



world revolution

Austerity and poverty: Not just Brexit Not just the Tories

Britain is seven years into a prolonged period of fiscal consolidation, in which constraints on public spending have been the central feature and are set to continue for some years to come. According to figures supplied by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, “*post 2010 ‘austerity’ is on course to be the longest pause in real-term spending growth on record.*” This already demonstrates that the austerity faced by the working class in Britain today is not just a result of instability in the economy caused by Brexit¹. In fact the ruling class always has a contingent excuse for any worsening in the economy, so that the last decade of austerity has been presented as the ‘recovery’ phase from the credit crunch of 2008. In this article we will show how today’s austerity measures are nothing but the continuation and worsening of a policy that has been carried out by politicians of left and right over five decades in order for the capitalist class respond to the historic crisis in their system. And this has been an international phenomenon.

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 admissions². 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 1.3 million public sector workers subject to a pay freeze or 1% cap since 2010 – a severe pay cut in real terms. The chancellor announced last November that this would be ended for nurses only.

1. This doesn’t mean of course that Brexit won’t bring further and deeper problems for the British economy when it finally arrives. See for example <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jan/30/key-questions-latest-leaked-brexit-forecasts>. We will return to this question in a future article.

2. file:///C:/Users/WINDOW~1/AppData/Local/Temp/NHS-bed-occupancy-report-feb2017-England.pdf



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 £4.2 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 £640 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 in-*

creases 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.”³

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 million⁴, 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

3. <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/07/Austerity-v2.pdf>

4. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/oct/29/sparkling-jobless-figures-mask-real-picture-uk-economy-unemployed>

Thatcher government). At that stage the figures were massaged when millions were pushed onto 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

Inside this issue

Churchill and the Brexiteers: the delusions of British imperialism	2
Britain, the ruling class divided	2
Demonstrations in Iran: strengths and limits of the movement	3
Iran: the struggle between bourgeois cliques is a danger for the working class	3
ICC day of discussion: On the degeneration of the Russian revolution	4-5
Reflections on the split in the Anarchist Federation	6
Life of the ICC	7
The dead end of racial identity politics	8

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 or two 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 Brexit, but derive from the decline of British imperialism over a far longer period. The article ‘Britain: the ruling class divided’ is part of a longer piece published online (<http://en.internationalism.org/international-review/201712/14546/united-states-heart-growing-world-disorder>) which also emphasises that sharpening divisions within the capitalist class are a product of the present phase of the historic and world-wide decline of capitalism – the phase of decomposition in which the watchword of the ruling class has increasingly become “every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost”. The other piece, written by a close sympathiser, looks at 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.

Churchill and the Brexiteers: the delusions of British imperialism

In his long political career Winston Churchill epitomised the implacable defence of British imperialism’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.¹

In 1953 Churchill apparently 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 is clear proof that Churchill was a convinced Eurosceptic. Except, as supporters of remaining in the EU have pointed out, he didn’t say this to Parliament at all; the quote is concocted. For the Remainers, on the contrary, Churchill was a passionate believer in a ‘United States of Europe’.

In fact what Churchill said on the question of Britain and Europe is revealing not only of the delusions of British imperialist policy after World War 2, but also of the extent to which Brexit is a mistake for the British bourgeoisie.

In Churchill’s vision of the post-WW2 world, Britain as a global imperialist power held a unique position at the centre of the Empire and Commonwealth, the ‘English-speaking world’ (ie. the USA) and a future United Europe; the interests of British imperialism were best served by maintaining close relationships with all three. For Churchill, Britain was therefore “with” Europe, but not “of” it.

The trouble was, Britain’s status as a global imperialist power was already in irreversible decline.

Before WW2 the British ruling class had tried hard to appease Hitler’s imperialist appetites, precisely because it knew that in a major war it risked losing its global empire and becoming a dependency of Germany – or America. But in the end of course it went to war to defeat its continental rival with American help, and despite all of Churchill’s best efforts and the famed ruthlessness of the British bourgeoisie that Hitler so admired, it came out of the war bankrupted by its supposed ally, and having lost its empire to the new global superpower.

Churchill’s post-war vision of Britain’s role was therefore a last ditch attempt to hold onto Britain’s status as an independent imperialist power. But the humiliation of British and French imperialism at Suez in 1956² demonstrated US supremacy and forced Britain to accept its subordinate role within the US bloc. This eventually led the main factions of the British bourgeoisie to conclude that Britain’s interests were best served by being part of Europe. There were clear advantages to the British economy in greater integration, with the removal of internal tariffs, etc., but there was also a strategic reason. Churchill had supported the idea of a ‘United States of Europe’ not, as the ‘Remainers’ would like, in the interests of ‘peace and prosperity’, but as a way of neutralising the threat from Britain’s continental rivals, as well as providing a much-needed counterweight to overweening American power.

Britain’s real objective in joining the EEC in 1973 is nicely summarised in the clip from the “Yes Minister” comedy series on the ICC homepage: to divide and rule. It did not give up the pre-



tensions that lay behind Churchill’s vision – the pretensions of a former global maritime imperialist power resentful of the subordination of its interests to the “Brussels bureaucracy” – and continued to consider itself to be “with” Europe, but not “of” it.

But outside of the EU and unable to directly influence its decision-making, Britain will find it more difficult to pursue this strategy, while for the same reason it risks being of even less use to the US as an ally – even without the added volatility of the Trump regime and its ‘America First’ policy. This is why Brexit is fundamentally a mistake for the interests of British imperialism, the result not of a re-orientation of imperialist policy but of the rise of populism and growing political instability.

The rosy vision of the Brexiteers – of Britain as a great island trading nation in the swashbuckling spirit of the 19th century when it ruled the waves – is even less based on the realities of British economic and political power than in Churchill’s era. The limitations on British imperialism’s pretensions to ‘punch above its weight’ are best illustrated by the ongoing fiasco of its new aircraft carrier, which is not only leaking water but more importantly will have to wait until 2023 for all its much-delayed US-built fighter jets; two years after it is supposed to be operational, making it reliant on the US Marine Corps to provide its air power. Continuing defence cuts mean that the second carrier may never be completed while operating the new warships could exceed Britain’s total future defence spending. Meanwhile, as the right-wing *Telegraph* spluttered, the same cuts could leave the army the smallest it’s been since Britain lost its American colonies... More than that, in a major operation British imperialism would have to deploy its remaining ground forces as part of larger US-led units.

