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Response to the IGCL from the Internationalist Communist Tendency

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We thank our readers who understand and support our activity through written, material or financial contributions, as well as by other means. Publishing, printing and mailing costs of our review represent a large financial effort, given our limited resources. The development towards decisive class conflicts, as well as our organization's overall activity (intervention in the class and regroupment...), all this demands, among other things, an important financial effort on our part. We appeal to all readers interested in our work, and the analyses that we defend, to show their support by subscribing and by getting the word out about our review, which is published in full version in English and French. We also publish a Spanish version with selected articles (any help with translations is also welcome). If they want to receive the journal regularly and be informed of our communiques, they can send us their email at intleftcom@gmail.com.

At the dawn of Massive Confrontations between the Classes

The succession of *singular* events, or unheard events if one prefers, at the global level, which would have seemed unlikely two or three years ago, makes people dizzy and breaks down "preconceived ideas" and certainties. The widespread consciousness that the world is at a crossroads and that the future of the human species is at stake is becoming a fairly widespread idea in all classes of society. The contradictions of all kinds of the capitalist world have accumulated and dangerously exacerbated since the 2008 crisis. They are now bursting one after the other. Their two main factors, the capitalist crisis and the imperialist war, feed on each other. They announce what capitalism is preparing for us if it is not defeated and destroyed: the generalized imperialist war. This increasingly direct interaction between the reality of the crisis and the perspective of generalized war is reflected in multiple particular contradictions affecting the other dimensions of capitalist society. By breaking out in their turn, they provoke various tremors and, in the first place, in the bourgeois political systems of all countries, starting with the main imperialist powers: the *unpredictable* Trump, the insoluble Brexit, the growing paralysis of the European Union, the "populists" in power in Brazil, Italy, Eastern Europe, etc.¹ But far from solving them, these political upheavals in turn exacerbate the capitalist crisis and the imperialist war. How much does the Trump caricature, as a result and agent of both, illustrate it!

Inexorably, capitalism drags humanity into even more misery and economic and warlike sufferings. In reality, the alternative is between international proletarian revolution or a 3rd world imperialist war. Not only will this *choice* be made in the long term, but it already determines the approaches and responses brought to the various present situations and conflicts by the social classes. For the ruling class, no one can doubt it: economic, political and ideological attacks closely associated with massive repression against the exploited classes, and especially against the proletariat, are at the core of its policies in all countries. Facing the international proletariat economically, by further lowering the price of its labour force, but above all politically and physically – through bloody repression – is a

1 . Only the so-called "authoritarian" regimes seem to remain stable. But precisely the Chinese regime or Putin's regime in Russia, to mention only these two and for historical reasons that are specific to each national capitalism, correspond entirely to the current period of imperialist rivalries and wars... as long as they manage to keep their proletariat under control what is becoming more and more difficult for the Chinese bourgeoisie.

necessary precondition for capitalism to engage effectively against rivals in the generalized war and with a minimum of insurance against the revolutionary risk.

In reaction, the result is a break-up and renewal of workers' and social struggles, which we cannot list here but which are developing on all continents. The mass strike dynamic that ran through Iran and neighbouring countries throughout 2018, the wildcat strike of Matamoros and northern Mexico that is still ongoing and affecting the *maquiladoras* factories that mainly supply the United States, the strikes of American teachers within the first imperialist power itself and, in its own way, the yellow vest movement in France set the tone, and acted as a signal, of the international workers' struggle. The historically decisive massive confrontations between classes have begun. They will decide whether the outcome is march towards generalized war or the opening of a revolutionary period.

The proletariat approaches these mass confrontations with strengths and weaknesses. One of the latter lies in the insignificant reality of its vanguard political minorities and their influence within it; and in the weakness and dispersion of its communist groups that are the most developed expressions of its class consciousness. If the former are largely due to objective conditions and dimensions on which revolutionaries can only partially act – they must nevertheless do so as much as possible – the latter are their own and it is up to them alone to actively work to overcome them. Gathering, debating, clarifying, acting in unison, speaking together if not with a single voice when possible, are their competence and responsibility. To commit oneself resolutely and with conviction to this path is to participate in the activation of awakening of the class and struggle on the one hand and, in the long run, in the regrouping of the most dynamic communist forces into an international party. And more concretely, it means preparing and actively participating in the class confrontations that are arising before our eyes.

