The reality of the present attacks

The fact that the NHS would face a bed crisis this winter was well known in September, with NHS England noting hospitals planned to open 3,000 and free up a similar number to cope. However, a BMA report shows that roughly 150,000 beds have been lost over the last 30 years, roughly half of them the general and acute beds needed for emergency admissions. The Nuffield foundation estimates that spending on the NHS needs to grow by 4.3% a year to cope with an ageing population till 2022/3, but based on figures supplied by the ONS (Office for National Statistics) it will only grow by 0.7%, and in the coming year, 2018/9, it will grow only 0.4%. Of course, a cash-starved NHS also means attacks on the workers in it, who have not only been expected to do more with less, but are also among the 3 million public sector workers subject to a pay freeze or a pay cut. How does ‘no more cuts’ work when it’s the first thing you do?

The current government was elected on a manifesto that pledged to cut £12 billion from the welfare bill. Freezing working-age benefits until 2020, originally announced in 2015, will save an estimated £12.2 billion or 6%. The IFS (Institute for Fiscal Studies) estimate this will put 470,000 more people into poverty. But the government is also making cuts elsewhere to achieve its target reduction. Bringing support for individuals on ESA (for the sick) into line with the JSA rate (for the unemployed) which applies to all new claimants from April 2017 is expected to save £404 million by 2020-21. These days our rulers like to call this a ‘reform’, which is exactly the opposite from the reforms which the working class could fight for in the 19th Century: measures that improved conditions for the whole working class such as the 10 hour day and then the 8 hour day. The latest such measure is Universal Credit, which is being rolled out to replace working-age means-tested benefits, both for those in and out of work, including those on low incomes with families, the sick, unemployed and carers. This comes with a 4 week delay in payment and the possibility of imposing tough sanctions, or cuts in payment, for those deemed not to be trying hard enough. Cuts to the family element, no longer paid beyond the second child, will make more savings. These welfare cuts “contribute to an outlook for income growth over the next four years that sharply increases inequality. The combination of plateauing employment growth, a renewed pay squeeze across the economy and sharp benefit cuts create the prospect of falling incomes in the bottom half of the distribution and the biggest rise in inequality since the final Thatcher term.”

One indication of how the crisis of capitalism is hitting an area is unemployment – capital can only make a profit by exploiting workers, so the unemployed mean lost profit. If you look at the official unemployment figures based on those claiming jobseeker benefits you would be led to think it had fallen to 785,000 or 4.3%, better than at any time since the 1970s. However, if you add in those who are seeking and available for work and those parked on incapacity benefits the number rises to 2.3 million, with the young particularly badly hit. Also we know that many jobs today are low paid, precarious and often zero hours contracts, so that those in work can be little or no better off than the unemployed. Unemployment started to rise at the end of the post-war boom in the late 1960s, but really took off at the end of the 70s (when it rose to around a million under a Labour government) rising to more than 3 million in the 80s (under the Thatcher government). At that stage the figures were massaged when millions were pushed into incapacity benefit, a tactic that continues to be used today. We see cuts in services, such as the NHS, pay frozen or below inflation rises, benefits frozen or cut, persistent unemployment, and insecure jobs, which overall adds up not just to an increase in inequality but specifically a decrease in the share of wealth going to the working class.

Austerity, the response to the economic crisis by governments of left and right

As we have seen, austerity did not start with Brexit, nor with this Tory government, the previous coalition, or even Margaret Thatcher. It was the response of capital from the very start of the world economic crisis at the end of the 1960s, and included the ‘Social Contract’ brought in by a Labour government in the 1970s to limit wage rises at a time of high inflation. With each new development in the crisis there have been new austerity measures and a great deal of continuity between governments at this level. So the Blair government was elected in 1997 on a promise of keeping to the spending plans of the previous Tory government, and brought in various attacks that were often called “Tory cuts” by those who wanted to pretend that a Labour Party could or should behave differently in office. However the Blair and Brown governments attacked the NHS, causing job losses in the interest of efficiency, and cuts in beds as we have seen, and also brought in benefits cuts described as the ‘New Deal’. Continued on page 3

The Guardian, 30 January 2018

Austerity and poverty: Not just Brexit Not just the Tories

Workers of the world, unite!

International Communist Current in Britain

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In his long political career Winston Churchill epitomised the impalpable defence of British imperial power's best interests, and for this reason he is still an icon for all factions of the British bourgeoisie, who have now recruited him in support of their arguments over Brexit.

In 1953 Churchill supposedly told the House of Commons: “If Britain must choose between Europe and the open sea, she must always choose the open sea.” For the Brexiteers this almost amounts to proof that Churchill was a convinced Europhobe. Except, as supporters of remaining in the EU have pointed out, he never used these words. Churchill loved the sea and it was the symbolic use of the figure of Winston Churchill in order to understand the increasingly delusional world view of parts of the British ruling class.

