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Revolutionary
Perspectives

The Difficult Path to an International Workers' Fightback



- Egypt's Crisis Goes On
- Street Protests and Class Power: Turkey, Egypt and Brazil
- East Germany 1953
- History of the Internationalist Communist Party
- Damen/Bordiga on Unions
- Correspondence with Occupy Movement

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For correspondence write to:
CWO, BM CWO
London
WC1N 3XX
email: uk@leftcom.org

Or visit our website:
<http://www.leftcom.org>

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The Difficult Path to an International Workers' Fight-back

Slowly Deepening Crisis

The so called “Great Recession” is now in its sixth year and is acknowledged, even by the capitalist class, as the most serious economic crisis since World War Two. Although the crisis now appears to have stabilised it is in fact slowly deepening. The violent gyrations in global stock markets of recent months indicate a nervousness and uncertainty, not a return to confidence. The fact that markets can collapse when the chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank announces that money printing will be scaled back because the US economy is *improving* indicates the upside down world which global finances now inhabit.

The strategies of the capitalist class for overcoming the “Great Recession” whether they base themselves on reflating demand, or austerity and balanced budgets, both rely on achieving economic growth as the only escape route. Growth is, however, proving elusive. The World Bank expects the global economy to grow by only 2.2% this year but this is almost entirely due to higher growth rates in China and India. For the UK, the economy has actually shrunk by 3.9% from its level of 2007 and for the EU as a whole growth has been negative with European Commission predicting only 0.5% growth in 2013.

Attempts at balancing budgets have also been unimpressive. The EU has a budget deficit target of 3% of GDP for all EU members. The UK deficit is now 8.2%, which is the highest since 2008, and the target date for achieving a balanced budget has been pushed back from 2015 to 2018. The EU bailout countries have all been given extended periods to cut their deficits. Portugal and Ireland have each been given another 7 years beyond the original bailout terms. The US budget deficit, though falling, is still expected to be 6.5%. The strategy of “Austerity and Balanced Budgets” is itself now being questioned by one of its architects, the IMF, which now admits mistakes have been made in earlier bailouts particularly Greece and the medicine dished out with the loans has made the situation worse.

A completely opposite strategy is being attempted in Japan. After two decades of deflation a massive programme of Quantitative Easing has been initiated. Money is being pumped into the economy at a rate of 1% of the GDP per month which is double the maximum ever undertaken by the US. The government aims to increase the rate of growth at the price of allowing inflation to rise to 2%. At present Japanese taxes cover a mere 46% of government expenditure and these measures will increase Japanese debt; a debt which stands at 245% of the GDP and is the highest of any country in the world. These measures reflect a sense of desperation.

The issue of debt in general is, of course, not limited to Japan. The UK government debt,

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which was £700bn in 2010, has doubled to £1400bn and is expected to rise to 85% of the GDP by 2015. This is just the government debt, once the corporate debt and personal debt are added the total figure is £7500bn or approximately 500% of the GDP.

While this indicates little success in finding a route out of the “Great Recession” it does suggest things could get dramatically worse. A significant rise in global interest rates would be a catastrophe. The figures for rescuing the financial system in the present conditions would be measured in trillions not billions as in 2008. These amounts would be beyond the capacity of the nation state. What the capitalist class would do then is a matter of speculation but, writing down debts, confiscation of deposits, as occurred in Cyprus recently, nationalisation of pension funds, as occurred in Argentina 1990, or devaluing debts by inflation of currencies could occur. All these things would produce a massive financial crisis and loss of “confidence” which in its turn would produce a social crisis.

Accompanying these manoeuvrings in the financial sphere the ruling class has followed a strategy of trying to shift the burden of the crisis onto the working class. There are indications that this strategy on its own is proving insufficient. A hint of this was the so-called “bail-in” of large depositors, namely sections of the bourgeoisie themselves, in the case of the Cyprus rescue. The decisions of the European Union at the end of June established the “bail in” of bank shareholders and creditors as a policy to be followed in future rescues. The signs are that this strategy isn’t working, even though the working class has not yet been able to successfully oppose it.

Far from indicating that a route out of the crisis has been found, these developments only indicate that the underlying problems of capitalism continue and that the ruling class is unable to either understand them or address them.

Attacks on the Working Class

The attempts of the ruling class to impose austerity on the working class have generally been successful. Before considering why this is the case we wish to briefly outline the extent of burdens which have been heaped on workers’ shoulders.

Since 2008 the attacks have been on two fronts, a direct attack on wages and an indirect attack via social benefits. The severity of these attacks can be illustrated by many statistics, but probably the most dramatic are those from Greece. Here we find that;

- Average family income has fallen by 38% from its level in 2007
- Wages and pensions have fallen by 35 – 50%
- Unemployment is 28.6% and 40% of youth are seeking employment abroad.
- Collective labour agreements have been revoked
- Pension age has been raised to 67
- Vat has been increased to 27%
- One of the results of all this is that 37% of all children are now living in poverty.¹
- Infant mortality has increased by 40%.

In the other EU bailout countries there have been similar, but smaller, attacks on direct

wages with reductions of 5-10%. Minimum wages have similarly been reduced. For the UK, the Institute of Fiscal Studies reports that there have been falls of 4.8% and 9.9% in wages in the private and public sectors respectively since 2008.

At the same more flexible conditions have been enforced with workers having to give up previous entitlements such as holidays, bonuses as well as having to sign individual contracts with employers or accept zero hours contracts.

Reduction in the social wage have been imposed through reduction of benefits and services. For example in the UK, disability benefit has been cut, the bedroom tax introduced, workfare, which means working for free, has been imposed together with increases in the pension age and reductions in pension payments etc.

This has been coupled with restructuring of the economies and speed-ups which, of course, has led to massive unemployment. In the EU as a whole the rate is 12% but in certain countries it is much worse. 12% unemployment represents 18.8 million workers! For the capitalist class this has resulted in a net reduction in labour costs. For Greece this amounts to some 14%. Why has the working class proved unable to resist all this?

Working Class Resistance in Metropolitan Countries

The working class in the so-called “developed”, or metropolitan, capitalist countries, particularly Europe, the US and Japan, has proved unable to resist these attacks. In general the capitalist class has succeeded in enforcing most of the attacks on wages and conditions of workers it wanted. We consider two factors need to be considered in explaining this, firstly the reorganisation of global capital which has been carried out under the banner of “globalisation” and secondly the confinement of workers’ struggles in the prison of the trade unions.

During the last 25 years globalisation has changed the material situation in which the metropolitan working class is forced to struggle. It has given the capitalist class a flexibility they did not previously have, and an ability to outmanoeuvre working class resistance. Richard Freeman, a Harvard economics professor, estimates that the entry of China, India and the former Soviet bloc into the world economy resulted in 1.47 billion additional workers becoming available to global capital. This resulted in a doubling of the size of the workforce to approximately 3 billion. These additional workers brought very little additional capital with them, and as a result cut the global ratio of capital to labour which decreased to between 55% and 60% of what it would otherwise have been².

Richard Freeman himself makes the obvious point that:

“The capital/labor ratio is a critical determinant of the wages paid to workers and of the rewards to capital. The more capital each worker has, the higher will be their productivity

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*and pay. A decline in the global capital/labor ratio shifts the balance of power in markets toward capital, as more workers compete for working with that capital.*³

The additional workers who have become available have been made use of by the metropolitan capitalist class by exporting production and service industries to the areas where they are available. This has resulted in massively cheaper labour power becoming available to capital. Technical developments in communications and the internet have, obviously, greatly assisted the exploitation of this new labour force. Much of the surplus value generated by these global operations has, of course, been returned to the metropolitan countries and in part been used to fund those service industries which cannot be exported.

For the metropolitan workers, globalisation has as its corollary a tendency to fragmentation of the entire working class. Large factories are split into smaller units forming a small section of a global production process, or simply closed down and production moved to peripheral countries. In the wake of the defeats of the bastions of working class resistance in the 80s the metropolitan capitalists have succeeded in reforming much of the organisation of labour under the banner of "flexibility". This has resulted in workers working in smaller units. For example, construction workers working for "labour only" subcontractors, or being "self-employed", or being on flexible contracts such as the infamous "zero hours" contracts⁴. The workforce is thus split into smaller units with apparently differing interests.

The sector of the economy which illustrates the decline of large scale production and large concentrations of workers most brutally is manufacturing. This accounted for 40% of the UK economy in 1955 employing 8 million workers and today accounts for just under 10% and employs only 2.5 million.⁵ UK coal mining which employed 470,000 workers at the time of nationalisation in 1947, had contracted to approximately half, 200,000, by the time of the miners' strike in 1984, and today employs a mere 6000. The same type of reduction of employed workers applies to the steel industry. In 1951 it had 450,000 workers and today the figure is 18,500⁶. Similar figures could be produced for other industries, but these industries are instructive as their decimation followed bitter strikes, strikes which failed to prevent either the plant closures or lost production being replaced by imports. They indicate how the previous methods and particularly the extent of struggle, which had won battles in the 60s and 70s, were no longer effective. Today steel making, vehicle production and whole swathes of manufacturing industry are owned by international capitalist corporations. They are thus able to transfer production elsewhere in the world in response to local profitability, or in response to strikes. Globalisation of production has given the capitalist class the ability to outflank previous methods of struggle.

As the surplus value producing industries, in particular manufacturing, have been cut back industries which generally appropriate surplus value produced elsewhere in the economy, have increased. This in turn has been made possible by globalisation. The service industries, now employ 81%⁷ of the workforce in the UK, according to the 2011 census. The sectors

included in “service industries” are government employees, health and education workers, transport, tourism and, of course, the famous financial sector, which, employs 17% of the workforce and which, until 2008 was supposed to be the saviour of UK capitalism⁸. Despite the obvious parasitism of the financial sector, not all of these sectors are totally unproductive in value terms and increasing numbers of ‘service sector’ workers are finding their service work is being turned into commodity production. It is no accident that these sectors have borne the brunt of the latest round of attacks on wages and conditions. However, in these sectors strike action is more difficult than in manufacturing, mining or steel-making and is less effective as so many key commodities are imported from abroad.

The second obstacle preventing any effective fight-back in the metropolitan countries is that struggles generally remain controlled by the trade unions. The conditions in which the trade unions operate have also been changed by globalisation, as described above, and the more general change in capitalism’s profitability which has occurred as the system moved from a phase of reconstruction, following World War Two, to one of crisis which started from the early 70s. Whereas the trade unions were able to negotiate some improvements in conditions and pay in the post-war period this was possible because capitalism was in a period of growth, caused by increased profitability brought about by the destruction of capital during the Second World War. As soon as the crisis set in the capitalist class tried to restore profits by reducing workers’ wages and benefits. In the changed circumstances trade unions’ principal activity became about negotiating redundancies, speedups and worse conditions.

This should not surprise us since trade unions do not in any way oppose the wages system which is the basis of capitalism. They locate themselves within the capitalist system and are therefore a part of it. Their principal task is to negotiate the rate capital pays for labour power and to assure its availability. This is a negotiation within the system, and it accepts the conditions and premises of capitalism. Trade unions therefore accept the need for a profitable economy and logic which goes with this. They consequently accept such things as the need for flexibility, speedups, redundancies and the rest. They stand for a healthy national economy and their vision of socialism is an entirely stultified economy, that is to say, a system of fully integral state capitalism. Trade unions are consequently agents of capitalism and, as such, they will sabotage any effective fight against the system itself.

For workers in the metropolitan countries, the situation is thus one in which they are under a general attack because of structural changes in the global economy, changes which are bringing about a slow equalisation of global wage rates, and a specific attack resulting from the financial collapse of 2008. We expect these attacks to intensify as the economic crisis deepens. At the same time resistance remains generally organised by trade unions who advise workers to knuckle down and submit to these attacks otherwise their situation will get worse and could reduce their conditions to those of workers in the peripheral countries. This is the background to the current failure to halt the wave of attacks which the capitalist class is launching on workers in the metropolitan countries.

Resistance in the Peripheral Countries

The situation in the peripheral countries is more or less the inverse of that in the metropolitan countries. Here we find huge concentrations of workers in large factories, reminiscent of the situation in Manchester in the Nineteenth century, but many times larger. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is Foxconn, the Taiwanese electronics company producing such things as smartphones, tablets, computer servers etc. which employs 1 million workers worldwide. Its 3 production facilities in China employ approximately 700,000 workers⁹. The biggest factory in Shenzhen employs 390 000. Similar massive concentrations of workers in production plants are found in India, Bangladesh, Brazil, South Africa and other peripheral countries. The conditions which many of these workers suffer are similar to those described by Engels in his study *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. In China some 250 million workers earn less than \$1 per day and 700 million live on less than \$2 a day. Workers often have to work 60 to 70 hours per week.¹⁰ In Bangladesh clothing workers are locked in the factories, have pay deducted for toilet breaks and work in notoriously unsafe conditions for a pittance. In November 2012 a fire in a factory burned 117 workers to death, and this year the collapse of a single factory crushed 1100 workers to death. These few examples give an indication of pay and conditions in the “Brave New World” which capitalism has constructed in the peripheral countries, conditions which revolutionaries can only brand as an outrage.¹¹

In most peripheral countries the role of the trade unions is not so entrenched in the capitalist apparatus as in the metropolitan countries. China, of course, is the exception where the unions are visibly integrated into the state. This means that much of the class struggle takes place outside union control. Strikes are wildcats and often do achieve some concessions but a price is paid, frequently in blood.

A majority of the workers in the peripheral countries are first generation workers without a previous tradition of class struggle. When class struggle breaks out it is with elemental violence on a local level often leading to violent clashes with the police. In China, for example, while there are no statistics, it is estimated that there are thousands, if not tens of thousands, of strikes every year. All of them are wildcats.¹² These have recently led to clashes with the police and army leading to deaths of workers. One of the most brutal examples of violent suppression of workers’ struggles in a peripheral country is that of the strike at the Marikana platinum mine in South Africa in 2012. Here the police simply gunned down 34 striking miners.¹³

In the periphery, therefore, it is generally the case that workers are struggling against the savage exploitation and achieving minor concessions in wages and conditions. These struggles remain local and are generally contained by the repressive forces of the state. There is, however, no perspective that this struggle is part of a general struggle against capitalism itself.

Globalised Resistance

While globalisation has provided the capitalist class with the means to undermine local and even national workers' struggles it has also, as predicted by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, created a global working class and a global system of production, which lays the basis for the international unity of the working class. While the capitalists are able to outflank strikes in a single industry or in a single country, strikes which generalised to many industries or became international could not be defeated. It is clear that workers need to unite worldwide exactly in the way the *Manifesto* states. This has become necessary to achieve even immediate economic demands. The capitalist crisis, however, makes economic gains short lived since the capitalist class will always find ways of taking such gains back or introducing other changes which compensate for these concessions. The real problem is the capitalist system itself which, because of its exploitative nature, is leading the world to catastrophe. The real issue is the replacement of the capitalist system with a communist¹⁴ one, and future struggles need to be given an orientation towards this goal. The question is how can this be done?

The working class owns nothing but its ability to labour. It is a property-less class in capitalism and is thus forced to sell its labour power to survive, and this sale of labour power is the basis of the entire capitalist system. To free itself from this condition it has to break the wage labour-capital relationship and, of course, doing this means exploding the whole capitalist system. It is for this reason that Marx described the working class as a class held in "radical chains" since it cannot break the chains without breaking the entire system apart and reorganizing production and society globally. In these circumstances the working class has only two weapons on which it can rely, its consciousness and its organisation.

Workers' Consciousness

At present the working class accepts the ideas of the capitalist class since, as Marx noted in *The German Ideology*

*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas*⁵.

In general workers accept that the present crisis is a temporary interruption in the operation of a system to which there is no alternative. For the present, for most workers, it seems best to hold onto what you have, keep your head below the parapet and wait for the better future, which our rulers are always promising. However, as Marx also notes in the *Preface to a Critique of Political Economy*:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being what determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the

*existing relations of production or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.*¹⁶

As workers' lives become ever more difficult and the promised glorious future never comes, it is this which will determine their consciousness. This is, of course, in direct contradiction with the ideas propagated by the capitalist class through their media, their education system and their ideological apparatus. It is in this situation that ideas of wider class struggle and international struggle can take root.

