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Strikes in France: The working class begins to become aware of itself

For years now the ruling class has been telling us that the working class does not exist, that we live in a “post-industrial” society, or that we are all “citizens” of democracy, or that we are just part of the “people”. Or that the working class is hopelessly divided between those of us who are “native”, “white”, or “left behind” and those who are either supposed to be part of an “urban elite” or who are compelled to become immigrants and asylum seekers.

This ideological assault has been based on real, material factors: the defeat of important workers’ struggles in the 70s and 80s, the break-up and re-location of traditional centres of working class militancy, especially in western Europe and the USA, the re-organisation of working conditions aimed at persuading us that we are all “self-employed” today, and the growing tendency for capitalist society to fragment into a war of each against all at every level. Furthermore, the collapse of the eastern bloc in 1989-91, the so-called “death of communism”, gave a tremendous boost to the idea that the class struggle is a thing of the past, and that, if it does exist, it can only offer the perspective of a society even more repressive and poverty-stricken than the one we are already facing. The fact that what collapsed in the east was really a highly statified form of capitalism was, of course, entirely buried in this torrent of lies.

A torrent aimed at hiding the simple truth: that the working class will exist as long as capitalism exists, and because capitalism is by definition a global system the working class is by definition an international exploited class which in every country has the same interest in resisting its exploitation.

It has proved extremely difficult for the working class to emerge from the reflux in its struggles that began at the end of the 80s, and during these decades, the very sense of belonging to a world-wide class has to a large extent been lost. But the class struggle never entirely disappears. It often goes underground, but that doesn’t mean that workers have stopped thinking, or feeling angry about the continuing attack on their living and working conditions, or reflecting on the increasingly catastrophic state of the capitalist world order. And from time to time, the struggle flares up again, reminding us of the prediction of the Communist Manifesto, that “*society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and*



Proletariat”. In France in 2006, the students, now increasingly the workers of tomorrow, led a struggle against the “First Employment Contract” or CPE which was a direct attempt by the government to drastically reduce job security for those starting work. They held general assemblies in the universities to organise their movement and appealed for the solidarity of the employed workers, the workers of all generations, and the marginalised proletarians of the “banlieu”, the ghettoised outer suburbs. The government, haunted by the memories of May 68 in France, of a generalised strike movement, backed down and withdrew the CPE. In 2011, the “Indignados” in Spain were largely made up of young proletarians and their indignation was directed against the lack of any prospects exacerbated by the 2008 “financial crisis”. They too came together in mass assemblies, this time in the city squares, where debates were held not only about the immediate methods of the struggle but also about the nature of the society we are living in and the possibilities of an alternative.

The Indignados’ struggle, for all its importance, suffered from a key weakness: it was not able to make effective links to the workplaces, to the employed working class, and it was thus

vulnerable to the myth that it was really a struggle of the “citizens” for a more responsive form of bourgeois democracy. And indeed, in the past year, as the economic crisis of capitalism continues to deepen, we have seen a succession of social revolts in which the working class has been drowned in the mass of the people, movements which have further distanced workers from their specific class interests.

In the central countries, the clearest example of such an “interclassist” movement was the Yellow Vests in France. Many workers took part in the Yellow Vest protests as individuals, but it was led by small entrepreneurs and dominated by their demands (such as the reduction of taxes on fuel). Above all, it was entirely comfortable with presenting itself as a movement of French citizens, parading under the national flag and demanding “more democracy” (as well as raising openly nationalist demands for the limitation of immigration).

The Yellow Vest movement, breaking out in a country which has so often been the theatre of radical proletarian movements, was a measure of the disorientation of the working class and posed a further threat to its capacity to recover its class identity.

But it is precisely here that we can begin to grasp the importance of the recent strike movement in France, principally involving railway workers, health workers and other parts of the public sector. This was a movement which was undoubtedly a response to a direct attack on workers’ living conditions – the so-called “Pension Reforms” demanded by the Macron government. It was centred on the workplaces where the working class is most obviously a living social force, but at the same time, there was a very strong push towards solidarity between the different sectors. There were also some signs – especially among the railway workers – of a capacity to take action outside the trade unions, even if, as we explain in the article “Government and unions hand in hand to implement the pension ‘reform’”, the unions retained an overall control over the movement.

The significance of this movement was above all that it gives us a glimpse of how the working class can regain its sense of being a class – as some of the banners on the strike demonstrations proclaimed, “*We exist*”, “*We are here*”. It is the response of workers to the attacks of capital demanded by the remorseless economic crisis which will enable them to recover their class identity, an indispensable basis for the development of a *revolutionary* consciousness, the recognition that the working class is not only collectively exploited by capital, but also that it is the only force in society that can offer a real alternative to capital, a new society where the exploitation of labour power, like previous forms of slavery, has been banished once and for all.

Amos, 16.2.20

Inside this issue

Britain: The political crisis has not gone away	2
Labour Party: Decline of ‘Socialist’ Parties is an international phenomenon	2
Covid-19: More evidence that capitalism has become a danger to humanity	3
The French government and unions hand-in-hand to implement pensions ‘reform’	4
Sudan: the democratic mystification fuels capitalist repression	5
Soleimani assassination: Middle East dominated by imperialist free-for-all	6
Life of the ICC	7
Anarchists and Extinction Rebellion: A bourgeois organisation cannot be transformed	8

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Johnson government

The political crisis has not gone away

The election of Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party, with a large majority, which meant the end of the parliamentary logjam and brought the UK’s formal departure from the EU on 31 January, would appear to mark a decisive break from the political crisis that has engulfed the British ruling class over the past few years. The political paralysis was ended by a simple process: Labour and the other opposition parties agreed to the holding of an election, the Tories campaigned round the basic theme of “Get Brexit Done”, the electorate trooped into the polling booths, and, fed up with years of arguments over Brexit, delivered an unambiguous majority for the Conservatives, despite their presiding over the last decade of austerity.

British capitalism has left the EU but the social contradictions that generated the deep political crisis of the ruling class over the past few years have not evaporated. Internationally, over 50 years of deepening economic contradictions and crises have led to a situation of acute economic tensions between the main capitalist powers. The US, China, and the EU are all locked into deepening trade wars. The US faced with its competitors and its own lack of competitiveness is desperately seeking to use any means to undermine its rivals. At the imperialist level the collapse of the Eastern Bloc has not led to a New World Order but bloody chaos as the declining US superpower desperately seeks to impose itself on its rivals. The social stalemate between the bourgeoisie and proletariat means that the economic, social and political contradictions of a dying capitalism are daily exacerbated. This situation of advancing decomposition has also made it increasingly difficult for the bourgeoisie to maintain control of its political apparatus

Out of the bowels of this rotting system has emerged populism. This is the expression of despair, frustration, and the anger generated by capitalism’s crisis that the existing political parties seem to have no response to, and the populists are able to exploit and manipulate. The populist politicians have big uncosted spending plans for the national economy, but mostly offer scapegoating, of immigrants, Islam, and the EU, and also the ‘elite’ that has ignored the needs of the ‘native’ population.

An ideological assault on the proletariat

Johnson’s victory will not solve the problems of British capitalism, but it marked the culmination of an ideological assault on the working class where everything was reduced to the question of leaving or remaining in the EU, of a deal or no deal, of a soft or hard Brexit. All of these questions were supposedly either ‘solved’ with the referendum of 2016, or conclusively solved with the 2019 general election.

The bourgeoisie wants to convince the working class that voting really matters, that it can have a ‘voice’ in bourgeois democracy. Johnson’s courting of parts of the working class in the North and Midlands is meant to reinforce this illusion. The working class appears to be back in fashion with the main parties after years of seeking to prove it no longer really existed whilst brutally attacking it.

The Tory Party under Theresa May was getting nowhere in parliament and declining in the polls, but, as soon as Johnson took over, the polling figures for the Tories started climbing and continued to climb up to the election. The election was not won by the Tories but by a combination of Labour’s contradictory and incomprehensible policies, and by the opportunism of Johnson and those around him, particularly Dominic Cummings his chief advisor. Without Johnson the Tory party would not have won. The British bourgeoisie has been reduced to relying upon a political chancer who shamelessly mobilised populist sentiments in order to further his rise to power. There was no other politician who had the necessary lack of scruples to wage the bitter factional struggle within the Conservative Party and then during the election campaign.

Johnson and Cummings framed the political conflict as ‘parliament against the people’, with Eton and Oxford educated Johnson as the figure-

head of ‘the people’. The prorogation of parliament, the battles in the courts, the provocative statements of Johnson and his backers, all created an atmosphere of crisis and confrontation, of division between leave and remain, between the supposed ‘elite’ and those ‘left behind’.

This atmosphere was kept up during the election. The Tory party brazenly issued false and manipulated videos of their opponents, set up false websites, etc. The shamelessness of Johnson’s lying reached such a level that during a TV debate the audience laughed when he talked about trust. All of these tactics had been learnt from Trump and other populist campaigns.