February 2019.

Erratum

In *Révolution or War* #10, in the footnote 30 page 13, we wrongly attributed the last quotation of our text to Rosa Luxemburg while it is a Kautsky's one.

International Situation

Workers' Struggles and Popular Revolts: the Historical Responsibility of the Proletariat in the Present Period

Workers' strikes and popular revolts against capitalist misery have increased recently all over the globe. All continents are affected. Since December 2018 alone, strikes by tens of thousands of workers have broken out in India in Calcutta, Bangladesh in more than eighty textile factories – mainly women workers –, Cambodia, China, Chile in Valparaiso, Romania and Hungary at the Audi factory. Many of these strikes are "wildcat", i.e. without an union, sometimes even against the unions. Almost all of them reach the street, block the roads and clash with the police. At the same time, popular revolts in which proletarians join with the unemployed, the socially displaced, the small shopkeepers or *self-employed* of all kinds have broken out in Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq in Basra, adding to the strikes and workers' demonstrations. In itself, this revival of struggles and revolts against poverty and hunger might seem to express only a constant phenomenon in the life of capitalism. But the attentive observer cannot fail to wonder about the increasing simultaneity and radicality of these social struggles and the revolutionary militant to identify four particular struggles that indicate that the international class struggle is entering a new chapter in its history.

Mass Strike Dynamics in Iran and Mexico

Iran experienced a real phenomenon of *mass strike* in 2018, affecting neighbouring countries such as Iraq, whose main focus were the sugar factory in Haft Tapeh and the steel factory in Hawaz in the Khuzistan region². The wave of struggle began in the Markarzi region. "On Monday, 16 February 2018, the enraged workers of the Hepco factory in Arak demonstrated in protest against 18 month pay arrears. With the bitter and black sense of humour they chanted 'Death to the Worker, Peace be upon the Oppressor'. The following days witnessed more demonstrations with new slogans, 'The desperate worker must be executed'. 'A corrupt financier should be freed'. These slogans resonated elsewhere. Over the course of several

*weeks, the content of the slogans became sharper and ridiculed the 'anti-imperialist' slogans of the regime: 'They do not pay our wages, Death to America'. Over the course of a few weeks, the sarcasm was dropped and the authorities were addressed directly: 'Friday Imam, listen to us, we are workers not mobs' or 'our enemy is right here, it is phony (regime saying) it is America'" (Internationalist Communist Tendency, *Iran : Class War against Imperialist Pretensions*³). Even today, and as mobilizations continue in Hawaz and Haft Tapeh, demonstrations and revolts, often by women, continue in the country as far as Tehran with the cry of "bread, work, freedom". In addition to the dynamics of *mass strike* in which strikes, demonstrations, revolts, even riots spread throughout the country, sometimes stops or decreases in intensity, to better set out again and explode again here or elsewhere, the other force of this proletarian struggle is to develop in a country in a state of war, which intervenes militarily in Syria, Iraq, or even Yemen, and whose imperialist ambitions are weakened, or even directly countered, by these strikes and this climate of social revolt.*

It is the same class dynamic that has seen, and still sees, at the time of writing, nearly a hundred thousand workers – including many women – engage in a "wildcat" struggle against trade unions, in the assembly plants, the *maquiladoras*, from northern Mexico in Matamoros in particular. After three weeks of struggle, some 20 companies out of the 30 on strike had to give in to some of the workers' demands to raise wages by 20% and grant a bonus of US\$1700. The new **left-wing** Mexican president, López Obrador, had to intervene and threaten to send the army. "We are looking for conciliation and agreement above all in Matamoros," he said. "It is not in conformity that they haven't reached an agreement. It seems the workers have rebelled against their union leaders, and the matter has grown out of control"⁴. At the same time thousands of teachers of Michoacan blocked the roads and "200 trains have been halted, explaining that auto parts, gasoline and imported grains are among the products that have been unable

2 . We refer the reader to the articles of the Internationalist Communist Tendency and Nuevo Curso in particular, which described the events and how the workers organized themselves into a real "shora", which means a workers council, at least in a strike committee to organize and extend the struggle and to face the repression.

3 . <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2018-05-10/iran-class-war-against-imperialist-pretensions>.