The "social being" of the working class, which Marx talks of, is, of course, enmeshed in the social being of capitalist society at large. The present phase of the crisis has produced a general dissatisfaction with capitalist society which has expressed itself in social movements in which workers have participated as individuals. We have witnessed mass struggles in peripheral and central countries; social uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt; occupations of central squares in major cities in Greece, Spain, US, UK and elsewhere; followed by social movement in Turkey, Brazil and once again in Egypt¹⁷. While movements are interclass movements without any clear objectives they undoubtedly do express a dissatisfaction with capitalism at a fundamental level and also a dissatisfaction with the formal structures of capitalism such as bourgeois democracy, political parties and trade unions. The crisis has, therefore, brought about an incipient challenge to bourgeois ideas in which workers have participated as individuals.

The CWO argues that capitalist relations of production are a "fetter" on the forces of production in the sense used by Marx in the passage quoted above. Although it is undeniable that the forces of production have grown enormously since the Second World War we argue that this growth depended on the massive devaluation and destruction of constant capital which the war brought about. This destruction of previously produced wealth has become an essential and integral part of capitalism's survival because of the systemic problems of accumulation which cause a tendency for profit rates to fall. When it is understood that the historical cycle of modern capitalism entails general destruction of wealth through global war it is clear that capitalist social relations are indeed a "fetter" to the forces of production. At present we are at the stage in the present cycle of reproduction where general destruction of constant capital through war is appearing again as the only solution to capitalism's impasse. However, since the conditions for general war are not yet developed, the present impasse is characterised by ever increasing attacks on the working class.

This is the material background to the working class' situation. However, the "social being" of workers within capitalism does not directly raise questions such as these. What workers experience are increasingly difficult conditions until it becomes impossible to continue living in the old way. The issue will then be confronting immediate problems, but problems, which when they try to solve them, will necessarily lead to the confrontation of the more

fundamental historical questions. Both the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 moved from initially trying to confront essentially bourgeois nationalist issues to world historical tasks, and there is no reason why this should not recur.

Organisation

The material conditions exist for the working class to become conscious that its immediate struggles need to be generalised and made international if they are to succeed. There is however no automatic trigger that will make that happen. At the moment the most widespread hope amongst many workers is that capitalism can be made “fairer” despite all the evidence that the wealth gap around the world continues to increase notwithstanding the crisis. This is a necessary stage we have to go through. In the course of their continuing exploitation the wider working class will be faced with the impasse that capitalism has created. It will be faced with the recognition that the system is no longer compatible with the future of humanity (and we have not even raised here the environmental destruction it is creating¹⁸). Its struggles will become wider and more collective. Street movements may bring impressive anti-capitalist masses out but it will be the mass strikes of the future which will really threaten the system. Only by paralysing the old system of production can we pave the way for a new one. It is worth noting in this respect that, where the struggles have had any success in the “Arab Spring”, strikes by the local working class have provided the force required to achieve the capitulation of the authorities, notably in Tunisia and Egypt. This indicates that the only real power able to confront the capitalist authorities is the working class.

At present workers’ struggles everywhere are largely in the hands of the trade unions which, as has been argued above, form part of the capitalist system of control of labour. For future struggles to have any chance of success it is therefore necessary to take their organisation out of the hands of the unions.

Struggles need to be organised democratically through workers’ assemblies which delegate members to strike committees who would give themselves the task of extending strikes or struggles to other industries and, where possible, internationally. These delegates are answerable only to the assemblies and are recallable.

But this alone will not be enough to defeat the system. In this process a historical consciousness will have to arise which will take many forms but will find its political voice in an international party. This will be a necessary instrument for the working class to be able to build a new world. We are not talking here about a party of government but a party of the working class, in the working class, whose task is to fight for the spread of international communism.

Such an organisation needs to be embedded in the struggles of the working class as this is the only way it can influence them. Without a clear political aim even the most determined workers’ struggles will ultimately end in confusion and failure. To fight for the

construction of such an organisation is the key task of the present period for revolutionaries who understand the historical lessons of the class struggle and the stakes of the present situation. How to engage in workers' struggles and propagate the revolutionary way forward is the key challenge to everyone who sees that only the working class can forge an historic alternative to capitalism.

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Footnotes

- 1 See <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/sites/www.solidarity4all.gr/files/aggliko.pdf>
- 2 "Labour Market imbalances" Richard Freeman, Harvard University paper. Richard Freeman
- 3 See Richard Freeman <http://www.theglobalist.com/storyid.aspx?StoryId=4542>
- 4 These contracts allow employers to retain workers but only pay them for hours they work. Often they are informed when they are required to work by text to a mobile phone. In the UK in 2012 there were 200,000 workers on these contracts with 100,000 of them in the National Health Service. This system has been extended to professionals such as doctors, engineers, lecturers, journalists and others and the numbers increased by 25% in the last year. It represents a way of cheapening the costs of labour and making employment more precarious. Figures from *Financial Times* 8/4/13.
- 5 See *Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2011/nov/16/why-britain-doesnt-make-things-manufacturing>
- 6 See *Financial Times* 14/05/13
- 7 See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/170-years-of-industry/170-years-of-industrial-changeponent.html>
- 8 The City of London produces 9% of GDP but generates 27% of government taxes.
- 9 See *Financial Times* 4/01/13. For an article on Foxconn see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2010-06-09/chinese-workers-show-their-class>
- 10 Reported in *Financial Times* 9/12/05
- 11 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2013-04-28/bangladesh-factory-disaster-workers-lives-are-expendable-for-capital>
- 12 See <http://jacobinmag.com/2012/08/china-in-revolt/>
- 13 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2012-08-25/south-africa-striking-miners-massacred-by-police>
- 14 When we speak of Communism we mean production for human needs, where the means of production are socialised and society will be organised so that each person will contribute according to their ability and each will receive according to their needs. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the state capitalist societies which existed in Russia, China etc.
- 15 Karl Marx *The German Ideology*
- 16 Karl Marx *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy*
- 17 See articles which follow this one.
- 18 See our pamphlet *Capitalism and the Environment* by Mauro Stefanini or <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2009-11-24/environmental-disaster-or-communism-there-is-no-third-way>

Egypt's Crisis Goes On: Power Struggles at the Top Whilst Those at the Bottom Die of Hunger and Poverty

Tahrir Square has exploded once again. Millions of protesters took to the streets of the main cities of Egypt. President Morsi has been deposed, arrested and is under surveillance in the "office" of the Republican Guard. An interim president Mansoor Adli, former President of the Constitutional Court, has taken his place, and the Constitution has been suspended. A caretaker government is supposed to come into existence to revise the constitution and prepare the ground for the next election to be held within a year, while the Army continues to be the pivot of Egyptian public life. Just as it was in Mubarak's time, as it has been under the management of the brief Morsi government, as it still is for domestic and international stability in this delicate phase of the crisis. It's no coincidence that the new strong man is the Minister of Defence, General Al Zizi who dominates the post-Morsi political stage.

Why all this? Why is Egypt still hanging on the tail of the so-called Arab Spring? First of all it must be said that the severe economic crisis, which was the basis of the original demonstrations against Mubarak, not only has not been resolved, but has got dramatically worse, affecting almost all social strata. In two years, Egypt, from an economic point of view, has taken ten steps backwards. In a country where the majority of the population lives in conditions of semi-poverty, official unemployment has reached 40% and pauperisation seems to be an unstoppable process, it is completely understandable why social unrest simmers under the ashes, ready to take to the streets at the first opportunity.

The opportunity was provided by the disappointment with the Morsi Government, of his party in power and, more generally, of the *Muslim Brotherhood* which had preached so much about democracy and equality that he was swept to power in the elections a year ago. Morsi has not only ignored those expectations, but, with his fundamentalist clique, continued the old tradition of dictatorial power based on force, coercion and corruption. Nothing had changed from the old and much-maligned regime, except for the worsening of the economic crisis and the religious repackaging of power as usual.

The combination of these two factors was the basis of the new demonstrations against the Morsi government and also by those who, with no lesser political intensity, support him although it has to be said in much smaller numbers, as the events of Friday 5 July demonstrated. This has given the impression to both domestic and international political observers that if some "demiurge" had not intervened in time, civil war would have violently erupted, Egypt would have entered into a serious political crisis, and with it the entire region, questioning the already difficult balance between the Arab world and Israel, between the European Union and the United States, not to mention the price of oil and the shifting international speculation over oil revenues.

The "demiurge" has had to come into action to forestall the crisis, safeguard the economic interests of big business and take control of the political situation before the anger on the streets goes too far. The army demiurge has completed its task. It has made the Government fall, arrested Morsi, promised new elections within 9 months and in the meantime has assumed, in the shape of General

Al Zizi, true command of operations. All in accordance with the programme of preserving the system and selling it to the masses. However, in this respect there are a few observations to make. The first is that the army was careful not to intervene in the streets with force. It has used the carrot while the stick has been brought out only to hit Morsi, a blow that was enough to get rid of the old government without the public at home or abroad crying “coup”, even if that is what it is. This stick has since been further used on the supporters of Morsi who have taken to the streets to vindicate the legitimacy of their leader. The second is that the use of the velvet glove on the streets and preparation for a very soft coup, were “advised” by the Obama administration, which pretty much directed operations via telephone even as it recommended the maximum prudence. Let’s not be fooled by Obama’s subsequent declarations “calling for a return to democratic normality as quickly as possible” because that’s just part of the usual game in these cases. Morsi’s Islamist government has never suited the White House.

The American interest has a threefold purpose. Prevent a new crisis from detaching Egypt from American plans for the Middle East, or rather to ensure that the relationship with Israel is unaffected by leaving things as they are. Reconnect the threads which have always linked American governments with the Egyptian army, the only strong structure, in political and economic terms, which can be related to for finding of any kind of internal solution. Use the weapon of blackmail (\$1.3bn arrive annually in the coffers of the army that was Mubarak’s, Tantawi’s and now Al Zizi’s) to influence policies and modus operandi. In terms of the latter point there is also Obama’s wish to propose Mohammed el Baradei, current head of the secular opposition, as a future candidate for the Egyptian presidency. Obama could not play that little game two years ago, when the situation in Tahrir square was politically out of hand and brought about the Islamist government and caused some concern in the White House, even though it claimed it would not tear up the agreements with Israel and would continue to be a staunch ally of the U.S.

In conclusion, for the moment, millions of desperate Egyptians who have taken to the streets have allowed a game to be played that is passing over their heads. On the one hand it has provided a pretext for the army to regain power. The removal of Morsi is a political sop to U.S. imperialism which allows it to regain its role, image and acceptance in an area where until recently it would have been rejected as a foreign body. What is even more disconcerting is that the announcement of Morsi’s overthrow and the army coup have been celebrated in the square as if they were a victory and not as yet another defeat. But as long as there is no revolutionary party in such situations, a party with a political programme that has a social and economic alternative to capitalism, as long as no-one tries to break the cords that bind the masses to the laws of capital and its political trappings, no matter if these are dressed in secular rather than religious robes, anything is possible, but always essentially within the same set-up. This is the risk, or rather it is a certainty. Down with Mubarak, up Tantawi. Down with Tantawi up Morsi. Up a secular government, then a religious one, then another secular one. Meanwhile, the crisis of capitalism remains; capitalism itself is not questioned. Egyptian workers are becoming more and more impoverished and unemployed yet the army remains in command of operations which, in this case, also follow a straight line which is always that of American imperialism.

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Street Protest and Class Power: Reflections on current events in Turkey, Egypt and Brazil and the aftermath of the Arab Spring

The ongoing events that set fire to Turkey from the end of May, the mass demonstrations in Brazil during the Confederations Cup, and the current events in Egypt with Tahrir Square once again full of demonstrators calling for the overthrow of the President, show very clearly that we still live in a world dominated by the events that were unleashed by a young man burning himself to death in Tunisia on 17th December 2010, which have become widely known as the 'Arab Spring'.

At the end of May, demonstrations against the development of a shopping centre and the demolition of a park in the centre of Istanbul exploded into a movement which brought millions of people into the streets in 79 of Turkey's 81 provinces. Then, while the world's eyes were turned towards the football tournament in Brazil demonstrations against public transport fare rises in São Paulo quickly spread across the country capturing the front pages and pushing the football to the sidelines. In Egypt demonstrations successfully demanding the removal of President Mohammed Morsi occurred across the country apparently bring even larger numbers of people into the streets than those of two years ago. In addition, though less well reported in the media, Indonesia has been rocked by demonstrations against a 44% increase in petrol prices.

Obviously this is a movement, if indeed it can be called a 'movement' that has gone far beyond any specifically Arab roots, and has also, at least on a superficial level, gone beyond protests against 'dictators' and for 'democracy' if only in that the countries currently affected are all democracies. What then, overriding all of the local detail, can be said to characterise these movements.

Demographics of Demonstrations

The most striking thing about this movement is how it is primarily of young people. The anarchist media may show pictures of a grandmother firing a catapult at the police in Taksim but such exceptions are merely proof of the rule. Of course, it is no surprise that young people make up the shock troops of any social struggle. What is more interesting is that these struggles are taking place in countries with an overwhelmingly young demographic. In Turkey, for example, 43.3% of the population are 24 or under. The comparative figures for Egypt, Brazil, and Indonesia are 40.7%, 41.5%, and 44.1% respectively. When you compare these figures with the statistics for countries in the 'West', the difference is very stark. The same figures for Germany, the UK, the US, and Japan are 24.1%, 30.3%, 33.8%, and 23.3%.

The countries where these events are taking place not only experience the global trends that are effecting young people across the whole world but also these trends are amplified by the much larger proportion of young people within the population. The expansion of university education is a worldwide phenomenon. In Turkey for example the number of university graduates has

increased by 5% every year since 1995. As in Western countries there are an increasing number of graduates coming out of university and finding that compared to their parents generation their qualifications have much less chance of leading them into a job. This of course has been made even worse by the effects of the latest outbreak of the international economic crisis since 2008. According to the left-wing trade union DİSK unemployment is running at 17%. Obviously this affects not just university students, but also all young people who are caught up in the same dynamic of studying, exams, and cramming schools. It is the overwhelming mass of young people caught up in an education system which fails to fulfil any of its promises in terms of being able to offer people a future which is the social dynamic, and then emerging into a world of low paid precarious jobs which is powering these sorts of movements.

Class Composition

The fact that the protesters are on the whole young is, though, hardly surprising. What is more important is to understand the class nature of these movements. Various different analysis have outlined how they see these movements according to their own ideological slant. This has ranged in Turkey from Erdoğan's supporters who would typify the movement as one of elites protesting against a government democratically elected by the countries poor, to the Turkish left, for some of whom, this is a completely proletarian movement. What is undoubtedly true is that many of the people who make up these sorts of movements come from the working class. That is unsurprising though. The majority of urban dwellers in these countries are working class, and no effective political movement, be it communist, fascist, religious, or nationalist, can exist if it doesn't get support from the working class. Certainly the composition of the pro-government rallies organised by Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP has also been working class, indeed one could even make an argument that they were even more so.

The question that needs to be asked before even trying to determine the class nature of these movements is what determines the class nature of a movement in general. The sociological composition of a movement alone is not enough to judge its nature. Workers can be mobilised behind completely reactionary movements, nor are the methods of the working class sufficient to make a judgement, as is shown by the Powell strikes in the UK in the 60s and the Ulster Workers' Council in 1974. Equally important are the aims, demands, and direction of a movement. In making this sort of judgement on a movement all of these factors need to be taken into consideration.

When looking at these considerations then how can we evaluate these movements. Certainly a certain section of the working class is predominant in them. As previously stated though, this is to be expected in any movement. The methods used, massive demonstrations, assemblies, and even some strikes are consistent with the methods of the working class. There is, though, a striking lack of activity in the workplace, which is a crucial part of any working class movement. Even in Turkey where there seems to have been the highest number of strikes, involving around half a million workers, the majority of unionised workers were not involved in strikes. As for the demands and aims of the movements, they have been a mixed bag. Certainly there have been

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demands relating to working class living standards such as those against public transport fare increases in Brazil, and opposition to state repression of demonstrators, but equally so there have been non-class demands such as those from the demonstrators in Egypt who were calling on the army to intervene and make a coup. If the Turkish army hadn't suffered a historic defeat over the last decade at the hands of the AKP government, it wouldn't have been a surprise to have heard some sections of the demonstrators raising similar demands there.

