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ver the years the significance of May 1st as a day of international solidarity for workers has been lost on the majority of workers in Britain. We don’t even share the same day for celebrating as the rest of the world’s workers. Ever since the introduction of the May Bank Holiday way back in 1978 local May Day parades are spread over the holiday period and rarely occur on May 1st itself. Michael Foot (as left-wing Labour Employment minister) brought in the May Bank Holiday as a sop to the working class at a time of growing discontent over job losses and the rising cost of living. He was criticized for ‘copying Russia’ and introducing a ‘communist’ measure although the TUC’s brass bands and Labour Party flutillas were hardly equal to the grotesque military parades which went under the name of celebrating International Workers’ Day in the Soviet Union. In truth, though, the ritual parades of the Labour Party and the TUC had already killed off May Day for most workers.

What began as a defiant celebration of the sacrifices workers had made on the incessant class war between capital and wage labour, a war which the world’s working class would surely win by overthrowing capitalist and introducing the working class. Yet there has never been more need for the working class to unite and fight for a totally different world.

Capitalism: The Worst is Yet to Come

Every day we are told there is no alternative to the society we have now. We are asked by tax-dodging multi-millionaires to make sacrifices for an economy that exploits us and pushes many of us into massive debt and unemployment. It’s a system of environmental destruction, wars to control raw materials, famine and genocide, but we are told over and over that this is the best we can hope for, that this is the only democracy there can ever be, that anything else would be madness (even though the ‘democratic right’ we do have are being attacked at an almost weekly rate).

We’re told to sit tight, accept what’s coming to us and wait until the worst is over, but the truth is that the more hardships we endure the more they think they can get away with. In any case, we can forget about the post-war years of steadily increasing living standards. From now on each generation will be worse off than the last. As the cuts deeper people’s lives are starting to change, not just here in Britain. All over the world need to keep up some credibility with their members, but all the time they search for an option that is acceptable to the bosses and which will reduce the chance of solidarity across union boundaries. (Look how public sector workers have been split up, with teachers left high and dry, after millions came out last November.) When the bosses cite the need to get rid of workers to keep afloat, that’s exactly what they’ll do. Time and again they limit strikes if it looks like they might be too ‘damaging’, or they reach some solution in secret talks with the bosses before a strike has even started, (like the current talks in the tanker drivers’ ‘dispute’) usually resulting in a call for workers to make sacrifices as ‘there is no alternative’. When workers in one sector are undermined and isolated like this, it impacts on us all.

Campaigns and Protests but No Prospect of a New Society

Outside of the workplace there are countless campaigns against aspects of the cuts. The unions are working out how to use the media, enlist support from the millions of the community and in short, become efficient campaigning organisations ready to claim a victory if a hospital ward is ‘saved’ from closure. Nothing wrong with saving hospital wards but it’s not going to prevent the overall attacks. At this level there is absolutely no possibility of a more class conscious resistance to the damage being wrought by capital. Many militants sense this and prefer to join more direct action groups, such as UK Uncut, whose campaigns gain media attention and which have certainly been particularly effective in getting retailers like Tesco, who want to avoid bad publicity, to withdraw from the state’s obvious workfare programme. However, there is no coherent political vision behind this kind of radical reformism which cannot offer a way forward to the working class in general. Of course the highest profile of all has been achieved by the Occupy movement, with its evocative slogans and its ‘anti-capitalist’, or at least anti-bankers’ bonuses, stance. Occupy is a genuine expression of popular resentment and as such a very wide umbrella which can cover anyone from company shareholders demanding more democratic meetings, to low paid workers battling to get a living wage and — in their discussion forums — there is even the possibility for some to develop a more revolutionary programme: communism. The possiblity for a revolutionary new world gains ground perhaps May Day will be celebrated with real hope for the future. Get involved!

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Capitalism and the Cuts: There is an Alternative But We Need to Fight For It

A System in Crisis

Even the ruling class admits that capitalism is in deep crisis. Their speculative bubble has burst and the consequences of the crisis are obvious to everyone. They cannot hide from us the fact that the working class everywhere will have to pay for years in order to get them out of the hole the capitalist order is in now.

Job insecurity, layoffs, cutbacks in social provisions, spiralling youth unemployment, tax rises for the poor and pensioners, as well as pension and welfare cuts for everyone.

It does not matter where you live in the so-called “advanced” capitalist world the recipe is the same. We are experiencing — and even the ruling class admits that worse is yet to come — a brutal deterioration of our living and working conditions. It will go on for years if we let it.

Meanwhile the grand coalition of all those who exploit us are slowly restoring their bank balances. Property prices soar — the very rich are on the rise and naturally they are voting themselves tax cuts as they are the deserving “wealth creators” and philanthropists of society. For them “the recession” is over.

But the crisis is far from over. This is not just a crisis about bad debts or bad banks. This is a structural crisis which has been with us for decades (since the end of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 in fact). Capitalism is at the end of one of it cycles of accumulation and it can only get out of the mess by devaluing existing capital values. In the early days of capitalism a few bankruptcies here or there could do the trick. The successful capitalists would buy up the losers at knock down prices and the system could start again. On top of that the working class has become less organised and less cohesive; and haven’t the capitalist class enjoyed it!