How’s that for symbolism?
MH January 2018

Britain, the ruling class divided

In Britain, Prime Minister Theresa May had called early elections for June 2017, with the goal of winning a larger majority for her Conservative Party before entering negotiations about the conditions under which the country would leave the European Union. Instead, she lost the majority she had, making herself dependent on the support of the Ulster (North of Ireland) protestant Unionists from the DUP. The only success of the Prime Minister at these elections was that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP, the hard liner Brexiteers to the right of the Conservative Party) are no longer represented in the House of Commons. Despite this, , the latest electoral debacle for the Conservatives made it clear that the fundamental problem remains unresolved –the problem which, a year ago, made it possible that the referendum about British membership of the European Union produced a result –the “Brex-it”- which a majority of the political elites had not wanted. This problem is the deep division within the Conservatives –one of the two main state parties in Britain. Already when Britain joined what was then the “European Community” in the early 1970s, the Tories were divided over this issue. A strong resentment against “Europe” was never overcome within the Tory ranks. In recent years, these inner party tensions developed into open power struggles, which have increasingly hampered the capacity of the party to govern. In 2014, the Tory Prime Minister David Cameron managed to checkmate the Scottish Nationalists by calling a referendum about Scottish independence, and winning a majority for Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Emboldened by this success, Cameron attempted to silence the opponents of British membership of the European Union in a similar manner. But this time, he had seriously miscalculated the risks. The referendum resulted in a narrow majority to leave, whereas Cameron had campaigned to stay in. A year later, the Tories are as divided on this question as ever. Only that today, the conflict is no longer about membership or not in the EU, but about whether the government should adopt a “hard” or a “soft” attitude in negotiating the conditions under which Britain will leave. Of course, these divisions within the political parties are emanations of deeper lying tendencies within capitalist society, the weakening of its national unity and cohesion in the phase of its decomposition.

To understand why the ruling class in Britain is so divided on such issues, it is important to recall that, not so long ago, London was the proud ruler of the largest and most far flung Empire in human history. It is thanks to this golden past that the British high society is still today the richest ruling class in western Europe¹. And whereas an average German bourgeois engages himself or herself traditionally in an industrial company, an average British counterpart is likely to own a mine in Africa, a farm in New Zealand, a ranch in Australia, and/or a forest in Canada (not to mention real estate and shareholding in the United States) as part of a family inheritance. Although the British Empire, and even the British Commonwealth, are things of the past, they enjoy a very tangible “life after death”. The “White Dominions” (no longer so-called) Canada, Australia and New Zealand, still share with Britain the same monarch as formal head of state. They also share, for instance (along with the former crown colony: the USA) a privileged cooperation of their secret services. Many among the ruling class of these countries feel as if they still belong, if not to the same nation, then to the same family. Indeed, they are often interconnected by marriage, by shares in the same property and by business interests. When Britain, in 1973, under the Tory Prime Minister Heath, joined what was then the European “Common Market”, it was a shock and even a humiliation for parts of the British ruling class that their country was obliged to reduce or even sever its privileged relations with its former “crown colonies”. All the resentment accumulated over decades about the loss of the British Empire began, from this time on, to vent itself against “Brussels”. A resentment which

1. Magazines such as *Fortune* publish annual figures about the world’s wealthiest banks, companies, families and individuals.

was soon to be augmented by the neo-liberal current (very important in Britain from the Thatcher days onwards) to whom the monstrous “Brussels bureaucracy” was anathema. A resentment shared by the ruling classes in the former dominions such as Rupert Murdoch, the Australian media billionaire, today one of the most fanatical Brexiteers. But quite apart from the weight of these old links, it was humiliating enough that a Britain which once “ruled the waves” had the same voting rights in Europe as Luxemburg, or that the tradition of Roman law held sway in the continental European institutions rather than the old Saxon one.

But all of this does not mean that the “Brexiteers” have or ever had a coherent programme for leaving the European Union. The resurrection of the Empire, or even of the Commonwealth in its original form, is clearly impossible. The motive of many of the leading Brexiteers, apart from resentment and even a certain loss of reality, is careerism. Boris Johnson, for instance, the leader of the “Leave” fraction of the Tories last year, seemed even more amazed and dismayed than his opponent, the party leader Cameron, when he heard the result of the referendum. His goal did not seem to be Brexit, in fact, but replacing Cameron at the head of the party.

The fact that it is the Conservatives, more than the Labour Party, which are so divided over this issue is equally a product of history. Capitalism in Britain triumphed, not through the elimination, but through the bourgeoisification of the aristocracy: the big land owners themselves became capitalists. But their traditions directed their interest in capitalism more towards the ownership of land, real estate and raw materials than towards industry. Since they already owned more or less the whole of their own country, their appetite for capitalist profits became one of the main motors of British overseas expansion. The larger the Empire became, the more this land- and real estate owning- layer could get the upper hand over the industrial bourgeoisie (that part which had originally pioneered the first capitalist “industrial revolution” in history). And whereas the Labour Party, through its intimate links to the trade unions, is traditionally closer to industrial capital, the big land and real estate owners tend to assemble within the ranks of the Tories. Of course, under modern capitalism, the old distinctions between industrial, land owning, merchant and finance capital tend to become dissipated by the concentration of capital and the domination of the state over the economy. Nonetheless, the different traditions, as well as the different interests they partly still express, still lead a life of their own.

Today there is a risk of a partial paralysis of the government. Both wings of the Conservative Party (who at the moment present themselves as the proponents of a “hard” versus a “soft” Brexit), are more or less poised to topple Prime Minister May. But at least at present, neither side seems to dare to strike the first blow, so great is the fear of widening the rift within the party. Should the party prove unable to resolve this problem soon, important fractions of the British bourgeoisie may start to think about the alternative of a Labour government. Immediately after the Brexit referendum, Labour presented itself, if anything, in an even worse state than the Conservatives. The “moderate” parliamentary fraction was disgruntled about the left rhetoric of its party leader Jeremy Corbyn, which they felt was putting off voters, and about his refusal to engage himself in favour of Britain remaining in the EU. They also seemed poised to topple their leader. In the meantime, Corbyn has impressed them with his capacity to mobilise young voters at the recent elections. Indeed, if the tragic Grenfell Tower fire (for which the population holds the Conservative government responsible) had taken place before instead of just after the elections, it is not unthinkable that Corbyn would now be Prime Minister instead of May. As it is, Corbyn has already begun to prepare himself for government by ditching some of his more “extreme” demands such as the abolition of the Trident nuclear armed submarines presently being modernised. **Steinklopfer, August 2017**

Demonstrations in Iran: strengths and limits of the movement

On 28 December, the first sparks of a movement which brought to mind the “Arab Spring” of a few years ago began to shake the territory of Iran. The movement seems for the moment to have run out of steam as we write, although we are seeing other expressions of anger against the deterioration of living standards, such as in Morocco, Sudan and above all Tunisia.