When trying to draw up a balance sheet of these movements, with their lack of activity at the point of production, mixed demands, and composition not made upon a class basis, but more on a demographic basis of the young, it is clear that they are cross-class movements. More to the point though, they are real mass movements, not small cross-class campaigns. Within these movements there are workers fighting for their own class demands. This was very evident in Egypt in 2011, when it was almost as if the strike wave in the factories was taking advantage of the 'Tahrir Square movement' to press its own interests. Equally so within these movements there are also workers on demonstrations backing all sorts of bourgeois demands.

It is important to understand what this means though. Just because a movement is a cross-class movement it doesn't mean that communist organisations should dismiss it and stand back highhandedly refusing to have anything to do with it. Of course communist organisations have a duty to be involved in these sort of movements, always working to encourage class autonomy and independence. Conversely, it is also important not to get carried away seeing some sort of pure proletarian movement, or pulled behind various bourgeois factions. These two things are closely interlinked as if you can't recognise and understand what sort of movement it is, and what tendencies are operating within it, it is possible to end up putting forth all sorts of nonsense.

'Occupy' and Assemblies

One thing that is quite clear is that while the movements of this summer are in continuity with the 'Arab Spring', and the 'Green movement' in Iran, the 'Occupy' movement has very little in common with these events, and was at most a very pale reflection of the events of the 'Arab Spring'. The most obvious level that this can be seen on is that while these movements are shaking societies, bringing in all sectors of the population, rocking governments (and in cases causing them to be toppled), and are genuinely massive movements, the Occupy movement was, and essentially never went beyond, a movement of activists. That it received the amount of media attention that it did, both in the mainstream and left press, is as much to do with it taking place in America, which is both the focus of the world's media, and a country where the working class is very weak, and where the level of struggle is extremely low. The US is obviously an important country, and communists can't ignore it. Nevertheless, understanding is, as ever, important. The amount of coverage given to these events by an American dominated world media, and the excitement felt by the American left after years of struggles being scarce are not sufficient data to judge the size of this movement. Of course 'Occupy' and even more so the events in Wisconsin are important, but their importance lies in the fact that they show the potential start of a resurgence in America, however small at the moment, and not in the events themselves.

One of the features of the 'Occupy' movement that has been trumpeted by many on the left has been its use of assemblies to 'run' the movement. These types of assemblies have also been seen in various countries in the 'Arab Spring', and in Turkey, and Brazil today. Many on the left seem to be eulogising these movements as if they are some sort of proto-Soviets. They are not.

The most important difference between these assemblies, and mass meetings held by workers is, who they represent. The mass meeting in a workplace clearly represents the people who work there. These assemblies aren't based upon workplaces. More often than not, although there have been some of them in working class neighbourhoods, they represent nobody but the demonstrators themselves, rather than being a class body, they are bodies of activists. How the demonstrators are represented varies from 'Taksim Solidarity', which is a top down amalgamation of mainstream and left political parties with NGOs and left trade unions to the worst of 'Occupy' which was a couple of dozen hippies in a circle discussing the report of the 'spiritual commission'. Of course, this doesn't mean that communists shouldn't try to present their arguments in these situations. It doesn't mean that they are the organisational form of the coming revolution either.

From Demonstration to Strikes

Nowhere has the nature of these assemblies been clearer than in their attempts to call strikes. An attempt during the 'Occupy' movement to call a general strike in Oakland, America failed to bring out masses of workers, and even in places where it had support amongst workers (port of Oakland, and teachers) only resulted in people taking a holiday, a personal day, or phoning in sick. What is clear from this is that committees of activists can't call the working class out on strike at will. Only workers themselves can do this, and while many of the activists in these sort of movements are workers, they tend to work, as many young people do today, in small workplaces, often in precarious jobs. However, the driving force behind large scale strike movements is not these sort of workplaces. It is in large workplaces, and what used to be called the 'mass-worker', that these workers carry an inordinate weight in comparison with their numbers.

To speak in very general terms, the demonstrators are not the same part of the working class as the part that is necessary to make a successful mass strike. In contrast to thirty plus years ago when these sort of young people would have gone into large workplaces either in factories, or the state sector, today there are less of those jobs, young people are much more likely to be university-educated, and when they graduate are less likely to go into those jobs anyway. Indeed even where these jobs still exist many of them are 'downsizing' and not recruiting new workers. In the TEKEL (a state monopoly) struggle in Turkey over the winter of 2009-10, young workers were noticeable by their absence, which was explained by the fact that no new workers had been recruited in the last 12 years. Statistics concerning the demonstrations in Brazil have suggested that nearly three quarters of the demonstrators are university-educated. This in a country where only 19% of the population have set foot in a university classroom, and even though college attendance rates amongst young people have almost doubled over recent years, this three quarters is well above the level in the general population let alone the working class. There is

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clearly a gap. The question is how to bridge it.

There have, of course, been moments where this gap has been bridged. To go back to the 'Green movement' in Iran there was a point when workers at Khodro, Iran's largest factory, came out in solidarity with demonstrators suffering from state repression. During the 'Arab Spring' there were workers' strikes particularly in Tunisia, and Egypt. In Turkey the left unions called for 'general strikes', and around half a million workers took part in them. In Brazil at the moment the main union confederations are talking about holding a day of 'protests, strikes, and marches' on the 11th July.

In Turkey, which has previously seen one-day 'general strikes' organised by the left unions, there seems to be a growing recognition that these strikes are neither widespread enough in terms of the amount of workers participating, nor long enough in terms of their limited duration to effectively challenge the state. A similar situation has been seen in Greece during the union organised one day strikes against the implementation of austerity programmes.

While the question of how to move beyond these strikes remains, the question of how to even call a one day strike is something that challenges the demonstrators. In all of these movements there have been calls for general strikes made over social media. Like in Oakland these have been largely unsuccessful. That is not to say that there is nothing at all positive here. It shows at least that there is a recognition that strikes are needed to push this sort of movement forward. In Brazil a Facebook call out for a general strike got more than half a million supporters, which shows that there is a level of support for strikes. However, there are problems with this approach in evidence from the fact that it has failed to be successful. Firstly, the demographic gap is something that is reflected in the usage of computers. Older workers are less likely to use computers than younger university-educated ones, and even where they do use computers they are less likely to use social media sites. Calls for a general strike on Facebook and Twitter are not even connecting to many of the people that they need to be aimed at.

This is not to disparage the use of the Internet. It is today an important means of communication. The Turkish state certainly thinks that it is a dangerous one, given the amount of people that have been raided, and arrested for tweeting. They certainly realise its potential, and don't look condescendingly at 'keyboard revolutionaries' as some on the left do. They lock them up. It nevertheless remains that while these media can bring people out onto the street for demonstrations it is far less effective at calling people out on strike. As well as the fact that these media don't connect to many of the people that they need to, the fact is that it is easier to turn up to a demonstration than to go on strike at work.

The first reason for this is that going to a demonstration is a decision that can be made individually. Of course there have been cases of people attending these protests collectively from their workplaces, schools or universities, it is not the majority experience. People can and do decide to go to them on their own. You can't decide to go on strike on your own, and it takes a lot more to decide to lose money and risk your job than it does to turn up at a demonstration, which

brings us the central question, the lack of experience, confidence, and consciousness within the workplace.

While there has been a resurgence in workplaces struggle on an international scale over the past decade or so, it is nevertheless a very small one. The fact that the last decade hasn't been as terrible as the 1990s were reflects more on how bad that decade was rather than how good the past one has been. Workplace struggles today are not at the level that they were in the eighties, let alone the seventies. The continuity with that period has gone. Workers with the experience of those struggles are already drawing their pensions, or at best approaching retirement. The experience has been lost, and newer workers are finding that they have to relearn things for themselves. In workplaces where they once held regular mass meetings to discuss things, these traditions have been lost and workers find themselves waiting for the unions to do something.

Future Expectations

It seems very clear that these sort of movements can be expected to continue to break out. The state has no solutions to offer. The removal of President Morsi in Egypt will not change the economic reality confronting any new government. The problems that are the underlining cause behind these movements can't be swept away. More specifically world capitalism does not have well paid secure jobs to give to the young people that it is churning out of its universities, and other educational establishments. Even though these movements may continue to explode, there is no way for them to move forward without activity in the workplace. Without that power, street movements will tend to burn themselves out, or even worse get transformed into conflicts turning workers against workers such as in Syria. The possibility of similar developments in Egypt, following the clashes caused by the military coup, are worrying to say the least.

Workers, while being involved in these movements as individuals, have nowhere been able to stamp their authority upon them as workers. With the development of class struggle there is the possibility that they might be able to assert themselves in future outbreaks. Also possible, especially in the Middle East, is the possibility that working class people will be dragged into killing each other on behalf of different ideologies, such as sectarianism, religion, and nationalism. If the road on Egypt leads to civil war it would be a disaster not just for workers in Egypt, but across the entire region. The self-activity of the working class is the first step in determining which road will be taken. This self-activity has not only to find adequate organisational forms for mass participation but also give rise to a political instrument which gives voice to the need not just to change the government but the entire economic and political system which spawned it. Ultimately the idea that capitalist can be made fairer has to give way to the idea that it has to be superseded.

D. Valerian

Remembering East Germany 1953

60 years ago the workers of East Germany rose in revolt against their Stalinist exploiters. To commemorate this we are presenting a translation from our German sister group, the Gruppe Internationaler SocialistInnen [GIS] which amply demonstrates not only the state capitalist nature of the former Stalinist states of Eastern Europe but also the great capacity for self-organisation of the working class. It also gives us a chilling reminder of the limitations of spontaneity if it is not translated into clear working class goals and revolutionary organisation. After this we reproduce an old article from Workers' Voice (1983) which takes in the revolt of 1953 but also follows up the history of the German Democratic Republic. It has the merit of underlining the same themes as the GIS document but also points to the growing crisis of the Eastern bloc which would lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reunification of Germany. As the GIS article in particular shows it is a history from which we can learn much.

17 June 1953: Workers' Uprising against the Party Dictatorship!

As early as 3 July 1953, the 17 June was elevated to a "national holiday" in West Germany, in order to commemorate the so-called "people's revolt", which had been defeated by Russian troops. This denial of a proletarian movement, which started as a protest against an increase in productivity targets, and insistence that it was a "day of German unity" proved to be a skilled piece of bourgeois propaganda. The workers' resistance of that time has been largely forgotten today. Instead, the myth of a "national people's uprising" has embedded itself in public consciousness. At the same time, the 17 June is a difficult fact for those state-obsessed "Lefts" who conceive of "socialism" exclusively in the bourgeois categories of money, wage labour and surplus value. All their formulas to explain and justify the events of that time fit into the propaganda of the bourgeoisie, as they all aim to attribute to the late German Democratic Republic [DDR] a "progressive" or even a "socialist" character. But the alleged "freedom", which is today so eagerly discussed in the bourgeois media was already possessed by the working class under the DDR — the "freedom" to sell their labour power, the "freedom" to throw surplus value into the hands of the state.

The DDR's Character

A worker, K. Walter, stood up and said: "comrades, what is happening here is shaming us as workers. 70 years after the death of Karl Marx, we still have a debate about the most elementary needs of life. If Karl Marx had an inkling of this, he would turn in his grave."

What sort of thing was the DDR? In the DDR, just as in the other countries of Eastern Europe, state capitalist regimes came to power without workers' revolutions and often under the direct or indirect control of the Russian army. The Stalinists gained control over the state apparatus through participation in the bourgeois coalition governments of the "people's democracies" and sought to carry over the Russian model of society by "revolutions from above". Private

property in the most important means of production was declared to be abolished and transformed into state or people's property. Nevertheless, we cannot speak of a socialisation of the means of production. Instead of production and distribution characterised by workers' democracy, a centralised managed economy was constructed, in which the state took the place of the private capitalists and made bureaucrats its managers, who assumed all the powers of an exploiting class. The bureaucracy ruled over state property as a collective. It had full rights over firms and social wealth. Its politics disguised it with all sorts of "socialist rhetoric" and implemented its domination in this way. Nevertheless, the economic structure of the state-capitalist regimes was, as before, governed by the law of value. Consequently, the plans drawn up by the state continually aimed at the most efficient and rationalised exploitation of the working class possible. The class was separated from the control of their affairs and their life was regimented by the policies of the ruling state party. As early as April 1918, confronted by the problems then facing the Russian Revolution, the Left Communist Ossinski, writing in the second issue of the oppositional journal *Kommunist*, forcefully warned about this tendency towards state capitalism:

"If the proletariat itself does not know how to create the necessary conditions for a socialist organisation of work, then no-one can do it in its place [...] Socialism and socialist organisation will be created by the proletariat or not at all, but, in its place, state capitalism."

State capitalism, moreover, put the existing techniques of "Western" capitalism to its own use, techniques which, like all bourgeois science and technology, are the material embodiment of global capitalist society. The Stalinist party took up the whole capitalist "rationality" and thus remained trapped in the world which they pretended to fight in their sermons. The Dutch Marxist Anton Pannekoek once correctly called the leaders of the Stalinist parties and societies "a class which tries to make the servitude of the workers eternal". In these societies, as in every class society, the class struggle is characteristic.

Exploitation

To split the working class and to bind the more obedient part to itself, with whose help the rest could be kept under surveillance — this was the role of the activist (Henneke) movement. This was strongly supported by propaganda in the early years. Nevertheless, it should not be thought that in the beginning only "class collaborators" participated in the activist movement, as there were also many young workers acting out of pure enthusiasm, convinced they were building "socialism". Thus, the works councils also merged with it. Most importantly, the organizational forms created by the unions had the purpose of giving the workers the appearance of self-determination through organised discussions. In 1951, the company collective contracts (*Betriebskollektivverträge*, BKV) were introduced, some of which met with open resistance, as they brought a considerable worsening of social conditions. 1952 was a year of heightened tension. The signing of the EEC treaty by the *Bundesrepublik* (BRD, West Germany) meant the rearmament of West Germany. This meant that the last hopes of the Kremlin bureaucracy for a neutralisation of Germany were dashed. The fact that the

fulfillment of norms was below the plan worked out in 1951, while the total wages were above it, was an especially great concern for the regime. The market situation was to be improved by administrative measures aimed at the richer peasants and the urban middle class. The first wave of increased productivity norms, which had begun with the 1949 plan nevertheless spared one sector: the construction workers. Their resistance and readiness to struggle was especially high. In the following year, however, the risky strategy of increasing norms in the construction industry was taken too. An increase of 10% in the building sector meant wage cuts of 30% for bricklayers and up to 42% for carpenters, as, in general, exceeding norms was rewarded by bonuses. Early in 1952 intensive construction on the Stalinallée began, and it became a massive building site. In May 1953 there were strikes against the new norms in Magdeburg and Chemnitz. On 9 June, just three months after Stalin's death, the CPSU announced the so-called "new course". Peasants and small capitalists who had fled [to West Germany] were to be brought back through tax cuts and credit facilities. In 1951, 80% of those who had gone to the West were in the middle class. Thus, as the DDR's "business friendliness" was strengthened, the discontent of the workers over the increases in norms grew.

