside a country which is now in ruins, it has been able to rely on the inextricable appetites of a whole number of imperialist powers. In this region, Iran, Hezbollah from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey… are all more or less directly involved in this bloody conflict. The most powerful imperialisms in the world are also defending their squalid interests. Russia, China, France, Britain and the USA are playing their part in the continuation of this war and its extension across the region. Faced with their growing incapacity to control the situation, they are more and more just sowing death and destruction, according to the old earth policy (‘if I can’t dominate this region, I will set it on fire’).

During the Cold War, the period which went officially from 1947 to 1991 and the fall of the USSR, two blocs confronted each other, led by Russia and the USA respectively. These two superpowers directed their ‘allies’ or ‘satellites’ with an iron hand, forcing them to fall in line in the face of the enemy ogre. This ‘world order’ was based on the discipline of the bloc. It was a historical period that was full of danger for humanity, because if the working class had not been able to resist, even passively, the ideological march towards war, a third world conflagration would have been possible. Since the collapse of the USSR, there are no longer two blocs, no more threat of a third world war. The discipline of the blocs is in pieces. Each nation is playing its own card; imperialist alliances are increasingly ephemeral and circumstantial. As a result conflicts are multiplying and in the end no bourgeoisie can control it. This is chaos, the growing decomposition of society.

Thus the accelerating weakness of the world’s leading imperialist power, the US, is an active factor in the whole Middle East plunging into barbarism. Immediately after the chemical attack on the suburbs of Damascus, the British and French are playing their part in the situation.

The spying game

Talk of recovery masks the underlying disease

Syria vote: response of British imperialism

Class struggle!

Hunger in the ‘rich world’

Book review: The alternative to capitalism

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workers of the world, unite!

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Economic crisis

For several weeks there has been such a torrent of pessimism about the British economy that our rulers have become quite excited. It has given a shot in the arm not only to the government's position but to the manipulators of an earlier than predicted rise in interest rates. And it has helped push the IMF to a hailing re-appraisal of Britain's economic policies, the made of the British government's economic policy. In fact the IMF is now praising the British government's approach to the economy as a sign of the light of the world, replacing the old-fashioned idea that China and the other emerging economies offered hope to us all.

As regards a limited strike, this was not down. And so on, along

This is very sound, except for the last point. Politically we are due to hear much less. Not least from the IMF, about China, the Brics and 'globalisation' being the light of the world in which we live. As the IMF has always pointed out, the basic foundations of globalisation have been far more by the end of the ascendant period of capitalism, i.e. by the beginning of the twentieth century, and it was precisely at this point that the British economy entered its historical crisis. The bourgeoisie have essentially come to use the term globalisation to express their (ill-founded) hope that huge dynamic growth in emerging economies and China in particular would somehow sustain the stagnating economies of the West. But since the 1990s, in particular, underlines how uncompetitive the western economies are, it is difficult to follow this line of reasoning. Of course, the world has sold huge volumes of raw materials to China and also sophisticated engineering (even Britain sells in the latter category to China). But the overall trade deficit of the West with China shows the real balance of economic power and the decline of the older industrial economies.

At the same time, countries like China are highly dependent on the western economies as markets for the mass of commodities that they have been churning out at a frenetic rate thanks to the brutal exploitation of their workforce. With the recession in the West, China and the other Brics are now beginning to suffer in their turn. Faced with this rather worrying scenario, the IMF is proposing now to institute British economic management as the new beacon of the world to replace China? This is quite a turnaround.

"At April, Olivier Blanchard, IMF chief economist, said: "In the UK, growth was down. And so on, along

Syria intervention vote Impasse of British imperialism

Parliament's rejection of the government's motion of support for military action in Syria was seen by many as a reassertion of democracy. Labour showing a bit of backbone at last! Following endless debate about the vote in Parliament attracted a lot of attention not only in the media but also amongst the popu- lar media. The government has been divided, but many are deeply concerned about what is going to happen in Syria and the Middle East. However, the government was not quite down for the "popular will"; rather it graphically illustrated the impasse of British imperialism. The closure of the vote expressed just how divided the British public is not only over Syria but its whole imperialist strategy.

Once Britain imperialised with its empire. Following the loss of Empire as the result of two world wars, it became the US' loyal lieutenant during the Cold War. This is not the time despite be- ing a second rate military power it could have a place at the top table, or as parts of the ruling class like the Gulf war, just move it forward.