A spontaneous explosion of anger

Iran is a country with powerful imperialist ambitions, where military expenses devoted to intervention throughout the Middle East have risen sharply. 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 supporting Hezbollah and the Assad regime, and its own armed gangs operating at the international level. And it has built up its stock 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 Obama administration, the economic crisis, aggravated by 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 - there has been talk of a “revolution of the eggs” – lit the fuse. The movement erupted in Mashhad, the second biggest city, in the north east, and quickly spread to the capital Tehran and all the main urban centres: north to Rasht and south towards Chabahar. In all the crowds openly rejecting the policies of the state, the working class was present, even if somewhat diluted in the rest of the demonstrators: factory workers, teachers, many unemployed especially young people: they were all there. Also many students. It is also significant that a large number of the demonstrators were women.

At the same time, despite the courage and fighting spirit of the protesters, the working class was not able to provide a real orientation to this struggle, was not 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 reactionary nationalist slogan “*neither Gaza or Lebanon, I will only die 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 “reformist” and “hard-line” bourgeois cliques¹. Such attitudes really scared the authorities and the students were particularly targeted in the arrests. And in general, despite the weight of democratic illusions and other political weaknesses, the bourgeoisie was extremely worried about this “leaderless” explosion of anger. The Supreme Leader Khomeini was silent for some time and president Rouhani was 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 militias. Violent clashes with the police led not only to arrests but to a number of deaths. Bit by bit the tone of the authorities, and their reaction, grew firmer. Rouhani and Khomeini announced that violence and illegal actions by “troublemakers” would be severely punished. They accused the demonstrators of being “enemies of Iran”, of being in league with foreign powers, in particular the USA and Saudi Arabia.

And indeed, on the social networks like Twitter, many of the hashtags calling for demonstrations originated in Saudi; similarly, the Mujahadin organisation based in Paris, opposed to the Iranian regime and close to the Saudis, declared its support for the demonstrations. And of course, Trump with his provocative statements and the other rival powers want a weakened Iran. But this was a movement that has its origins inside Iran. Taking advantage of the movement's lack of perspective, the regime could prepare the ground for repression. It mounted counter-demonstrations supporting the regime and its ayatollah, shouting slogans like “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” and denouncing “sedition”. The head of state could play on these divisions and announce that the alternative was “us



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

or chaos”. By evoking the tragedy which followed the original protests in Syria and elsewhere, the leadership was clearly threatening the demonstrators, insinuating that their movement could only result in a similar chaos and bloodshed.

The difficulties of the proletariat in Iran

This spontaneous social movement is the most important since the social crisis of 2009, the year of the “Green movement”. At this time, there was a real danger of the proletariat being caught in the crossfire between competing bourgeois cliques. As we wrote at the time:

“*Opposing the bloody, corrupt elements around Ah-madinajad, we see people who resemble them like two drops of water. They are also in favour of an Islamic Republic and for building the Iranian atomic bomb. All these people are basically the same because they all stand for their own personal and nationalist interests*”

Today, much more than in 2009, the movement is a real expression of the exploited and the disinherited themselves, but it is without a clear proletarian orientation, apart from a few minorities. The struggles of the proletariat in Iran have without doubt been part of the struggles of the world proletariat since the 1960s, especially in the oil industry, transport, education and so on, but even when the struggles reached their high point in 1978-79, when they precipitated the fall of the Shah, the political weaknesses of the proletariat made it possible for a horde of religious fanatics led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, supported by the Stalinists and other left nationalists, to install themselves in power. Brutal repression came in the wake of the “Islamic Revolution”. Many militant workers were executed for taking part in strikes under the regime of the mullahs. The proletariat was also subjected to the terrible war between Iran and Iraq between 1980 and 1988, which left millions dead.

Since then, there have again been some important struggles, such as during the year 2007 when 100,000 teachers came out in solidarity with the factory workers, but the underlying difficulties remain today. Despite a very strong fighting spirit, and the fact that the current movement was based on economic demands which are part of any proletarian struggle, the movement has waned because of a lack of a real class identity and perspective. At the same time, the workers are still very much faced with the permanent rivalry of different bourgeois factions, and there is a real danger of the class being dragged behind one or the other². On top of this, Iran is surrounded by countries at war which makes it very difficult for the workers of Iran to win the solidarity of the proletariat in these countries and strengthens nationalism within their own ranks.

But in a more profound sense, the weaknesses of the proletariat in Iran are above all those of the world proletariat, since even in the most experienced sectors of the class we are seeing a serious loss of class identity, and above all a loss of perspective that would give a real meaning and direction to the class struggle.

Nevertheless, the bravery and militancy of the demonstrators in Iran should be an encouragement to workers of the world. Fighting against austerity, raising demands in defence of our economic interests, this remains essential if the class struggle is to again raise its head. But the real solidarity with our class brothers and sisters in Iran consists in reviving and consciously taking charge of our own struggle, not only against austerity but against the capitalist system as a whole.

WH (5 January)

2. See our article in this issue: ‘Iran: the struggle between bourgeois cliques is a danger for the working class’

The struggle between bourgeois cliques is a danger for the working class

As we show in our article ‘Demonstrations in Iran, strengths and limits of the movement’, although there are promising signs of working class resilience, the danger is very real, not only of bloody repression, but also of the manipulation of the popular anger by the different fractions of the ruling class. The old conflict between “reformers” and “hard-liners” within the “Islamic Republic” has entered a new stage. The reformers around president Rouhani are convinced that a major policy change is necessary in order to consolidate the considerable gains made by Iran in recent times. These advances have taken place essentially at two levels. At the level of foreign policy, the Shia militias and other forces supported by Tehran have made important advances in Iraq, Syria and the Lebanon (the so-called revolutionary sickle from Iran to the Mediterranean) and in Yemen. At the diplomatic level, the regime was able to make an “atomic deal” with the major powers, leading to the lifting of certain economic sanctions (in exchange for a formal renunciation of acquiring an Iranian atomic bomb). Today these advances are menaced from a number of sides. One of them is the alliance against Iran which the USA 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 has made no economic progress in recent years. The contrary is the case. The economy is groaning under the cost of the operations of Iranian imperialism abroad, and weakened by the international sanctions. The United States has failed to lift economic sanctions against Iran as it had promised as part of the nuclear agreement. Instead, it has been obstructing the engagement of European companies in Iran. Now, under Trump, the US sanctions will even be reinforced. Another central problem is that the competitiveness of the Iranian national capital is being strangled by the highly anachronistic theocratic-clerical bureaucracy, which has no idea how to run a modern capitalist economy, and by the kleptomaniac system of the “Revolutionary Guards”. From the point of view of president Rouhani, breaking or at least curbing the dominance of these structures would be in the best interest of Iranian capitalism. It would also give Iran a more liberal image, better suited to countering the sanctions, the diplomacy and the rhetoric of its enemies abroad.

