Karl Marx – political thinker, historical materialist, economic analyst of capitalism and its class society; above all, revolutionary fighter – was born in Trier, Germany on 5 May 1818. For anyone today fighting for an end to capitalism his life is cause for celebration. Marx's work enabled us to understand the basic dynamic of capitalism, its place in the history of civilisations, and learn from the historical ebb and flow of the class struggle. As Engels said at the grave-side of his friend: Marx was before all else a revolutionary. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, to make it conscious of its mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society. His life is fighting for an end to capitalism – his life is revolutionary fighter – was born in Trier, Germany on 5 May 1818.

The CWO stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. This has to mean the active, direct participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war. We call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a ‘party’ for want of a better word: Not a government in waiting but a fighting, a living association, in which the free development of every conditions for its own emancipation – that was his real life work.

Marx was not the first person to recognise the struggle between classes or to hold out the prospect of communism springing from the revolt of the oppressed against the masters of society at large. But the Manifesto was a rallying call to the working class. This was a time when revolution was threatening the old feudal regimes throughout much of Europe, a time when the working class was already organising on its own account but not yet in a position to overthrow the system of capitalism. But the Manifesto should not be dismissed as a romantic flight of fancy by an intolerant dogmatist in later life. It is fashionable to regard the Manifesto as a brilliant piece of prose by a young Marx before he became an intolerant dogmatist in later life. There is no denying the inspirational style of the document which Marx re-shaped out of Engels' drafts. From its famous opening: A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism, to its defiant: Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. The Manifesto was a rallying call to the working class. This was a time when revolution was threatening the old feudal regimes throughout much of Europe, a time when the working class was already organising on its own account but not yet in a position to overthrow the system of capitalism. But the Manifesto should not be dismissed as a romantic flight of fancy by an intolerant dogmatist in later life.

Ever since joining the Young Hegelians as a student at Berlin University Marx had devoted his considerable brain power to challenging the world view of his day. His work was a consistent method to learn and preserve the lessons from historical experience in order to frame a clear guide for action to the working class movement. Marx devoted much of his life to the First International whose members accepted that, “To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class.” (Marx's Inaugural Address, November 1864) When it collapsed after the defeat of the Paris Communist the historical calumny is that this was due to Marx's 'statism'. (For the anarchists the need for political struggle was equated with taking over the existing state.) Nothing could be further from the truth. As the International at first accepted:

They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify… All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.

The only way we proletarians can become masters of society at large is by destroying the production of capital. But the working class has no property to use to build up its own power within capitalism, the struggle for communism has to be a conscious political struggle where workers as a whole can see the prospect of a different world beyond their day-to-day skirmishes with capital. In other words, the onus is on the Communists, those who have the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement to form a distinct political party which will spearhead the struggle.

This is not to say that the communist programme was set in stone in 1848. Marxism is nothing if not a method to learn and preserve the lessons from historical experience in order to frame a clear guide for action to the working class movement. Marx was influenced by the idea of 'social contract' the domination of the ruling class is reinforced by laws, religious precepts, military force – in other words, the state. So far all the epochal changes in history have been the result of the struggle of a rising class to consolidate their economic hold over the means of production by getting control of the state. However, when it comes to the proletariat, the working class, who live by wage-labour whose numbers are growing with the expansion of capitalism.
We Don’t Need Borders: in Ireland or Anywhere

New Class Composition, New Struggles

A
fter years of falling wages and worsening working conditions are we now seeing a new shape to the working class? While the story of Ireland is that of the start of the 1970s, capitalists the world over attempted to make us pay with speed-ups and real wage cuts. Workers resisted so that the 1970s became a period of massive class confrontation. Faced with this serious working class resistance, capitalists across the world abandoned defence of the so-called “commanding height” of the economy. Capital was written off and from 1979 on manufacturing investment was transferred to wage economies in the “developing world” where greater profits could be made. This was a key area of globalisation. (For more on this see http://www.leftcorm.org/en/articles/2012-02-13-class-composition-in-the-crisis)

In the UK, for example, the number employed in manufacturing fell from 27% to less than 8% today. And it was not just in the “industrialising world” that low wages provided capitalists with new opportunities. Older capitalist states workers’ real incomes today are lower than in 1979 despite a massive rise in productivity (i.e. exploitation) in manufacturing. Even the bosses’ media admits it. Given the jobs losses (especially in heavy industry), grassroots movements, and capitalist restructuring over the last four decades, there are plenty who think that the working class in the older capitalist states has lost its “identity”.

A New Class Identity?