The Uprising

On 15 June 1953 the workers on the Friedrichshain hospital site stopped work and agreed a resolution to send to Prime Minister Grotewohl, calling for an immediate withdrawal of the increased norms. In the resolution it stated that the "new course" had only benefited the capitalists and not the workers. On the same day, a party functionary held a meeting with the workers of block 40 on the Stalinallée and put a resolution to them expressing thanks for the "new course". The workers demanded that the withdrawal of the higher norms be adopted as a point of the resolution. They finished by selecting two of their number as delegates, who would deliver the resolution to the regime. But they waited for the rest of the day so they could "discuss" the increased norms with a union representative. However, when on the next day the union paper "die Tribüne" vigorously defended the norms, the workers of Block 40 decided to send their delegates off. The workers went with them to protect them from any reprisals. This developed into a demonstration, which quickly attracted 2000 workers from the surrounding building sites. The demonstration went to the union headquarters, which was closed and locked, and then finally to the Ministries. There were already several thousand demonstrators waiting for them. They demanded that Ulbricht and Grotewohl appear, but they didn't dare show their faces. Finally, the Industry Minister Selbmann appeared and tried to proclaim the withdrawal of the increased norms, but he didn't get that far, as the workers didn't trust him or anyone else from the government. They wanted to take their fate into their own hands. Many workers followed one another as speakers. In the end, one worker began to speak: "Comrades, it is no longer a question of norms and prices!" And, turning to Selbmann: "What you are seeing here is an uprising. The government must face the consequences of its mistakes." The masses' spontaneity seemed to have reached its high point. After so many years of repression, the particular circumstances of the workers meant they were in a position to develop an enormous consciousness.

Workers' History

Nevertheless, this is also an example of the limits of spontaneity. For this declaration was followed once again by a time of hesitation and uncertainty. People were agreed on the aim, but they were not agreed on the path to follow. Now another worker spoke and called on the crowd to mobilise for a general strike in the workers districts of Berlin, if Ulbricht and Grotewohl didn't appear in the next half hour. Loudspeaker vans belonging to the governing SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, Socialist Unity Party of Germany), which, at that point, had already been announcing the recent review of the increases in norms, were taken over by the homeward-bound demonstrators shortly afterwards, and used to summon all the workers of Berlin to Strausberger Platz on the morning of 17 June. In the meantime building workers' delegations had already met at the transmitter of RIAS (*Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor*, the radio station in the American sector), from whence they demanded to be able to speak to their comrades in East Berlin and the DDR. The call for a general strike was denied them in the negotiations with the Western station. But they were able to make their demands known on the radio, such as the payment of wages according to the old norms and the immediate reduction of living costs, free and secret elections and no punishment of strikers or for discussing strikes. These demands were taken up and supported by the strike movement. The next day, the entire state apparatus of the DDR was helpless in the face of events. The Berlin workers' call for a general strike spread to all layers of the population throughout the whole DDR on 17 June. The strike movement nevertheless spread primarily from the largest concerns. The centres of the uprising were the industrial cities, which even in 1919-1923 were the citadels of the revolutionary working class, that is, alongside East Berlin, the central German industrial area with Bitterfeld, Halle, Leipzig, Merseburg and Magdeburg, but also Jena and Gera, Brandenburg and Görlitz. The well-organised and determinedly prepared workforces of large factories like, for example, Lena (28,000), Buna (18,000), the dye factory Welfen and Hennigsdorf (12,000 each), were a power against which the local party offices could do nothing. Of the DDR's ten large iron and steel-producing companies, nine struck or revolted. The workers in basic and heavy industry had been hit particularly hard by the recent campaign for increases in norms. They now became the most confident part of the working class in the DDR, as, according to the official pronouncements, the pivot for the construction of "socialism" should be located in heavy industry and the government had conceded special privileges to these workers. The 17 June destroyed the illusion that there was no freedom for action outside the Stalinist Party and its institutions.

An example of the political direction which the committees took, is the "Walter Ulbricht" works. On 17 June at a meeting of about 20,000 of those working at the plant, the following demands were raised: an end to the changing of work norms; disarming the factory police, sacking of the union leadership in the plant, removal of "Walter Ulbricht" from the plant's name and the resignation of the government. On the level of the firm, workers can take the initiative very quickly. But it is necessary to go beyond the firm. In the former "red heart of Germany", in Halle, Bitterfeld, Merseberg, there emerged the most striking revolutionary organisations. In Halle, all the delegations met together in the centre of the city and elected a committee for initiatives, in which all the large firms, but also a businessman, an administrative employee and a student were represented. In Bitterfeld the central strike committee comprising

of representatives of the large firms, was joined by a housewife and a student from the workers and peasants' faculty. In Merseburg the workers of the gigantic chemical works, Leune and Buna, joined together and the crowd elected a 25-strong central committee by acclamation on the Uhlandplatz. The committees took over the administrative functions of the official authorities. Radio stations and printers were occupied in many places, and the provision of gas and electricity also fell into the hands of the workers. It is true that in many places there were nationalist demonstrations in the countryside, yet where there were links between the country and the city, the working class took the leadership. If the demands of the previous day, that is, the resignation of the government and the construction of a "workers' government" were to be realised, the co-ordination of the movement in the individual cities had to be stepped up. The Halle and Bitterfeld committees linked up with each other. The workers of the steel and rolling mill works of Hennigsdorf started early and crossed the border between the zones and went through West Berlin, in order to reach East Berlin, where they demanded the creation of a government of metal workers.

Borders and Limits

The strike should also have been extended into West Germany. In hindsight it is hard to say what the consciousness of the West German workers was at that time, but at least on 20th July 20,000 shop workers demonstrated against the new Shop Closing Hours Act. In October, some participants in the IG-Metall conference argued that the only way for the West German workers to show their solidarity with their East German comrades would be a general strike against Adenauer and their own government. A statement which was taken up with frenzied applause. Despite this, the uprising of the East German workers remained isolated. The situation was becoming threatening for the SED leadership. Their argument that the movement was infiltrated by fascist provocateurs was in no way convincing. The nationalist campaigns at the border or in the countryside remained isolated from the mass of workers. Apart from problems with their propaganda, the SED faced the difficulty that the police, the "*Volkspolizei*", often refused to move against demonstrators and strikers and, in many places, had even joined in with the demonstrations. The Soviet army had to withdraw to safeguard its own zone and its power-base. Neither the ruling class of the West nor of the East had any interest in allowing a proletarian revolution to succeed. An overspill of the revolutionary wave into the West would have shifted the balance of power in favour of the European proletariat to an unimaginable extent, and strongly questioned the post-war order created by Yalta and Potsdam. In general, many workers believed on 17 June that the Soviet occupation powers would have at least remained neutral if a general strike remained disciplined. To this end, a loudspeaker-van could be heard calling "Do nothing that the Soviet occupation power could see as a provocation." But this was a vain hope. The repression was already on the starting blocks. Because of its isolation within the territory of the DDR, the movement could be defeated and buried under rubble and lies. However the uprising revealed the open hatred of the workers towards a puppet regime, that was propped up by Russian arms and, on top of that, had the nerve to call itself a workers and peasants' government. The defeat of the workers' uprising allowed the true face of class society to come to light as it sought to defend its authority. As the oppressed and exploited class workers

Workers' History

must obtain a hearing for themselves. No-one can be their advocates. And that they did on 17 June 1953.

The SED regime stood accused. It was a regime which pretended to be based on the working class but which, in reality, moved against it when the class itself raised complaints: a so-called "People's" Police (*Volkspolizei*) which shot at workers; a propaganda machine which swung into action whenever enforced "volunteer production duties" were to be made known, but which distorted events in the factories and denounced workers as fascists, Western agents and provocateurs; which refused at all times to publicise the demands of workers or report them; a works management which behaved as if the workers were enemies; so-called workers' organisations which were *de facto* henchmen of the Party; decisions which were taken at all levels without consideration of and against the workers. In the East as in the West, nationalist tendencies, which were in the minority, were made to appear typical and used to distract from the proletarian character of 17 June. The Holiday of "German Unity" glorified by the West is a mockery and a further blow against the concerns which carried thousands on to the streets on 17 June. The movement of 17 June 1953 was not only an uprising against the domination of an autocratic bureaucratic class and its politics, but also provided the proof of the ability of the working class for spontaneous action. The movement of 17 June was clear against whom it fought, but it lacked time, not least because of the absence of an established revolutionary organisation, to throw off its illusions, in relation to parliamentarism, for example, and to completely develop its own social and political structures. The budding first signs of self-organisation and councils were destroyed by the Russian occupation powers, the committees dissolved, the spokesmen and women were persecuted and arrested as "ringleaders" and the state's control of exploitation was again set in motion in the firms.

GIS

Thursday, June 13 2013

East Germany 1953–83: Repression and Recession

THE EVENTS OF 1953

Thirty years ago, in June 1953, occurred the largest and most significant movement of the German working class since 1923. In response to declining real wages, food shortages and finally an increase in work norms (productivity) by 10%, discontent led to the outbreak of a massive strike wave in East Germany. Sporadic incidents culminated in construction workers in the Stalin Allée building project striking against the new norms, and marching on the trades union (FDGB) offices in the city centre. Ulbricht, head of the government and the Socialist Unity Party (SED) commented, "It is raining. People will go home." However the next day, the 17th the strike was general throughout Berlin and large crowds marched to the centre and set siege to government buildings, By midnight the Soviet Army had restored order by massive arrests and the imposition of martial law.

The movement then spread to the rest of East Germany. In Jena workers at the Zeiss factory struck. 25,000 stopped work at the Leuna Chemical Works in Halle. The railways were paralysed, and the strike spread to Dresden, Leipzig, Rostock, and elsewhere. But Soviet troops quickly spread repression, and the movement was crushed, with 25,000 arrested and 42 killed or executed. The movement was unambiguously proletarian in its class composition, with little support from the intelligentsia and demonstrates in practice the existence of a class struggle, i.e. classes and the capitalist mode of production in the so-called 'socialist' part of Germany. The workers showed great courage in fighting with crowbars and cobblestones against Soviet tanks, and soldiers with orders to fire. Government offices were stormed and sacked, prisoners freed from jails. Yet the failure of the movement to rise to greater heights was not only due to Soviet repression, but to its own internal weaknesses.

Spontaneous action by individual workers played a great role in the struggle; the small group of building workers who discussed the possibility of a strike on a secret boat outing prior to 16 June, the building workers who toured central Berlin that day in a truck calling for a general strike. But the workers failed to organise themselves in order to generalise the struggle. One worker later described how the building workers actually ran out of steam and returned to work on the afternoon of the 16th:

From the start the construction workers lacked leadership, for no strike committees had been chosen on the two construction sites ... a worker called for a general strike ... this was greeted with loud applause. But without organisation and leadership no concerted action was possible. After only five minutes more the workers started to drift back to their work sites, to Stalin Allee. Arnulf Baring Der 17 Juni 1953, pp 58, 62.)¹

¹ Our German comrades of the Gruppe Internationaler Socialistinnen have criticised us for using this source. They tell us that "A. Bahring is well known reactionary and nationalist (we would say fascist) historian, a promoter of the myth of the "Volksaufstand" ("People's Rising" as opposed to workers' rising. It is like trying to rely on R. Pipes or David Irving (which some left communists have done in the past, over Dresden for example) but we should avoid such things". We were not aware of this in 1983

Workers' History

As a result the building workers went back while others came out. The movement was actually defeated in Berlin before it had spread to the other industrial regions like Saxony. And the strike was far from general; out of a proletariat of over 4 millions, only 300,000 actually struck. Had communists been active in the movement, the call for the election of strike committees, and their centralisation into workers councils would have been made, and could have found an echo.

But the working class needs not only organisation to struggle, but also consciousness. Here too the movement thirty years ago was permeated by limitations on class consciousness, stemming from the traditions of the German proletariat, and its domination by social democracy. The aims of the strikers, where they were not simply for a reduction in work norms tended to be nationalistic and social democratic. "Free and secret elections in all Germany", was one of the more prominent demands, and demonstrators waved red, black and gold flags (the German flag). Red flags were torn down, as were pictures of SED dignitaries, Stalin and Lenin (though not of Karl Marx!). No demands were made during the movement for a return to 'private' capitalism. All these factors are consistent with a social democratic consciousness; indeed railway workers in Magdeburg chanted, "Neither Ulbricht nor Adenauer, but Ollenuer" (the SPD leader). Limited by such perspectives, the fate of the uprising was sealed. The anniversary of this movement offers the chance to survey developments in East Germany since 1953, and to assess the prospects for the class struggle there today.

THE BIRTH OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (G.D.R)

The establishment of a pro-Soviet regime in East Germany came about almost by accident. The imperialist carve-up of the world between the USA and USSR at Tehran and Yalta left the German question 'open', and the division of the defeated Germany at Potsdam into zones of occupation was seen as a temporary solution. Stalin's policy was to neutralise Germany, and demilitarise it, to prevent its incorporation into the US bloc. But the US decided that Europe was only safe for American imperialism if Germany was integrated into the N.A.T.O. bloc, and this meant the unification of the western zone in 1947 into the Federal Republic (F.D.R.). Stalin's creation of the GDR followed in 1949, after the forced unification of the KPD and SPD in the Soviet zone into the SED. But Stalin's policy remained the same, and the GDR was a pawn that could be abandoned to achieve this. As late as 1952 Stalin offered 'free elections and reunification' if Germany were demilitarised, and kept out of NATO. Meanwhile, true to its imperialist nature, Russia continued to plunder East Germany, (compared to a loss of 15% of industrial production by war damage, 26% was lost via reparations to the USSR. And till 1953 15% of current production was yearly transferred to Russia by the occupation of 200 key industrial units.)

Only with West German entry into NATO in 1954 was the continued existence of the GDR, and the prevention of its re-incorporation into a pro-western Germany, seen as vital to

and thank them for drawing this to our attention.

Soviet interests. The GDR was then integrated fully into the Russian bloc via COMECON and the Warsaw Pact. Hailed by its Berlin agents as a shining example of “proletarian internationalism”, Russian intervention in 1953 was a brutal and cynical move to keep its bargaining counter for imperialist manoeuvres, and a fall back source of plunder should these schemes fail.

Once up for sacrifice, today the GDR is a vital cornerstone of Soviet imperialism. It is no exaggeration to say that with the continued instability in Poland, the loss of the GDR to the western bloc would lead to the undermining of the whole Soviet bloc, without the GDR, Russia's whole northern flank is indefensible. The 400,000 Soviet troops in the GDR are an insurance policy against such a risk, which in effect can only become reality via a world war.

The GDR bureaucracy is the most slavishly pro-Russian in East Europe. The only suspicion of disloyalty is that Ulbricht provoked the events of 1953, to prompt Soviet intervention and make any withdrawal more difficult: Since then GDR clocks have been set by Moscow time — supporting the intervention in Hungary, backing Russia against China and taking part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. There is little doubt that had the Russians gone into Poland to maintain Jaruzelski, the GDR would also have invaded. The GDR also supplies surrogate military technical advisers to many Soviet clients such as Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique, where there are 3,000 GDR ‘advisers’. Under Honecker as under Ulbricht, the GDR remains Russia's most loyal ally.

But the importance of the GDR to Russia is not simply political and military, but also economic. The GDR is COMECON's most sophisticated industrial economy, and it supplies Russia and the Warsaw pact with much of their vital technology, at well below world market prices; COMECON takes 65-70% of all GDR trade. The GDR is Russia's largest source of machinery imports, amounting to 25% of goods in this field. The USSR is the GDR's largest trading partner, accounting for 36% of all trade and taking 45% of GDR exports of plant and machinery. The cost of replacing these sources of chemicals, microelectronics and electrical equipment would be astronomical for the USSR.

The USSR also, in return for supplying oil and other materials to the GDR, procures funds for raw material extraction, and the supply of skilled labour, e.g. for the Siberian gas pipeline, at lower than ‘world market’ prices. In the period 1980-85, the USSR obtained 100bn dollars of investment from COMECON, interest free, and although no break-down was given, a large part must have come from the GDR. The USSR also has a large balance of trade surplus with its COMECON partners, and especially with the GDR, which now only publishes figures for total trade with the USSR, rather than imports and exports. Clearly, a large part of the surplus value created by the GDR proletariat is creamed off by the USSR ruling class. While its nature has changed from one of direct plunder, to one operating via economic mechanisms, the relation of the USSR to the GDR remains one of imperialist domination. But the GDR workers must avoid the trap of nationalism and anti-Russianism,

and in future struggles, hold out their hand to their Russian class brothers.

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE G.D.R

Since 1953 the GDR has undergone phenomenal economic expansion; it is the 'Wirtschaftswunder' (economic miracle) of the eastern bloc.