But on account of the dominant position of the hardliners within the armed forces, the reformers have few legal means at their disposal to put through their policy. This is why president Rouhani began to call on the population at large to formulate its own critique of the present economic policy, and of the corruption of the Guards and their business interests. The reformers were trying 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 disappointment once the promised economic boom which was supposed to follow the lifting of sanctions failed to materialise. Moreover, Rouhani was apparently not the only one taking chances. The president himself has accused his hardline opponents of having organised the first demonstration in Mashhad, which is the bastion of Ibrahim Raisi, the candidate of the hardliners in the presidential elections last May. The main slogan of this demonstration is indeed reported to have been “*death to Rouhani*”. But as soon as the protests extended, other slogans were heard such as “*death to Khamenei*” (the religious hard-line head of state), “*down with the dictatorship*”, or “*What is free in Iran? Thievery and injustice!*” The appearance of such slogans directed against the regime as a whole indicates that neither of the two main bourgeois fractions is able to manipulate the popular anger at will against the other.

This however in no way lessens the danger of the working people being manipulated by the ruling 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 beginning of the “Arab Spring”. But this was only possible because the military let it happen (president Mubarak intended to curb the influence of the generals on politics and above all in the economy). In Iran (as in Egypt at the time) foreign powers were also involved. The claim of the clerical leaders in Tehran today that the protests in Iran have been instigated by foreign powers (USA, Israel, Saudi Arabia) has enraged wide sectors of the population, since these claims arrogantly deny both their very real suffering and their ability to take the initiative themselves. This does not mean, however, that these and other rival powers 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 conflict between his country and its Persian neighbour would be fought out “*in Iran, not in Saudi Arabia*”. One of his think-tanks in Riyadh has been advising him to stir up discontent within the Sunni religious minority in Iran, as well as among ethnic minorities (one third of the population of Iran are not Persian). In Egypt, after the fall of Mubarak, a civil war between the two main fractions of the bourgeoisie – the armed forces and the Muslim Brotherhood – was only averted through the ferocious repression of the latter by the former. In Syria, the social protests triggered off an 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 account of the present reflux of class struggle, class consciousness and class identity at a world scale. Without the support of the world proletariat, difficulties and dangers for our class sisters and brothers in Iran are all the greater.

Steinklopfer. 9.1.2018.

Continued from page 1

Austerity and poverty Not just Brexit Not just the Tories

In the run up to the 2010 election, the Conservatives promised more of the same.

“*In addition, Labour’s flagship ‘New Deal’ back to work programme is to be scrapped by the Tories and replaced with more ‘personalised’ help, which will include benefit cuts for those unwilling to take part in whatever spurious training they are made to undergo. On the other hand, Labour has said that ‘People out of work for more than six months who have turned down work experience, support or training will be required to take a work placement as a condition of receiving their benefits.’ It’s not for nothing that the Work and Pensions Secretary, Yvette Cooper, noted (apparently without any sense of irony) that the Tories ‘are simply rehashing Labour policies...’.*”⁵

This continuity is no accident: it is because both parties hold office in a capitalist state, one which works in the ‘interests of the nation’, i.e. the ruling class. This remains true despite democratic elections, and also when governments spout a left wing rhetoric. So we should not be fooled into thinking that the Labour Party led by an old left wing ‘rebel’ would be any different, as we saw last June when it refused to rule out freezing benefits, because it was important to overcome the state debt, but promised to keep defence spending at 2%.⁶ “Ooooh Jeremy Corbyn” leading the Labour Party would be no better than the similarly radical-sounding Syriza government in Greece which in 2015 went ahead with the very austerity measures that had been rejected by a referendum it called.

The working class cannot defend its conditions by relying on any elected government, whatever it promises, nor on any union or campaign, but only on its own struggle, its unity, and its solidarity. **M and A, 2.2.18**

5. ‘2010: workers face sweeping cuts’ in *WR* 330.

6. See ‘Hard times bring increased illusions in Labour Party’ in *WR* 377.

1. <https://libcom.org/news/iran-bread-jobs-freedom-05012018>

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, aimed at marking the centenary of the revolution and responding to the many falsifications of this crucial experience of working class history. The morning session was introduced by a comrade of the Communist Workers Organisation, who mounted a very thorough argument in defence of the proletarian character of the Bolshevik party 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, summarised by two close sympathisers who attended the meeting, 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>).

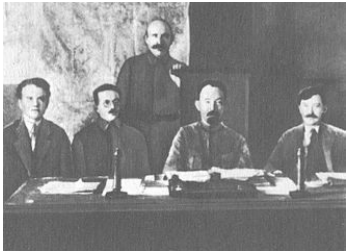
Afternoon session: presentation by the ICC: On the degeneration of the revolution

This presentation will be based mainly on the section in our Manifesto on the October revolution (<http://en.internationalism.org/icc/201709/14380/manifesto-october-revolution-russia-1917>) which deals with the degeneration of the revolution and the errors of the Bolsheviks. This section begins as a polemic with other currents in the revolutionary movement: internationalist anarchists and councilists, whose ancestors may have supported the revolution in the beginning, but who later decided that October 1917 had been no 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: the constant tendency towards degeneration and betrayal under the weight of the dominant ideas. Those who portray the Russian revolution as bourgeois evade this question. It is perhaps more ‘consistent’ on the part of the anarchists, some of whom have always rejected Marxism and trace their origins to the likes of Bakunin, but with marxist currents like the council communists or the ‘Impossibleists’ of the SPGB, it skirts round the obvious fact that they, like the Bolsheviks, have the same origins in international social democracy. Our method is that of Rosa Luxemburg, 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 and its degeneration in the framework of isolation and the terrible siege mounted by the world bourgeoisie is not, as many anarchists claim, an ‘excuse’ for the errors of the Bolsheviks, but it does enable us to understand why a proletarian party could make such errors and why they were to prove so fatal. The key thing for us is to draw the lessons 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 progress of the revolution. The Manifesto points to the following essential lessons:

The absolute necessity for the extension of the revolution. This of course was 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 overthrown by invading (and homegrown) counter-revolutionary armies: they didn’t sufficiently grasp the danger of an internal counter-revolution. Furthermore, recognising the impossibility of ‘socialism in one 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.