Johnson, while using the tactics developed by Trump, is not simply the British Trump. He is not a newcomer to the Tory party. He grew up within the ‘establishment’ but, much like Trump, he has shown no scruples and ridden the populist tide, and, like Trump, he has used an established party to satisfy personal ambitions. Like Trump, he also understands that his lying, provocative statements will not damage his standing with parts of the population.

A further similarity is the tendency to ride roughshod over long-standing traditions and impose a more dictatorial form of rule. Johnson’s February ministerial reshuffle, in which Chancellor Sajid Javid was compelled to resign, showed that, with the control of special advisers, Johnson/Cummings will try to keep tight control of the executive, and also that there will be no rigid fiscal controls by the Treasury. This will open the door to a populist version of big-spending Keynesianism, illustrated by schemes like HS2, that will supposedly benefit the North and other more deprived areas.

However, Johnson is not Trump’s man in Britain (that’s Farage) and he and his team are aware of the bitter price that the bourgeoisie had to pay for getting too close to US imperialism in the early 2000s. The dispute between Trump and Johnson over the use of Huawei in the UK technical infrastructure is one example of the real divisions between the UK and the US. On the other hand, the Americans are aware of the UK’s weakened position when in search of trade deals, which make British capitalism vulnerable to US demands. And with the EU talking tough as it enters post-Brexit trade talks, there is still the possibility that Britain will be faced with the consequences of a no-deal, which would further weaken Britain’s economic standing in the face of a looming world recession.

Possibility of the break-up of the UK

The integrity of the British state has been put into question by the Brexit fiasco. The Scottish National Party has dominated the Scottish Parliament since 2011 and Scottish elections to the UK parliament since 2015. The SNP took Tory, Labour and Lib Dem seats in the 2019 election. The very size of the Tory victory in England and Wales has reinforced the ambitions of the SNP, who prosper by denouncing the rule of Johnson, the caricature of a typical English toff. Preventing the break-up of the UK, which is implied by the drive for Scottish independence, is going to be a challenge for the British bourgeoisie. With Johnson’s history of open disdain for Scottish independence, there is every prospect of growing conflict between London and Edinburgh

Even before the election there was an accentuation of tensions in Northern Ireland. Unlike May, Johnson had no deal with the Democratic Unionist Party. Indeed, in order to remove the backstop from the withdrawal agreement with the EU (which means there will be an effective border between Britain and Northern Ireland) the DUP were not just ignored but thrown under a bus. The DUP had kept the Tory party in power after 2017, but dismissed by Johnson in order to get a deal. Northern Ireland is now in a situation of half in, half out of the EU. This will further fuel the tendencies toward the break-up of the UK.

The cohesion of the political apparatus in danger

The latest electoral defeat for the Labour Party has opened up the prospect of its fragmentation. In other European countries ‘Socialist’ parties have

been in a process of decline, but in Britain the rise of Corbyn produced a growth of the party, and in the 2017 election produced an outcome that was better than generally expected. But now the very much reduced circumstances of the Labour Party might begin to make it irrelevant as an opposition and, with no prospects of a return to government, the opportunity for further conflict within the party. The danger for the ruling class is that Labour might tear itself apart when it is still required to play a role in the democratic pantomime.

Meanwhile, with the size of the Tory majority, and with a large number of MPs with no government role, the possibility of divisions within the Conservative Party turning into renewed conflicts cannot be discounted. The parliamentary jam has been cleared, but that gives space for the eruption of underlying divisions. The likelihood of further economic decline for Britain outside the EU means that the political apparatus will have an

Labour Party Decline of ‘Socialist’ Parties is an international phenomenon

In the December 2019 general election, the Labour Party got its lowest number of seats in the House of Commons since 1935. The inquest into this fourth successive defeat continues, in the Labour Party and beyond. Some point to the suspicion towards party leader Corbyn, along with the publicity over anti-Semitism. Others acknowledged Labour’s confusing position over Brexit. On the sociological level, research showed that the Conservatives had greater support than Labour in all socio-economic groups including all the bourgeoisie’s categories for the working class. From the latter point of view Labour had lost support from those who had been “left behind”. The bottom line is that Labour has lost out again in a situation of electoral instability

In the 2015 general election UKIP got nearly 4 million votes. In 2017 Labour got 3.5 million votes more than it did in 2015. In 2019 Labour got 2.6 million less than 2017, losing votes to the Tories, Liberals and Scottish National Party. In these fluctuations it seems that 2017 was maybe just a blip in a longer term decline for the Labour Party.

There were specific aspects of the 2019 election which should be taken into account. The theme of the election was basically the Tory appeal to Get Brexit Done. But there had to be enough agreement from the other parties for Boris Johnson to be able to call an election. Labour effectively agreed to the election, despite the opinion polls correctly suggesting that they were in a poor position. The parliamentary paralysis was broken and the Conservatives have a comfortable majority of 80. Having noted this, it is necessary to look beyond the British specificities for an international and historical context.

Labour Party is no exception

In a report for the ICC’s 23rd Congress in early 2019 we saw that, internationally, *“the past few years have been characterised by an irreversible trend towards the decline of the Socialist parties”*. While left-wing parties played their role in the 1970s and 1980s against the waves of workers’ struggles (when a period of the left in power was generally succeeded by one of the left in opposition) they have also played other roles for capitalism. For example *“in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st, Socialist or social democratic parties were deployed in the front line to counter the first effects of decomposition on the bourgeoisie’s political apparatus (cf. Blair, Schröder, Zapatero, Hollande). As a consequence, they suffered not only from the disillusionment in the major democratic parties ... but they are also particularly identified with the failed political system. Thus the tendency towards decline seems irreversible: the Socialist Party has disappeared in Italy, is threatened with extinction in France, Holland and Greece and is in deep cri-*

important role to play against any response from the working class.

As things stand, in 2019 the working class was drawn into the charade of parliamentary elections again, with all sides saying that it was a crucial election, the most important in a generation etc. At this level it was a success for the forces of bourgeois democracy. However, the strains and tensions within the political apparatus show that the problems for the bourgeoisie in controlling the situation have not diminished. The current British Prime Minister is an unpredictable chancer whose line of march can’t be easily gauged; the main political parties are still riven with divisions; the main opposition party is a shadow of its former self, and the break-up of the United Kingdom is not a far-fetched fantasy. ‘Global’ Britain has plenty of political problems ahead. **Sam 16/2/20**

sis in Germany, Spain or Belgium. Only the Labour Party in Britain seems to be escaping this trend at the present time”.

It would now appear that Labour is not escaping this trend after all. In the quoted report we wrote *“It is possible that the Labour Party could profit from the Conservative Party’s difficulties in managing the populist groundswell around Brexit, when, should the Tory Party implode, the bourgeoisie will have to turn to it for help”*. The Tory party expelled a number of MPs during the course of 2019, but it did not implode; in fact it gradually increased its support from the moment Johnson replaced May, going on to a convincing victory in the election. Tensions remain in Conservative ranks, but Labour is not currently in a position to benefit from this.

There have been various trends to the left of the social democratic parties that have emerged in recent years and have played their role for the bourgeoisie - Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, “La France Insoumise”, the Democratic Socialist current in the Democratic Party in the USA. Like these groups, some of which were a direct response to outbreaks of class struggle (Podemos in particular after the Indignados movement in Spain) Corbynism did offer something to soak up questioning of the status quo and divert discontent into the Labour Party. But a Corbyn-dominated Labour Party now seems to be offering even less protection from the general weakening of the social democratic parties – perhaps because despite its radical rhetoric, Corbynism was above all more an attempt to revive “Old Labour” than invent something new.

To understand the present situation of the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie it is important to see that, in contrast to the 1970s and 80s, when the bourgeoisie was able to marshal its political forces, with the decomposition of capitalism there is a tendency to lose control of the political apparatus.

The emergence of populism has had different impacts in different countries. In the UK we saw the growth of UKIP, the 2016 Referendum, the replacement of UKIP by the Brexit Party, and the Conservative Party more and more taking on populist ideas. With the government of Boris Johnson this has continued, not only in relation to Brexit, but also with big spending plans that are aimed at appealing to those who would otherwise be ‘natural Labour voters’. In this context the Tories have stolen some of Labour’s clothes, and it’s not obvious what function Labour is now going to have. It has been a central party of the bourgeoisie for more than a century, but it’s not clear how Labour can now best serve the political needs of the capitalist class. In the absence of another left-wing alternative in Britain, it will continue to

Continued on page 7

Covid-19

More evidence that capitalism has become a danger to humanity

The emergence of this new virus and the reaction of the bourgeoisie shows how the development of the productive forces has come up against the death and destruction caused by capitalism. So while China has become the world's second economic power it has been laid low by a viral epidemic, and while medical science forges ahead capitalism cannot protect its population from disease, any more than it can from economic crisis or war or pollution.