Yet now, though, the situation is beginning to turn. The working class — everyone who depends on wages for a living — is under an unprecedented and concerted attack. So far, for the reasons already outlined above, workers have been slow to react.

However something is stirring. From the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement it is clear that the crisis itself is provoking responses which go beyond the limits of these experiences and some sections of the working class have gained confidence from this. In the worst affected countries like Greece and Spain resistance is beginning to appear. Even so, in relation to the impending disaster for the working class it has been inadequate. There are several reasons for this. Years of defeat have taken their toll of working class self-confidence. However, this is not just a question of confidence. Many workers have bought into capitalist individualism and are waiting and hoping that somehow the worse of the crisis will not hit them and that when it does workers will need to respond in two ways:

What Will Have to be Done

In the first place they will need to unite whatever their age, their employment situation, or trade. The form of this unity will have to be through autonomous bodies such as strike committees which are controlled only by mass meetings of all the participants in the movement. They will need to go beyond the trades unions and capitalist political parties who call for negotiations with the existing order.

In the second place they will have to recognise that the struggle has to become political. So far many have not even recognised the need for “anti-capitalism” but this means different things to different people. Some think it just means anti-union. Others think it means anti-bank as if small-scale capitalists are nicer exploiters. Others think it means bringing in the state to nationalise everything. We need to keep the system in check.

The fate of workers under the former Soviet Union shows the limits of this vision.

There is no half way house. Anti-capitalism if it has any real meaning has to be about setting up another way of producing things. The only option is a system which abolishes money in exchange, profit, in fact we need a complex of different society where humanity produces to satisfy human needs; a society in which the means to produce and distribute are socialised and not managed by a handful of capitalists (whether of the private or state variety). It is a society where the environment is not looted and devastated (in an almost irreversible way) but respected by present and future generations.

Change the names, and the story is about you — Proletarian Internationalists from Greece

The Internationalist Communist Tendency is not “the Party”, and is not even the sole core of such an organisation. Having said that, we have given ourselves the goal of working together with serious working class activists and revolutionaries to further the construction of a new international revolutionary organisation. We invite everybody who can identify with this perspective to get in touch with us and to enter into discussion.

Statement of the Internationalist Communist Tendency

May Day 2012

This piece, produced as a bi-lingual leaflet in German and Greek, is being distributed to workers in Greece by internationalists there, and in Germany by our comrades of the GIS

Letter To Fellow Workers in Germany

“Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur” ("Change the names, and the story is about you")

This is probably something you suspect, and maybe already know. If you haven’t thought about it already, consider it now.

What happens here in Greece, also concerns you. What happens to me here will only benefit you there. We are both working men and women. We work hard and flexible hours (if we still have jobs). We are not paid much. They threaten us with wage cuts and dismissals. We work hard and flexible hours (if we still have jobs). We are not paid much. They threaten us with wage cuts and dismissals.

Purchasing power is now well below inflation. 7 million (about 20% of the workforce) work part-time under fixed-term contracts (“mini-jobs”), with monthly earnings below 400 euros and without insurance.

While real wages have declined over the last 10 years, banks have increased their profits by 39%. The prime reason for the external debt is commercial rather than fiscal deficits. This drives countries into financial speculation. And one last thing: the loans that Greece gets do not come from Germany’s state budget, but come from the financial system itself, which multiplies its profits on its loans. However, the public current account budget (the so-called “tax-payers”) has to take the risk of these financial transactions.

It is obvious. The ruling classes of our countries — using unimportant differences and our fragmentation — are trying to split us. They are trying to turn us against each other. While you and I are at loggerheads, we cannot defend ourselves against their oppression. The idea of the “nation” is their important weapon because it hides the class character of the ruling class system. It gives the impression that the existing state of things is an expression of common interests of the “people”.

We have nothing between us to make us divided. They are not united, we can be.

We are class brothers and sisters. We will not pay for the crisis they created. We resist as far as we can, but we need your solidarity. Let’s fight together for our class liberation. In order to shake off all oppression and discrimination!

In order to achieve this requires the overthrow of the democratic capitalist state in which parliament acts as a fig leaf for the rule of the capitalist class and the taking of power by the proletariat. Its aim will be to establish a society of “freely associated producers” who plan for need and not for profit. It will have no nations, no states, no frontiers and no wars.

This is the kind of communism we envisage. It will not come about overnight. We have a long struggle ahead of us both to convince our class comrades of the real alternative to capitalism and to organise to defeat the ruling capitalist cliques. In the course of this those who can already see the need for a new society will need to join together in a communist minority, an international revolutionary party. This is not a question of wanting to create an instrument of domination, a government in waiting or even another parliamentary project. What we need is an international and internationalist organisation capable of participating in the class movement, of debating and illuminating the perspective for the overcoming of capitalism and another way of living together: an association of free and equals, in which the “free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”.

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Proletarian Internationalists from Greece

In the preface to the first volume of Capital Marx says to the German reader, even though England is used as the main example, de te fabula narratur (the myth is talking about you!) Anyone who feels that England is a special case hasn’t realised that social forces are now operating on an international scale. According to Marx, England showed the future of Germany and the world.