What was definitively 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 a greater or lesser extent held by the Marxist movement in general, not just by the Bolsheviks: Luxemburg for example declared that the Spartacists would only take power on the basis of a clear majority will in the working class. But 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 were themselves ambiguous on this question: Trotsky, for example, saw why the October insurrection should be carried out in the name of the Military Revolutionary Committee, a soviet 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 for the inevitability of the proletarian dictatorship being exerted by the communist party alone. These conceptions reinforced the gulf between the party and the class, while at the same time the attempt to run 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, 1921. 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, in the end, the problem of morality: 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 less can it be imposed on the majority by force. We are with Luxemburg who argued that the idea of the Red Terror, understood as generalised state violence against all sectors of the population, was incompatible with the revolutionary project, and with Miasnikov who understood that the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921 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

Stalinism – for whom the methods of terror are perfectly compatible with its real aim: the consolidation of a brutal capitalist regime. But the notion that the party must exert its dictatorship on behalf of and if necessary against the class as a whole lives on in the proletarian camp: it is defended by the Bordigists above all. But present day Bordigism has only arrived at this position by burying the real contribution of the Italian communist left from which it claims descent, since the latter’s investigations led it to recognise first that the party cannot use violence against the class and must not become enmeshed in the transitional state; and second, particularly through the work of its successors in the French communist left, to explicitly reject 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 Bordigist idea of the party’s role: that 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 that it may be necessary to create instruments (such as a standing army) which have a definitely statist function and which contain an inherent threat to the autonomous 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 factory committees and workers’ councils no longer embodied the armament of the working class. At the same time, the Soviet state was not only made up of proletarian organs, but also by the representative bodies of other classes, which, although allied to the working class, nevertheless had their own interests to defend. These problems will not appear in exactly the same form in the future, given the changes that have come about in the composition of the global working class, but in essence they will continue to be posed in any revolutionary situation.

Regarding the economic and social measures to be carried out by the proletarian power, the Russian revolution has demonstrated that state capitalism is not a step towards socialism, as some of the Bolsheviks believed, but is always a means for strengthening the capitalist relationship. At the same time, the programme of self-management, the creation of a federation of ‘independent’ production units linked by commodity exchange, as advocated by the anarcho-syndicalists of the time and further theorised by the likes of Cornelius Castoriadis, also fails to transcend the horizon of capitalist relations and, like state capitalism, is seen as being achievable within the context of a single nation state. Again, the economic measures the proletariat takes in the first phases of the revolution must be compatible with the ultimate goal of communism, but at the same time they cannot be confused with the true communist transformation which can only be achieved when the revolution has triumphed on a world scale. For this reason our polemic is also directed against another current which is critical of both the state capitalist and self-management models: the “communisers”, who tend to revive old anarchist conceptions by arguing that you can by-pass the problem of political power and proceed to an immediate communisation of social life. This again tends to evade the problem of the international extension of the revolution. But above all, it inverses the real process of the communist transformation by insisting that the proletariat must immediately negate itself and merge into humanity, whereas the new human community starts with the self-affirmation of the proletariat and is completed when the whole of humanity has been integrated into the proletarian condition. This is the only abolition of the proletariat that communists can advocate.

In many ways, the problem of the self-affirmation of the proletariat is the central problem of the revolution, above all after a series of traumas and changes in the life of capital have undermined the old sense of class identity but not replaced it with a new one. This problem was in many ways posed during the Indignados movement in Spain in

2011, a movement which was predominantly proletarian in composition, and proletarian in many of its methods (assemblies, affirmation of internationalism, etc), but in which most of its protagonists saw themselves not as part of the working class but as “citizens” demanding a “real democracy”. The class struggle of the future will only become explicitly revolutionary and communist by resolving this paradox. **Alf, for the ICC**

Discussion

The essential content of the discussion on the disintegration of the Russian revolution is in fact embedded in the presentation on this issue: the isolation of the revolution due to the defeat of attempts to extend it through revolutionary action in other countries (notably Germany) and the exhaustion of the workers, soldiers and revolutionary layers of the peasantry through invasion and civil war, leading to a real decimation of revolutionary forces and a political degeneration accelerated by errors and erroneous conceptions held by the class as a whole and the Bolshevik Party in particular. Similarly the present-day conceptions of the ‘communisers’, also raised in the discussion, are dealt with in the presentation (and continued in the discussion thread on this site <http://en.internationalism.org/forum/1056/mark/14433/working-class-identity>).

Other issues raised included:

Was the very conception of a communist beacon or beacon a hangover from the bourgeois revolution? Absolutely not. ‘History will not forgive us if we don’t act’ said Lenin, in 1917 understanding (and even under-estimating) the international extent and depth of revolt against war, privation and the ruling classes held responsible. The revolution was indeed an inspiration to the subsequent uprisings in Germany, Hungary, Italy; the massive strikes in Britain, the US and elsewhere. It was the defeat of these revolts – the failure of the revolution to extend internationally – and 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 Communism/requisitioning; the militarisation of labour, the Cheka, etc) – which wrecked the soviet project from within.

There was a desperate need to defend the revolution from invasion by the imperialist powers (armies from the US, GB, Canada, Germany, Poland, Estonia, China, Japan, France, etc) and from the White armies backed by these powers in the civil war that followed the October revolution. This was a life or death issue. And what the soviets and the Red Army achieved in militarily repulsing these hostile forces while awaiting the eruption of the world revolution was quite remarkable. But the political price - in terms of the dissolution of the workers’ own autonomous armed militias incorporated 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 subservience of the Party and Soviets to the state remained while the working class itself retreated in Russia and internationally. Most comrades at the meeting agreed would have been better if the revolution 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 of the Russian revolution was the worst possible outcome for the proletariat: the fact that it was a communist party that was ‘in charge’ as the revolution degenerated; that it was in the name of the international proletariat that the notion of ‘socialism in one country’ was developed in contradiction to Marxist internationalism – all this allowed for the dreadful legacy that equates Stalinism with communism.

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

Given criticisms raised of the Bolsheviks, a sympathiser of Trotskyism asked ‘What should they have done, then?’”

There were various aspects given in response:

a) The question is based on the incorrect idea that the revolution was for the Bolsheviks to save if only they made the right decisions, rather than understanding that it’s what 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 homogeneous 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 of what they should have done rather than one of analysing what they did and did not do and learning 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 parliamentarianism. 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 ends justify the means’, of taking actions incompatible with the goals of communism, is certainly a notion which predates the event, even if it had not been posed concretely.

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 understand that the party does not take power and (for the ICC) that the state after the revolution is 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 the result, 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...

Two further elements in the discussion:

The Third Communist International was formed late (1919) and was overly-influenced by the Bolshevik 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 advance of the revolution itself; For the SPGB, 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 disillusionment – he realised he’d made a big mistake. Other comrades replied that a) The aim 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’s no sense in blaming Lenin nor looking for any Russian ‘particularism’. Finally, the meeting was marked by a high degree of homogeneity: between the CWO and the ICC, their sympathisers (and even a lone internationalist anarchist) on the main issues under debate and on the ICC Manifesto and the CWO 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 expressions 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



Kronstadt sailors in 1921

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 – a society of freely associated producers can’t be achieved through coercion but only resolved con-

sciously. Behind this unexplored disagreement lies a difference of appreciation on the crucial question of what is the state in general and the nature of the state in the period of transition in particular.