Covid-19 is one of a number of new infectious diseases that have emerged, particularly in the last 50 years, including HIV (AIDS), Ebola, SARS, MERS, Lassa fever, Zika. Like so many new diseases Covid-19 is an animal virus infection that has jumped species to infect people and spread, a result of the changed conditions brought about by capitalism in this period. We have increasingly global supply chains and urbanisation; for the first time in history the majority of the world population lives in cities, often with the population crowded together and inadequate infrastructure for hygiene. And as in China there are many workers not just concentrated in cities but in crowded factory dormitories, eg Foxconn's workers live 8 to a room. Alongside this is the use of bushmeat, and in Wuhan an illegal wildlife market is thought to be the source of the new infection. In addition the destruction of the natural environment and the effects of climate change are driving more and more animals into cities in search of food. Crowded cities are a potential breeding ground for epidemics as Wuhan shows, and the increased international connections a means to transmit them abroad.

These conditions are the result of the decadent capitalist system being driven to disrupt and pollute every last corner of the planet in order to cope with its crisis of overproduction. The destructive impact of this global expansion was clearly demonstrated by the First World War, which marked the beginning of this epoch of decline. At the end of the war came the deadly Spanish flu pandemic that is estimated to have infected about a third of the world population and killed over 50 million people in three phases. The death rate was linked to the conditions of imperialist war including hunger and malnutrition, poor hygiene, and the movement of sick soldiers from the trenches which bred a more deadly virus for the second wave.

In the more recent period we can see that HIV has killed 32 million, mainly in Africa, and has now become endemic. Despite the medical advances that have turned HIV from a killer to a chronic disease, AIDS killed 770,000 in 2018 due to lack of access to care.¹ Many other diseases that medical science can prevent are continuing to cause illness and death. We hear about the measles cases in the USA, perhaps in Samoa, and the importance of immunisation to prevent its transmission. But the media are silent on the nearly 300,000 measles cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the deaths of nearly 6,000 children², where the woeful health care facilities are also trying to cope with Ebola. These deaths are of no great interest to the ruling class because unlike the swine flu pandemic in 2009 or the current Covid-19 epidemic in China they do not threaten its production and profits to the same extent. But capitalism is responsible for the conditions that give rise to these epidemics: in this case, an unstable country, the result of the carve up of Africa by imperialist powers, constantly ravaged by fighting over its natural resources (gold, diamonds, oil and cobalt) which has claimed millions of lives. 50% of DRC exports go to China. It is a particularly graphic example of what we mean by the decomposition of capitalism, the period in which the ruling class does not have sufficient control over to carry out its cold blooded response to the crisis, a new world war, because the working class is not defeated, but equally the working class has not the strength to take its struggle to a level that can threaten capitalism. It was announced by the collapse of the Russian imperialist

bloc, and is characterised, among other things, by chaotic localised wars.³

The persistence of polio is also directly related to decomposition, when fighting or fundamentalism prevents immunisation, with health workers being murdered by jihadists, for instance in Pakistan. Any publicity about this is totally hypocritical. The great powers which condemn this are perfectly willing to use irregular and terrorist fighters – as the west used the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan against the Russians in the 1980s and since then in many other conflicts. In fact the rise of terrorism is a feature of imperialist conflict in the period of decomposition.

Meanwhile, rather than spend on health or education, global defence spending in 2019 was 4% up on 2018. For the US and China it was more than 6% up and for Germany more than 9%. To give an idea of the bourgeoisie's chilling priorities, while the CDC (Centre for Disease Control) budget in the US was cut from \$10.8 billion in 2010 to \$6.6 billion in 2020, the US has just passed a rearmament budget of \$738 billion. China's annual defence budget is estimated at \$250 billion. The WHO had a budget of only \$5.1 billion in 2016-2017.

Lies and irrationality

There are many diseases causing more deaths than Covid-19 at present, yet the bourgeoisie are taking this seriously as a threat, as they do every new disease that may become a pandemic and may therefore cause increased threats to their productivity and profits, for instance through increased sickness absence – something we see with this new virus in China, as well as causing threats to human health and life. There are many aspects of the disease that can contribute to its pandemic potential – infectivity, the nature of the disease. It is also important that it has arisen in a large city of 11 million inhabitants in a country that is well connected internationally for trade and tourism, and this makes it harder to contain the spread of the virus. Harder to contain than if it had arisen, like Ebola, in Africa with far less opportunities for foreign travel, or if it had arisen in 2003, like the SARS epidemic, when China's economy and connections were smaller.

Much of the initial response to this new virus by the Chinese state was criminally negligent and unscrupulous. While they had already got preliminary genetic data on 26 December indicating a SARS-like virus, the Chinese authorities were harassing Dr Li Wenliang for warning of the danger on 30 December. At the same time they were warning the WHO about the virus. Nevertheless the authorities in Wuhan continued to suppress information about the epidemic, holding an enormous communal meal and a Lunar New Year dance on the 18 and 19 January, pretending it did not pass from person to person, before locking down the city on 23 January when 5 million people, almost half the population, had already left for the New Year holiday.

All this has given rise to enormous anger in the population, enraged that the government should conceal the disease from the public and make a doctor sign a false confession for 'spreading rumours' for warning about it. This has engendered a campaign for free speech within China. Media and politicians in western countries have echoed this campaign with sermons about the benefits of democracy and free speech. However, we should not think for a moment that our own ruling class have any greater moral scruples about lying and covering up information when it suits them, even if it puts human life at risk. Drug companies suppress clinical trials that put their profits at risk, even when this means failing to warn that certain antidepressants have an increased suicide risk for teenagers and young adults (see *Bad Pharma* by Ben Goldacre, a whole book about such dishonesty). And the US and UK governments infamously lied about weapons of mass destruction to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The Chinese state was completely cold blooded in putting its concern to maintain its authority above concern for health and life of the popula-

3. See 'Theses on decomposition', https://en.internationalism.org/ir/107_decomposition



tion, a result of its rigid hierarchical Stalinist bureaucracy, which has led it to cover up the start of an epidemic when timely action was needed to reduce and slow the spread of the virus. This shows the brutality of the regime which takes little account of human life, but also its irrationality as taking timely action in response to the epidemic would not only have saved lives, but also it would have saved much of the loss we can expect to the economy and much of the damage to China's prestige as a growing power in the world with its ambitious Belt and Road initiative. This irrationality of China's regime in its response to the epidemic is linked to its paranoia about any loss of power or control, a paranoia shown in its big labour and 're-education' camps for Uighurs and others, in its fondness for facial recognition technology and in its Social Credit system for keeping the population in line. To preserve its authority it dare not admit any dangers or problems.

Repressive quarantine measures

Quarantining a city of 11 million by shutting all transport links and putting in place road blocks is a first. To do so after half the population has been allowed to leave makes matters worse. Building two new hospitals to take 2,600 extra patients in 10 days is an impressive piece of propaganda, and even an impressive feat of prefabricated engineering (even if they weren't ready when claimed). But it did not provide the equipment or doctors and nurses needed – even with army medics and volunteers from other regions. Hospitals in Wuhan have been overwhelmed, as have quarantine centres equipped with 10,000 beds. Sick people with coronavirus cannot get into quarantine centres let alone hospital. Patients with other conditions, including cancer, cannot get hospital treatment as all the beds are full. Sick and dying patients in quarantine centres have no nursing care. Quarantine centres have hundreds crowded together in beds or on mattresses on the floor wearing small paper masks of doubtful value, with inadequate toilet and washing facilities, sometimes portable toilets and showers outside. It is quite clear that anyone entering a quarantine centre without Covid-19 will soon get it. Those suspected of carrying the virus have been forcibly taken to quarantine centres – one disabled boy starved to death after the relatives he relied on were taken. It is as much a police exercise as a health measure.

Herding people together in quarantine centres which can only become centres for passing on the virus is reminiscent of the hospitals for the poor until the 19th Century in Europe which were also sources of infection, for instance increasing maternal mortality from puerperal fever from the 17th to the 19th Centuries before the need for hygiene was understood.

Equipment is lacking, including protective clothing for hospital staff; doctors and nurses are working extremely long hours, all of which makes them more vulnerable to illness. 1700 of them have been infected and 6 have died.

Inaccurate monitoring of the disease

In these circumstances it is clear that there will be many patients dying who might have been saved with adequate medical care. Covid-19 appears to have more than double the mortality in Wuhan than elsewhere because of this. However, whether or not the Chinese authorities are continuing to lie about the numbers infected, the figures are suspect because not all the cases can be confirmed. Hence a spike in the number of cases reported in Wuhan on 11 February when those diagnosed clinically – without a test – were included, bringing the total recorded cases to over 60,000.

It is not only in China that disease figures are likely to be inaccurate. Unlike Singapore, a rich country with numerous connections which has been preparing for an epidemic since SARS in 2003, many other poorer countries are not prepared. "Any country that has significant travel back and forth with China and hasn't found cases should be concerned" says a Harvard professor of epidemiology.⁴ Indonesia, for instance, evacuated 238 citizens from Wuhan and quarantined them for two weeks but did not test them for the disease because it is too expensive. More to the point, what about China's African trade and clients for the New Silk Road? There will be many places without the health infrastructure to diagnose and care for patients with the virus.