4 . <https://libcom.org/news/maquiladora-strike-set-expand-amlo-shows-his-true-colors-24012019>.

to reach their intended destination" (*Mexico News*, January 28th 2019 ⁵).

The dynamics of the mass strike, however confused and chaotic it may appear to many, carries within itself, through its frontal opposition to capitalism, the affirmation of the proletariat as a class and its confrontation with the capitalist state both politically, against the government, against trade unions and bourgeois parties – including left-wing parties – and against violence and state repression. In this sense, the workers of Matamoros and Haft Tapeh point the way forward for the international proletariat.

They show the way to their class brothers and sisters on the other side of the *wall* that Trump is so obsessed with. The strikes that have been affecting the education sector, mainly teachers, in the United States, region after region, most recently in Los Angeles and Denver, for several months now take on a major significance in this general context of international struggles. The American working class, that of the first imperialist power, the one where the bourgeoisie finally chose Trump who was supposedly elected by the so-called "blue collar", does exist and does fight. In this case, the impact and echo of the struggles in Mexico being reflected almost directly in the United States, the workers on struggle tend to transform the border that separates the two countries into a bridge leading to unity between the two proletariats.

Mass Strike and Popular Revolts

As we have noted, there is another type of social struggle that is also tending to become widespread: that of popular revolts. Whether they are against hunger, against the lack of food or employment, or even against repression, whether they take place in Sudan, the Maghreb countries, Basra, Iraq, Jordan, sometimes in so-called Latin American countries, and whatever the forms of expression, demonstrations, riots or even looting, these revolts are against widespread poverty. Even if many proletarians participate directly or indirectly, most of the time these revolts tend to identify with the people rather than with a class. As a result, they are all the more easily prey to nationalist and democratic traps and often end in deadlock or even bloody defeat. This was the case in the *Arab springs* of 2010, with the Syrian drama being the most barbaric expression of it.

But let's face it, we were far from imagining that a movement of this type, bringing together diverse classes and social strata, could break out and change the political situation in one of the main European countries like France. The second communique,

below, that we issued on 27 January on the yellow vest movement provides, we hope, the main elements and arguments to understand the reality of this particular struggle and its political stakes.

It is certain that the movement of the yellow vests will mark *a before and an after* in the dynamics of the class conflicts in France. In particular and in a way, they respond – at least their workers component – to the failures of the railway workers of spring 2018 ⁶ and the fight against the labour law in 2016. It tells that the tactics of *Days of action* by the trade unions will no longer be sufficient to control the working class and divert it from political confrontation with the state and its entire apparatus. The international echo it has received will also leave its mark and provide an experience for the entire international proletariat by its characteristics and, in particular, by its degree of confrontation with the State. It also raises many questions for the combative workers and the revolutionaries that they would be wrong, especially once the yellow vests are clearly in political powerlessness, to ignore as if they could – as if we could – return to our previous certainties and schemas. Even if it is fundamentally correct, it would be pointless to fatalistically explain the failure of the yellow vests by the mere fact that the proletariat, as a class, did not directly enter into open struggle. Of course, it is the only force that can provide a real perspective to this type of "popular" movements and revolts and break the political deadlock in which their inter-classist nature condemns them. Nevertheless, the concrete attitude of the proletariat as such towards the outbreak of this type of social revolt, which can only multiply, and therefore the orientation of the intervention of the communist groups, must be reflected and clarified.

Hence the interest of the contribution of a comrade from the Netherlands, which we reproduce below after our communique. Any comments or responses to both documents are welcome. The period of massive confrontations between the classes that is beginning will not fail, it is already doing so, to raise new questions and new problems for the proletariat and its political minorities.

RL, February 1st 2019.

⁵ . <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/teachers-get-another-800mn-pesos/>.

⁶ . See RG #10 : <http://igcl.org/Rapid-Assessment-of-The-Spring> and RG #6 : <http://igcl.org/Reflections-and-Balance-Sheet-of>.