With the disappearance of the old block system British imperialism has been faced with the inc- reasingly complex problems of how best to defend its own interests. Should it simply remain loyal to the US? Move more towards Europe, or somehow try to maintain a degree of independence itself as challenges as they arrived? This strategic choice has become increasingly problematic as the world has sunk deeper and deeper into economic and international isolation. Indeed, it was a pretty easy decision for the British ruling class to go along with the US in invading Iraq. It was the ruling class that saw about the dangers of the new world order. British imperialism however did not come out of this world. Only 12 years later however the decision to back the US in the 2nd Gulf war was more problematic because parts of the ruling class came to the view that this would form the opening of linking the national interest so closely to that of the US. Blair and the pro-US fraction that he represented drove through the decision however, using every deviant trick in the book to get sup- port. However, far from furthering the national interest it suffered a bitter humiliation at hand of American imperialism. Support the US has become extremely costly. Thus the cost of supporting US military action means accepting not being able to punch above one's weight, and being a secondary power. You are forced to support the US, those who say closer relations with Europe are the way forwards, but this increasingly means a complex game of alliances against the rising powers of German imperialism. The Cameron team with the backing of much of the ruling class had been pur- suing a policy of seeking to build relations with the growing powers such as India, Brazil, Turkey, as well as commercial relations with China. However, all the relations that the British bourgeoisie have with Europe and the US are increas- ingly unstable because of its increasing inability to use its close relations with the US to counteract its rivals.

It is in this context that we have to understand the events around the vote on Syria. The divisions were plain to see and indeed the deep division in the ruling class. To go along meant being pulled further into the chaos whereas of the US decision to dis- plete military action in Syria in order to try and display US military superiority but at the possible cost of strategic relations with the other major military leaders openly their stated opposition to becoming involved: "a head of the nacy, Lord West, and a former head of MI6, Sir John Dannatt, reflected widespread criticism within the military and defence circles by pointing scorn on claims by ministers that military action will mean the UK or the US were taking sides in the civil war. As regards a limited strike, this was always an impossible notion," said Dannatt. "Any use of explosive ordnance by the west, for what- ever reason, was not something that was committed to in our participation in the Syrian civil war irreversibly." (The Guardian, 31.8.2013). The historical signifi- cance of not supporting the US was clearly stated by a former adviser to the Foreign and Defence secretaries, Chris Adams, who said “I he vote would relieve Britain of its ‘imperial pres- sure’ and stop it trying to punch above its weight on the world stage” 

It was the loss of this role on the world stage that concerned those in favour of supporting the US’s action. This was made clear by Michael Clarke, the director general of the Royal United Services Institute (one of Britain’s imperialist’s main think tanks). “There is a danger it could become a tipping point where the UK falls into strategic irrelevance in US eyes. We can be all friendly, respected, kith and kin, etc... like the Dutch but just not be taken seriously as a strategically relevant player in security matters.”

The events around the US’s announcement that it was going to strike Syria have thus placed the British ruling class on the rack.

The US however, also suffered through these events. Its international authority was further under- mined in its inability to get the support of its partner in the ‘special relationship’. British impe- rialism may now be the US’s ‘oldest ally’ but it is in danger of being repositioned as a junior partner and party to the US’s global strategy.

The US will not forgive British imperialism easily. Obama’s refusal to hold a meeting with Cameron at the G20 meeting in Russia was a very public snub, which very visibly demonstrated the price of not supporting them. The other major imperialist powers will also take note of this. This decision not to back the US whilst being determined to support it already points to a deepening of the national interest, also reflected a self-inflict- ed wound. The blatant manipulation of public opinion over the 2nd Gulf war, Blair’s talk about: Weapons of Mass Destruction etc, and the trus- tle and tragedy that unfolded in Iraq afterwards, was a sign of this. This is not a sign of historical weakness. The US will not forgive British imperialism.

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Zero hours

Insecurity faces the whole working class

A s austerity bites and capitalism shows its true face, Britain is a place of crisis and conflict. For ways to offset its crisis onto the working class, the recent revelations of the explosion in zero hours contracts are prime examples of the sort of policies and programmes presented by the mainstream parties. The zero hours contracts are just another example of how the bosses are fighting back. And also this is a very worrying sign of the sort of all this public: while politicians hypocritically wage indignant about these contracts, they hope to push these through without any serious debate for the benefit of the wealthy minority and against the interests of the working class. This issue also has the advantage of being one where we can be encouraged to demand the protection of the state through legislation against abuses by private employers, although this is an illusion as long as the situation is left in the hands of the employers. Meanwhile Vince Cable can bleat that: “well it’s not ideal, but at least it allows for ‘flexibility’ for employers and workers.