For the CWO, Lenin’s State and Revolution is clear enough: the workers’ councils wield statist functions including military power and having some kind of organs removed from this nexus of power is building castles in the air. For the ICC, the state is an unavoidable excrescence – symptom of the fact that different classes still exist – and will indeed have to form organs of coercion and violence to defend the revolution... Which is precisely why the working class can’t simply identify with the ‘workers’ state’ or such organs dealing with the ‘here and now’ but above all must wield political and armed control over them, armed with a consciousness of where the revolution is heading, of what it must become....

ICC online

- 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
- 2 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

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 Gulag. For the majority at the ICC meeting, this was not the case.

The Russian Revolution failed. True, the working class, through its soviets, through its party, smashed the bourgeois state and established, for a short time, a dictatorship of the proletariat (only the Socialist Party of GB regarded this as a bourgeois revolution and a Bolshevik coup). However in the view of other participants at the meeting, an indisputably proletarian revolution – the first at the level of an entire nation state - degenerated. Relatively rapidly.

Thus it is that the real issues of the Russian revolution are largely unknown within the populace at 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 one 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, the Netherlands, Spain and further afield, while the CWO was holding a meeting in the North of England. This was the first coordinated meeting of the ICC and CWO for 20 years – and the previous meeting was also on the subject of the Russian Revolution. And the real differences of historical appreciation, of theory about attitudes towards regroupment past, present and future – about how to build the party in practice - remain to be further developed beyond past, bitter polemics

MH/KT

Continued from page 7

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.¹³ With each successive struggle, workers in the United States learn for themselves that they have more in common with one another than not. Sadly, this emergent wave of militancy has been confined to a handful of industries and it has not yet spread to the whole class. Although still in its infancy, these experiences have greater transformative potential than all the consciousness-raising and leftist proselytizing in the world. The material imperatives of the class struggle impose themselves on the consciousness of social actors as an 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 class struggle itself that challenges people’s most deeply-held beliefs about the world and each other, and which draws the lines of battle within the workplace between workers and capitalists. 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. E.S., October 13, 2017

13. See, for example, the walkout by 4,000 dockworkers in Newark, New Jersey (http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/01/surprise_walkout_by_ila_shuts_down_the_nj_and_ny_p.html), which the International Longshoremen’s Association did not approve of, the latter issuing a call later that very day for its members to return to work. Or the truck drivers’ protest in Hialeah, Florida, (<http://miami.cbslocal.com/video/3412103-truck-drivers-protest-pay-rates-by-blocking-okeechobee-road/>) which blocked traffic on Okeechobee Road, one of the main arteries through which goods and people move in and out of the city, until they were forced to disperse violently by police.

Reflections on the split in the Anarchist Federation

The Anarchist Federation, one of the main anarchist organisations in Britain, has just been through a major split. Members in Leicester and London, including a number of founder members, have left the organisation following the tumult over “transphobia” at October’s Anarchist Bookfair.

If we were right in our assessment of the AF as an internationalist anarchist group¹, this is a significant event which attests to growing difficulties across the entire spectrum of groups who are seeking to develop an authentic revolutionary opposition to capitalism – not only among anarchists but also within the communist left. We think that it is essential to understand the roots of these difficulties if we are to face up to the challenge they pose, and it is in this spirit that we aim to 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 Anarchist 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 saddened by events as are most people, no matter what perspective or interpretation they have on what happened and the role of the Bookfair collective.*

*We were, 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, nor did we support the statement issued by other campaigns and organisations. We did not want to respond immediately as there are so many issues involved and emotions are strong. We hoped that after some time we could give a political assessment of the situation rather than just a knee-jerk reaction based on our emotional response to events and statements from other groups”*²

The former members have reconstituted themselves into London Anarchist Communists and Leicester Anarchist Communists³.

It’s not possible here to deal in any detail with the events at the Bookfair, which caused such ructions across the anarchist milieu and even reached the national press⁴. In essence it involved a clash between a group of feminists who intervened at the Bookfair with a leaflet arguing that new government legislation on “transgender rights” could be seen as an infringement on women’s rights to organize separately, since it would allow transgender males into spaces reserved by or for women. The leaflet provoked a lot of anger from “trans” rights supporters, who saw it as an expression of transphobia by what they call the Trans Exclusive Radical Feminists or TERFS, and one of the women supporting the leafleters, a well-known activist who was involved in the MacLibel case and has been targeted in a particularly vicious way by the undercover police, was subject to mobbing and accused of being a fascist. The Bookfair Collective, which attempted to intervene in the situation to calm it down, subsequently issued a statement saying that this would be its last Bookfair – it has experienced similar clashes in a number of other Bookfairs and its patience has run out⁵.

These events are not unconnected to other scandals centred on the question of morality and behavior which have rocked the anarchist movement in the last few years, the most notable of which are “Aufhebengate” and the “Schmidt affair”⁶, both of which raise the problem of the role

played in the anarchist milieu by individuals with a dubious relationship with the police (in the first case) and with out-and-out racists in the second. We have also seen a substantial part of this milieu plunging into support for “national liberation” in the shape of the “Rojava revolution”, armed enclaves in Syria controlled by the Kurdish nationalists of the PKK and based on a semi-anarchist ideology of “democratic confederalism”⁷, and an extremely widespread support for anti-fascism which was highlighted by the incidents around Charlottesville in the USA⁸.

These developments are not taking place in a vacuum. The tendency, within anarchism, to abandon class politics and look for solutions in various forms of identity politics – whether based on gender, race, or nation – while not new, are certainly being exacerbated by the characteristics of the current historic period, in which capitalism is sinking towards barbarism while the working class, weakened by all the divisions engendered by this decomposing society, has found it extremely difficult to resist as a class and above all to rediscover its own perspective for the future of 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, while linked to genuine oppressions, tend to obscure the central problem of exploitation and the capitalist social relation.

The statement issued by the seceding groups is highly critical of the mobbing witnessed at the Bookfair. And while it affirms the importance of fighting against all particular forms of oppression, including transphobia, it also contains a questioning of the identity-based politics which it feels has become increasingly dominant within the AF, and a strong desire to return to “class struggle anarchism”. The question of internationalism is also directly posed by this split, because, although the AF published a fairly clear statement on the “Rojava revolution” some time ago⁹, some of the comrades who left the organisation also consider that pro-PKK positions have also been increasingly influential within the organisation¹⁰.

These aspects of the statement are expressions of a proletarian reaction to the engulfing of the AF in the mire of identity politics and a drift towards support for radical forms of nationalism. They confirm what we wrote in our two-part article on internationalist anarchism in the UK, where we argued that for all its concessions to leftist campaigns, the AF was in the tradition of internationalist anarchism – of those currents in the anarchist movement which have stood against any participation in imperialist war.¹¹ The revival of the term “anarchist communism” (the AF had originally been called the Anarchist Communist Federation) is symbolic of this will to recover the healthiest parts of its tradition, which they feel can no longer be done within the AF.

And yet: the very fact that these criticisms of identity politics are carried out in the historic framework of anarchism means that they don’t – and cannot – go far enough.