Faced with the growing dissension within the ruling class, and the Tory party in particular, in response to negotiations around Brexit, it is useful to take a step back and examine the historical roots of some of these divisions. The two articles published on this page both aim to show that the divisions are not merely the result of the fear of losing the symbolic advantage of the US, but are far deeper, and have their origins in the present phase of the historic from divisions within the ruling class, and the Tory party in particular, in response to negotiations around Brexit.
A spontaneous explosion of anger 

Iran is a country with powerful imperialist ambitions which have been checkmated throughout the Middle East; it has seen many uprisings. Although Iran is still suffering from the sanctions imposed by the USA, it has spent huge amounts of money in the war in Yemen, in support of the Saudi-led regime, and its own armed gangs operating at the international level. And it has built up its store of arms against Saudi Arabia. All this has meant austerity for the population. In a context marked by disappointed hopes in the wake of the deal over nuclear weapons agreed with the OPEC oil producing countries, and in the face of the international sanctions and the corruption of the regime, has plunged the majority of the population into poverty and uncertainty. For months now there have been demonstrations of discontent by pensioners, the unemployed (28% of young people are out of work), teachers, workers whose wages aren’t being paid. Finally, the 50% rise in oil and basic foods, like the doubling of the price of eggs has been a trigger. The “revolution of the eggs” – lit the fuse. The movement began to call on the population at large to formulate its own critique of the present economic situation. At the same time, the regime could prepare the ground for repression. But of course, Trump with his provocative statements, has been advising him to stir up discontent within the Sunni religious minority in Iran, as well as among the working class (one-third of the population of Iran is not Persian). In Egypt, after the fall of Mubarak, a civil war between the two main factions of the bourgeoisie – the armed forces and the Muslim Brotherhood – was only averted through the ferocious repression of the latter by the for- mer supported by the USA, and by the Saudi-led imperialist war which is still raging. Whether in Egypt, Syria or Iran, the working class is not only relatively weak, it is also internationally isolated on the question of what it is fighting for. But in Iran, the class consciousness and class identity at a world scale.


democrat as a danger for the working class

A t the same time, despite the courage and fighting spirit of the protesters, the working class was not able to fight on the basis of the old slogans, or able to affirm itself as an autonomous political force. And this was the case even if a minority among the students, notably in Tehran, came out against the re- nationalization slogan "neither Gaza or Lebanon, I will only fight for Iran" with an expression of real proletarian internationalism: "From Gaza to Iran, down with the exploiters". These elements also called for workers’ councils and rejected any idea of being dragged into the battle between the “reformed” and “hard-line” bourgeois classes (or between the armed forces and the students) and the students were particularly targeted in the ar- ress. And in general, despite the weight of democratic illusions the exploited and the working class of Iran were more cautious than firm. The government even announced that the rise in fuel prices would be cancelled. It’s true that symbols of the political and religious authorities were targeted and in some cases burned down; banks, public buildings, religious centres and above all the HQ of the Revolutionary Guards, the regime’s militia. Violent clashes with the police not only to arrest but to number of deaths. Bit by bit the tone of the authorities became more and more radical – Rouhani and Khamenei announced that violence and illegal actions by “troublemakers” would be severely punished. They accused the demonstrators of being “enemies of Iran”, of being “agents of foreign powers, in particular the USA and Saudi Arabia.

And indeed, on the social networks like Twitter, many of the accounts of the bourgeoisie in Saudi, similarly the Mujahedin organisation based in Paris, opposed to the Iranian regime and close to the Saudis, declared that “the protests were instigated by foreign powers. And of course, Trump with his provocative statements and the other right-wing wars a wanton Iran. But the USA, Saudi Arabia and the other imperialist states have been chauvinist. Taking advantage of the movement’s lack of perspective, the regime could prepare the ground for repression. But the movement was not able to forge a united front against the regime and its ayatollah, shouting slogans like “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” and denounc- ing “Israel’s genocidal measures”. The regime’s ministers and officials and its opposition, and the right-wing opposition, and the hardliners and the Ayatollahs, and the middle class are not opposed to these movements, but they are not in a position to lead them. The working class cannot defend itself on its own. The struggle between bourgeois classes is a danger for the working class.

The strugge between bourgeois classes is a danger for the working class

On 28 December, the first sparks of a movement which a few days later turned into a massive movement, began to shake the territory of Iran. The movement seems for the moment to have run out of steam as we write. But over the past few weeks, the regime has feared an- ger against the deterioration of living standards, such as in Morocco, Sudan and above all Tunisia.

Removing the hijab, which women in Iran are forced to wear in public, was a symbolic expression of revolts against the clerical regime

1. See our article in this issue: “Iran: the struggle between bourgeois classes is a danger for the working class”.
2. See our article in this issue: “Iran: the struggle between bourgeois classes is a danger for the working class”.

Continued from page 1

Austerity and poverty Not just Brexit Not just the Tories

In the run up to the 2018 election, the Conserva- tives promised more of the same.

In addition, Labour’s flagship “New Deal” back to work programme is to be scrapped by the To- ries and replaced with “personalised” help, which will include benefit cuts for those unwill- ing to accept work placements: “If you want to be made to work you will be made to work”.

The working class cannot defend itself on its own. The struggle between bourgeois classes is a danger for the working class.

As we show in our article “Democracy in the EU has gone through a crisis”, although there are promising signs of working class resilience, the danger is very real. The current economic crisis represents a blow to the manipulation of the popular anger by the dif- ferent factions of the ruling class. The old conflict between the “reformists” and the “hard-liners” and the “Islamic Republic” has entered a new stage.