What is impressive is that the new virus was sequenced by 12 January. Following on from that the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation (CEPI) which was set up in 2017 after the west African Ebola outbreak has been working towards a vaccine, in the hope that this can be ready if Covid-19 spreads, and particularly if it becomes a seasonal disease like flu. In fact as we write this article work on the vaccine is under way, using a new method based on gene sequencing, which is safer than working with a deadly virus, and has already expedited production of vaccines for Zika, Ebola, SARS and MERS. Of course it will require testing for safety and effectiveness before it can be used, and this will take time.

However, this striking potential for the productive forces is not the end of the story. There is a lack of factories to produce sufficient vaccine, and since with the risk of pandemic governments will not export vaccine until they have stockpiled enough for their own use "citing national defence or security"⁵ CETI needs to plan for it to be manufactured in several sites.

Effects on the economy

China's economy has ground to a halt as it has gone into lockdown to contain the new virus. In response it is pushing money into the economy, the banking regulator is relaxing rules on bad debt. However, China is now responsible for 16% of global GDP, 4 times greater than in 2003 at the time of the SARS epidemic which cut 1% off its GDP for the year. Its economy is much more integrated into global supply chains than it was 17 years ago. This has already forced Hyundai to close car plants in South Korea, Nissan to close one in Japan and Fiat-Chrysler to warn it may shut some European production. Smartphone production could be down up to 10% this year. Textiles (China produces 40% of global exports), furniture, and pharmaceuticals could all be hit. As will tourism. And China now accounts for nearly 20% of global mining imports, and is trying to cancel deliveries of oil, gas and coal it doesn't need. Shares in US firms with high exposure to Chinese sales are underperforming by 5%. Coming with its trade war with the US not resolved, this is bad timing – for China and the global economy.

In the longer term this may make China look a less reliable trading partner for multinational companies to invest in. It certainly makes it look less a powerful trading partner and imperialist backer for its clients on the New Silk Road. It may depend on how quickly it can get its economy back to normal.

Whatever happens with this new Covid-19 virus, whether it becomes a new pandemic, or whether it dies out like SARS, or becomes established as a new seasonal respiratory virus, this new disease is yet another warning that capitalism has become a danger to humanity, and to life on this planet. The enormous capacity for the productive forces, including medical science, to protect us from disease comes up against the murderous search for profit, the herding of an ever larger proportion of the population into huge cities, with all the risks for new epidemics. The risk of capitalism does not end here, there are also the risks of pollution, ecological destruction and increasingly chaotic imperialist wars. **Alex, 15.2.20**

4. Quoted in *The Economist* 15.2.20
5. *The Economist* 8 Feb 2020

1. <https://www.who.int/gho/hiv/en/>

2. https://stories.msf.org.uk/contagion-in-congo/index.html?gclid=EAIaIQobChM15_WRhNvR5wIVA7T1ch0W0eQDxEAAASAAEgLvD_BwE

The French government and unions hand-in-hand to implement pensions ‘reform’

From beginning to end the movement against the pensions ‘reform’ has been under the control of the unions. There are those that call for strikes, those that have picked and organised days of action, those that have run rare general assemblies. And these are the ones leading us to defeat. We can’t be naive, the government and the unions have been working together for two years... in order to prepare the ground for this reform and make it happen!

Faced with the danger of a resurgence of class struggle...

The government had to provide itself with certain guarantees so that this wide-scale attack, announced by Macron in 2017 as a real “Big Bang”, did not provoke a massive response from the whole of the working class. Edouard Philippe, French Prime Minister, was backed up by the collaboration of his “social partners”, i.e., the unions, in order to sabotage the inevitable explosion of anger among the workers.

This general attack against the whole working class could only unleash a wave of indignation and spontaneous anger in one particularly combative sector: transport. For the rail workers “enough is enough”: after being at the forefront of class movements these last years, notably with the “go-slow” of 2018 against the degradation of their working conditions, against their re-grading, these workers obtained nothing. The attack on their pensions could only strengthen their willingness to take up the struggle again even more determinedly with the slogan “*Now that’s enough! We won’t let this happen!*” The combativity in the transport sector risked an uncontrollable explosion with the danger that the general attack against pensions would spread a general anger amongst the whole working class.

The ruling class has many means for “taking the pulse” of social discontent (in a country where Macron, “President of the Rich” has become the man most detested by the majority of the population): opinion polls, police-work to assess the “at-risk” sectors, and in the first place the working class. But the most important “social thermometer” is the union apparatus, which is much more efficient than opinion poll sociologists or police functionaries. In fact this apparatus is the instrument *par excellence* for keeping the exploited corralled in the service of capitalism’s interests. The union apparatus of the capitalist state has had almost a century’s experience. It is particularly sensitive to the state of mind of the workers, to their willingness and capacity to fight against the bourgeoisie. It’s these forces surrounding the working class who are permanently responsible for warning the bosses and the government of the danger represented by the class struggle. Meetings and periodic consultations between the union leaders and the bosses or the government also serve this warning system: they elaborate together, hand-in-hand, the best strategy to allow government and bosses to carry out their attacks with the maximum effect against the working class.

The unions have understood perfectly well that the working class in France was no longer disposed to keep its head down and unflinchingly take new attacks. The ruling class equally knows that the working class today hasn’t the least illusions in the “light at the end of the tunnel”: all workers are now conscious that “it will get worse and worse” and there will be no other choice than to fight in defence of their living conditions and a future for their children. Thus the popularity of the movement of the Gilets Jaunes a year ago against the cost of living and misery, was a good indication of the anger grinding away in the entrails of society: 80% of the population supported, understood or had sympathy with this anti-Macron tsunami (even if the working class couldn’t recognise itself in the methods of protest¹ of this inter-classist movement initiated by a petty-bourgeoisie being strangled by fuel taxes). In the last two years the bourgeoisie has seen a real growth of workers’ combativity. The tenacity of the hospital workers and postal workers, on strike for over a

month, was another indication. The multiplication of struggles in the distribution sector, bus drivers and aviation was another.

Faced with the accumulation of the discontent of the exploited, the French bourgeoisie thus had to accompany the application of the pension reform with a “fire-wall” in order to channel, lock up, divide and exhaust the inevitable response of the proletariat.

... government and unions manoeuvre together!

Hated among the demonstrators today for “stabbing us in the back”, the CDFT and UNSA have played their role perfectly as “responsible and reformist unions”. It was a real piece of theatre²:

- Act I: the CDFT put together a text with the government over two years by affirming that it wanted a “*just and equal*” universal system but refused the notion of an “age pivot”(part of a points system for receiving a full pension or partial pension), a real provocation from the government having the aim of focusing all the anger on this point and thus turn attention away from the real subject, the general attack against pensions.

- Act II: On December 11, the government officially announced... with a drum roll... that the age pivot would finally be in the reform: the CDFT reacted because a “red line” had been crossed and it re-joined the “union front” and the whole media was occupied by the “age pivot or not” debate; a great drama made out of nothing.

- Act III: Friday January 10, finally, a big surprise. At Matignon, the government pulls back on the “age pivot”; the CDFT and UNSA cry victory and leave the movement.

People leave with “a points-based pension system” in their pockets, that’s to say more years of work and a reduced pension.

Twenty-five years ago, the Juppé government used some elements of the same strategy: make a general attack against the class (in this case the reform of social security which meant restricted access to healthcare for all) and a specific attack against one particular sector (the reform of the rail worker’s retirement deal, which imposed another 8 years work on them!). After a month of strikes, with the ultra-combative railworkers at its head, Juppé retreated and the unions cried victory, insisting that the status quo for the rail workers had been maintained. This sector, a real “locomotive” of social protest, returned to work and in doing so sounded the end of the movement for all. Thus the government could keep its social security reform.

This old manoeuvre functions less well today. No-one has cried victory apart from the CDFT and UNSA. Everyone has denounced the trap for what it is: humbug! A strategy aimed to sugar the pill. Even in the press the secret was open and stale.

If then, despite their determination, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators stopped fighting little by little without the government withdrawing its general attack against pensions, it’s because the attack was wider and more complex. Alongside the “reformist” unions, the “radical” CGT, FO and *Solidaires* (an alliance of “radical” unions) played their role in isolating and exhausting the strikers. Taking account of the level of anger and the combativity of our class this programme took longer than foreseen. It needed all the know-how of these specialists in sabotaging the struggle in order to achieve their aims.

September

After the return to work from the holidays, the campaign on the pension reforms was officially launched with FO, *Solidaires* and the CGT using any means available. How? They did so by calling a multiplication of sectoral days of action; everyone in their box, with specific strikes and specific claims. “Look after number one, the unions for everyone”. The aim was to exhaust the existing struggles before launching a wider and more controlled movement.