Growth has given the GDR today, with its 17 million people, an industrial output greater than that of the entire German Reich in 1939, and made it the 9th industrial power in the world. Both per capita GNP (at \$6,808 in comparison with Britain's \$5,895) and labour productivity are higher than Britain's, though only 70-75% of West Germany's. If these facts disprove any idea that there is a ceiling to growth under decadent capitalism, they do not disprove the idea that this accumulation has been of a capitalist nature. Other countries, e.g. Japan have accumulated even faster, without becoming non-capitalist, neither has this accumulation been crisis-free.

Growth rates have been far from uniform, as apologists of a crisis free accumulation would have us believe. Originally huge rates of 20% declined to 8% in 1953 (the year of political as well as economic crisis), rose to over 10% for most of the rest of the 50s, to fall to 2% in 1961 — the economic crisis that led to the closing of the border with West Berlin to stem the flow of refugees to West Germany.

This crisis was resolved by economic reforms which eventually led to the establishment of Kombinate, more oriented to market forces, which pushed up the sluggish growth rates of the 1960s (average 3.2%) to 4.8% in the 1970s (compared with 3.3% in West Germany). At the same time, agriculture was collectivised in the 1960s to free labour for industry, after the exodus of 2.5 million refugees 1949-61. Collectivisation also allowed the state to obtain the surplus value of the exploitation of rural proletarians, rather than the peasantry.

So clearly economic growth in the GDR is cyclical rather than steady, a factor along with the exploitation of wage labour, production for the market rather than needs, and huge social differentials it shares with western capitalism. In the latter case, the ratio of earnings in the GDR is as follows, taking a skilled worker as 100: factory manager 453, government minister 596. But this economic growth has given the GDR the highest standard of living in COMECON, higher for example than Britain, Italy or Austria, and even a consumerist illusion; ownership of consumer goods (e.g. cars) reaches Western levels. These factors, along with repression and regimentation, are the material basis for the absence of social movements in the GDR similar to those seen in Poland and Rumania, as well as Russia itself.

But although there are no food queues as yet, and although unemployment and inflation are still negligible, the crisis is finally hitting the GDR, just as it is hitting even the most

favoured of Western capitalist economies. As yet, however the crisis is undeveloped, in contrast to Poland, for example, and on the surface the GDR is still booming. Growth rates are still steady, (in %):⁹

	1978	1979	1980
Net material product	4.0	4.0	4.8
Industrial production	5.4	4.8	4.7
Foreign Trade	5.6	12.4	12.0

This was followed by a 5% growth in NMP in 1981, a figure echoed in 1982, which also saw a record harvest in the GDR. Labour is in short supply, and the GDR imports unemployed Polish and Yugoslav workers. But behind all the statistics of optimism, even the most successful of the state capitalist economies is heading for the shock of overt crisis.

The GDR's growth has been the result, not of Socialist planning, but of foreign borrowing. In the 1970s huge loans were taken out from western banks to fund accumulation. At approximately \$14bn today, the GDR'S debt is equivalent to Poland's. Most were taken out in the heady days of Ospolitik, and used to purchase western capital goods, e.g. a 1.1bn mark Hoeschst PVC plant, a £40m GKN forge for lorries, etc. Like other east European rulers, the 'marxists' of the GDR didn't realise the western economies were in crisis, and hoped to payoff their capital borrowings by an export drive into western markets. The only success of the GDR has been in penetrating the west German market (where its goods pay no tariffs), which takes 50% of its non-COMECON trade and with which it recorded its first surplus in 1982. Otherwise, the GDR's export drive has failed to cover its import bill, and its trade balance with OECD areas is deteriorating;(in bn. dollars)

1977	1978	1979
-54.0	-82.8	-780

The GDR's cumulative foreign debt from 1976 to 1980 was 28 bn. marks. This clearly leads to pressure on its ability to pay its debts, and for the first time ever the GDR is negotiating debt rescheduling for 1983/4.

Further problems loom on the horizon, even allowing that renewed deliveries, and payments from Poland are a godsend at this time, following Jaruzelski's restoration of normal exploitation. The USSR supplies the GDR with 90% of its oil, on a 5-year moving average of world market prices; as the price of oil falls, the price paid by the GDR and other COMECON countries will rise in real terms, further blunting the GDR's competitive edge on the world market. In this context the GDR's rulers will be forced to do what they have feared to do since 1953; to attack directly the living standards of the working class.

Already the regime has announced a series of price 'reforms', where essentials will remain the same, but luxuries such as consumer goods will rise in price, thus reducing domestic consumption and freeing goods for the export market. Industrial productivity (i.e. exploitation) has been increasing sharply: 5% in 1978, 4.4% in 1979 4.5% in 1980, which averages about half as high again as the growth in wages. Further productivity gains are planned in the coming years, to be largely achieved not by new investment, but by re-organising existing labour practices, i.e. absolute exploitation.

Although as yet at an early state, the economic crisis of state capitalism is coming into operation even in the GDR. (For a fuller account of the nature of state capitalism, and of its crisis see "Theories of State Capitalism", in *Revolutionary Perspectives 19*.²)

THE WORKING CLASS IN THE G.D.R.

The working class in the GDR is one of the most skilled, and highly concentrated in the world; 77% of all industrial workers work in units employing over 1,000. It is a proletariat which can see daily the effects of the crisis of state capitalism via FDR television, and the crisis in the FDR via its own; they know about the food queues in Warsaw and the dole queues in the Ruhr. It is also a proletariat that, in the heart of Europe can see clearly what the economic crisis is leading to re-armament and world war. When the GDR workers move into action again the 30 years development since 1953 should ensure that they do so without many of the illusions of that epoch.

In those 30 years reported incidents of class struggle in the GDR have been few. Reports of strikes have emerged in the western press, to be denied by the GDR bosses, though one at the Narva works in Berlin was confirmed by Robert Havemann a leading GDR dissident, in January 1978. Others, among Rostock dockworkers in 1980, remain unconfirmed. What is clear is that these have been isolated incidents, otherwise they would have been visible; no ruling class can hide a mass strike. What workers can expect when they do move into action was shown when 3,700 West Berlin railway workers (employed by the East German state railway) struck in September 1980. Denounced as 'terrorists' by the GDR authorities, the strikers were isolated from the East Berlin railway workers, and the strikes broken by the police. This a dress rehearsal for the GDR authorities for their own class battles tomorrow.

... AND OTHERS

If the economic crisis and class struggle still underdeveloped in the GDR, so is the political crisis. The SED is, and always been, the most monolithic of the East European ruling parties; there have been no Titoist or Dubceckist factions, indeed no factions at all. The development dissidence has been an individual affair, with Havemann (shouted

² Long out of print.

down by the workers in '53) as the main advocate of state capitalism with a human face till his death in 1982. A new factor has emerged in the early 1980s with the emergence of the Protestant Church into the political arena, calling for general disarmament. This has resulted in huge, unofficial demonstrations, which have undoubtedly attracted large layers of youth. The regime, fearing a Polish situation, has responded by courting the Church, and preparing massive commemorations of the anniversary of Luther's birth.

Meanwhile for the middle class and bureaucracy the regime has been rehabilitating the 'Prussian' past with its traditions, and for the proletariat there is the constant spectacle of the GDR's sporting achievements.

When we today recall the struggle of the German workers in 1953, we do so not to worship spontaneity, but to assess the strength and weaknesses of the movement, so as to contribute to its victory next time. This means working towards the construction of an underground communist movement in the GDR; the failure of such an organisation to exist in the Polish mass strikes proved fatal.

In many ways the construction of such a network in the GDR could be easier than in other east European countries. And from the minority who could be induced to break from the flotsam and jetsam of dissidence and pacifism, and move from the idea of reforming state capitalism, to that of its overthrow, the core of this future organisation could be built. Its message would be to destroy the imperialist blocs and reach out the hand of solidarity, in the first instance, to the proletariat of West Germany, and raise the red banner of civil war in central Europe against the war preparations of the bourgeoisie.

Sources:

The statistical material for this text was provided by the following sources;

"The DDR' s Frozen Revolution" G.Minnerup *New Left Review*, 132, 1982.

"German Democratic Republic" Economic Report, Lloyd's Bank 1980.

World View 1983 (Pluto/Maspero) 1982

Apology to Readers

In the last issue of *Revolutionary Perspectives* the footnotes in the article on the Eurozone were listed at the end of the text but the numbers in the document were missing. We apologise for this as we know that it is important to follow up sources and irritating if they are missing. Readers will now find these on the internet version on our site and if they wish we will mail them a printed copy.

CWO

The Internationalist Communist Party of Italy

We reproduce below a translation of the third section of the fourth part of the book "Les années terribles (1926-45)" subtitled "The Italian left in emigration amongst the oppositionist communists" by Michel Roger. Although the book came out in late 2012 it was based on an academic thesis written in 1981 which would have made it a pioneering work in its time. Since then the work of Philippe Bourrinet and Sandro Saggiaro have added further information to the story of the Italian Left and these have been incorporated into the new edition. The CWO is publishing it here as part of our investigations into the history of the Italian Left and in particular to bring documents hitherto untranslated to an English-reading audience. We are particularly aware that English-reading comrades will have only had access to this history through the works of Philippe Bourrinet whose writings began under the influence of Mark Chirik, the founder of the ICC (as did those of Michel Roger as the list of sources make clear). Philippe, like Michel, has long since left the ICC and appears to have taken an "anti-party" direction and although we do not wish to impugn his integrity or indeed the usefulness of his work, which should be read, we would like to redress the balance in some of his judgements on the Internationalist Communist Party. For example he implies that Stefanini and Damen did not share the same position on the unions. In a footnote to Chapter 8 of his work "The Bordigist Current"¹ he wrote "Another member of the anti-union tendency was Luigi Danielis (known as "Gigi"). Stefanini and Danielis resolutely defended their position on the unions against the majority of the PCIInt founded by Damen."

This is based on his reading of the account of the Convention of Turin in 1945 and could be read to imply that Damen and Stefanini did not share the same position on the unions. This is not true. It is also not true that Stefanini and Danielis had the same anti-union position. Danielis called for the destruction of the unions whilst Stefanini thought that was unrealistic and was more concerned about how to connect the economic and political struggles. Furthermore Philippe does not point out the confusing context in which the discussion on the unions took place (the existing ones were from the fascist era and new ones were in the process of formation in the context of a British occupation of Northern Italy) so that there were a number of different positions expressed in the Congress about how best to relate to the union question. Damen himself took no part in this as his spokesman was Stefanini who had been the first to contact him about founding the "party of Damen" when he was in internal exile in Cantú (a town in Como province north of Milan). We have translated the discussion on the unions from the proceedings of the Congress into English but have decided now to wait to publish the document as a whole with the explanatory introduction of our Italian comrades. Instead to confirm Damen's own views we also reproduce the two documents on the unions that Damen exchanged with Bordiga in 1951 which demonstrate that Damen already had an

¹ See http://www.left-djs.nl/uk/gpci/gci9_df

understanding that the unions were lost to the working class. The position of Bordiga was confused and this confusion translated into splits in the Bordigist current (the International Communist Party) on the union question even before Bordiga died.²

Similar disagreements of interpretation could be made against Sandro Saggiaro whose 2011 work in Italian "Neither with Truman nor with Stalin" was reviewed by our Italian comrades in Prometeo demonstrating that for all its worth it still exhibited a strong bias in favour of Bordiga. This review article is also being translated as it makes a contribution in its own right to the story of the split in the Internationalist Communist Party in 1951-2 between the followers of Damen and those of Bordiga. We should make it clear that in these historical publications are not looking to sanitise the past of the Italian Left but to understand it and the inevitable errors and hesitations that occurred in the context of their time. This is not an exercise in archaeology or ancestor-worship but an essential element of revolutionary formation. We certainly agree with Michel Roger that we have had too many "isms" and have no wish to give rise to a new one.

Although Michel's work is more positive about the Internationalist Communist Party it does not shrink from criticism of its weaknesses as he sees them. At the end of the chapter he reproduces the resolution taken on the Vercesi affair. Vercesi and members of the Italian Left in Belgium had, against the entire internationalist framework of opposing both sides in the imperialist war joined an antifascist committee in Brussels though they had eventually resigned from it. However the International Bureau of the Party condemned the politics not the men. Vercesi (who had been a major contributor to the opposition to Stalinism in the 20s) was basically wrapped over the knuckles with a feather and allowed to enter the party. This was not without its controversy even in the Party at the time. According to Luciano Stefanini (Mauro) some comrades turned up at the Turin Congress of the Party in 1945 with revolvers intending to forcibly prevent Vercesi's entry and had to be persuaded to accept it. The idea that the issue was quietly swept under the carpet as the Gauche Communiste de France (who were not present at the Congress) insisted is not true but the fact is that it remained an error.

However the decision of the IB in 1945 played little part in the later split with the Bordigists (by now headed by Vercesi himself) in 1951 as Michel implies. The fact is that the stabilisation of capitalism after the war (In Italy largely through the combined efforts of the PCI of Togliatti and Marshall Aid) had begun to reduce the influence of the party as it would any organisation of revolutionaries. From 1948 onwards the whispering against the founding of the party in 1943 began and it was against this background that the split occurred with Damen insisting that the Party should exist as a revolutionary nucleus whatever the objective circumstances and the followers of Bordiga returned to something like the old "wait and see" position which some of the Italian Left had adopted so disastrously in the 1930s. We will go into this discussion more deeply as we present

²The Florence (Firenze) section of the International Communist Party broke away in the 1960s over the issue of forming "red trades unions". They confusingly also kept the name International Communist Party but as their paper is called *Il Partito Comunista* they are usually referred to by that. They now also publish in English as "Communist Left"

Italian Left

Further documents but it is important to stress here that the party grew for the first three years of its existence when post-war Europe was in a political and economic crisis. Its subsequent decline (as well as that of other tendencies on the communist left) only came when those objective circumstances receded. One thing above all else this chapter reveals is the courage and determination of the precursors of today's Communist Left.

Chapter 3 The Internationalist Communist Party of Italy

In Italy the "Bordigist" current had not disappeared. The combined forces of the Communist Party of Italy (now Stalinised) and Mussolini had neither reduced the influence nor the tenacity of its members. Under the dictatorship of Mussolini, an "internal centre" always existed in Italy. It regrouped some ex-members of the Italian Left around Damen. We have already indicated that Bilan and Prometeo penetrated clandestinely in Italy before the war. It seems that this penetration came through several channels and in particular through the efforts of Lanfranqui who, thanks to his commercial activities, had professional relations in many countries³.

However, if a "Centre" existed the individual militants remained isolated and scattered, the only ones able to continue political activity were those militants who were condemned to internal exile in the famous "confini". This was how Damen continued to remain active. In 1933 he organised a hunger strike among the prisoners of Civitavecchia gaol⁴. It ended with his release "as unshakeable". His Fascist gaolers could do no more with him and found it was better to free him and put him under house arrest⁵.

In 1942, the economic and social situation changed in Italy. In October 1942 the first important strike took place in FIAT then in March 1943, the first mass movement appeared. After 20 years of the Fascist regime these were the biggest strikes against "starvation-level wages and the war"⁶.

The extent and intensity of these workers reactions were significant throughout the length and breadth of the country. In Piedmont alone there were 107 strikes involving 94,453 workers, in the other industrial centres the strikes involved at least 100,000 metalworkers, 27,000 workers of the textile and other categories like chemicals as well as other branches of industry. At the same time within the Army there were a

³ Mario Lanfranqui was born in Bressana Bottarone (Pavia) on 10 February 1902. Founding member of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) in 1921 he was obliged to leave Pavia following the assassination of some fascists and sought refuge in Milan and later in Paris. In 1924 he returned to Italy where he took part in the Committee of Entente (Comitato d'Intesa). He was expelled from the PC d'I in 1926. He created a tractor importing firm in Italy and Libya. This trading status allowed him to remain in contact with the fraction abroad. After the war until his death on 25 January 1959 he remained a generous patron of the Italian Left, financing it in part, he notably enabled several children of its militants to go on to higher education (information from Pierre Corradi)

⁴ D. Montaldi, *Saggio sulla politica comunista in Italia*, Quaderni Piacentini, Piacenza, 1976, p.205.