While President Rouhani is still in power, the hardliners are in charge. The reformers and the other rival powers want a weakened Iran. But the US under Trump is trying to construct around Israel and Saudi Arabia. Another is the economic situation. Unlike at the military or diplomatic level, Iranian capitalism is in a situation of serious economic progress in recent years. The contrary is the case. The US has said that if the EU does not lift sanctions, it will work to make sure that EU companies in Iran. Now, under Trump, the US sanctions will even be reinforced. Another central point is that the competitiveness of the Iranian national capital is being strained by the highly anachronistic theocratic-clerical bureaucracy, which has no idea how to run a modern capitalist economy, and by the kleptocratic system of the “Revolutionary Guards”. From the point of view of President Rouhani, breaking or at least lim- iting the dominance of these structures would be in the best interest of Iranian capitalism. It would also be a way to counteract the sanctions, the diplomacy and the rhetoric of its enemies abroad.

But on account of the dominant position of the military political apparatus in Iran, the reform- ers have few legal means at their disposal to through their policy. This is why president Rou- hani has been unable to do anything about the US policies. If, on the other hand, the US leaders formulated its own critique of the present economic policy, and of the corruption of the Guards and the hardliners. The administration is still try- ing to use popular discontent as a lever against the hardliners. Such a hazardous policy reveals the backwardness and lack of suppleness of the ruling class in Iran, which is unable to settle the conflicts in its own ranks internally. It was all the more hazardous when one considers that Rouhani was perfectly aware of the popular disappoin- tment since the promised economic boom which was supposed to lift sanctions faces the US. Moreover, Rouhani was apparently not the only one taking chances. The president himself has accused his hard-line oppo- nents of weakening the regime in the name of the people. In Mashhad, which is the bastion of Ibrahim Raisi, the candidate of the hardliners in the presidential elections, the majority of the protest was against the US con- struction is indeed reported to have been “dough to Rouhani”. But as soon as the protests extend- ed, other slogans were begun, such as “down with the Khamenei” (the religious hard-line head of state), “down with the dictatorship”, or “What is free in Iran? Freedom for political prisoners”. Such slogans directed against the regime as a whole indicates that neither of the two main bour- geois fractions is able to manipulate the popular anger at will against the other. This however in no way lessens the danger of the working class, even when it is not being manipulated by the bourgeois class. It is important, in this respect, to remember what happened in Egypt, where popular protest (“Tahrir Square”) involving mass meetings and demonstrations, but also workers’ strikes, swept away the Mubarak regime. This was at the begin- ning of the “Arab Spring”. But this was only pos- sible because the military let it happen (president Mubarak was forced to resign by the generals on politics and above all in the econo- my). In Iran (as in Egypt at the time) foreign pow- ers were also involved. The US and Saudi leaders in Tehran today that the protests in Iran have been instigated by foreign powers (USA, Saudi), but it is by no means clear that the US are not trying to destabilise the Iranian regime. In an interview given in April of last year, the Saudi crown prince Bin Salman declared that the con- flict between his country and its Persian neigh- bour would be fought out “in Iran, not in Saudi Arabia”. One of his think-tanks in Riyadh is has been advising him to stir up discontent within the Sunni religious minority in Iran, as well as among the working class (one-third of the population of Iran is not Persian). In Egypt, after the fall of Mubarak, a civil war between the two main factions of the bourgeoisie – the armed forces and the Muslim Brotherhood – was only averted through the ferocious repression of the latter by the for- mer supported by the USA, and by the Saudi-led imperialist war which is still raging. Whether in Egypt, Syria or Iran, the working class is not only relatively weak, it is also internationally isolated on the question of what it is fighting for. But in Iran, the class consciousness and class identity at a world scale. Without the support of the world proletariat, the working class in Iran can’t win its class struggle. The class struggle in Iran and in other countries is not only about stability of the imperialist war which is still raging. Whether in Egypt, Syria or Iran, the working class is not only relatively weak, it is also internationally isolated on the question of what it is fighting for. But in Iran, the class consciousness and class identity at a world scale. Without the support of the world proletariat, the working class in Iran can’t win its class struggle. The class struggle in Iran and in other countries is not only about this. The class struggle in Iran and in other countries is not only about the imperialist war which is still raging. Whether in Egypt, Syria or Iran, the working class is not only relatively weak, it is also internationally isolated on the question of what it is fighting for. But in Iran, the class consciousness and class identity at a world scale. Without the support of the world proletariat, the working class in Iran can’t win its class struggle. The class struggle in Iran and in other countries is not only about this. The class struggle in Iran and in other countries is not only about
On the degeneration of the Russian revolution

On 11 November 2017 the ICC in the UK organised a day of discussion on the Russian revolution, part of a series of international meetings on this theme, aiming to compare the lessons of the October revolution corresponding to the many falsifications of this crucial experience of working class history. The morning session was introduced by a comrade of the Communist Workers Organisations, who mounted a very thorough argument defending the revolutionary character of the Bolshevik and the October insurrection. The afternoon session, introduced by a comrade of the ICC, focused on the need to understand the degeneration of the revolution, and it is this presentation and the ensuing discussion that we are publishing in this issue of the paper. An account of the whole meeting can be found on our website (http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201712/14536/icc-day-discussion-russian-revolution).