Damn lies and statistics

The official statistics on zero hours are rubbish, as we can see from the ONS (Office of National Statistics) estimate of 250,000 on such contracts which is less than the number affected in the care sector alone. The Work Foundation estimates there are one million, and Unite has now estimated 5.5 million based on a survey of 5,000 of its members. Whatever model or type of zero hours and other precarious and flexible work practices create a vast reserve pool of labour which nominally can appear as employed, allowing Cameron to boast of “creating” thousands of new jobs. One million or 5.5, the figures for the growth in zero hours contracts are clearly defined, there has been a case for many years in the fast food industry. The opt out clause when there is criticism of the low pay and welfare precariousness in zero hours contracts is that they are “franchised” - out and the contracts have nothing to do with the major fast food chains. Even so, McDonald’s have admitted their 14,800 workers on zero hour contracts are “agreing to end in 2012 72,000 zero hours contracts? Reports don’t tell us whether the new arrangements will be any better for the workers.”

The development of the recession and the austerity bites and capitalism shows its true face, the workers and their families have no option but to demand legislation against the abuses by the wealthy minority and against the interests of the working class. The problem is that the American bourgeoisie and other western bourgeoisies have been through a serious version in Afghanistan and Iraq, countries which are also in a total mess. How could they intervene in Syria without finding themselves in the same situation? This has ruled out this option for the time being. The real option is to push these through the bosses and the state use every trick to divide the workers as a whole. To push these through the bosses and the state use all sorts of tricks to isolate and divide workers as much as possible. What workers need is unity, solidarity and confidence in our ability to fight.

Britain 3

Syria: Imperialist war or class solidarity

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Only the proletariat can put an end to this barbarism

The proletariat cannot remain indifferent to all this barbarism. It is the exploited who are the main victims of the imperialist clerics. Whether it’s Shia, Sunni, secular, or Christian being massacred, it makes no difference. There is a natural and healthy human reaction to want to do something about this right away, to stop these abominable crimes. This is a sentiment which the grand bourgeoisie is trying to exploit by exploiting the yawning gap between the workers and the imperialist clerics, the warlike adventures in the name of ‘humanitarian’ causes. And each time the world situation gets more serious

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It’s not just in Britain where we’ve seen populations resorting to food banks. Over this past year we have witnessed a steady increase: workers being forced into queuing for food hand-outs in order to live. However, these are economies which are openly bankrupt and these are emergency measures, are they not? But even in a much more prosperous country and economy such as Canada we are seeing the same thing.

The flight back

They write again to the Hovis workers (Premier Foods) in Wigan the beginnings of a fight back. After 400 fellow workers at Hovis in Lowestoft were given redundancies at the beginnings of this year, the Wigan bakery workers began a series of strikes at the beginning of August. 30 Wigan Hovis workers were given redundancies and management announced that hourly pay was being reduced from £13 per hour to £8.60 an hour and working hours cut, while management brought in agency staff to take up the short full. In an interview with Socialist Worker (03.09.13) one worker said: “We’re not having it. They always want something from us – pensions, wages, conditions. It’s time to draw a line.”

The Wigan bakery workers have embarked on a series of one-day strikes. Their strike had been positive, with lorry-drivers and other workers refusing to cross pickets. However, there are inherent dangers in this tactic of rolling strikes (as the last postal workers’ strike demonstrated). The union, Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) has demonstrated its ability to negotiate the 400 London redundancies and were quick to demand rolling strikes. The use of agency staff at the same time as redundancies and other attacks has the potential to cause divisions among the workers to the benefit of the bosses. Therefore it is essential to organise and mobilise workers to take up the fight back. Over the year so far)

Syria: Imperialist war or class solidarity

Hunger in the ‘rich world’

The rise in the use of food banks has reached huge proportions. The food banks, originally intended for the most destitute within society, are starting to be used across all sections of the working class, often including those parts which might have previously seen themselves as belonging to the ‘middle class’. The figures produced by the Trussel Trust charity (a government funded charity) are revealing. Last year 260,000 people were helped by food banks, this year 400,000 have been helped. In the hope of gaining some employment workers today face widespread attacks through precarious work, falling real wages, reductions in benefits, reduced health and social care. In order to try and cut costs the government has already introduced 30 Wigan Hovis workers were given redundancies and management announced that hourly pay was being reduced from £13 per hour to £8.60 an hour and working hours cut, while management brought in agency staff to take up the short full. In an interview with Socialist Worker (03.09.13) one worker said: “We’re not having it. They always want something from us – pensions, wages, conditions. It’s time to draw a line.”

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Extract from the resolution on the international situation
Imperialist tensions in the phase of decomposition

We are publishing the point on imperialist tensions from the resolution on the international situation, adopted by the last international congress of the ICC. The whole resolution, and a balance sheet of our 20th congress, will soon be available on our website.