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid p.210

phenomenal number of desertions⁷.

Political parties and groups began to appear. On 1 July 1942 the Communist Party published the first clandestine number of its clandestine *l'Unità*. To its left there was a veritable flowering of groups who often published newspapers composed of a single sheet. This phenomenon shows the strength of the Italian proletarian movement as well as the force and the penetration of the ideas of the communist Left. These simple printed sheets often did not have any links with the others and remained localised in this or that city.

These groups did not have any financial means beyond their own militants, nor any support compared to that provided to the official Communist Party. The spontaneous movement which impelled all these small isolated groups seemed very powerful.

Only the attempt of the Internationalist Communist Party around Damen which tried to regroup the workers in struggle and the former members of the "Sinistra italiana", seemed resolute and organised. It was around Damen in the north of Italy that the initial core of the Italian Left gathered.⁸

"The party was born at the end of 1942 [...] We were a small group in Lombardy and Piedmont based on a platform, a short document in which we had agreed that the Party had to be maintained as a body right up to the present. We demolished the propagandist scaffolding of the war and its ideological crusade, we denounced the degeneration of the workers' state and the International and we explained certain important events of contemporary history with the reaffirmation of the need for a class party, on the ideological framework which had presided over "the unrelenting sharpness of Livorno".⁹ The presence of small groups of comrades claiming historical continuity with the positions theoretical and political position of the communist left at the end of the Second World War was announced in Italy in the first half of 1942 [...] around Onorato Damen and of Bruno Maffi, with its principal centre at Cantu¹⁰ in the house of Damen and then in Milan".¹¹

Who Was Onorato Damen?

Born in Monte San Pietrangeli in the Marche on 4 December 1893, he took his first political steps in the Italian Socialist Party [PSI] and very quickly moved to the left of the party¹².

7 In **Resoconti** : Convegno di Torino 1945, Congresso di Firenze 1948, Edizioni Prometeo, Milano 1975, p.210; D.Montaldi **Saggio...**, op.cit.p.210 et. Dolléans, **Histoire du mouvement ouvrier**, Volume 3, Paris, Colin, 1967, p.201 et sq

8 Sandro Saggio, **Né con Truman, Né con Stalin**, Edizioni Colibri, Milan, 2010, 413p.

9 Cf. **Battaglia Comunista**, Year 1, No.2, Rome, 23-30 January 1946.

10 A town in the province of Como in Lombardy

11 **Il processo di formazione e la nascita del Partito Comunista Internationalista**, Quaderni di **Battaglia Comunista**, No.6, December 1993, p.16.

12 **Battaglia Comunista**, Year XXXVII, n° 14, du 10 au 31 October 1979 (Special edition in memory of O.Damen, who died Sunday 14 October 1979)

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During the First World War he gave out various leaflets inciting soldiers to desert and was condemned to two years in prison between 1917 and 1919. From Imola to Livorno, two key dates in the formation of the fraction that would give birth to PCd'I, he fought alongside Repossi and Fortichiari and members of the Milan Federation of the PSI to detach the largest number of activists from the PSI to create a true communist and internationalist party. The revolutionary current which existed in the Milan Federation of the PSI was the third component, alongside Ordine Nuovo and Bordiga's abstentionist fraction that together would lead to the founding of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) in 1921.

Very quickly, this tendency found itself on the left of the PSI and, with its own characteristics it came to be called the "sinistra italiana" (or Italian Left). Subsequently, in particular in 1925, Damen represented the more determined wing even within the "sinistra", whilst Bordiga was sometimes the more conciliatory.

Damen was, with Perrone, one of the initiators of the "Committee of Entente" in 1925¹³. He was among those who, following the Lyon Congress in 1926 wanted to break with the PCd'I to found a fraction. This line was opposed by Bordiga, who until the end, thought that the Party could be reformed, or that they had to allow its "discipline" to run its course.

But in 1926, the most well-known members of the PCd'I were arrested; in November 1926 Damen was confined to Ustica, then a court convened in December 1926 in Florence tried him on the same charge as that of the Communists of Florence and condemned him "for attacks on the State." He was also sentenced to 12 years in prison including 7 years in Saluzzo Pallanza, Civitavecchia and Pianosa before being pardoned in 1933 whereupon he was allowed to live in Milan under surveillance.

Upon his release, he went back into political work so he was arrested again in 1935 and again in 1937 for "making Communist propaganda." The police indicated that he had distributed political material of the International Left Opposition "against the policies of the Comintern and against Stalinism in Spain".¹⁴

Incidentally, it is amusing to note that the Italian police confused the Trotskyist Left Opposition and the "sinistra italiana", as can be read in all police reports. This error is all the more odd since the OVRA had more to do with ex-members of the "sinistra" than with Trotskyists. A partial explanation of this phenomenon was due to the fact that police thinking was mostly formed in the 1930s when the existence of the Left Opposition was denounced in official Stalinist newspaper columns, and when militants of the left of the PCd'I were either abroad or in prison.

¹³ This has been translated by the CWO and printed with a historical introduction. It is available from the group address (£4 includes postage)

¹⁴ *Battaglia Comunista*, op cit p.4

Damen was a tireless and determined fighter, nothing could bend his revolutionary will. He was arrested again at the outbreak of war and released on the fall of Mussolini in July 1943 during the formation of the Badoglio government¹⁵. Upon release, the old fighter got back to work to found the Party during the 45 days of the Badoglio government. Around the nucleus formed in northern Italy we already talked about, two other components regrouped: the elements of the external fraction that had returned to Italy such as Gigi Danielis, Luciano Stefanini, etc. ... and then in 1945 the Frazione di Sinistra e dei Comunisti Socialisti Italiani that had developed in Rome.¹⁶ Vittorio Faggioni¹⁷ was one of the key elements of the southern Italian Frazione. According to Sandro Saggiolo the confluence of these three components formed the backbone of the party.

From the end of 1942, the political situation in Italy was very lively with an increasing number of small groups in Piedmont and Lombardy being formed on the political basis of the Italian fraction established in Pantin [then a suburb of Paris] in 1928 and that of the “sinistra italiana” of 1921 to 1926¹⁸ to finally culminate in July 25, 1943 in the founding of the Internationalist Communist Party. The organisational existence of the party could then turn to the more important task of external propaganda from September 8, 1943¹⁹.

*“Our struggle against the war, against all its manifestations was extremely clear ... We openly criticised the ideological mystification of the partisans as a capitalist weapon of war against the resumption of the class struggle”.*²⁰ (emphasis added).

It was on the 1st November that the first clandestine issue of *Prometeo* was issued. It carried “21st year” on its front page to show its political continuity with the first newspaper of Bordiga in 1924²¹.

A huge title dominated the first page: “The proletariat opposes the imperialist war with the strong desire to reconnect to its historic goals.” A police report to Mussolini on the underground press said about *Prometeo*:

“The newspaper said without hesitation it is the opponent of Stalin’s Russia and Stalin, while proclaiming itself a faithful fighter for Lenin’s Russia”²².

The party was growing very quickly, especially among workers in northern Italy and 11 federations with a further 3 in process of formation were created in northern and central Italy. The implantation of this new party was more difficult to achieve in the south since

15 Marshal Pietro Badoglio, born in Grazzano Monteffrato (1871-1956), Governor of Libya in 1929 and Viceroy of Ethiopia in 1936.

16 Sandro Saggiolo, op.cit, p.36

17 D. Montaldi, *Saggio...*, op. cit. p.238 Vittorio Faggioni (1918 – 2005), cf www.avantibarbari.it.

18 “Rapporto politico organizzativo”, presented by B.Maffi in the Congress of Turin 1945, in *Resconti...*, op. cit., p.4.V. Faggioni was from Naples.

19 *Resoconti*, op. cit., p.5.

20 *ibid*

21 The police did not even manage to make a link with Bordiga and the past of the Communist Party of Italy. The report on this group which was consulted mentions 21 years of political work in *Rapporto a Mussolini, sulla stampa clandestina*, 1943-1945, State Archives, n° 086713

22 Op. cit. n° 086714, p. 6.

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the split between the north and south of Italy prohibited any contact between the two areas. There were 47 sections with 25 more being formed in the South. In 1944 the party had more than 3000 members, but it was sorely lacking in experienced cadres. The party was made up largely of workers and very active and enthusiastic activists who were ready for a fight but were not ready for a new period “in the wilderness” if the social situation should again become more stable and normal.

What other political groups were formed in the rest of Italy?²³

We can point to the formation of the integral Communist Party formed in Turin which published *Stella Rossa*, the group “The Italian Communist Movement” or *Bandiera Rossa* in Rome²⁴ and Group of Il Lavoratore of Fortichiari²⁵ and Venegoni²⁶ which had a very short life, these groups did not take a clear position as far as the Italian Left was concerned on the imperialist nature of the Soviet Union²⁷.

Particular attention must be paid to the “Left Fraction of communists and socialists of Naples.” It was through this group that Bordiga took his place in the political struggle without formally joining it. The group was founded by Renato Pistone and Libero Villone²⁸. The Neapolitan fraction had some influence in southern Italy and Naples in particular. It had three newspapers, *Il Proletario* in Rome, the *Sinistra Proletario* in Naples and *Avanguardia* in Salerno. The fraction also had two other sections in Puglia and Calabria²⁹.

First of all nothing could be further from the truth than to believe that the thought of Bordiga was all one. For our part, we believe that we should not confuse the Bordiga of 1926, the popular fighter involved in the PCd’I, and the Bordiga of 1944 and especially 1952, when he became at times a somewhat obscure theorist. Let’s stop the “isms”! The revolutionary movement is not a dogma but a living revolutionary theory that feeds on the class struggle. There is no more a “Trotskyism” (an invention of Zinoviev in the struggle for power in Russia) than a “Leninism” an invention which came from the degeneration of the revolutionary movement in the 20s), or a “Bordigism”.

We could ask what Bordiga was thinking in isolating himself from 1926 and 1943. Some, like Piero Corradi, think he retired from politics in order to avoid the fate of Trotsky. Emissaries of Stalin would have made him understand it was better for him just to stick

23 Arturo Peregalli, *L’Altra Resistenza. Il PCI e le opposizioni di sinistra, 1943-1945*, Graphos, Genova, 1991.

24 For English readers Peregalli also wrote an article on the Italian Communist Left for the Trotskyist journal *Revolutionary History* called “The Left Wing Opposition in Italy during the Period of the Resistance”. It is factually accurate but written from a standpoint critical of the Internationalist Communist Party. See <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/back-iss/vol5/no4/peregalli.html>

25 Bruno Fortichiari (1892 - 1981) was among the founders of the Communist Party of Italy in 1921.

26 Carlo Venegoni

27 *Saggio...*, op.cit., p. 239 et seq and *Resoconti*, op. cit. p. 4.

28 *Saggio...* op. cit. p. 245 et seq

29 *Saggio...* op. cit. p. 246

to architecture³⁰. For our part we believe that Bordiga saw that the period could only end in imperialist war and had withdrawn from activity pending the arrival of more favourable days.

The Naples left fraction of communists and socialists was ambiguous on the possibility of reconquering the Socialist and Communist parties for the proletariat³¹. “The left is organised as a fraction inside the proletarian parties”³². But this passage shows that there was no longer any ambiguity. This group was against imperialist war and defended “proletarian internationalism”, however, it recognised that the partisan struggle had a special status. In Rome the group which published *Proletario* came from a group of partisans.

The Naples fraction’s position on Russia was quite complex:

“The fraction is defined not against the Russia of soviets but against the policy of the current Russian ruling class, because it is harmful to the development of the proletarian revolution”³³.

That may be why Bordiga took his later position vis-à-vis the Russian army³⁴.

The Naples fraction played an important role in the union question. It was Enrico Russo³⁵ who was a member of the central committee of the Italian Left abroad who reorganised the Italian communist left in Naples and southern Italy. The influence of the memory of Bordiga through his imprint on the first PCd’I was so great that Togliatti was forced to come to Naples to fight against this new organisation. This struggle of the PCI resulted in the union split of 1944, which after 6-7 months of existence had 150,000 registered members in 30 federations³⁶. Sandro Saggiaro has written about the fears of the Stalinist Party that Bordiga might really spring back to political life.³⁷ The southern fraction operated until June-July 1945 when it regrouped with the Internationalist Communist Party in the North of Italy³⁸.

The Internationalist Communist Party at that time, as we have already pointed out, found a great echo in the working class. The official Communist Party was not mistaken when it wrote internal circulars designating “Bordigists” as “dogs to kill.” *Battaglia Comunista* published³⁹ facsimiles of a circular of the PCI’s Bari Federation of August 18, 1945 which had the following slogan, “Death to the Trotskyite dogs!” and had the following sentence: “These are enemies of the proletariat, these traitors, and as such we should treat them”.

30 We think this should be “engineering” as Bordiga’s had a degree in that discipline [CWO].

31 “La situazione dopo Roma”, in *II Proletario*, 15 July 1944

32 *ibid* p.19

33 A. Bordiga L.Villone, R. Pistone, “Per la costituzione del vero Partito comunista”, Milan, 1945.

34 *Gazette de Lausanne*, op. cit. n° 142. Bordiga’s position on Russia was the key issue in the Five Letters between him and Damen published in our last issue of *Revolutionary Perspectives*. See *bordiga-beyond-the-myth-five-letters-and-an-outline-of-disagreement*

35 Nicola de Ianni in *Italia Contemporanea*, Milan, July-September 1979, n° 136, p.30.

36 Paolo De Marco in *Italia Contemporanea*, op. cit. p. 64.

37 Sandro Saggiaro, *Né con Truman, Né con Stalin*, op.cit.

38 *Saggio...* op.cit p. 248

39 *Battaglia Comunista* 1st September 1945, n° 9.

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The circular is signed by the secretary of the Federation A. di Donato.

Dante Corneli recounts in his book all the murders committed by the Italian Communist Party during the Liberation. He pointed to the failed assassination attempt against former party leader Tasca in 1952⁴⁰, and the assassination of Pietro Tresso by French partisans and that of Temistocle Vaccarella⁴¹ on June 19, 1944 who had founded the "Integral Communist Party".

Then he also talks about the liquidation of known members of the Italian Left. On March 27, 1945 Fausto Atti was killed in his bed during the night, when he was ill, by a group of supporters who just entered his home in Trebbo in the province of Bologna⁴². Mario Acquaviva was killed by six pistol shots on July 13, 1945 in Casale Monferrato on leaving his work at 18:30. The killing came after a campaign by the Communist Party who wanted to pass Acquaviva off as an agent of the OVRA and Gestapo⁴³. At Schio *L'Unità* also tried to compromise Riccardo Salvador, who was well known among the local proletariat, as an OVRA agent⁴⁴. Here the operation was stillborn and the matter ended there.

Italian Left activists had experienced many difficulties for over 30 years, but for the most part, these events only helped to make them stronger. After the difficulties of the war, the Internationalist Communist Party met for its first congress in December 1945. It would allow the party to weld itself together at national level. During the Congress a dispute arose between the French Fraction and Internationalist Communist Party of Italy because of the return of Perrone.

The French Fraction did not call into question the need for the party in this period, as their report of the Congress of the Italian Left stated:

"Against the revisionist and opportunist trend known by the name of its leader Vercesi (Perrone). Against this current which denied the existence of the proletariat in the political arena ... we argued that 1943 marked a political rupture in the course of the imperialist war. This analysis led us to the political conclusion expressed in the formula: the era of building the class party is open".⁴⁵

If all the Italian Left was agreed on the need to found the party it was on the method of

40 Dante Cornelli, *Persecutori e vittime*, Rome, Tivoli, 1979, p. 100 (Book III)

41 Op. cit. p. 104 and G. Zaccaria, *200 Comunisti*, Ed. Azione Comune, pp. 99, 102,

42 Corneli, op.cit. p. 100. Atti was born in Trebbo, he was one of the founders of the Communist Party. He joined the Fraction in Paris in 1928. Under the Nazi occupation he was arrested in Belgium and returned to Italy where he was exiled to the Island of Ventotene. From the moment of his liberation he adhered to the new Internationalist Communist Party.