Afternoon session: presentation by the ICC

On the degeneration of the revolution

This presentation will be based mainly on the section in our Manifesto on the October revolution (http://en.internationalism.org/icc/2017/09/14380/manifesto-october-revolution-russia-1917) which deals with the nature of the October revolution and the errors of the Bolsheviks. This section begins as a polemic with other currents in the revolution, linking the program of the Bolsheviks and councilists, whose ancestors may have supported the revolution in the beginning, but who later described it as something more than a bourgeois revolution – in which they are joined by the Socialist Party of Great Britain. For us it is necessary to face a reality of proletarian life under capitalism, and to understand the errors of the Bolsheviks. It is perhaps more ‘consistent’ on the part of the anarchists, some of whom have always rejected Marxism, than it is for the likes of Bakunin, but with Marxist currents like the council communists or the ‘Impossibilists’ of the SPGB, it skirts round the obvious fact that, like the Bolsheviks, they have the same origins in international social democracy. Our method is that of Rosa Luxembourg, and later of the Italian Communist left, who were able to make profound criticisms of the Bolshevik party from a position of total solidarity with the Russian revolution and the Bolsheviks, and who understood that the errors of the latter could only be understood in the context of the isolation of the revolution. Situating the October revolution in the framework of isolation and the terrible siege mounted by the world bourgeoisie is not, as many anarchists claim, an ‘ideological error’. This is not the case with the Bolsheviks, but it does enable us to understand why a proletarian party could make such errors and why they were able to go so far. This is intended to show the limits of these mistakes so that they are not repeated, even if the conditions of any future revolution will be very far from a carbon copy of the Russian experience. These are lessons that could only be drawn in the light of the whole experience, and could not have been fully grasped beforehand. Thus, for example, in State and Revolution Lenin was able to overcome the ‘amnesia’ of the socialist movement regarding the lessons of the Commune – the necessity to dismantle the existing bourgeois state – but he could not yet clearly see why the new Commune state would itself present a danger to the working class. This was only understood already by the Bolsheviks who knew that without the world revolution they were doomed, but they couldn’t know entirely the manner in which this doom would take place. The Bolsheviks’ main fear was that they would be overthrowing by invading (or at least competing with) active bourgeois armies: they didn’t sufficiently grasp the danger of an internal counter-revolution. Furthermore, recognising the necessity of a ‘proletarian country’ was necessary but not sufficient. Contrary to the later views of the Trotskyists, even when they were still a proletarian current, there could not be ‘workers’ states’, albeit degenerated, surviving in a capitalist world for decades. Isolation meant not only that you couldn’t construct socialism: it also meant that you could not sustain the political rule of the working class.

This was definitely clarified by the Russian experience was that the role of the party is not to take political power on behalf of the workers, and not to get entangled with the state apparatus. This idea of the party as a ‘government in waiting’ was to be a lesser or greater extent held by the Marxists in general, not just by the Bolsheviks: Luxemburg for example declared that the Spartacists would only take power on the basis of the revolutionaries’ leadership (even if this idea shows the weight of parliamentary ideas on the workers’ movement: the council system, with the possibility of instant recall of delegates, is incompatible with the idea of the party holding power for a given period since a majority one day could turn into a minority the next. The Bolsheviks didn’t believe in this and were themselves ambivalent on this question: Trotsky, for example, saw why the October insurrection should be carried out in the name of the Bolshevik party alone, whereas the Cheka etc would not be a proletarian organ, and not the party, as Lenin had at one point suggested. But with the isolation of the revolution and the disintegration of any idea of a ‘coalition’ with other revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks began to make a virtue out of a necessity and argue that the whole leadership of the party was only possible because the state was being exercised by the communist party alone. These conceptions reinforced the gulf between the party and the class, while at the same time the attempt to turn the machinery of state prohibited the party from playing its true role as the most radical fraction of the class movement and culminated in the bureaucratic death of the party.

Stalinism – for whom the methods of terror are permanent instruments for the liquidation of a brutal capitalist regime. But the notion that the party must extirpate its dictatorship on behalf of the class against the bosses, which lives on in the proletarian camp. It is defended by the Bourgeoisies above all. But present day Bordigists have been beaten at this point by the very real contribution of the International communist left from which it claims descent, since the latter’s ‘uncritical’ nature, which recognized it would be impossible to use violence against the class and must not become enmeshed in the transitional state; and second, particularly through the work of its successor, the new International, which have rejected the identification between the proletarian dictatorship and the dictatorship of the party. The work of these fractions has led the ICC to a position which is controversial even within those parts of the communist left which reject the Bolshevik idea of the party’s role: the transitional state, though a necessary evil, does not have a proletarian character and is most vulnerable to the pressures of the counter-revolution. The experience of Russia showed it that it may be necessary to create instruments (such as a standing army) which have a definitely statistic function and which contain an inherent threat to the auton- omous organs of the working class. In Russia, the Red Army not only quickly began to reproduce the hierarchical norms of bourgeois armies, but even more crucially, was accompanied by the dissolution of the workers’ militias, which meant that the dictatorship of the party and the state, was only one large step to this. There is no more tendency to develop the idea of the Red Terror, understood as general myths of the working class. In Russia, the Bolsheviks: Luxemburg for example declared that even this idea shows the weight of parliamentary ideas on the workers’ movement: the council system, with the possibility of instant recall of delegates, is incompatible with the idea of the party holding power for a given period since a majority one day could turn into a minority the next. The Bolsheviks didn’t believe in this and were themselves ambivalent on this question: Trotsky, for example, saw why the October insurrection should be carried out in the name of the Bolshevik party alone, whereas the Cheka etc would not be a proletarian organ, and not the party, as Lenin had at one point suggested. But with the isolation of the revolution and the disintegration of any idea of a ‘coalition’ with other revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks began to make a virtue out of a necessity and argue that the whole leadership of the party was only possible because the state was being exercised by the communist party alone. These conceptions reinforced the gulf between the party and the class, while at the same time the attempt to turn the machinery of state prohibited the party from playing its true role as the most radical fraction of the class movement and culminated in the bureaucratic death of the party.