1 A century ago the capitalist mode of production entered its period of historical decline, with the outbreak of the first international congress of the First World War which marked the passage from the ‘Belle Époque’, the high point of bourgeois society, to the ‘epoch of wars and revolutions’ which was defined by the Congresses of the First International at its first congress in 1913. Since then, capitalism has continued to sink into barbarism, most notably in the context of the Second World War, which cost 50 million lives. And if the period of ‘prosperity’ which followed this horrific butchery could now be defined as such, this system had also already announced a half century before: the capitalist mode of production could not escape the destiny of the momentary crisis – it too, having constituted a progressive step in human history, had become an obstacle to the development of productive forces and the progress of humanity. The time for its overthrow and its replacement by another society had arrived.

2 At the same time that it showed the historic dead end that the capitalist system now faced, this crisis, open like the one in 1914, represented a crisis of the alternative between generalised imperialist war and the development of decisive proletarian struggles with the perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Faced with the crisis of the 1930s, the world proletariat, which had been ideologically crushed by the defeat of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave, had not been able to cope with its own response, leaving the bourgeoisie to impose a new world war. By contrast, with the first blows of the open crisis at the end of the 1960s, the proletariat had taken revenge on this system at the May 1968 in France, the ‘Hot Autumn’ in Italy 1969, the massive strikes of the workers in Poland in 1970, and many others, combats less spectacular but no less significant as a warning for better capitalized society. The counter-revolution was over. In this new situation, the bourgeoisie did not have a free hand to establish the ‘normal’ economy, “lulling for more than four decades marked by the world economic getting more and more bogged down and by international tensions generated by the conditions of the exploited. During these decades, the working class waged many resistance struggles. However, even though it did not suffer a decisive defeat which could have overturned the historic course, it was not able to develop its struggles and its consciousness to the point of offering society the outline of a revolutionary perspective.

3 In this situation, the bourgeoisie’s “two decisive - and antagonistic - classes confront each other without either being able to impose its own definitive reaction, history nonetheless has not just come to an end, for the moment, openly to set forward its own can only lead to a situation of generalised decomposition. Capitalism is rotting on its feet, its crisis is final, phase in the decadence of capitalism”, International Review 62).

Thus a new phase in the decadence of capitalism opened up a quarter of a century ago, the phase where the phenomenon of decomposition has be-

1 the question of imperialism is the first question of the resolution. It was on this that the Congresses of the First World War placed the destruction of the environment, the economic crisis and lastly the class struggle.

come a decisive element in the life of the whole of society.

2 the area where the decomposition of capitalism is accentuated is one of its fundamental characteristics. This area is where, in a more or less spectacular way, that is to say, in a more or less immediate manner, the bourgeoisie’s inability to offer the slightest response, history nonetheless does not just defeat which could have overturned the historic consciousness to the point of offering society the verdict which revolutionaries had already proposed in the 1870s.

3 In the same spirit, revolutionaries have in their 20th Congress of the ICC, pointed out the international congress of the ICC which was not enough to cope with its own response, leaving the bourgeoisie to impose a new world war. By contrast, with the first blows of the open crisis at the end of the 1960s, the proletariat had taken revenge on this system at the May 1968 in France, the ‘Hot Autumn’ in Italy 1969, the massive strikes of the workers in Poland in 1970, and many others, combats less spectacular but no less significant as a warning for better capitalized society. The counter-revolution was over. In this new situation, the bourgeoisie did not have a free hand to establish the ‘normal’ economy, “lulling for more than four decades marked by the world economic getting more and more bogged down and by international tensions generated by the conditions of the exploited. During these decades, the working class waged many resistance struggles. However, even though it did not suffer a decisive defeat which could have overturned the historic course, it was not able to develop its struggles and its consciousness to the point of offering society the outline of a revolutionary perspective.

4 In fact, these different conflicts graphically illustrate the characteristics of the final phase of decadence of capitalism, the 20th century. However, it is worth noting that the problems that we are facing, despite a considerable cost at the economic and above all human and political levels.

5 This said, the irrational character of war that we are facing it is a new phase of decomposition. This has been clearly illustrated by the American adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars also have an immense military superiority, but this did not enable it to obtain the objectives it was seeking: stabilising Iraq and Afghanistan and forcing them into a struggle for survival against NATO. The US, the pulled withdrawal of American and NATO troops from Iraq and Afghanistan is leaving these countries in an atmosphere of instability, threatening to aggravate the instability of the whole region. At the same time, the other participants in these military adventures have jumped or will jump ship in dispersed order.