However, this organised dispersion was greatly criticised. In the demonstrations you could find many workers who expressed their discontent faced with the divisions: they wanted the unions

together because “*we are all in the same boat, we have to fight together*”. The announcement on September 20 of a large, unified demonstration for December 5 responded to this push. Here again, nothing is left to chance: the date is chosen because it’s sufficiently far away (more than two months) to enable the crumbling and exhaustion of the strikes to continue. They are also just before the Christmas and New Year period liable to make any transport blockages unpopular and isolate the most combative workers.

October

During October and November, the “radical” unions continued their work of undermining the movement through isolated and sectoral strikes. While in many sectors the worker’s anger was palpable, the unions were wary of calling for open gatherings in general assemblies unifying firms and the sectors among them, through sending massive delegations to discuss and spread the strike. Nothing like that! Just isolated strikes and actions while having to wait for the promise of the great December 5 demonstration. But this strategy of exhaustion and demoralisation turned out once again to be insufficient. The working class continued to push and combativity was mounting.

On October 16, rail workers suddenly stopped work following an accident on the line in the Ardennes. Spontaneously, through telephones, they warn each other and thus spread the strike through parts of the SNCF. The workers at Ile-de-France were particularly combative. RER (suburban and rapid transport system) lines were blocked. The unions jumped on the bandwagon and took over the strike demanding “pension rights”. In other words, they hobbled the movement that was already underway. The bourgeoisie had no stomach for this sign of workers’ autonomy and the dynamic of taking the movement in hand and extending it, to the point that government and bosses denounced the illegality of this “wildcat strike” and threatened reprisals against the strikers. This allowed the unions to definitively take control of the situation by putting themselves up as the protectors of the strikers and defenders of the right to strike. During October, a number of wildcat strikes affected the SNCF, notably in the maintenance centre at Chatillon where, without union say-so, 200 out of 700 workers stood up against measures being introduced to worsen their working conditions, measures which were quickly withdrawn so as to stop the strike in its tracks and thus avoid spreading its ideas to other workers.³

November

Thus the unions have been warned and they had to become more combative in order to harness the movement. On November 9, the CGT joined UNSA-railways⁴ and Sud/*Solidaires*, in calling for the strike on December 5. It announced that this action would also be undertaken at SNCF. Then the CFDT-railways announced it would also be part of the movement⁵.

But behind this “union front” and speeches about unifying all sectors, in the corridors they continued their dirty work of undermining and division. Their sabotage of the unity of the movement in the hospital sector is particularly characteristic: since March, the unions and their “inter-emergency ward collective” undertook ultra-corporatist actions, separating the struggle of the emergency workers from all the other hospital services. But

3. The declaration of the workers at Chatillon was highlighted in *Révolution Internationale* no. 479 and here’s a short extract from it: “*We, the workers on strike at the Technicentre of Chatillon on the TGV Atlantic line, stopped working in numbers from Monday October 21 in the evening, without consulting the unions or being corralled by them (...) Our anger is real and deep and we will fight to the end for our demands and for our respect and dignity (...) Enough of reorganisations, low wages, job losses and not enough workers! We call on all rail workers to stand with us because the situation today at Chatillon is in reality the reflection of a national policy*”.

4. Whereas UNSA in other sectors did not call a strike! In fact with UNSA-railways it was forced to stick with the combativity of sector or face the risk of being completely discredited.

5. ... whereas at the national level, the CFDT was no longer calling for a strike!

under the growing pressure of the will “to fight together” they changed their tune and called for two “unitary” demonstrations, November 14 and 30... unifying the hospitals! The unions did this to better separate this struggle from the general movement against pension reform in the name of the “*the specificities of the hospitals*” (and all the better to divide them). This decision of the unions caused a row within the general assembly of the hospital workers and a number of them mobilised for the December 5 demonstration all the same.

December

At the time of the great December demonstrations, the need for solidarity between sectors and generations, to fight together, is taken up in the slogans blasted out by the loud-speakers mounted on union lorries. For what? Nothing. Just repeat the slogans endlessly at each day of action. But concretely, each sector is called to march behind their union, sometimes marked out, cut off from the others, cordoned off by and surrounded by union “security”. There was no great meeting to discuss at the end of the demonstration whereas a number of workers had suggested it. The unions and the cops dispersed the crowds. Time was getting on, the transports must leave...

Mid-December, the striking rail workers of the SNCF and RATP understood that if they remained isolated the movement was destined to defeat. What did the unions do? They organised a joke of extension: some CGT representatives went to meet some other CGT representatives at another firm.

At the Saturday demonstration, officially organised by the unions so as to allow workers from the private sector to participate in the movement, the CGT, FO and *Solidaires* made no effort towards mobilising other workers. On the contrary, all their speeches focused on the courage of the railworkers “who were fighting for us all” and on the strength of the blockade of this sector (suggesting that other workers were impotent) and the necessity of support in ... filling up the collection boxes of solidarity organised above all by the CGT in place of the active solidarity of workers in the struggle and extension of the movement (even if it was understandable that everyone felt the need to help the rail workers financially because they were losing a month’s wages!). Throughout December, the unions cultivated a strike by proxy!

Thus, alone in their “unlimited” strike, the rail workers were encouraged to hold on whatever the cost, during the 15 days of the holiday with the slogan: no Christmas truce!

January

Here again, while the media denounced “the taking hostage of families who simply wanted to come together for Christmas”, these two weeks of “truce” during which the rail workers fought alone weren’t enough to exhaust the anger and the general combativity, nor did it make the strike “unpopular”.

January 9, the new slew of multi-sectoral demonstrations once again saw hundreds of thousands of protestors thronging the streets and still determinedly refusing the reform.

January 10, Philippe negotiated with the unions and announced “*a constructive dialogue going forward*”, promising to ask President Macron the next day if it was possible to withdraw the “age pivot”. All the unions saluted this great victory for the CFDT and UNSA, this small step forward for the CGT, FO and *Solidaires*, showing that the government had begun to retreat under the pressure of the street and the strikers of the transport sector.

The next day, another demonstration: Saturday January 11 in Marseille, the unions organised some entertainment at the end of the demonstration in order to make it impossible for any discussion to take place. In Paris they left the way clear for the police to use their tear gas, once again dispersing the throng and beating up some of the demonstrators. The unions don’t want discussion between workers. But above all, the turnout for the day was clearly much lower, the trains began to take to the rails again, fatigue was making itself felt, the ambience among the smaller crowds was

Continued on page 5

1. Occupation of roundabouts, ostentatious displays of Republican or nationalist symbols such as the tricolore and *La Marseillaise*.

Continued from page 4

less combative. The final blow could now be dealt: Prime Minister Philippe announced the withdrawal of the “age pivot”... temporarily. The timing was perfect.

The unions call for extension... of the defeat!

Now that the movement was running out of steam, when the striking rail workers were running out of money, when they were going back to work bit by bit, what did the “radical” unions do? They now called for the extension of the movement which was going into a reflux, haranguing the private sector to “take up the reins”, denouncing the “cowardice of the strike by proxy”! You only had to listen to Monsieur Melenchon (leader of the left-wing *Parti France Insoumise*) on January 9 on all the TV channels telling us “*the strikes by proxy started well, now everyone should get going!*”

Now, the unions can only talk about “sovereign general assemblies”, trying to make us think that only the former are the spokespeople of the workers and that if some continue to exhaust themselves in carrying on striking alone, they can do nothing: “*it’s the GA and the base who decides if the rail workers want to lose more days of wages*” (so said the boss of the CGT, Philippe Martinez on the television).

Now, they multiply the actions in order to demonstrate that the workers don’t want to strengthen and generalise the movement and in this way they put the defeat down to the workers! There were no less than 3 days of action in one week: January 14, 15 and 16, which the unions have called whereas the rail workers are gradually going back to work.

Now, the leader of the CGT, Monsieur Martinez, echoed Melenchon in denouncing police violence... violence which had been going on for months. And this while the unions up to now have allowed workers to be beaten up and dispersed at the end of demonstrations with tear-gas, without a word or any sort of protest. Melenchon now calls for the resignation of the Paris police boss so that the unions could say that they were against the repression of the strikers.

Now, the unions are playing the game of negotiating with the government in order to “*take the hardship and the drudgery of work into account*”, a new stage for the corporatist fragmentation of the movement when everyone is working under pressure and exploitation means hardship for everyone! This “aspect of negotiations” is seriously under consideration with a single objective: divide workers and even put them in competition in negotiations that are lost in advance, branch by

branch, in order to determine if this job produces more hardship than the other. The “union front” will doubtless look good when they try to find out whether the CGT-railworkers and the CFDT-*Carrefour* workers have the most “hardship”.

The unions pulled the same trick at the time of the rail workers’ strike of winter 1986 by calling for the extension of the strike at the end of the movement, when the workers began to return to work⁶. In fact what these social firefighters are trying to do is extend and strengthen the defeat of the class. The aim is to give guarantees to government so that this reform can pass through parliament without difficulty (thus allowing the government to put through other attacks)!

No, the working class will not be made to feel guilty by the unions!

No, those who go back to work are not strike-breakers!

No, the sectors which haven’t joined the struggle do not lack courage and solidarity!