Anarchist obstacles to theoretical advance

What is the evidence for this claim?

- The statement begins by admitting how

org/forums/general/ak-press-says-michael-schmidt-fascist-25092015

7. <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201412/11625/anarchism-and-imperialist-war-nationalism-or-internationalism>

8. <http://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201709/14390/anti-fascism-still-formula-confusion>

We should also mention that there has also been a split in the main international organization of the anarcho-syndicalists, the International Workers’ Association, which appears to centre round its most numerous section, the CNT in Spain. See for example <https://libcom.org/blog/cnt-iwa-part-2-crisis-iwa-seen-cnt-17122016>.

9. <https://libcom.org/news/anarchist-federation-statement-rojava-december-2014-02122014>

10. See <https://libcom.org/forums/anarchist-federation/whats-going-afed-27122017>, especially p 2 and

11. See note 1 for references

difficult it has proved to overcome all the divisions within the working class and to build a revolutionary movement committed to the overthrow of capitalism. But it gives little sign of trying to situate these difficulties in the overall context of the present period – a period, as we have noted, marked by a loss of class identity and a low level of class struggle. It’s true that prior to the split the Leicester group of the AF had held a meeting in Leicester and one at the Anarchist Bookfair, as well as writing an article that started a thread on libcom, under the heading ‘Is the working class movement dead?’¹², which posed serious questions about the problems facing the working class and revolutionaries. There is a recognition in the article that the class struggle has been weakening over a long period but the approach to the problem in the presentation to the meetings is essentially an empirical one which is unable to place it in the global, historic context of capitalism’s terminal phase of decline.

- Although it affirms the central role of the class struggle, the statement does not pose the fundamental theoretical issue: the nature of the working class as a historic, revolutionary class, or as Marx famously put it in 1843: *“a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no historical, but only human, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win it-self only through the complete re-winning of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat”*. (*Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*)

It is this conception which enables us to understand why the struggle of the proletariat contains, in potential, the solution to all the particular oppressions spawned by capitalist society. But this conception of the proletariat is, 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 bugbear of the anarchists, to develop a critique of the Economist vision which limits the class movement to something that takes place in the factories and essentially on a day to day basis. And in many ways this is precisely the conception of the main currents in anarchism – most notable the anarcho-syndicalists, but also of those who produced the statement, for whom a class struggle orientation seems to boil down to “getting involved” in the workplace and the local community, which is presented almost as a panacea: *“our answer to the first issue”* – the reluctance of working people to get involved in revolutionary politics – *“is that we need to make sure as anarchists we are directly involved in struggle, in the workplace and the community”*. The issue for us here is not whether revolutionaries should engage with struggles in the workplace or the neighbourhood, but the content of that engagement – its methods and objectives, which are nowhere posed in the seceding statement. Otherwise comrades risk burning themselves out in non-stop activism whose real content is essentially a trade unionist one. This is evident in the case of the anarcho-syndicalists whose “organising” role is linked to a project of building a “revolutionary union”. But even those who appear to be more critical of trade unionism can be led back to union-building through a simple focus on day-to-day workplace organising. It was pointed out on the libcom thread about the AF split that some of those who left the AF had previously joined the IWW, which is not entirely consistent

12. <https://libcom.org/library/working-class-movement-dead-what-econ-pro-revolutionaries-current-social-political-econo>

with the AF’s position on anarcho-syndicalism, while some of the campaigns of the more “autonomist” Angry Workers of the World group in West London seem to be heading towards calls to build new IWW or “independent union” branches¹³.

- This restricted view of the class struggle does not offer any real alternative to the ideas of “idpol”, for whom being working class is another particular oppression, another separate identity with its own rights to defend. The statement’s critique of identity politics and the kind of mobbing witnessed at the Bookfair makes some valid points – in particular by recognising that fighting against oppressive and divisive ideologies is one that takes place inside the working class, and that those proletarians who are weighed down by various kinds of prejudices need to be won over 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 organise autonomously”*, without any discussion about whether such forms of organising – by gender, sexual orientation, race – tend to become inter-classist by definition and create obstacles to a wider class unity. The statement mentions that it disagrees with the statements put out by Edinburgh and two other AF groups, but it doesn’t mention the fact that one of these groups was the “Trans Action Faction” within the AF¹⁴, and no criticism is made of the organisational model adopted by the AF, which presents itself as a myriad not only of local groups but of groups organised around sexual and other identities. Again on the organisational question, while it’s recognised in the statement that a lot of people entered the AF without really agreeing with its Aims and Principles, the new group goes no further than reprinting the original document and doesn’t appear to have an answer to the pertinent question posed by a member of the SPGB on the libcom thread: *“Just out of interest how was it that people whose politics are closer to liberal idpol than anarchist-communism came to be the majority in the AF anyhow? Isn’t there any kind of screening process for new members?. In other words, is there not a need to examine the ‘entry requirements’ of a genuine revolutionary organisation?”*¹⁵

Does any of this mean that all the problems posed by the different forms of oppression and division reinforced by capitalist society have been solved by the marxist movement? Not at all: even when we are talking about authentic marxism and not its Stalinist or leftist caricature, its various currents have not been immune from workerist ideologies, reductionist visions of class, and even overtly “patriarchal attitudes”. But we are convinced that it’s only the marxist, historical method that will enable us to understand the origins of different forms of oppression and the way to oppose and overcome them, which can only mean starting from a lucid class standpoint that states openly that identity politics are a dead-end¹⁶.

For us, the underlying problem is that, historically speaking, anarchism itself stems from deep confusions about class: the Proudhonist tendency classically expressed a reaction by the artisan to being dissolved into the proletariat; the Bakuninist current tried to respond to the development of the proletariat with a more collectivist approach but without jettisoning the attachment to the cen-

13. <https://libcom.org/forums/anarchist-federation/whats-going-afed-27122017?page=6#comment-601412>, post 184, Steven. On the AWW’s drift towards syndicalism: *“Workplace groups: Currently we work in a major warehouse of a supermarket chain and factories of a major ready-meal producer and try to establish workers groups. Together with the IWW we try to organise independent union structures in ten local companies”*. <https://libcom.org/blog/migration-national-social-democracy-britain-15012018>

14. <http://afed.org.uk/afed-trans-action-faction-statement-in-response-to-events-at-london-anarchist-bookfair-2017/>

15. <http://libcom.org/forums/anarchist-federation/whats-going-afed-27122017>, post 19, Darren P

16. This is why we are also publishing the article ‘The dead-end of racial identity politics’ by the US group Workers’ Offensive in this issue (<https://www.workersoffensive.org/single-post/2017/10/13/The-Dead-End-of-Racial-Identity-Politics>)

The dead end of racial identity politics

We are publishing an article written by the US communist group Workers’ Offensive (<https://www.workersoffensive.org/>) which offers a welcome critique of the “identity politics” which is gaining strength around the globe, and which, as we examine in another article in this issue, was behind the recent split in the UK Anarchist Federation. Basing itself on a solid class standpoint and the analyses of past revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg, it shows how today’s identity politics serves to channel the real discontent stirred up by exacerbated racial oppression towards bourgeois political goals and institutions, and argues that only the broadening and deepening of the class struggle can overcome the many divisions that class society and capitalist social relations have imposed on the exploited (WR).