Members of the presidium of VCheka (left to right) Yakov Peters, Józef Unszlicht, Abram Belenky (standing), Felix Dzerzhinsky, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, 1917. The Cheka, escaping the control of the soviets, became a key factor in the degeneration of the revolution

This idea of the party dictatorship is closely linked to the question of violence, terror and justice, and, in the end, the problem of the world. The revolution cannot be advanced by using methods that contradict its goals. For the working class, the end cannot justify the means. Socialism cannot be carried out by a minority – as Lenin constantly emphasised in the early phase of the revolution – and still can it be imposed on the majority by force. We are with Luxembourg who argued that the idea of the Red Terror, understood as generalised state violence against all sectors of the popula- tion, was incompatible with the revolutionary project, and with Miasnikov who understood that the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921 was opened the door to “the abyss”. In the wake of Kronstadt, the rejection of the use of violence to settle disputes within the working class must be seen as a principle. The idea that the revolution can use any means at hand to further its ends is most often associated with counter-revolutionary terror. Was the very conception of a communist bas- is and beacon a hangover from the bourgeois rev- olution? We can look at it from this viewpoint and say ‘yes – we if we ’don’t act’ said Lenin, in 1917 understand- ing (and even under-estimating) the international threat of a world revolution of anti-war, revolution and the ruling classes held responsible. The revol- ution was indeed an inspiration to the subsequent uprisings in Germany, Hungary, Italy, the mass -ive strikes in Britain, the US and elsewhere. It was the defeat of these revolts the failure of the revolutionaries: this was an attempt to repeat the subsequent attempt by the party to ‘hold on at all costs’, to make virtues out of perceived necessities (the dictatorship of the party, the Red Terror; War Communistisation; requisitioning; the militarisation of labour, the Cheka) etc – which wrecked the soviet project from within.

There was a desperate need to defend the revo- lution from invasion by the imperialist powers (armies from the US, GB, Canada, Germany, Poland, Estonia, China, Japan, France) and from the White armies backed by these powers in the civil war that followed the October revolution. This was not only an armed struggle. And what the soviets and the Red Army achieved in militarily repulsing these hostile forces while awaiting the eruption of an international revolution, the revolution or the political price - in terms of the dissolution of the workers’ own autonomous armed militias in- corporated into the Red Army – coupled with the physical decimation of the urban working class and the wrecking of production in the cities and countryside, proved to be too high in the absence of revolution elsewhere. The Red Army, the Red terror, the banning of fractions in the Party, War Communism and the subjugation of the Party and Soviets to the state that remained while the working class itself retreated in Russia and internationally. Most comrades at the II Congress of the ICC in 2011, a meeting that had ‘gone down fighting’ with a clear defeat from ‘outside’, just as it would have been better for the health of the revolution if the Bolsheviks had acquiesced to the 1921 programme of the Kronstadt “rebels” whose demands were similar to those raised by fractions within the Bolshevik Party at its 10th Congress the same year. As it was and remains, the nature of the defeat and the new world that emerged: the outcome for the proletariat: the fact that it was a communist party that was ‘in charge’ as the revolu- tion developed was an important factor the international proletariat that the notion of ‘social- ism in one country’ was developed in contradic- tion to the Bolsheviks, a development made for the dreadful legacy thatquaté Stalinism with communism.
Given criticisms raised of the Bolsheviks, a synonym of Trotskyism asked “What should they have done, then?”

There were various aspects given in response - by different people. The most pertinent idea that the revolution was for the Bolsheviks to save if only they made the right decisions, rather than undertaking class war. It’s not the working class in its entirety could accomplish under the circumstances and given the international and historical balance of class forces.

b) The Bolshevik Party was not some homogenous bloc but had many political currents within it which ebbed and flowed, some of whom opposed specific policies and actions (such as the militarisation of labour or the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt), others of which put forward correct critiques but incorrect solutions. Such oppositions – in general appearing earlier and seeing clearer than Trotsky’s Left Opposition – exemplified the fact that the Bolshevik Party was still a living organism of the working class.

c) It’s not a question of understanding what they should have done rather than one of analysing what they did and did not learn from it. The conceptions they held – i.e. of the party taking power – were widespread within the entire working class at the time, a hangover from bourgeois parliamentarism. It’s as a result of what actually happened – something which could not have been known in advance – that subsequent critiques can and must be made. However the rejection of “the post-revolutionary” is fundamentally incompatible with the goals of communism, is certainly a notion that predates the event, even if it had not been discussed.

The dreadful legacy of the defeat would could have been avoided if the class as a whole and the Bolshevik Party in particular had been able to understand the broader historical sweep and the ICC that the state after the revolution was not simply an expression of the working class – more of which below. The same individual from Trotskyism criticised the absence of reference to the enemy Stalin as the main focal point of and for the counter-revolution. For the rest of the meeting, the counter-revolution was a process and Stalin – including the doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’ – was not the cause. However: perhaps this is a wake-up call for the present revolutionary milieu not to take the standing of Stalin in the minds of the present generation for granted.