43 D. Corneli, *ibid.*, p. 98. Acquaviva was born in Acquapendente (Viterbo) on 20 June 1900. He was a militant in the PSI then in the PCd'I. He was condemned by the Special Tribunal on 23 September 1927 to 8 years and 6 months of house arrest. He had married Maria Platone sister of Felice Platone, a Communist deputy who was at first a member of Bordiga's abstentionist fraction then remained loyal to the Party after 1926. In 1940 Mario Acquaviva made contact with those close to Damen in order to reconstitute a political group. The police account from Alessandria noted "He still maintains subversive ideas ..he acts in a subversive way" *ibid* p.99

44 *Un comunista di meno*, Ed. Prometeo, Milan, 1972.

45 *L'Étincelle*, n° 10, January-February 1946

formation of this body that disagreements persisted. The report continues:

“The political platform came out against any policy of the Antifascist coalition Committee. It therefore implicitly condemns ... Vercesi. So, why is this implicit condemnation kept secret; it is worthless. Only an explicit condemnation through a public debate in the Congress (...) could have been used as a political weapon for the proletariat”⁴⁶.

The Congress then discussed the international and domestic situation, the union and agrarian questions and the creation of the International Bureau⁴⁷. This Bureau would regroup the Internationalist Communist Party of Italy, as well as the French and Belgian Fractions of the Communist Left.

However, Perrone went on to create a new French section in the month of March 1945, which began its public interventions at the end of 1945 and whose organ *L'Internationalist* appeared in September 1946. The French section of the Communist Left was created from scratch around Suzanne Voute and “Vega”, it included also former members of the Union Communiste such as “Chaze” or Gaston Davoust and Lastérade and some ex-members of the former minority of the Italian fraction. These events would eventually poison relations between the International Bureau and the ex-French Fraction which was permanently excluded in the early months of 1946, despite its efforts to open a public debate on these issues⁴⁸.

This group changed its name in order to not be confused with the New French Fraction and took the name “Communist Left of France” (GCF), then turned to the other “left” currents and the “German-Dutch Left” as well as dissident Trotskyists in Europe and the USA.

After the last fires of liberation died down the lack of method shown by the International Bureau, led to the first and most serious split in the “sinistra”, between the Internationalist Communist Party of Damen, and the International Communist Party of Bordiga. But that’s another story ... which remains to be written.

46 ibid

47 *Compte rendu de la première conférence nationale* du Parti Communiste d'Italie, publication, de la Gauche communiste internationale, Milan, 1946 (28 December – 1 January 1946) et *Resoconti convegno di Torino 1945*, Éditions Prometeo, Milan

48 *Internationalisme*, n° 16 December 1946

Document

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE COMMITTEE OF ANTIFASCIST COALITION

The IB has considered the question of the participation of some Italian comrades, supported by the Belgian Fraction, in the Committee of Antifascist Coalition in Brussels from 1944 to 1945.

It considers that this participation has not been justified up to now by a clear, precise and definitive theoretical premise, which can only give grounds for stating that this was a breach of our principles. On the other hand, the formulation of the theory of the war economy which has established a pretext for some biased and partisan criticism in order to make political scandal against our movement has never been maintained by anyone as a theoretical justification for participation in this hybrid united front organisation.

The IB recognizes the Antifascist Coalition Committee did not have the character of a Committee of National Liberation, and notes that the comrades resigned as soon as its transformation into C. d. L. N. (Committee of National Liberation) was projected. This does not, however, diminish the seriousness of the attitude taken by these comrades. In order to agree to this policy, not only had they underestimated the historical role of the proletariat in the imperialist war, but particularly important and fundamental the forces of its political vanguard, since no class issues were raised against this characterised by the experience of the Left Fraction in Italy which gave birth to the Internationalist Communist Party (fight against war, no alliance even temporary and limited to the purposes of assistance and culture as in the case of the Brussels Committee of Antifascist Coalition with the forces who had solidarised with the war).

However any theoretical formulation which would try to justify tactics such as participation in the Brussels Committee of Antifascist Coalition has to be recognised as erroneous and in contrast with the ideas and tactics of the Communist Left. It is an attitude that the BI condemned at the time both in principle and in practice, while it stood against the campaign unleashed by international groupings seeking to accuse the comrades in question and all the Italian Communist Left of participation in the imperialist war.

ON THE UNION QUESTION

What follows are two further extracts from the book by Onorato Damen "Bordiga: Beyond the Myth and the Rhetoric". Other parts of this will be found on our website (see the list on p. XXXX). As the title suggests these are devoted to the union question. The extracts demonstrate that Damen supported work within unions but it was in the form of factory groups, politically constituted and outside of union structures and their conservative aims. Bordiga still had not given up the perspective of reconquering the unions for the working class once the objective situation had changed. Damen considered this impossible. This is the first time this exchange has appeared in English.

CWO

Comrade Bordiga has finally seen fit to specify in detail his thinking on the union question.

The way that this letter/document came to the Party would be irrelevant if not for the fact that, having been sent before the meeting of June 1, 1951 in Milan, it remained in the pockets of the recipient, in the Stalinist manner, brought to light much later and for reasons of *force majeure*.

BORDIGA'S LETTER OF JANUARY 5, 1951.

- 1) The current union situation is different from that of 1921, not only because of the absence of a strong Communist Party, but also due to the fact that the content of union activity has been progressively eliminated and bureaucratic functions are replacing base action: assemblies, elections, party fractions in the unions. This applies to everything from professional staff to heads, etc. This disappearance, favourable to the interests of the capitalist class, follows the same story line as those other factors: CLN type corporatism, unions of the Di Vittorio (50) or Pastore (51) kind. There is no reason to declare this process irreversible. If a strong Communist Party faces up to the capitalist offensive, if the proletariat openly distances itself from the (union) tactics of the National Liberation Committee, if it escapes the influence of the current Russian policy, then it is possible that at some time X and in some country Y class unions may resurface *ex novo* or by conquering existing unions. We cannot exclude this from a historical perspective. And these unions certainly will be formed during a period of advancing struggles, of a fight for the conquest of power. In both cases it is immaterial that D'Aragona(52) leads today, or Di Vittorio, that does not stop our fraction's activity in the GLC.

2) Given the limited strength of the party, while this is not growing enough and we do not know if it will before or after the return of apolitical class organisations that have many members, the party could nor should proclaim a boycott of unions, factory organs and workers' struggles, nor submit on principle its own candidature list in union

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elections in the factories nor, wherever there is a majority in support, use the slogan of boycott in workers' struggles, encouraging them not to vote, or not to belong to the union, nor to go on strike or other such things.

Putting it in positively, in most cases, practical abstention not boycott.

3) In certain situations, wherever the correlation of forces is favourable, we should never raise the slogan of boycott. We may or may not submit lists of our own, depending on the practical consequences anticipated, and in any case we spread our principles by means of the factory group formed by elements of the party, that emanates from the party and is subordinate to the party.

4) It is necessary to develop the propaganda of union history, and in particular explain the tactics of the Communist International and the Communist Party of Italy in the favourable phase of the First World War, the Theses of Moscow and Rome, etc., etc., the history of the communist union fraction of the CGL, the railway union, etc. A principle: no intermediate bodies between the party and the class means no possibility of revolution. The party does not abandon these organs only due to the fact of being a minority in them. But in no case does it submit its principles and directives to the will of the majority under the pretext that they are "workers". This also applies to the Soviets. (See Lenin, Zinoviev, etc..).

Amadeo Bordiga, January 5, 1951.

What follows are some excerpts from Bordiga's letters and documents, which clearly demonstrate that, especially with regard to the union issue, if it's true that Bordiga's "thought" was struggling and shows some uncertainty, in any case it was far removed-at that time-from the open position to boycott strikes and indifference regarding workers' struggles, rather he was in favour of participating in such struggles, always fighting the guidelines imposed by unions. These are the positions (boycott and indifference) that would characterise the behaviour of those who would be his supporters at the time of the 1952 split.

And it should be noted that it was precisely the "union issue" which was the main stage for numerous antics and tactical stunts of the "new party" that the splitters went on to form, this time with Bordiga in front.

"Today in Italy, given the current state of the party, you cannot raise the slogan that these organs [unions] must be conquered and always participate in their elections, but we cannot and must not raise the slogan of a general boycott. Ninety percent, maybe ninety-nine percent of the time, the numerical correlation of forces is such that the problem does not even arise. But where it does, you might think about participation campaigns, with lists in some cases, and generally without accepting positions that you may possibly get, but always spreading our criticism and propaganda. The basis for this task is the workplace group and other groups of adherents to the party. It is

the party going to the workplace, and not vice versa, they are not cells from below, but instruments of the party, which is organised territorially (Left 1925).

“The Italian left has never confused parliamentary issues with unions, which are very different. In the latter it has always been in favour of participation, and never in favour of boycott or departure.

A. Bordiga, February 2, 1951.

“The party does not include more than a part of the working class, the party leads the working class not only through teaching its doctrine, proselytising in favour of their organisation and the preparation of military actions, but also by participating in organs much larger than the party and accessible to all class members. This means that there are three levels (and this is most evident on the eve of the major events): the party, that according to the left is not vast, the proletarian organisations by their constitution, which only include workers regardless of their ideological adherence, and the class, which includes everyone, including those who are not organised.

A. Bordiga, February 2 1951.

“However the call to create another *couche* (53), related to other organs which ‘constitutionally’ do not only contain proletarians, but also elements of other classes (parliamentary bodies, etc.) is a DIFFERENT question, a pure manoeuvre. The first question which arises now is a central problem, if we do not solve it, there’ll be no revolutionary class or class party, before, during or after the revolution. “

A. Bordiga, February 2, 1951.

“As for unions, I have come to this conclusion: in the absence of an organ linking proletarian interests, the connective tissue between the vital centre of the party and the peripheral muscles of the class, the revolution is impossible. It has to be independently reborn, outside the influence of the ruling class, in new forms.

“I would be in favour of Onorato’s formula where he proposes to free the union movement from bourgeois oppression, but against his claim that this depends on workplace organs and not ‘external’ organs of economic association. The union is a non-constitutional voluntary organisation and, and the bourgeoisie is trying to destroy this form. “

A. Bordiga, April 15, 1951.

EXTRACT (54) OF A LETTER FROM COMRADE DAMEN TO COMRADE BORDIGA ON THE UNION QUESTION

It seems superfluous to point out once again my position on the “union-party” issue on the many points on which we agree completely, compared to the few, even rare cases in which we analyse differently, something that is due, not just to a disagreement of principle, but to our experience being seen differently because we have lived it differently.

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Let's take them in order. Our agreement is complete in:

- 1) Rejection of the slogan, whether expressed, understood or implemented, to boycott unions, workplace organs and workers' struggles.
- 2) Participate when our success is practically possible in elections to Workplace Committees, with or own list but in the end not taking the seats won.
- 3) Consider factory groups, which go from the party to the places of work and not the other way around, as the basis of our work.
- 4) Consider as still valid the position of the left, which has always declared for participation and not boycott or departure, with regard to the union issue.

The agreement is not as complete when we take this participation from the factory to the union, in which we are virtually absent and therefore it is physically impossible to exert any influence.

Our approach also differs on the problem of the reconquest of existing unions. You wrote: " If a strong Communist Party faces up to the capitalist offensive, if the proletariat openly distances itself from the (union) tactics of the National Liberation Committee, if it escapes the influence of the current Russian policy, then it is possible that at some time X and in some country Y class unions may resurface *ex novo* or by conquering existing unions. We cannot exclude this from a historical perspective. And these unions certainly will be formed during a period of advancing struggles, of a fight for the conquest of power."

I think that the current corporate union (who cares if fascist, communist or social democratic), due to its essential role for the revival of the capitalist system, is destined to continue until the end of economic, social and political hardship of dying capitalism, and will only be defeated when the assault of the revolutionary proletariat takes down the imperialist state. In such a breakthrough phase and struggle to conquer power, the grouping of the proletarian forces will not wait for a repeat of the traditional practice of the union, but new mass organisation with a structure more suitable than that of the union (factory councils, or soviets) or others, (such as occurred in Russia and Germany) and under the direction of the revolutionary party, will face up to the particular problems of power. Finally, the hypothesis that extracting the proletariat from Russian influence necessarily involves their immediate and certain fall under American influence, a pendulum motion depending on the attractiveness of these two opposite poles of the imperialist mechanism. That could be perhaps a historical period in which unions of all kinds flourish politically, but in no case a period of class unionism.

Currently, unions interest us, but not because we consider them as proletarian organs under bourgeois dictatorship, as you think, but because the masses are in them, which on one hand are unable to fend for themselves on the class terrain and on the other are constantly willing to be drawn into the realm of imperialist competition. That is where we must exercise our critical activity of class re-education and political orientation; such activity must be accompanied by our own union policy, to be developed in the workplace,

and especially wherever the reaction of the union bureaucracy is less effective against party political free speech.

In this sense, I think the need for a regrouping of proletarians on the terrain of absolute autonomy, no matter if few in number at the beginning, must always be the central concern of the party.

This is the specific way to focus the significant and not too distant experience of our union fraction.

NOTE ON THE INTERNAL CRISIS

I enclose the statement I sent to the E.C. and it raises the problem of the crisis at the top of the party in real terms. We do not accept the experiments whose theoretical justification has caused me and then comrade Bottaioli (55) to leave the EC. The issue that has divided us and still divides us is always to defend the political line adopted in Florence (56), voted for or not. Now, if the centre continues to have a different opinion, if it continues to believe that this can become detrimental to the organisation, I think it's time to raise the specific problem of the active defence of that political line, applying wherever physically possible, with or without the consent of the EC, a line which can be roughly summarised as follows:

- 1) The current party policy clearly rejects any perspective that means leaving the unions, and the boycott of these organisms and their struggles
 - 2) Participate in the fight for the Workplace Committee, openly and with our own list, in the workplaces where it is materially possible to manifest our strengths and not accept the places that will possibly be achieved.
 - 3) Reject without hypocrisy the policy that minimises the present and future tasks of the party and that restricts the field of possible activity based on concerns that have nothing to do with revolutionary militant activity.
 - 4) Reactivate the organisational and political life of the party, starting from the fact that it considers suitable for the revolutionary struggle, not running away from the responsibilities of this fight, but confronts them depending on the objective conditions, situations and the enemy forces dialectically reflected in the dynamics of class conflict.
- O. Damen, March 14, 1951.

50 Giuseppe Di Vittorio (1892-1957) ex anarcho-syndicalist; took the place of Ravazzoli for the union work of the PCI when the latter was thrown out of the P.C.d'I. as a trotskiyst (He was part of the New Opposition with Tresso y Leonetti, the so-called group of "Three" "Tres"); during the liberation he was part of the Communist Party leadership. Elected secretary of the CGIL in 1945.

51 Ottavio Pastore (1887-1965), became chief editor of the daily L'Unità in 1924.

52 Ludovico D'Aragona, secretary of the C.G.L., an organisation which he declared dissolved during WW1. He continued to be a leader of the C.G.L in the post-war period and had an important role in the factory occupation movement in Turin, signing the agree-

Italian Left

ment with the bosses to return to work.

53 Layer or strata, in French in the original.

54 It concerns a letter –document sent to Bordiga with the intention of exactly defining his points of agreement and disagreement concerning the union question.

55 In March 1955 Damen and Bottaioli left the Executive Committee of the Internationalist Communist Party in which they were a minority. Giovanni Bottaioli “Butta” (1900-1959) was a militant of the Italian Communist Fraction and a member of the Executive Committee of Marseilles during WW2. After his exile in France, he returned to Cremona in 1945.