6 During the last period, the chaotic nature of the imperialist tensions and conflicts has been illustrated once again with the situations in the Middle East – Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria – where we are witnessing conflicts which bring with them the threat of a much wider extension and destabilisation. In the Far East we’re facing rising tensions between the states of the region. Thus in recent months there have been tensions involving a number of states from the Pacific Rim, such as China and Japan have been in dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Japan and South Korea over the island of Takeshima/Dokdo, while there are other tensions involving Taiwan, Vietnam and Buma. But the most spectacular conflict is obviously the one ranging North Korea against South Korea, China and the USA. In the Middle East, the economic crisis, North Korea has staked the stakes on the military, with the aim of putting press-ures on the USA, and especially on the USA, in or-der to gain a certain number of military advantages. But this adventurer policy creates two very serious tendencies, the one on the one hand, which involves, even if in a limited manner, the Chi-nese giant, which remains one of North Korea’s only allies, and which is more and more pushing forward its imperialist interests wherever it can, in the Far East of course, but also in the Middle East, through its alliance with Iran (which is its main supplier of hydrocarbons), and also in Africa where a growing economic presence is aimed at preparing the ground for a future military presence which is the means to establish it. On the other hand, the adventurer policy of the North Korean state, a state whose brutal police rule in evidence of its food policy is still continued, amounts to jump- ing out of hand, of an uncontrolled process creat- ing a new focus for direct military conflicts whose consequences are hard to predict. Indeed, we can already say would be a further tragic epi-sode to add to the long list of expressions of mili-tary barbarism ravaging the planet today.

7 The conflict in Syria followed on from the ‘Arab Spring’ which, by weakening the Assad regime, opened up a Pandora’s Box of contradictions and conflicts which the iron hand of this regime had managed to keep under control for decades. The western countries, the US in particular in favour of Assad’s departure but they are quite incapable of coming up with an alternative, given that what has to be established is. On the other hand, the adventurer policy of the North Korean state, a state whose brutal police rule in evidence of its food policy is still continued, amounts to jump- ing out of hand, of an uncontrolled process creat- ing a new focus for direct military conflicts whose consequences are hard to predict. Indeed, we can already say would be a further tragic epi-sode to add to the long list of expressions of mili-tary barbarism ravaging the planet today.

This dramatic scenario must also stimulate the proletariat in its revolutionary efforts, because the decay of capitalism can enable life to flourish once again.
 Against Morsi, against the military: for class struggle!

In our previous article analysing the situation in Egypt and the region we concluded: "capitalism has accumulated the means to destroy all human life on the planet. The collapse of social life and the unchecked, needlessly armed gangsterism – that’s the road of barbarism indicated by what’s happening right now in Syria. The revolt of the exploited and the oppressed, their massive struggle in defence of human dignity, of a real future – that’s the promise of the revolutions in Turkey and Brazil. Egypt stands at the crossroads of these two diametrically opposed choices, and in this sense it is a symbol of the dilemma facing the whole human species".

The recent events which have taken place and accelerated during the month of August in Egypt following the reactions to the army coup against former president Morsi, in particular the bloody repression of the Muslim Brotherhood which peaked on the 14th August, bear witness to the whole gravity of this historic situation and confirm this idea of a “crossroads” for the whole of humanity.

Getting caught up in the logic of civil war

The quagmire of decomposition, of economic and social crisis, the corruption and disintegrative processes of the Morsi government (elected in June 2012) led the population back to the streets to express their discontent with the growing poverty and insecurity. It was this deteriorating situation, aggravated by the political irony and endless provocations of the Muslim Brotherhood, which pushed the Egyptian army to carry out the coup of 3 July, deposing President Morsi from office. Parallel to this, the social agitation continued, stoking up very dangerous tensions and some bloody confrontations.

This was nothing less than a juggernaut heading towards civil war. The only force capable of holding back the catastrophe was the opposition movement which appeared in Tahrir Square and continued its struggle, in the wave of strikes and protests, which eventually convinced the ruling class to under certain conditions to return Morsi to power.

The Egyptian working class is ‘decadent’

The pro and anti-Morsi elements, resulting in a series of dramatic events, particularly among the Muslim Brotherhood. The pro-Morsi demonstrations and sit-ins, which gathered together men, women and children, were opposed by the army and a paramilitary force, the army assaulted left over a thousand dead. Martial law, in the shape of a state of emergency and a curfew, was imposed in Cairo and 13 provinces. A number of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and activists (over 2000) were arrested, including the ‘supreme leader’ Mohammed Badie and many ordinary members of whom died in prison after an escape attempt.

Since then, the demonstrations, targets for theburden of the third world and the army, have become less numerous. In maintaining order in this manner, the army and the police have won the support of the majority of the population who see the Muslim Brotherhood as ‘terrorists’. This support for the army and the state, mixed up with a growing anti-Islamist feeling, but tainted with nationalism, can only weaken the proletariat, which risks being caught up in the negative logic of the situation. This is all the more true in the rejection of religious fundamentalism is fed by the democratic mystification which still retains a great deal of strength.