It’s the unions, hand-in-hand with the government who have planned and organised this defeat!

It’s the unions, hand-in-hand with the government, who have prevented all possible unity and all real extension of the movement!

The working class on the other hand must be conscious of what it has done. After ten years of weakness, following a long, exhausting and impotent movement called by the unions, in 2010, the workers have begun to raise their heads, to try to unite and to recognise each other as part of the same class. These last months have been animated by the development of solidarity between sectors and between generations!

Here’s where the victory of the movement lies, because the real gain of the struggle is the struggle itself where workers from all jobs, all generations finally come together in the same street combat against a ‘reform’ which is an attack against all the exploited! And this is what the government and the unions will try to wipe out in the weeks and months to come.

We must come together to debate, discuss, draw the lessons in order not to forget them and, at the time of tomorrow’s struggles be still more numerous and stronger by beginning to understand and to thwart the unions, these professionals ... of defeat. They will always be the last rampart of the state for the defence of capitalist order!

Lea, January 14, 2020

Translated from Revolution Internationale 480

6. In *Revolution Internationale* (no. 480), there’s a further article in French of the lessons of the 1986 strike: “The workers can fight without the unions” https://fr.internationalism.org/files/fr/ri_4_80_bat.pdf

International Communist Current public forum

Strikes in France: the working class begins to become aware of itself



Saturday 7 March 2020
2.30-5.30pm

May Day Rooms
88 Fleet Street
London EC4Y 1DH

Sudan
The democratic mystification fuels capitalist repression

Sudan is a country that has been ruined by over 40 years of “civil” wars in which the big imperialist powers have been involved from the start. The various armed conflicts have left over two million dead in South Sudan and Darfur, and led to a general impoverishment which has given rise to numerous hunger revolts against the military and Islamist regimes which have succeeded each other since “independence”.

Beginning in December 2018, Sudan has been shaken by a powerful social movement composed of strikes and massive demonstrations which have been violently repressed by the Islamo-military regime, resulting in hundreds dead and thousand imprisoned or “disappeared”. At the start the movement was spontaneous with a massive presence of workers and the poor: “*people want bread (the price of which was tripled on 18 December), fuel, cash, medicines... as long as the petty bourgeoisie that was not interested in politics could prosper or just survive, the frustrations of the poorest layers of society were not enough to launch a big protest movement. But the economic paralysis obliged the white collar workers to line up with other workers in the food queues*”¹. In fact, massive strikes broke out again and again, paralysing the main cogs of the economy and administration, to the point where the military/state bodies dumped their great leader, Omar Al Bashir, in order to placate the “streets”. At the beginning this was a movement initiated by the working class which has a numerical weight in a country where the oil sector is a significant part of the economy, which came out onto the streets against the degradation of its living conditions.

However, a part of the bourgeoisie was very quickly able to exploit the weaknesses of this movement. In a country where the proletariat re-

1. *Courrier international* 6.2.19

ICC online

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Readers' Contribution:
The Elite and the Ruling Class

mains very isolated, has little experience of the traps lying in wait for it, the bourgeoisie did not have much difficulty in derailing this movement onto the terrain of settling scores between various factions vying for control of the state. The “democratic” forces around the Association of Professionals of Sudan (APS) were able to contain and channel the movement by calling for “*the transfer of power to a transitional civil government in which the army would participate*”. The social movement was rapidly taken over by bourgeois organisations whose primary aim was the installation of a “democratic government” that would do a better job of managing national capital. “*In October 2016, a nucleus was formed around the grouping of three entities: The Central Committee of the Doctors, the Network of Journalists and the Democratic Alliance of Lawyers. At the end of 2018, the APS sealed the union of fifteen professional bodies which supported the demonstrators who had come onto the streets on 19 December to protest against the high cost of living, the day after a decision to triple the price of bread. Very quickly demands linked to the economic crisis and the fall in purchasing power evolved into calls for the fall of the regime*”². This Association also managed to federate all the opposition parties into a collation ranging from the Republican Party to the Stalinists and including the Islamists and certain armed groups.

The social movement thus became the open expression of a purely statist and bourgeois orientation, for which the working class would soon pay a price. Last August, a technocratic “transitional” government was named under the leadership of an executive organ composed of six civilians and six military leaders. When we know that the army leaders who had carried out the bloody repression against the demonstrations (between 180 and 250 deaths in less than six months) have maintained the same posts in the repressive apparatus (defence and interior) in the new “transitional” government, there can be no room for illusions about the ending of the poverty and killings suffered by the working class and the oppressed strata.

As for the hypocritical concert of applause from the media and all the big sharks who welcomed the so-called “change of regime”, like Macron who rushed to announce “*unconditional support for the democratic transition*” following a meeting with the new president Abdalla Hamdok on 30 September. We should not be fooled: the population faces more poverty and more massacres.

What’s more, Sudan is under the influence of a whole number of imperialist powers (especially those in the Gulf) which the regime depends on to survive: “*In Sudan, the head of the Military Council of Transition (MCT) got the ‘green light’ from Saudi Arabia and its regional allies to launch the repression against the demonstrators who had for several weeks (since 6 April) been camping out in front of military HQ in Khartoum – this was underlined by a Sudanese military expert. According to this specialist who wants to remain anonymous, the destruction of the protest camp on 3 June had been discussed during the recent visit of general Abdul Fattah Al Bourhan, the leader of the MCT to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. And according to an Algerian-Sudanese analyst, on 21 April, Ryad and Abu Dhabi announced that they would pour 3 billion dollars into Sudan. They wouldn’t have done this without getting something in return. What they expected was not democracy but the preservation of their economic interests*”³.

Obviously, the intervention of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates in Sudan can’t be explained by purely economic interests, but also, and above all, by their desire for hegemony in the face of their imperialist rivals. Sudan participates directly in the slaughter in Yemen, with 14,000 soldiers at the disposal of the murderous Saudi regime. We should also recall that the same coalitions of murderers are confronting each other in Sudan, Libya and Syria for the same reasons, i.e. the preservation of their sordid capitalist and imperialist interests.

Amina, November 2019

2. *Courrier international* 24.4.19

3. *Courrier international* 9.6.19

Soleimani assassination

Middle East dominated by imperialist free-for-all

With the assassination of Qaseem Soleimani and nine other associates, including bosses of Iran’s powerful military groups, the Popular Mobilisation Units and Kata’ib Hezbollah on January 3 2020, Trump sent a signal, entirely consistent with his presidency, that all “convention” was out of the window and no-one was safe in this tense stand-off between the USA and Iran. Hassan Nasrallah, president of Hezbollah in Lebanon and firm ally of Iran, probably a little nervous in the hours after the attack, took to the airwaves to call on Tehran not to make any sudden response and, for “*US troops to leave Iraq*”. A day later, despite noise from some “hard-liners” within the regime that were quickly silenced, that was the official position of the Islamic Republic whose ruling elite signalled the details of their “retribution” to the Americans through Iraqi conduits. Despite being hyped-up in a general media campaign, there wasn’t any great possibility of a regional conflagration through an exchange of missiles (the use of US troops was not likely either) and there was even less possibility of a Third World War, despite the sensationalist headlines in some parts of the bourgeois press. Why we think that this wasn’t the case and why this means no attenuation in the spread of military barbarism we will return to below. In the meantime, the removal of Soleimani has dealt a blow to Iranian imperialism, but it’s never about one man and it remains to be seen just how grievous this blow is to the Islamic Republic; whether this further undermines it following the recent protests (quelled but not disappeared); or whether it strengthens Iranian nationalism and its base. Whatever the case Soleimani, over the decades, had already done a great deal towards the extension of Iranian imperialism throughout the Middle East and into sub-Saharan Africa.