Kronstadt sailors in 1921

Two further elements in the discussion:

The Third Communist International was formed late (1919) and was overly-influenced by the Bolshievist Party and the needs of the Russian state. Indeed, it evolved into a tool for the imperialist interests of that state. The lessons of this are the need for an international organisation of revolutionaries. In essence of the revolution itself:

For the SGPB, the degeneration of the Russian revolution proved Marx correct: the workers could not establish communism in a backward country. Lenin’s last articles were full of disillusion - he realised he’d made a big mistake. Other comrades replied that a) the aims was never to establish communism in a single country but to provide a spark for the world revolution; b) Russia was relatively well-developed at the time with giant factories housing a concentrated working class – some of the biggest in the world and extensive rail networks; c) that even if the revolution had broken out in the most advanced country like Germany, with the most educated working class, it would still have been defeated if it was isolated. There was no sensation in blaming the looking for any Russian ‘particularism’. Finally, the meeting was marked by a high degree of homogeneity: between the CWO and the ICC presentation. The two currents agree that one of the main lessons of the Russian Revolution is that the party of the working class does not seek to take power, which must be exercised by the masses themselves, but that without the influence of revolutionaries within the very bowels of the working class – and certainly within its self-organised organisations such as the factory committees and workers’ councils (or soviets) – the revolution will be robbed of vital historical, political and above all visionary elements of the goal of communism and cannot therefore progress.

However ... there was no fundamental agreement between the CWO and the ICC on the question of violence within the working class which in turn masked different attitudes to the state in the period of transition between capitalism and communism, of which our only ‘real-time’ experience is the Russian Revolution.

For the CWO, the question of violence within the working class, while something to be avoided, obviously, is not something that can be proscribed or wished away. There will be disagreements within the working class itself and some of these will be settled forcibly. It depends on the material circumstances.

For the ICC, it’s not a question of this or that disagreement on a picket line or struggle committee that’s at stake here but a generalised attitude that the means can’t be separated from the end and a generalised orientation of where the revolution is heading of what it must become....

Conclusion

In the ‘common sense’ view (the bourgeois view – history is written by the victors) the Russian revolution succeeded and the result was ‘communist rule’ by Stalin and the GPU. For the majority at the ICC meeting, this was not the case. The Russian Revolution failed. True, the working class, violently smashed the bourgeoisie state and established, for a short time, a dictatorship of the proletariat (only the Socialist Republics regarded this as a bourgeois revolution and a Bolshevik coup). However in the view of other participants at the meeting, an indisputably a ‘first’ – the first at the level of an entire nation state - degenerated. Relatively rapidly.

Thus it is from these issues of the Russian revolution are largely unknown within the populace and large and the working class in particular, a working class which has tended at the present moment to lose its sense of identity, its sense of history, its sense of itself as a historic class with a past and a future. This meeting was in truth a very small even if it did provide a focus for a number of elements interested in the positions of the communist left, and even if it saw a high level of agreement amongst the majority of individuals and groups attending.

There was also agreement that revolutionaries were still finding an echo for their positions and that such meetings were valuable. The ICC was holding similar events in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and elsewhere. The majority at the CWO was holding a meeting in the North of England. This was the first coordinated meeting of the ICC in the UK and the ICC’s previous London meeting was also on the subject of the Russian Revolution. And the real differences of historical appreciation, of theory about attitudes towards revolution, of the potential to build the party in practice - remain to be further developed beyond past, bitter polemics.

MH/KT

Recently published on the ICC website:

The elections in Austria reveal the growing instability of the capitalist political apparatus

One year after Trump’s victory: The US bourgeoisie struggles to manage the political turbulence

Erdogan’s “New Turkey”: a prime illustration of capitalism’s senility

Kurdish nationalism – another pawn in imperialist conflicts

Yemen - a pivotal war in the fight for influence in the Middle East

Paradise Papers: an ideological campaign in the service of the capitalist state

Two contributions to the ICC day of discussion:

Contribution to the discussion of the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917

Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution (volumes 1, 2 & 3): an appraisal

Dead end of racial identity politics

industries, many of which have been multiracial due to the displacement of a large segment of the general working population into low-waged and low-skill labor over the last few decades, is a sign that something is potentially brewing beneath the surface. With each successive struggle, workers in the United States are fighting for differences which they have more in common with one another than not. Sadly, this emergent wave of militancy has been confined to workers of a specific race at a specific point in time yet spread to the whole class. Although still in its infancy, these experiences have greater transformative potential than the passive, and leftist proselytizing in the world. The material imperatives of the class struggle impose themselves on the working class, who are objective barrier impeding any further progress. Thus, for example, if white and male workers believe that they are inherently superior to black workers or to women, then they will make no attempt to organize with them, and their resistance will be crushed by the bosses all the same. For it is the struggle itself which challenges people’s most deeply-held beliefs about the world and each other, and which draws the lines of battle within the working class and among the Bolsheviks.

In other words, the very process of putting together a solidaristic movement – that is, a social movement that unites all those who are exploited under capitalism – also works to actively undermine the various ideologies employed by the system to fortify and stabilize itself.

MH/KT

See, for example, the walkout by 4,000 deadworkers in Newark, New Jersey (http://www. nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/05/surprise_walkout_ by_4000_members.html), which the International Longshoremen’s Association did not approve of (http://www.icc-international.org/newsorns打扮/day_for_its_members_to_return_to_work). On the truck drivers’ protest in Haleah, Florida, (http://miami.cbslocal. video/34055-truck-drivers-protest-pay-rates-by-blocking-160.html) which blocked traffic on a major road used by trucks.