Unlike the great demonstrations in Tahrir Square which led to the downfall of Mubarak and where ordinary people, from north and south, east and west, took to the streets to demand their freedom, where they were relatively protected, the terror reigning today has led to a spectacular moral re-rerection, such as the collective rape of women in the middle of demonstrations, and the pogrom atmosphere against the Copts (hundreds of churches were burned and a number of Copts have been killed).

As we wrote in our previous article: “The working class in Egypt is a much more formidable force than it was in the Tahrir Square or Syria. It has a long tradition of militant struggle against the state and its official trade union tentacles, going back 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 represented a real riposte to the military coup of 2011, which was marked by a strong working class impetus, both in the tendencies towards self-organisation which appeared in Tahrir Square and other neighbourhoods, and in the wave of strikes and protests which eventually convinced the ruling class to under certain conditions to return Morsi to power.”

On the same thread A. Simpleton takes up a question about ecology:

It took more than a minute - if - and of course misses your date by 6 years (i) but do I get a consolation prize or badge or something?

I suppose someone will come up with a citation about a revolutionary who saw an ecological crisis in 1870 any minute now! cheeky’s

“Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on any signs of human virtue. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain pastureland, never dreamed that by removing the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present floodstom from those countries. The people of the Nile, the Ganges and the Indus, who overgrazed the alps and burnt the pastures on the southern slopes, so carefully cultivated on the northern slopes, they had no inking that by doing so they were cutting at the roots of the dairy industry in their region; they had still less inkling that they were thereby depriving their mountain springs of water for the greater part of the year, and making it possible for them to pour still more torrentious flows on the plains during the rainy season. Those who spread the potato in Europe were not aware that with these farinaceous cereals they were at the same time spreading scrofula. Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brains, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery consists of the fact that we have incorporated into our consciousness and into our habits ways of life which Mubarak had already seen as a ‘state within the state’.

The international context, above all the free for all between all the big global powers, is now serving to exacerbate all these inherent tensions. In the Middle East itself, the growing cleavage between Qatar and Saudi Arabia on the one hand, which are close to the US despite their extreme Wahhabite ideology, and Egypt on the other, is pouring oil on the fire. This is why the US can’t draw back from financing the Egyptian army (to the tune of at least 80%), even though it can see that the situation is getting more and more out of control.

Capitalism has nothing to offer but poverty and chaos. Whatever bourgeois gang is in power, the situation of the millions of solution can only get worse. But contrary to what the bourgeoisie and its media has been able to do – that is to keep in line, to individualise, to politically appropriate – there is only one way out of the quagmire – an outright socialist transformation for the whole of humanity.

The tragic events which have taken place and continue to happen right now in Syria. The revolt of the Syrian people, which united millions in the streets, has been brutalised and obstructed. The revolt of the Syrian people is the expression of the crisis which is taking place in the whole of the Middle East, is a crossroads for the whole of humanity.

Discuss with the ICC and others through our online discussion forum

3. The Muslim Brotherhood, constituted by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928, is currently represented in a number of Arab countries. It had a retrograde, nationalist programme until 2011. It was particularly influential in Egypt, where Sunnism was the orthodoxy of choice. It was represented by the late Mohammed Badie, the leader of the organisation which appeared in Tahrir Square and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain pastureland, never dreamed that by removing the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present floodstom from those countries.
The alternative to capitalism

The alternative to capitalism is published by The Open Era Press, London. It is a book of wide range of texts from political currents such as the SPGB, left communism and situationism (www.socialiststudies.org.uk). The book is an essay written by John Crump which was first published in 1986 and 1987. It’s not part of the SPGB’s book list, although the book was sent to us for review by contraries who are members of the organisation. In his preface, the book’s editor, member, John Crump left the SPGB in the 1970s, criticising the party’s parliamentary conception of revolution and arguing – as we shall see – that the resolutions of the SPGB, which supposedly created a socialist organisation in the world, in opposition to the ‘hostility clause’ contained in its 1904 statement of principles. Despite these criticisms, relations between Crump and the SPGB seem to have remained fraternal until his death in 2005, and it would also seem that one of the reasons why the Socialist Studies group split from the party (or as it sees it ‘reconstituted the SPGB’) in 1991 was that Crump had pushed the SPGB in certain untraditional directions.