Qaseem Soleimani: the butcher’s butcher

The Quds (“Jerusalem”) force and associated units, which Soleimani rose up through from the 1980’s and took control of about 15 years ago, were responsible for the internal repression of struggling and protesting Iranian workers and others in 1999, ten years after that in 2009 and again a decade later, in 2019/2020. They were responsible for the many deaths of Iraqi protesters around the latter time and it was these forces which unleashed a pitiless repression against anti-Assad protesters after 2012, virtually saving the Syrian butcher and his tottering regime. Soleimani wasn’t a Shi’ite fanatic but an important representative of Iranian imperialism. He was an ally of the Russians but he was no Russian stooge. He was also allied, at different moments, with the Americans, and with Kurds, Alawites, Maronites, Sunni, anyone in fact who would further his cause. He has even used al-Qaida against the Americans - for which Iran received its own “blow-back”. It’s no wonder that Soleimani was held in such high regard by the faction-riven Iranian regime¹ and why he was anointed a “living martyr” by Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

Iran and particularly the Soleimani elements were never puppets or pawns of Russia acting on Moscow’s orders. It wasn’t the case recently and after the fall of the Shah, which took place in 1979 when the blocs still existed, Iran has tended to go its own way. The Mullah’s regime was something of a wild card, presaging in some ways the collapse of the blocs and the ensuing imperialist free-for-all. But, if anything, while he was directly and indirectly responsible for many US deaths, Soleimani remained willing to work with the Americans; and there is no doubt that even after President George W. Bush targeted Iran as part of the “Axis of Evil” in 2002, American diplomatic and military arms played a significant role in building up and consolidating the Quds and associated Iranian forces in Iraq. Even if relations became more complicated later, after Saddam’s fall, the Iraqi governing council was essentially set up by the Americans and Iranians, given that the US had no alternative but to tolerate the rise of the Shi’ite

parties after Saddam’s overthrow. After the Twin Towers atrocity in 2001 and a certain “reaching-out” by Iran, career ambassador and senior State Department official Ryan Crocker and his team, regularly met² Iranian officials including Soleimani in order to discuss their common enemies: al-Qaida and the Taliban. Even after Bush’s Neo-Con inspired rant ended the official meetings (and the official rapprochement), Iranian-US contacts were kept up in the years that followed. The game that Soleimani developed was to carry on talking to the Americans, making concessions here, doing favours there, while continuing to pressure the US and kill and harass American troops and their allies. The release of diplomatic cables by Wikileaks shows that Soleimani was in touch with US General David Petraeus, Commander-General of forces in Iraq around 2008. It was in this unprecedented development of asymmetric warfare - a general factor of capitalist decomposition that includes terrorism - that the Iranian commander lured the US into a trap that would be sprung largely with the facilities and space provided by the Americans themselves. At this time there were over a hundred-thousand US troops in Iraq and every one of them was a target. The Iranians used them and then subjected to constant violence and psychological pressure which contributed to the gradual withdrawal of US troops; and while this may have pleased the Russians the driving force behind it was Iranian imperialism.

Trump declared himself the victor over Isis recently but if one man was responsible for the defeat of Isis (along with US logistics, Russian air-power and Kurdish ground troops) it was Soleimani and his forces. In the battle against Isis, US and Iranian high commands worked very closely together, with Iran sometimes calling the shots. The battle over Isis-held Amarili, a Shi’ite Turkmen town in Iraq, saw combined air and ground attacks involving both forces in what was a significant defeat for the Islamic State and a major victory for the US/Iranian coalition. In this respect, Soleimani could also lean on the Russians and the Kurds with some pressure; once again, it shows the relative independence of Iranian imperialism.

The Hit

Taken from the “extreme” end of the spectrum of possible US responses to continuing Iranian aggression, the hit against Iran/Soleimani was directed by Trump in true Mafia style. The President, who was calm and lucid throughout the whole episode, clearly laid his cards on the table, was open about those up his sleeve, and the Iranians, understandably, folded. There was no interest in a missile exchange, no interest from Iran in suffering further, greater losses and no interest whatsoever from Trump in getting engaged in a wider war. Nor was there any interest at all from China and Russia in getting involved in war in the Middle East over Iran, the consequences of which were obvious. All the wars of imperialism are fundamentally irrational but a wounded, possibly leaderless Iran would have been a dangerous development for all the imperialist vultures, creating an unstable black-hole sucking in all sorts of elements (including a partly resurgent Isis) and aggravating further the centrifugal tendencies already at work.

Nevertheless, the USA’s general policy of turning up the heat on Iran will certainly result in further instability in the region. Even though National Security Advisor John Bolton’s gone, Trump is still surrounded by anti-Iranian “hawks”. The letter to the Iraqi government from US Iraqi overlord General W. H. Seely, acceding to the former’s request to withdraw all US troops, shows the confusion that reigned in the upper echelons of the US military. The Germans and the French were openly scornful of the action and Britain, which desperately needs Trump on side, joined the EU’s criticism. None of them have much to gain from the USA further exacerbating the chaos in the Middle East.

New blocs not on the agenda

The relationship between Russia and Iran, highlighted by recent events, is worth a brief, closer look, particularly in relation to the ICC’s general analysis of decomposition and the perspective raised by the Internationalist Communist Tendency, who talk of the potential for a bloc-wide world war led by Russia which, according to the ICT’s position can’t stand by and “watch” (the US assassinations) and it can’t allow Iran to be attacked “with impunity”³. Not only can Russia “allow” this, it facilitates attacks on Iranian forces in Syria by Israel and is not averse to attacking Iranian positions in Syria using its own forces. The overriding tendency is not towards the “coherence” of a bloc-wide world war but one of each against all and the development of military barbarism which is just as dangerous for the working class and humanity - if not more so.

In his comments after the US attacks Putin did not mention the name “Soleimani” once and his muted criticism of the attack reflected the view of the Kremlin as a whole, which left it to its media to play up the question of “the aggression of US imperialism”. Russia’s historical relations with Iran have left deep scars and its relatively recent relations have been ambiguous to say the least; but Soleimani’s death does present Russian imperialism with a chance to further strengthen its grip in Syria and, possibly, in Iraq.

Although his role was exaggerated somewhat by Tehran, Soleimani worked very closely with the Russians in Syria as an ally. But we have also seen that he has worked very closely with the US high command in both Syria and Iraq. The recent strategy of Soleimani and the IRGC (Quds and other militias) has been to strengthen the role of Iran in Syria in order to further its reach; opposed to this, the Russian aim is to strengthen the Assad regime and thus its own position. Rather than pushing for a wider confrontation over US attacks on Iran, the Russians may not be too unhappy about the outcome of these US attacks; and if there was one world leader that would have been informed of the drone attacks beforehand by Trump, it would have been Putin.

Under the leadership of Soleimani, the IRGC has been buying vast tracts of land and buildings around Homs and Damascus which are being turned into Iranian enclaves. There are clear tensions here that are split three ways and Russia does not see eye to eye with Iran over Syria. Russia could have protected Iranian forces in Syria from attacks by Israel by simply keeping its newly-installed S-300 missile system deployed but, in collusion with the Israeli state, it regularly allows Israeli war planes to enter Syrian air-space, unleash their weapons against Iranian positions and get out again. Iran has repeatedly expressed its anger at Russia over this but the latter just ignores it. Russia has also let Israel know that it might be able to help reduce Iran’s weapons supplies through Damascus, a card it holds over Iran, and it’s not above confronting Iranian forces in the country directly - as it did in Deera Province when it routed the Iranian-backed Fourth Division. And along with Israel, Russia has recently developed ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, all of them no allies of Iran.

None of these things point to any sort of bloc coherence with Russia, or with Russia “having” to respond to US attacks on Iranian interests in the way the ICT envisages and none of it prevents Russia posing as a “protector” of Iran and using its “assets” which have proved very useful to it in Syria. And with Turkey very much in the mix, upsetting everyone with its drive for the so-called New Ottoman Empire, which has recently led to direct confrontations between Turkey and the Syrian army around Idlib, we are not seeing the development of a drive towards unified military blocs. Rather we see the war of each against all and centrifugal tendencies dominating. Without going into to the myriad divergences between the different powers over different regions, now the “Great Game” in the Middle East resembles even more what was described by one British diplomat

a while ago: “*a nine-sided game of chess with no rules*”.

The collapse of the two bloc system and the rise of the “New World Disorder”

From the early 1950’s to the late 1980’s, World War III was a distinct possibility. The two imperialist blocs existed, the world more or less carved up between them and tensions were rising everywhere, particularly around key flashpoints. But throughout the period 1968-89, when the return of the open world economic crisis “logically” implied a new march towards war, the proletariat’s dogged insistence on fighting for its own class interests staved off any mobilisation for an imperialist conflagration. Today though, with the complete absence of unified imperialist blocs, with no prospect of them on the horizon and, possibly, their disappearance for good, the bourgeoisie is not forced to confront and mobilise the proletariat in this way. And this is the result of capitalism’s own inability to impose and cohere the discipline necessary for major blocs to fight a world war. Instead of that there are all sorts of centrifugal tendencies at work, dog-eat-dog, fragmentation, ‘Us first against the others’ and instability. The formation of blocs is not at the root of imperialism - it’s the other way round, and the consequence of 1989 is that imperialism now takes on a different, but no less dangerous form in keeping with the general decay and decomposition of the entire capitalist system. World-war-fighting imperialist blocs are a consequence of decadent capitalism, but the fragmentation of this particular form and its elimination, certainly for the foreseeable future, is significant of capitalism’s further decay and the consequences of the Pandora’s Box that opened up in 1989.

The collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989, was one of the most spectacular “peace-time” expressions of the crisis and decomposition of the entire capitalist system. Overnight, world war was off the agenda. The implosion of the eastern bloc and all its structures had its reverberations in the west where, almost immediately, bloc ties became loosened. Despite the deafening campaigns about the “death of communism” and the “victory of capitalism”, it didn’t take long - two years - for the reality of the “New World Order” to assert itself. Soon after the USA’s doomed attempt to prevent the fragmentation of its own bloc via the coalition that fought the first Gulf War in 1991, war broke out in Yugoslavia 1992, the first outright war in Europe since 1945. A brutal, bestial conflict, targeting civilians in ways reminiscent of World War II; it was stirred up initially by Germany, which expressed the tendency for bloc indiscipline and then descended into hell with almost every major power backing their own factions and joining in. And it’s been downhill in the expanding zones of war and militarism ever since, with the Middle East and Africa prime examples.