MH/KT

MH/KT
Reflections on the split in the Anarchist Federation

The Anarchist Federation, one of the main an-
archist groups in the UK, has seen a significant
split in its ranks. This comes after a polemic in
the shape of the “Rojava revolution”, armed en-
claves in Syria controlled by the Kurdish nation-
alist group, and an extremely widespread support for anti-fascism
and anti-transphobia after the incidents around
Charlotteville in the USA.

These developments are not taking place in a
vacuum. The tendency, within anarchism, to
seek solutions and look for contexts to und-
derstand the roots of these difficulties if we are to
face up to the challenge they pose, and it is in
this spirit that we critically analyse the
statement issued by those who have decided
to leave the AF.

The attempt to break with “identity politics”
The statement of the seceders begins thus:

“It has been over a month since the London An-
archist Bookfair and as a movement we are still
reeling, with deep divisions between people who
had respect for each other and once worked well
together. We are still shocked, horrified and sad-
denly finding themselves on what matter what
perspective or interpretation they have on what
had happened and the role of the Bookfair col-
leagues.”

We view, until recently, members of the AF who
did not sign the initial statement that was issued
by Edinburgh AF and signed by two other AF
groups in London as well as being co-signed by
other campaigns and organisations. We did not
want to respond immediately as there are so many
issues which need to be considered. We hoped
that after some time we could give a political as-
sessment of the situation rather than just a knee-
jer reaction to develop a response to the “events and
statements from other groups”.

The former members have reconstituted them-
theselves into the London Anarchist Communists
and Leicester Anarchist Communists.

It’s not possible here to deal in any detail with
the events at the Bookfair, which caused such ruc-
tions across the anarchist milieu and even reached
the national press.1 In essence it involved a clash
between a group of feminists who intervened at
the Bookfair with a leaflet arguing that new gov-
ernment legislation on “transgender rights” could
be seen as an infringement on women’s rights to
organise, as the new government was transgen-
der males into spaces reserved by or for women.
The leaflet provoked a lot of anger from “trans
right” anarchists. It also seems to have demon-
strated by events as are most people, no matter
what happened and the role of the Bookfair col-
leagues.

We think that it is essential to under-
stand the struggle of the proletariat contains,
in potential, the solution to all the particular op-
pressions spawned by capitalist society. But this
conception of the proletariat, of course, the one
developed by Marx and the marxist movement,
which affirms that the class struggle is not
restricted to the economic sphere but has numerous
dimensions: social, political, moral, intellectual.
It was this understanding which enabled Lenin, that
to organise and result in revolution, it was neces-
sary to emancipate itself from a sphere of society
which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win it
only social force, it is not surprising that the problem
of class identity is being obscured by a fixation on
other, more specific identities – a fixation which,
with the emergence of this struggle, forced the AF
to clearly the central role of the class struggle, the statement does not pose the
overall political issue, that of the theoretical indi-

1 http://en.internationalism.org/societas/1292
2 http://anarchistlibrary.org/library/uk/bookfair
3 http://en.internationalism.org/w/345/3/bn-anarchy
4 https://libcom.org/bookfairs/2018/01/17/class-struggle-anarchist-statement-on-1_1.html
5 londonmag@riseup.net; leicesteranarchist.blogspot.
com
6 https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/nov/26/
transgender-rights-legislation-internet-feminists
7 Statements by the Bookfair Collectives can be found at
https://anarchistbookfairs.org.uk
8 The statement is available in English, German and
Kurdish.
9 https://en.internationalism.org/icc12057746
on anarchist-affair.info; the “Schmidt affair”.
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5. We should also mention that there has also been a split
in the Bakunin group, which is the smaller of the two
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which appears to centre round its most numerous
and best lead group, the IWGB, the London independ-
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9. https://libcom.org/library/anarchist-federation-
statement-october-july-2011-02-212014
10. See https://libcom.org/library/statement-france/
what-goings-on-afed-27122012, especially p 2 and
11. See note 1 for references. it has proved to overcome all the divi-

dent case). There were also a number of other dem-

2. https://libcom.org/bookfairs/2018/01/17/class-struggle-
anarchist-statement-on-1_1.html
3. Londonanarchist@gmail.com; leicesteranarchist.
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11. See note 1 for references. with the AF’s position on anarcho-syndicalism, while some of its principal individ-
uals and outstanding figures, such as “Angry
Worker” Anonymous. Workers of the World group in West
London seem to be heading towards calls to build
new TWU branches in the course of the class struggle, not treated as
enemies. And yet the ABC of identity politics is not questioned: “We support oppressed groups to organ-
ise autonomously”, without any discus-

sion about whether such forms of organising – by
gender, sexual orientation, race – tend to become
repressive and lead to the emergence of a wider class unity. The statement mentions that
does not feature the references to get involved in revolutionary politics – “that we need to make
ancephalism has found it extremely difficult to resist as a class and above all
in its own perspective the future of the future
humanity. In a situation where the working class
is tending to lose its sense of itself as a distinct
social force, it is not surprising that the problem
of class identity is being obscured by a fixation on
other, more specific identities – a fixation which,
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that includes clergy, politicians, and middle-class professionals), are little more than professional poverty pimps, opportunistically riding the wave of black proletarian discontent to achieve political power or riches for themselves. The most recent manifestation of this phenomenon is an activist network in the United States that calls itself “Black Lives Matter”, which has become synonymous with the movement against racialized police violence, a clear-cut example of capitalists and their lackeys co-opting the authentic resistance of black workers. This organization, whose ties to the Democratic Party-NGO complex are fairly well-established at this point, attempts to harness the explosive spontaneity of the proletarian element within these social movements, which often takes the form of riots and looting, into forms of engagement with the capitalist system that do not interfere in any way with profit-making. It is unsurprising, therefore, that their manifesto reads like the DNC platform, but with demands for reparations and investment into black-owned businesses, which effectively amounts to income redistribution for black capitalists, thrown in for good measure.