56 The 1st National Congress of the Internationalist Communist Party was held in Florence, from the 6th to the 9th of May, 1948. Following the national meeting in Turin, 1945, taking into account the inevitable existence of certain disagreements, and misunderstandings amongst the cadres of the Italian Left, after two decades of dispersion and isolation, the Congress approved a set of Theses which some members of the party accepted with open reservations. As the national and international situation worsened in an ever – more revolutionary sense, some symptoms of crisis appeared with the appearance of a tendency in the party centre, of a pessimistic nature, if it can be put in that way, regarding the development of the political and organisational tasks which were being imposed. See the article in the Pamphlets produced by Prometheus Editions – *The Process of formation and birth of the Internationalist Communist Party* .and *The Internationalist Split of 1952* It has to be clarified that since this party was created, there existed a tendency within it which sought to restrict its tasks, going so far as to deny the historical legitimacy of its very existence. According to them, the party should not have reappeared until after an overturning of the reactionary situation which characterised the second post-war period. There were those who advocated the construction of a fraction rather than a party, when the former had exhausted the reasons and tasks for which it was created in the twenties in the context of the centrist experience. With the passing of all worker parties to the side of the counterrevolution which had been confirmed in Russia, the problem of forming a new party became something necessary and urgent, even if only not to lose all the work that the fraction had done in those years. By way of a synthesis, here is the assessment made by Onorato Damen at the Turin Meeting and the Congress in Florence: *“For the proletariat to again become a revolutionary force it must be assisted, it must be helped so as to learn to recognise its enemies and be free from the influence of the workers’ parties that have gone over to the counter-revolution. And it is up to the party to create in the heat of the fight the human class force which is called on to solve this crisis in a revolutionary way, otherwise it leads us to war. In this sense the party is revealed as the necessary theoretical, critical and organisational condition for this revolutionary solution: revolution, or war.”*

Correspondence An Exchange with supporters of the Occupy Movement

Earlier this year contacts in Devon suggested that we have a debate via letter with some members of the Occupy Movement and in particular their nearest group in Exeter. According to the format they devised we were to ask the Occupy supporters three questions and as part of their response they would put three questions to the CWO. We reproduce below the first round of that correspondence (there has yet been no second exchange) but have been asked to stress that the responses from Adam are not necessarily those of the Occupy Movement. We welcome further discussion.

Exeter Occupy's Answers to the CWO

1. How do you see the global capitalist crisis? What are its causes and is there any solution?

I would say that the current global crisis is simply the most recent, and the most destructive yet, of the crises that are endemic to capitalism itself. Capitalism depends upon these periodic collapses and the destruction of wealth – so-called ‘creative destruction’ – in order to function and continue to revolutionize the means of production. In this particular crisis, the unprecedented growth of the financial sector, its almost complete lack of proper regulation and its accumulation of vast amounts of unsecured wealth based on investment bankers’ gambling on the movements of the markets were the main factors that have led to the ongoing economic downturn, in which the 99% are being forced to pay for the ruthless actions of the 1%. Banks become supposedly ‘too big to fail’, get bailed out by the people whose money the bankers are gambling with, and are then allowed to carry on with business as usual, with the shadow banking sector now worth around \$70 trillion – even more than it was in the lead-up to the crisis.

In terms of a solution, I believe that a radical alternative to capitalism is much needed. Personally, I would favour a system of free-association along anarcho-syndicalist lines – as was successful in pre-civil war Spain in the 1930s and as is being somewhat realised in the occupation and running under the control of the workers of public workplaces such as health centres and broadcasting centres in Spain, Greece, Argentina and elsewhere.

2. How do you see social change coming about, who will carry it out and how?

True, democratic change on a large scale can only be brought about by the will of the people, expressed in a mass uprising. I feel the best way for this change to be brought about is through a combination of both wildcat general strikes and continued occupations of public squares, city streets and workplaces.

Correspondence

The example of Iceland, where popular protest forced the government from office and led to the writing of a new constitution through the utilisation of crowd-sourcing techniques, also demonstrated the potential that the internet holds as a revolutionary tool for democracy, as did the people's use of social media during the ongoing Arab Spring uprisings.

3. What are the immediate and long-term goals of the Occupy movement?

The immediate goal of the Occupy movement is to occupy public spaces, to bring people together and to allow them to experience direct democratic action in a non-hierarchical environment. The main way this is enacted is through general assemblies, open debates that give people the chance to have their voices heard, to debate issues and put forth proposals, which are then considered by the whole group through consensus decision-making. The focus on awareness raising and free education has also led to the creation of 'free universities', where talks and film showings are given for the general public.

As the Occupy movement is highly decentralized, with thousands of different groups in countries across the world, their immediate concerns will of course be slightly different in each place. The focus on bottom-up change means there is by necessity no pre-set long-term agenda, as the primary change that needs to be made is one towards actual, direct democracy, whereby the people themselves can forge the best solution to the crisis we find ourselves in. As such, although each Occupy group, including Occupy Exeter, have issued many demands and put forth various solutions, and the global movement produced a May Manifesto last year in conjunction with calls for an international general strike, the immediate goal of establishing authentic democracy needs to be achieved before setting concrete long-term goals.

Cheers,
Adam

The CWO's Reply to Occupy Exeter

1. How do you envisage the revolution that will lead to communism coming about?

All previous revolutions which have led to a change in the way in which human beings organise to produce in order to maintain their existence have been based on a form of property (land under feudalism or capital today) but the proletariat is that class without private property. Its links to capital are via "radical chains". With no form of property to defend our revolution has to be a revolution not only to change property relations but abolish them. This means we have to be completely conscious of what we are trying to achieve. And working class consciousness does not arise simultaneously or everywhere at the same time. Its struggles throw up not only an immediate recognition by some workers in one place that the system is exploitative and not in the long term beneficial to humanity but also furnishes historical lessons which shape the communist programme of

the future. At first this communist programme will be carried forward by minorities from one generation to the next. There will be much disagreement amongst them as long as there is no real movement of the class in opposition to global capitalism. Only once a more general movement is in operation will the minorities unite in to a world proletarian movement or party or whatever you like to call it which will then further extend the communist programme around the world. At the moment we are losing the global class war. The restructuring of capital over the last 30 years has decimated the collective strength of the traditional working class and the class is now divided as much as it was in the nineteenth century. However a communist movement is slowly re-emerging and it is on a global scale. This movement has taken on board the lessons of the failure of the revolutionary wave which followed World War One (even though some remain debated) and we now know that social democratic and Stalinist ideas are not just wrong but real barriers to the development of communism.

In fact one of the biggest nightmares weighing on the workers today is the cul de sac of the USSR. In one way it makes it easier to demonstrate that communism has to be about smashing the state and not about using it to leverage socialism. Socialism has to be built by the direct participation of the immense majority or it will not happen at all.

One factor in our favour though is the insoluble crisis of capitalism. This crisis is as you put it is only the most recent in capitalism's history but is far deeper than just a banking crisis. It is not caused by the one per cent ripping off the other 99 but by the cyclical crisis of accumulation. Capitalism has been in THIS crisis since the early 70s when the post war boom, the greatest boom in capitalist history, came to an end. From then on it has been battling to revive accumulation without much success. Their final trick was the speculative financial operations which began at the beginning of the 1990s and ended in tears in 2007-8. What appears as a financial crisis is actually an over-accumulation of capital. Capital has to destroy masses of existing capital values in order for a new cycle of accumulation to begin again. In the twentieth century in global conditions the solution has been global wars. This is not yet on the cards for all kinds of reasons but in the last resort this is where the current crisis will end up. They have to devalue capital. In the meantime they are trying to make the working class pay for it in price rises, speed ups, productivity drives and wage cuts. Labour has to become more "flexible", cheaper and more insecure. The drive to reduce wages begins with a drive to reduce welfare. At the moment they are getting away with this but increasingly the attacks will drive workers to seek a political solution. They will be forced to forge a international political instrument expressing more than anti-capitalism – they will have to adopt a new programme along the original lines of the communist ideas of Marx before they were distorted by social democracy, Stalinism and Trotskyism. This political instrument will not have as its goal the conquest of state power but the destruction of all states. It will not be a government in waiting but a force inside the wider class movement guiding it to the onslaught on the capitalist system and its state. Class wide forms of organisation will be adopted based not on representation but on direct democracy (as in the original

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soviets or workers' councils) with recallable delegates taking mandates from one level to the next. We note you favour the anarchist agrarian collectives in Spain (these occurred mainly AFTER the Civil War broke out and unfortunately, as many anarchists, will agree were not quite the organisations many hoped they would be – poor collectives remained poor, rich collectives remained rich and the collectives did not abolish the state so were always at its mercy. However some of their collectivist principles (as well as those of other proletarian experiences) will be adopted in any new society. We cannot be certain about all the innovations a future revolution might throw up but on the basis of past experience we know that there will be no ruling political caste or class.

Revolution will come about only through the paralysis of the system of production by a mass strike (which is slightly different from a general strike in that it will not be called or called off at the whim of some trade union executive). Mass strikes are coordinated from the bottom up and lead to the formation of assemblies, strike committees etc (i.e. the embryonic forms of a new way of organising society). The spread of such bodies of course leads to confrontation with the state and that is in the last resort the organised violence of the ruling propertied classes. This leads to your next question.

2. What is your opinion on the usefulness or otherwise of non-violent direct action?

Non-violent (or even violent) direct action can take many forms but in our view its greatest usefulness is in raising the awareness of a wider mass of people of the issues facing us. All the Anti-capitalist, indignados and Occupy movements have done one useful thing in this respect. At a time when many see no real alternative to capitalism they have altered the terms of the debate. Talking of anti-capitalism is widespread now and no longer the marginal agitation of a few revolutionary marxists. I'll return to this below in Q3 but would like to deal with the question of violence and revolution. Direct action by small minorities may have propaganda value but it is not the route to system change. Only a wider rising of the working class can achieve this. The more coherent, conscious, united and organised that movement is the less violence there will be in the revolutionary process. The propertied classes have never given up an item of property without a fight and they will do everything in their power to break class unity and when that fails they will try to turn to open repression. The violence they will unleash will a thousand times more vicious than anything the working class does (c.f. the Paris Commune – killed by the Communards – 84, killed by the Versaillaises – 20,000 plus). The better prepared we are the more likely we are to be able to snuff out their violence quickly and get some of the forces of bourgeois order to turn their guns at their masters. Experience again suggests that this won't happen until the masses are moving in great numbers around a coherent aim.

3. Do you not agree that our society is more complexly-stratified (i.e. the existence of a 'managerial class' mediating between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) than

Marx described it? Is not opposing ‘the 99%’ and ‘the 1%’ a view of society more conducive of revolutionary action?

Absolutely not! The social structure is no more varied today than it was in Marx’s time (even if the categories are different (e.g. we have a “service industry” when before the First World War we had over a million domestic servants in the UK). All the sociological surveys concocted to complicate the picture are designed to create confusion over this (a confusion which did not seem to exist in the various responses to the death of Thatcher – everyone knew on which side of the class barrier they stood then!). It seems very clever and overwhelmingly a great idea to talk of the 99% versus the 1% but this is not only wrong but dangerous. The 99% also includes the petty bourgeoisie the police and a whole range of enemies of the working class. They don’t want what we want (the end of capitalism). They just want a “fairer” capitalism. This in itself is an oxymoron. In this respect the “occupy” movement is the child of the “no-globals” of the Naomi Klein, ATTAC schools of thought. They are not against capitalism but just BIG CAPITALISM. You can make common cause with libertarian American businessmen on that programme. And let us be clear it is only the wage workers who do the work who have the real power to paralyse the system and form the basis of a new society. They alone have the capacity to be “revolutionary”. Sure, they will accept the cooperation of other classes if offered but there is no question of who will be leading the process and on what programme. When you talk of democracy what do you mean? Do you mean the existing process of representation (which we think is a useful cover for the dictatorship of the capitalist class) or are you simply using the term to imply a real participatory system in which the vast majority will be permanently engaged as part of daily life? We think only the working class can bring about such a “democracy” and it showed in the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 that it has the capacity to establish such a living entity in contrast to a capitalist system which only demands a cross on a ballot every 5 years or so to endorse who will claim to represent you in the capitalist parliament.

I don’t know whether the terms of our discussion demand we ask 3 more questions or whether you just respond to my responses (in which we tried to take on board some of what you said in your replies) but this is our first offering.

Fraternally
Jock (CWO)

Internationalist Communist Tendency

The extremely fragmented nature of the revolutionary left is obvious to all. So what are the differences between us and the other anti-capitalist groups who support the class struggle?

We are called internationalists because we believe that the interests of the exploited are the same all over the world, and that communism cannot be achieved in a single geographic area, a myth peddled as the truth by Stalinism. We, are therefore, bitterly opposed to Stalinism in all its varieties, for too long taken to be communism, both by the bourgeoisie and many generations of workers who looked to it in good faith when the ownership of industries, distribution, land, etc ... went from private to state hands, leaving capitalism's relations and all its parts (commodities, money, wages, profits, borders etc.) largely intact. This was not communism but a particular form of capitalism, state capitalism. After 1917 the economic blockade of the Soviet Union and the failure of the world revolution in the West meant that the revolution was transformed into its opposite, eventually becoming an imperialist bloc that would collapse after only seventy years.

In the conflicts between one national bourgeoisie and another, from Palestine to the Basque Country, we are on the side of the proletariat. This means putting aside territorial claims, and fraternisation with the workers in the opposing trenches. This is not to passively ignore the workers who have been victims of military occupation, but revolutionary defeatism for the unity of the class, beyond bourgeois frontiers. So-called wars of national liberation are subtle traps to drag the working class, the dispossessed, behind the chariots of reactionary bourgeois interests.

We see ourselves as a political reference point for the working class, first of all to those sections who are tired of the unions, all unions: this does not mean the fight to defend our immediate interests (wages, hours, workrates, etc.) is over. On the contrary! But the union is no longer the form through which workers can (effectively) organise and carry out these struggles in any way. The unions are now openly a tool to control the class struggle and manage the labour force on behalf of capital, whilst rank and file unions, despite the intentions of their militants, are a blunt instrument for workers, because they put forward radical economic demands without questioning the legal and economic framework imposed by the bourgeois state. The activity of rank and file unions has been further shown up by the crisis, which has severely restricted the opportunity for their reformist political practice.

For us the real alternative to unions is the 'self-organisation of the struggle', which has to start spontaneously from the working class, outside of and against the unions, to choose for themselves the most effective forms of mobilisation, which of necessity go beyond compatibility with the system. The struggle for immediate interests must not, however, ever forget that the general interests of the class lies in the overthrow of capitalism, and this must be constantly linked to it.

We are anti-parliamentarian: the idea of pushing these institutions in a proletarian direction "from inside", means mistakenly seeing them as a neutral entity, when in fact they are the structures which the bourgeoisie gives itself in order to impose its rule. The participation in bourgeois

parliaments and legislatures of the various communist parties, is the result of renouncing - for ever - the revolutionary perspective and means acceptance of democratic peace (which ultimately rests, let's remember, on bourgeois guns).

The overthrow of capitalism is only possible through a revolution, i.e. the conquest of political power by the proletariat, outside and against all bourgeois pseudo-democratic channels (elections, reforms, etc ...) mechanisms which are specially designed to avoid any radical change in society. The forum of our "democracy", the bodies of power of the revolution, will instead be the workers' councils, mass meetings in which delegates will be entrusted with specific mandates and will be recallable at any time. But these organizations will never become real bodies of proletarian power, without the approval of a clear programme aimed at the abolition of exploitation and, therefore, the elimination of classes, for a society of "freely associated producers" who work for human needs. This programme does not fall from the sky, but is articulated by that section of the working class which tries to grasp the lessons of past struggles, regrouping themselves at an international level to form a party that fights within the workers' councils against capitalism for socialism. This is not a party of government that would replace the class, but a party of agitation and political leadership on the basis of that programme. Only if the most advanced sectors of the proletariat recognise themselves in the political leadership of the party will we be on the road to the revolutionary socialist transformation.

The Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) was founded with these objectives during the Second World War (1943) and immediately condemned both sides as imperialist. Its roots are in the Italian Communist Left, which from 1920 condemned the degeneration of the Communist International and Stalinization imposed on all the parties that belonged to it. In the Seventies and Eighties it promoted a series of conferences that led to the creation of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party and finally the Internationalist Communist Tendency (2009).

We are for the party, but we are not the party or its only embryo. Our task is to participate in its construction, intervening in all the struggles of the class, trying to link its immediate demands to the historical programme; communism.

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