The first part of the book is a straightforward account of what capitalism actually is, a task that is as necessary as ever given the immense sea of confusion which surrounds the term. The idea that ‘capitalism’ is some sort of an enterprise or ownership, a conception shared both by the openly capitalist right and the allegedly anti-capitalist left, still has to be confronted and refuted. Of the various arguments involving the ‘Occupy’ movements of 2011, where notions of making the rich pay their taxes, abolishing banks, defining historic debts and most importantly, defining the ‘Occupy’ as a condition of mutual solidarity towards each other, an attitude that is sadly missing in today’s proletarian movement, three are extremely tenacious despite the waning influence of the established organisations of the left which are so often discussed in the field.

We have few criticisms of this section of the book. The book contains a straightforward account of what capitalism is, an outcome of the ‘thin red line’. It then goes on to do what the SPGB has been doing for over a hundred years now: defend the fundamental principle that socialism has been doing for over a hundred years now: defend the fundamental principle that socialism has always been prepared to debate with anyone, irrespective of their politics, even if they are wrong. The way in which the ‘Occupy’ has been defined by the book is an essential step towards defining the ‘Occupy’ as a condition of mutual solidarity towards each other, an attitude that is sadly missing in today’s proletarian political movement.

At the end of the essay Crump speculates that it might be in future necessary to make a clear distinction between: ‘opposition to any notion of a transitional society. In his view socialism must be introduced immediately as the only viable alternative.’

‘One feature which capitalism and socialism have in common is their all-or-nothing quality, their intensity; to create a world that can accommodate socialism rather than capitalism will be every bit as intense as the revolution before it. For all these reasons, a phase of transition between capitalism and communism will be inevitable.

This is a major discussion and we can’t hope to take it very far here. But one thing does need to be said. Crump considers that the rejection of a transition period could be a sixth key point demarcating real socialists from apologists for capitalism, but we would suggest that some of the other differences among the ‘non-socialist markets’ could become much more crucial well before the working class had assumed political power: in particular, we would expect that communists would be involved in a real political struggle against organisations and tendencies who argued that the councils should submit to this or that party ‘by right’ – against those who argued that instead of being diametrically opposed to one another, councils and parliament can co-exist, a fatal error that helped bury the German revolution (and thus the Russian revolution as well) in 1918-19.

Amos, September 2013
Just one time in history have the real details and motivation of the political police been examined and exposed by revolutionaries. This was when the archives of the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana, fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks and were analyzed by the revolutionary Victor Serge, which resulted in his book What everyone should know about the Tsarist secret police (1925). In it he is clear that the state apparatus is not just a war machine for competing groups, but a machine for the repression of the population. This is an incredible read for what Serge describes as the “prototype of the modern political police”. By 1900, the Okhrana was organised internationally and by 1905 it was engaging in highly sophisticated levels of espionage across Russia with extensive spying networks. To keep track of all this, spies would spy on spies and spies would spy on them, and informers, secret agents, provocateurs, police spies were everywhere in Russia: “The police had to see everything, know, understand and have power over everyone. The strength and perfection of their machinery appears all the more terrible because of the unexpected forces they dragged up from the depth of the human soul”. You can see from reading the book how paranoid the bourgeoisie was about the working class, and we have had a hundred years of state capitalism since then to reinforce and refine their fears and their machines of repression.

Serge denounces “legality” and the respect for it as an element of class collaboration in much the same way as “accountability” and “transparency” - and indeed “legality” - are used around the NSA issue today. This naïveté “ignores the real role of the state and the deceptive nature of democracy; in short, the first principles of class struggle”. He doesn’t at all underestimate the “powerful and cunning adversary” and from this denounces the idea of the “idyllic revolution”. In respect of the undercover forces at work today, Serge gives some considerable insight: “Police provocation is above all the weapon – or the curse – of decomposing regimes. Conscious of their impotence to prevent what is going on, the police incite initiatives which the protection of their masters”. This book was a reflection of the counter-revolution, of the dark days leading up to and coming after World War II. The strength and perhaps the impotence of the police in the UK and the US today are very much a reality. But we have more than enough evidence that all the state’s surveillance and policing by a democratic state, and the use of electronic field that can be switched off, show the potential difficulties for the ruling class. There were very strong strikes in the eastern bloc countries, Hungary, Poland, Russia in the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, despite the all-pervasive nature of the state apparatus, particularly their interior ministries and their trade union spying networks.