Changed its identity we would say. The working class has been constantly changed throughout capitalist history. Today in the UK 83% of the workforce are employed in the services sector, which includes such

newly socially necessary areas as health and education. As the system slides into deeper and deeper economic crisis these sectors cannot be excepted. One reason is that once privileged ‘proletarians’ with years of education and training behind them are in the forefront of attacks today. Their working conditions are becoming increasingly like those of every other worker. As always, when the layers of silent script writers to teachers, a whole range of professionals are finding they now have no control of their work, which is controlled by “apps” in warehouses or the gig economy (another sector of the class where resistance is on the rise).

We got a taste of how the professions class composition can work in the UK. In 2014/15 Irish junior doctors’ strike dealt two blows in a row and in the Durham and Derby teaching assistants’ fight last year. Now it is the turn of education workers across the world. As we go to press, Kentucky and Oklahoma teachers have just gone on strike over pension cuts. In Oklahoma it’s a 28% cut in the education budget (since taxes “have gone up”, which has which made schools go on a 4 day week). Arizona teachers are likely to follow them soon. No doubt they are all as weary for the struggle animated by West Virginia teachers who took on the state with virtually no support from their union.

In Yemen and Zimbabwe strikes of lecturers have been going on for weeks. In these cases have been accompanied by strikes of nurses, some of whom face arrears of pay. That these workers are now part of the proletariat would have come as no surprise to the young Karl Marx. He predicted that capitalist restructuring over the last two centuries has turned everyone into “proletarians” – now and for ever.

In the course of their struggle some education workers are gaining a new consciousness. It is not just in the “industrialising world” that once-privileged ‘professionals’ have been proletarianised in the capitalist crisis these sectors cannot be excepted. The bourgeoisie now has emerged in favour of special arrangements on either side of the Irish border. Against the Tories’ paralysis a broad coalition of working people is leading the call for “special status” with the EU. The Irish government and the EU negotiators.

For the Brexiteers the crucial question is how to extract the UK from the EU’s “shared sovereignty” while keeping most of the trading and financial benefits. For the Irish the question is how to hold the Tory party together, in the process of both the Irish government and the EU negotiators.

Against the Tories’ absurd coalition the TUC has emerged in favour of special arrangements outside the EU. The question is whether to support the needs to keep the Irish border as “frictionless”. In Northern Ireland Sinn Fein is leading the call for “special status” with the UK government, and this is more of a question of both the Irish government and the EU negotiators.

Still, May’s government is pressing on with no borders – why and how

No borders – why and how

Brexit: it can’t let in Ireland

Despite recent evidence to the contrary, capitalists are generally not fools when it comes to looking after their own interests. For almost 100 years Irish and British ruling classes have operated a system where a “national border” has separated the North East from the rest of Ireland. This was not intended to significantly disrupt trade, a part-province marked by its loyalty to the British state.

Brexit is part of the legal framework of the capitalist crisis. Now it is the turn of education workers across the world. As we go to press, Kentucky and Oklahoma teachers have just gone on strike over pension cuts. The EU’s free trade agreements include the “free movement of people” which, as everyone knows, has helped many firms in the richer EU core reduce their wages bill by employing migrant workers from poorer countries. But the workers’ councils, or even just the workers’ collective ability to withdraw their labour has been quick to do deals behind the scenes. The strike has been halted by votes in branches and on picket lines. The union’s next step is to be an all-out ballot to understand the solidarity of the strike. The problem here is not just that the union bureaucracy is afraid the strike is part of the legal framework of the state. All unions exist to haggle over the terms of wage labour on behalf of the system. Any questioning of this, whether practical or otherwise, is ruled out.

What the bosses’ and “authorites” are truly afraid of is the kind of self-organised action of the working class that we have seen in West Virginia and the UK. Once we go beyond the trade unions’ ritual and existing structures, that’s when we become dangerous, especially as more workers see the need to get involved. In the past workers often confronted the bosses and the state directly, put the struggle directly into their own hands (be they neighbourhood Nabisco workers, delivery drivers, members of the TUC, teachers, workers’ councils, or even just independent workplace groups). Though often short-lived, genuine fighting bodies appear and disappear as struggles come and go. In terms of decision making, delegation, not representation, has been the key method of organisation for the working class, from as far back as the Paris Commune. This cannot be changed from within the state and employers, and so they would much rather have unions control us instead.

The capitalist crisis is not going away. The system has nothing left to offer but increasingly stressful, poverty-pay and ever-changing conditions for all. Its continued existence is more and more at odds with the survival of humanity itself (since capitalism, in its never-ending search for profitable “growth”, is wrecking the planet for everyone). In a world where resistance is not just a function of a border, but a borderless class society and create a human community conditioned by our needs and not profit becomes all the more urgent.

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