More problems for the proletarian perspective but its tasks remain the same

It’s certainly true that since the downfall of the USSR, Russian imperialism has rationalised and re-armed, once again emerging as a major player on the world arena. Even more importantly, China has appeared as the major challenger to US hegemony, demonstrating that that a tendency towards bipolarisation between the most powerful imperialist states still exists. Furthermore, it is above all the rise of China which, already under Obama, led to the USA declaring Asia to be the new pivot and the containment of China its main priority; this was the real meaning behind Obama’s policy of disengagement from large parts of the Middle East, which the Trump regime has taken even further. But neither the mounting rivalry between US and China, or the tensions between Russia and the US, should be confused with the actual formation of blocs, which is being continually undermined by the dominant tendency towards fragmentation. This tendency has been illustrated very clearly

1. See: <https://en.internationalism.org/icconline/201801/14694/iran-struggle-between-bourgeois-cliques-danger-working-class>

2. The Shadow Commander <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander>

3. <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-01-04/the-us-attack-on-baghdad>

Anarchists and Extinction Rebellion

A bourgeois organisation cannot be transformed

Extinction Rebellion (XR) will be organising another “mass protest” in London in May. Taking part in this action, or supporting it, will be many who argue that, while XR, like the cycle of school climate strikes, is a sign that people are ready to act against the looming environmental disaster, it does not go far enough. There will be Trotskyists like the Socialist Workers’ Party insisting that XR needs to understand that the threat to the planet comes from capitalism’s insatiable search for profit. We won’t deal with them now because, like all Trotskyists, Stalinists or social democrats, the SWP believe that you can get rid of capitalism through the existing state taking over the economy – in sum, through nationalising the insatiable search for profit. This disqualifies them from lecturing us about the need to overthrow capitalism.

But there are others, such as the anarchists, whose claim to be opposed to capitalism can be taken more seriously, because some of them at least talk about the destruction of the capitalist state, the abolition of wage labour and the need for communism. And generally speaking, they make a more thorough-going criticism of the aims and tactics of XR. They find it especially hard to stomach XR’s efforts to establish friendly relations with the police and their tactic of encouraging members to seek arrest. The London anarchist paper *Rebel City* puts it like this: “*XR’s main tactic involves people voluntarily getting arrested to put moral pressure on government to act. But it’s a pipe-dream to think we can reverse climate change without the dismantling of capitalism as a world-exploiting system. You can’t have some nice democratic non-ecocidal market economy: reversal of the climate cataclysm means overthrowing the classes that profit from it*”¹.

Perfectly true. And we can also find some well-researched anarchist investigations into XR’s shady relationship with the police, business and the upper echelons of the state: at a recent meeting of the Anarchist Communist Group in London, a member of the Green Anarchist Front provided some very telling information about links between the security services and some of the elements involved in setting up XR.

And yet the majority of anarchists continue to argue that it is necessary and possible to work inside organisations like XR. The GAF member talked about the need to work inside XR’s local groups because a lot of its members are indeed 1. *Rebel City* no 12: <https://rebelcitylondon.wordpress.com/2019/11/29/rebel-city-no-12/>

posing questions about the relationship between capitalism and environmental destruction. The *Rebel City* article says that “*Extinction Rebellion has inherited the split nature of green movements; one half reliant on moral blackmail, class blind, focused on one issue without seeing how it is vitally linked to the whole social and economic structure, naïve towards the enforcers and controllers of those structures. Many others, however, have learned to understand the connections and build links that transcend them. So these issues are being debated within XR; the people involved are changing and adapting in response to reality and experience....XR’s potential is obvious, but will it fizzle out, outgrow the liberal illusions of leading voices? It’s yet to be seen (and fought for from within)*”.

XR claims to be a non-hierarchical, “holocratic” organisation and many of the anarchists involved in it think that this makes it possible to “fight from within” in order to transform it.

The libertarian collective, Out of the Woods, which has done its homework on the dangerous and illusion-spreading tactic of “voluntarily seeking arrest”², has also made an interesting exposure of XR’s claim to be non-hierarchical, showing that those who have tried to challenge its semi-hidden hierarchy have been given short shrift by the leadership. And this seems to lead Out of the Woods to a clear conclusion: “*In the first part of this critique we stated that we would not encourage people to get involved in XR and we stand by this call.... Those hostile to XR’s tactics and strategy are often encouraged to join the movement, taking advantage of its ‘holocratic’ structure to change it for the better. Our hope is that this essay has made clear just how difficult - if not impossible and potentially counterproductive - this will be. XR’s ‘holocracy’ reproduces informal and oppressive power structures, and actively works against serious changes. It has permitted occasional critiques of XR’s leadership, but not in a way which prompts serious questioning of power structures*”³.

But the strength of this position is undermined in the same text. Out of concern “*not to do a disservice to those fighting internally, against great odds, to improve it*”, they seem to include a very big “maybe”: “*Perhaps we should not be*

2. https://libcom.org/blog/extinction-rebellion-not-struggle-we-need-pt-1-19072019#footnoteref3_oYk5dbI
3. <https://libcom.org/blog/xr-pt-2-31102019>

too hasty in writing off these struggles as futile, however. If XR’s ‘success’ is indeed in part due to a lack of historical memory of radical struggle in the UK then these internal struggles within it may prove invaluable in the long run, even if they do not achieve their laudable aims in the short run. Many people are experiencing activism for the first time in XR and whilst we feel comradely-but-forceful critique from outside the movement is important, there is potential for groups within XR to make substantive pedagogical contributions in this context. We have all been involved in struggles that were imperfect or, sometimes, downright wrongheaded. We do not come into this world perfect activists. The experience of many in XR may prepare them for other struggles that are still to come”. And therefore: even though the chances of this are “slim”, “*were they to be successful XR would be a wholly transformed organisation*”.

The underlying problem here is a lack of a class analysis - a kind of original sin of anarchism, which has always tended to express the standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie or other intermediate strata rather than that of the working class. XR – like the trade unions or the Labour party – is fundamentally hierarchical because it is a **bourgeois** organisation, linked directly to the capitalist state, and thus incapable of being “transformed” into something that serves the class struggle. Its function – like the New Green Deal or the Youth for Climate campaign - is to recuperate genuine concerns about the future of the planet and to steer them away from questioning capitalism. By its very nature it is going to attract people who are seeking alternatives to the current system – just like the Labour Party or the Trotskyist groups – but it can only exhaust and distort their search for a new society. Consequently revolutionaries – who must certainly relate to such individuals – can only call on those who want to get rid of capitalism to make a complete break with XR, and the sooner the better.

And the answer does not lie in trying to devise “independent” campaigns around the question of the environment. The GAF, for example, advocates protest actions alongside the blockades organised by XR, but not warning the police in advance⁴. But this kind of “direct action” not only “indirectly” strengthens XR but also conveys the idea that you can struggle against capitalism by organising protests by small minorities cut off

4. <http://afed.org.uk/london-gaf-target-oil-money/>

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

from the struggle of the only force that can really oppose capital: the proletarian class struggle.

The Anarchist Communist Group, on the other hand is more concerned with the need to relate the problem of the environment to the workers’ struggle, and thinks it has found the answer in launching a campaign for free transport in the cities, which they think can unite transport users and transport workers in a common fight. Although this sounds like one of those Trotskyist “transitional demands” which are aimed at seducing workers into unconsciously raising demands that capitalism is unable to grant, the ACG argue that it is quite realisable:

“*Public transport should be free because it is a public good. It is something that everyone has to use, like the health service. And, if any form of car has major disadvantages for people and the planet, then public transport is the answer and needs to be supported with funds. This is not an idealistic or impossible demand, even in the current capitalist system. It is a question of building an effective movement which forces changes in policy. Many places already have free transport, such as Luxemburg which made all public transport free earlier this year*”⁵.

In fact, capitalism provides nothing for free. The health service certainly is not free – it’s paid for out of the taxes imposed on the working class, or more generally by the surplus value sucked out of our labour. And capitalism in crisis will have no alternative than to reduce all social benefits while at the same time making them more expensive.

The ACG, like most anarchists, also suffers from the illusion that mass movements can be “built” by the patient organising or ingenious campaigning of those committed to social change. But as Rosa Luxemburg explained over a hundred years ago, such notions were already being refuted by the real movement of the working class, which, above all in this epoch of history, has an uneven and explosive character which cannot be planned in advance until it has reached a very high level of self-organisation and political awareness. The task of revolutionaries is to participate in this real class struggle and to indicate ways that it can reach the level of a conscious assault on capitalism. And this difficult but necessary process is the only way that the working class can integrate the problem of “ecocide” into the fight to overthrow capitalist exploitation. **Amos 15.2.20**

5. *Jackdaw*, Climate change special

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*.

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