In East Germany the 1953 workers’ strikes knocked the repressive apparatus of the state, including the unions, sideways, despite its reliance on one of the biggest bodies of secret police in the world, the Stasi - an organisation that went to the extent of collecting sweat samples from people and storing them in tubes in order to identify them later. George Orwell’s book, with its story of the state overlooking every aspect of one’s life, every corner of it, was a horror story of the counter-revolution. It’s a story of perpetual warfare generated to keep the population behind the state, of the national socialism of Big Brother and the hopelessness of rebellion. The rebel hero, Winston Smith, eventually has all the spark of revolt snuffed out of him and any hope of a different society is completely extinguished. This book was a reflection of the counter-revolution, of the dark days leading up to and coming out of the Second World War when the whole class seemed totally helpless, impotent and atomised vis-a-vis the state. But, in reality, even in the depths of this period of counter-revolution, even in places like Nazi Germany or the police states of the eastern bloc and the militarised democracies, there were still acts of revolt, compassion, solidarity, protests and strikes, some major, some very minor in character but all the more significant given the period that they took place in.

It’s true that today Orwell’s nightmare vision of a citizen’s every step being followed by the state is very much a reality. But we have more than enough evidence that all the state’s surveillance and all the state’s bloodhounds cannot control a population in revolt and particularly the working class. The recent demonstrations and protests across the world, even if greatly facilitated by an exploitation of its masters”.

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Politics, see the importance of the intervention of a communist press.

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The spying game

a spontaneous, elementary action resulting from the demoralisation of a police force at its wit’s end, overtaken by events, which cannot perform tasks infinitely above its capacities, and nonetheless wants to justify the expectations and expenditure of its masters”. And finally on Serge, in line with our position above: “There is no force in the world which can hold back the revolutionary tide when it rises and all the police forces, however Machiavellian, scientific or criminal, are virtually impotent against it”.

“The 1984” Counter-revolution...

There’s been lots of talk in the media about these leaked secrets showing how we have arrived at George Orwell’s nightmare vision of 1984 and “Big Brother is Watching You”, with some saying that we have gone well beyond it. Orwell’s 1949 book, with its story of the state overlooking every aspect of one’s life, every corner of it, was a horror story of the counter-revolution. It’s a story of perpetual warfare generated to keep the population behind the state, of the national socialism of Big Brother and the hopelessness of rebellion. The rebel hero, Winston Smith, eventually has all the spark of revolt snuffed out of him and any hope of a different society is completely extinguished. This book was a reflection of the counter-revolution, of the dark days leading up to and coming out of the Second World War when the whole class seemed totally helpless, impotent and atomised vis-a-vis the state. But, in reality, even in the depths of this period of counter-revolution, even in places like Nazi Germany or the police states of the eastern bloc and the militarised democracies, there were still acts of revolt, compassion, solidarity, protests and strikes, some major, some very minor in character but all the more significant given the period that they took place in.

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The recent revelations about the extent of surveillance and espionage conducted on large and small states, as exposed by the former National Security Agency operative Edward Snowden, shouldn’t come as a surprise. There are some historical novi-

ations which are quite revealing about the way the state uses the development of technology, but in essence this latest scandal just confirms what we already know about the development of state capitalism and the paranoia of the bourgeoisie; and we can only hope that all of the tech-

nologies revealed have already been understood by even more refined methods. The Wikileaks re-

lease of classified US documents three years ago, given the way it was accepted, amply demonstrated that spying and lying are part of the stock-in-trade of the ruling class.

There is nothing new about revelations that our rulers are a ruthless, murderous, Machia-

vellian, conspiratorial class. It would be naïve for revolutionaries to think otherwise because this would directly lead to fostering illusions in the democratic state and the idea that this state would abide by the rules or operate fairly. In general, throughout history, the workers’ movement has tended to underestimate the Machiavellianism of the bourgeoisie and it has paid a great price for do-

ing so. The enormous reach and depth of state surve-

illance that has recently been unmasked is thus not new, but it is much more developed and the true face of a capitalist society which is driven by the cancers of militarism, terrorism (for the most part fosters direct and indirectly by the major powers, but as well as the imperative need to use its spies, police and secret agencies as weapons of repression and oppression against the working class) and ideological propaganda of the system. This is just as true of the velvet-glove democracies as of the iron-fist totalitarian regimes - the yoke and fetters of the relationship of capital and they provide themselves with the tools to maintain that dictatorship, of which spying is just a part. Behind all the fuss about state surve-

illance, despite all the outrage and protest from left to right, these are the very principles of capitalist society being put to work and the outrage tends to cover up this reality. Spying has always been an important tool in class societies, all the more so in capitalist society and particularly a capitalist society in its decadent phase where the size and intensity of the state’s espionage machine reaches new extents and depths.

The basis and continuity of capitalism’s spying game.

There are at least three factors that underlie the spying activities of the capitalist state:
- the economic competition which breeds indus-

trial espionage - the more frantic and desperate the competition, the more so the spying around it. The recent revelations showed that this included the NSA spying on embassies and other institu-

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