Racial identity politics within the United States have historically assumed one of two forms: integrationism and black nationalism. The integrationist view was most eloquently espoused by Frederick Douglass. It sought to eliminate racial barriers to upward social mobility by reforming the dominant social, political, and economic institutions within capitalism to be inclusive of black business 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 blacks should build their own independent political and economic enclaves within American cities, with many in the movement calling for blacks to return to Africa.¹ Both integrationist and nationalist ideologies were predicated on notions of elite spokespersonship that made black workers into the wards of ‘their’ capitalist class. This principle is encapsulated in the politics of “symbolic representation”, in its various iterations, according to which parity between social groups can be determined by measuring the degree of elite representation within the halls of power.² Alternatively, it has been referred to as an “elite-brokerage” style of politics. Within this framework, the diverse and often conflicting interests of blacks, which are primarily dependent upon their class positioning, are subsumed under the heading of homogeneous racial interests, with black capitalists, predictably enough, speaking on behalf of an empirically non-existent black community.³ In short, in spite

1. John Henryk Clarke, *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2011), 207.
2. Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2009), 188.
3. Adolph Reed, “Why Is There No Black Political Movement?”, in *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and*

of their superficial differences, both integrationist and racial separatist (i.e., nationalist) perspectives share many assumptions that are apologetic to the existing capitalist social order. It shall be the aim of the present essay to prove the inadequacy of identity politics for liberating blacks within the United States from racialized oppression and to provide, in broad outline, a roadmap for their emancipation and that of all oppressed peoples.

The idea of the right of nations to self-determination entered public discourse in earnest when then-US president Woodrow Wilson issued his Fourteen Points towards the end of the First World War. Long before that, though, the ‘national question’ had been a subject of fervent discussion, not only among the most ardent defenders of capitalism, but also the international socialist movement. Rooted partly in the experience of the American and French revolutions, but also the major social upheavals that took place between the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, this theory holds that a nation, or group of people sharing a cultural identity, has the right to detach itself from an alien political body and decide for itself the manner in which it is to be governed. Naturally, this postulate appealed to the weak among the capitalists. Subordinated economically with respect to the dominant factions and effectively excluded from political power, they saw in it the opportunity to advance their position within capitalism by capturing the state apparatus. However, it also found a great deal of support among socialists, who feared that their mass movements would collapse from under them and workers would flock to the capitalist parties if they did not prostrate themselves before the delusions of the masses. Only a few within the Socialist International took a principled stance against the shameless opportunism of its leadership. Other Thoughts on the American Scene, (New York City: The New Press, 2000), 4-5.

ership concerning the question of nationalities. The left-wing of the socialist movement, whose foremost representative was Rosa Luxemburg, rejected the right of nations to self-determination as a bourgeois myth and reasserted the validity of the core Marxian concept of class struggle.

Nations, according to Luxemburg, are abstractions whose existence cannot be asserted through factual means. They do not exist as internally homogeneous political entities because of the contradictory interests and antagonistic relations between the social classes that comprise them. Hence, as Luxemburg explains, “*there is literally not one social area, from the coarsest material relationships to the subtle moral ones, in which the possessing class and the class-conscious proletariat hold the same attitude, and in which they appear as a consolidated ‘national’ entity.*”⁴ But nationalism is not simply an artificial thought-system propagated by the ruling class to keep the exploited masses subjugated under their rule. Rather, like all other ideologies and political theories, it is rooted in socioeconomic realities and historical processes. To be more specific, nationalism was the ideological implement through which the ascendant European bourgeoisie rallied the poor peasantry and the proletariat in its struggle to overthrow (and replace!) the feudal nobility. It was likewise with race, a category with no scientific basis whatsoever, since the current extent of our species’ biological diversity is far too superficial to merit differentiation into distinct racial categories, but which served nevertheless as an *ad hoc* justification for the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, both of which were vital to capitalist primitive accumulation.⁵ Therefore, the function of race in the American context is rather comparable to nationalism in 18th century Europe. As Adolph Reed explains, these ideologies, “*help to stabilize a social order by legitimizing its hierarchies of wealth, power, and privilege, including its social division of labor, as the natural order of things.*”⁶

The institutionalization of the racialized division of labor in the United States, which was quite

4. Rosa Luxemburg, “The National Question and Autonomy,” in *The National Question: Selected Writings* (New York City: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 135-136.
5. Karl Marx, *Capital vol. 1* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 915.
6. Adolph Reed. “Marx, Race, Neoliberalism,” *New Labor Forum* 22 (2013): 49.

profound historically and has assumed the form of slavery, racial segregation, and ‘post-racial’ structural racism successively, makes the American context unique in a few significant ways. For instance, whereas in other countries, racially and ethnically delineated labor pools have historically been incorporated into capitalism as a particularly vulnerable segment of the working class that can be subjected to intensified forms of exploitation, i.e., surplus-value extraction, black workers in the United States are disproportionately impacted by the structural unemployment that capitalism naturally produces. Their status as a surplus or excess population – ‘excess’ only in the sense that they cannot be profitably employed by capital – can be attributed in large part to their historical exclusion from the formal economy, and particularly those sectors experiencing the highest growth, which some have identified as the source of their relative underdevelopment.⁷ Instead, the majority of black workers live in a chronic state of unemployment or under-employment and have been affected more than any other subsection of the US working class by the tendency towards the casualization of employment that has flourished under neoliberalism. It is precisely this dismal state of affairs which racism seeks to rationalize. Hence, racist thought plays a dual function in modern-day capitalism: 1) it helps channel groups of people into certain occupations and allows for the maintenance of a reserve army of labor that can be deployed during periods of heightened capital-expansion; and 2) it sows divisions within the ranks of the workers and ideologically binds them to ‘their’ exploiting class.⁸

Since racism is grounded on the economic substructure of society, it logically follows that its abolition will not be brought about by the exploiting class or political movements led by it. The self-anointed leaders of the so-called ‘black community’, who purport to be mediators between this idealized collectivity and the majority-white political establishment, are deeply embedded in capitalist production relations and therefore complicit in the reproduction of racism. These ‘black brahmins’, as Manning Marable famously referred to the professional-managerial stratum (a layer of society

Continued on page 7

Political positions of the ICC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUR ACTIVITY

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

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

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

OUR ORIGINS

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