Black Lives Matter are modern-day Garveyites, only they have traded in the overt black nationalism of the latter for a hollow social justice rhetoric that thrives on a veneer of radicalism over their essentially capitalist politics.

We have already explored here, the capitalist class and its allied strata, all of whom are materially invested in the preservation of the existing social order, are incapable of putting forward a suitable response to anti-black racism in the United States, much less to the generalized barbarism of this society. Therefore, a solution to the bound social, economic, and moral crisis that capitalism presents at this juncture rests with the large segment of humanity dependent on the salaried for its labor-power. In the American context, the creation of a multi- gendered, national, racial, etc., working-class front unifying all those who are actually dispossessed, share a fundamental relationship to the economy, will be instrumental to abolishing capitalism and its attendant hierarchies. To this end, all forms of identity politics, which espouse collaboration between exploited and exploiting classes, and thereby continue the process of workers’ struggle for emancipation, must be firmly opposed. It is not, however, enough to oppose identity politics; socialists that actually address non-class forms of oppression, detailing their foundations in capitalism and explaining how a socialist society will do away with them.

It is true, for example, that within the United States blacks are murdered by police at a rate that is more than twice their percentage within the general population, while whites and Latinos are killed at a rate that is roughly proportional to their share of the population. However, it is important to note that more than half of all those killed by police are white. Moreover, in states with very small black populations, the percentages of blacks killed by police is many times smaller than the national average, which suggests that although anti-black racism is an important factor in police killings, it is clearly not the principal one. In fact, empirically speaking, the most reliable predictor of whether a person is likely to be murdered by police is not their race, but their class. More than 95% of all police killings are concentrated within neighborhoods where the median annual household income is just under $100,000, while the median annual household income in neighborhoods where police killings occur in general is just over $52,000. Police killings are not, then, a mechanism for establishing and reproducing white supremacy, but rather white supremacy is part of the system for maintaining the domination of capitalists over workers, regardless of the race of either one. Or as Adolph Reed succinctly explains, “the pattern in those states with high rates of police killings suggests […] that it is the product of an approach to policing that emerges from an imperative to contain and suppress the pockets of economically marginal and sub-employed working-class populations produced by revanchist capitalism.”

Recent developments in the class struggle within the United States are cause for careful optimism, since they reveal a willingness on the part of some workers to organize themselves in order to press their demands collectively against the bosses, independently of the Democratic Party and institutionalized (labor unions) organizations that actively discourage such behavior and openly stifle these attempts. The recent wave of illegal and non-union (i.e., wildcard) strikes by workers in the logistical and service
Racial identity politics within the United States have historically assumed one of two forms: in terms of geographical space racial identity is viewed as a question of residence. The integrationist view was most eloquently espoused by Frederick Douglass. It sought to eliminate racial barriers to upward social mobility by reforming the dominant political, social, and economic institutions within capitalism to be inclusive of black workers and professional elites, as opposed to just their white counterparts. The black nationalist perspective, whose best-known exponent was Marcus Garvey, was much more skeptical concerning America’s ability to accommodate racial diversity within the ruling class. Its proponents argued that the struggle for racial identity was not only a political and economic struggle within American cities, with many in the movement calling for blacks to maintain a separate identity, but that black and nationalist ideologues were predicated on notions of elite spokesmanship that made black workers into the wards of “their” capitalist class. This principle is then used to argue that the “race for power” will be facilitated by the existence of a separate black identity. These ideas, in turn, have been used to support the argument that the only way to achieve black political and social equality is through the establishment of a separate black state. This is in contrast to the idea of the right of nations to self-determination which has been a subject of fervent discussion, not only among the most ardent defenders of capitalism, but also the international socialists movement. The National Question: Selected Writings (New York City: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 335–37.


5. Adolph Reed, “Why is There No Black Political Movement?”, in Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Politicalisation within the ICC

World Revolution is the subsection that presents the International Communist Current which defines the following political positions:

* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decaying social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of war, world war, reconstruction and crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decaying phase, 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 the world system.

* 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. One of these conditions had been the suppression of the October 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 1917 revolution, but the 1917 revolution was the starting point for Stalinism.

* The statefied 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 toward state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decomposition.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars were imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in their superfluous differences, both internationalist and racial specificities. While the former represents the Leninist perspective, the latter represents the Trotskyist perspective. The foremost representative was Rosa Luxemburg, rejected the right of nations to self-determination as a bourgeois delusion, in contrast to the theory of the bourgeoisie, in the newly emerging world capitalist order, the role of the proletariat, and the working class, and then the condition of their economic and social development.

* The idea of the right of nations to self-determination entered public discourse in earnest when US-then President Woodrow Wilson issued his Fourteen Points towards the end of the First World War. Long before that, though, the “national question” had been the subject of fervent discussion, not only among the most ardent defenders of capitalism, but also the international socialist movement. The National Question: Selected Writings (New York City: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 335–37.

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

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the elections is a call to participate in the elections to participate in the elections. Any call to participate in the elections is a call to participate in the elections to participate in the elections to participate in the elections.


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