Communiqué on the Movement of Yellow Vests in France – January 27th 2019

The eleventh Saturday of the 'yellow vest' movement in France, on 26 January 2019, saw the mobilization continue throughout France. According to the police, there were 69,000 demonstrators across the country. It is nevertheless obvious that the figure is largely underestimated: it announced 2500 demonstrators in Paris whereas there were indeed between 8000 and 10,000 when the two main processions met at 4 pm at the Bastille place. The clashes that broke out then allowed the police to disperse the crowd that would gather in the square. But whatever is the exact number, it doesn't really matter. The fact is that this movement of the yellow vests expresses a rage and a willingness, which the bourgeoisie is unable to extinguish for now, to oppose the growing misery imposed and promised by capitalism and to confront the state. Just as the strikes in Iran in 2018 or the mass strike of tens of thousands of workers in northern Mexico as we speak, to mention but a few ⁷, the radicality, combativeness, obstinacy of this yellow vest movement signals the present degree of the class antagonisms and the fact that we have entered in a new period of massive confrontations between the classes at the global level. This generalized climate of potential social revolt, and in part already in action, is essentially the result of the effects of the 2008 crisis, which are still being felt and which exacerbate capitalism's current contradictions of all kinds, political, ecological, imperialist, migratory, social, etc. Today, these contradictions have accumulated and are exploding one after the other. In this international climate of general social revolt in the making, the "slowdown of world growth" – to use the words of bourgeois economists – and the risks of financial and stock market crash can only accentuate this atmosphere of *end of the world*, the end of the capitalist world to be exact, and bring the current generations of proletarians to the necessity, consciousness and willingness to oppose capitalism's misery as well as the generalized war that it is preparing and, finally, to destroy it. The entire capitalist class, at least its most enlightened fractions, is so concerned of this situation that *"the eminences gathered at the Davos summit believe that it is time to 'moralize again' globalization (according to Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum) and to seek the paths to a 'more inclusive' world economy"* (French newspaper *Liberation*, 23 January 2019) and that States are already preparing both politically and in terms of violent and massive repression.

⁷ . From the United States to China, via Africa and all continents, strikes and conflicts tend to increase in these recent months...

But before going back to the situation in France at this end of January, it is necessary to give a brief summary of the events since the communiqué we issued on 2 December for readers who do not live in France and who have not been able to follow the situation closely. The violent clashes of 2 December around the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris but also in the provinces, including in very small towns, and the rage they expressed, surprised, and even partly panicked, the fraction of Macron's forty-year-olds in power for whom, trained in business schools, the class struggle had disappeared. It took the urgent back-up of other political fractions, Sarkozy's in particular, and big bosses, to impose on Macron the fact that he had to make "concessions" ⁸. At that time, the media complained that the yellow vests had no leaders "to negotiate with" as well as that the unions were discredited and powerless. It was only on the eve of the demonstration on 8 December that a real first contact was made with the main spokespersons for the yellow vests that were received by the Prime Minister and who, when they left, declared that they were waiting for Macron's declaration that they had been promised for the following week. So, they left him take the initiative and the State's counter-offensive could take place. The demonstrations on the 8th were as massive and violent as those on the previous Saturday. On Monday the 10th, Macron announced a 100 euro increase in the minimum wage [the *SMIC*] – in fact a bonus we found out in the subsequent days – and some other measures. As such, they are only marginal concessions even if they will force the government to present a budget deficit beyond the 3% required by the European Union ⁹. Politically, however, they represent the first real significant setback for the State in the face of any massive mobilization since... 1968. But above all, on the occasion of 1 January, Macron announced the organisation of a major national debate, planned until

⁸ . As such, if the government and Macron did not understand what was happening until December 10, the state apparatus as a whole, starting with its police, going through the trade unions and up to the other bourgeois political forces (including Sarkozy's former party but also the Socialist Party) has at no time lost control of the situation. Contrary to what the media suggested, we were far from an insurrectional, even revolutionary, situation, even at the height of the December 2nd clashes. Macron and the government have faltered. Not the state apparatus as a whole, far from it.

⁹ . Macron had undertaken to respect it... especially to establish his international – imperialist - credit with the German bourgeoisie. From this point of view, the yellow vest movement has weakened Macron's credit and authority with its European allies, which is supposed to restore French imperialism to a more central position, in particular to drive the strengthening of the German-French imperialist axis.

March 15th!, to respond to the yellow vests' demand for direct democracy and, more particularly, for a "referendum of popular initiative".

Since then, it is this typically petty-bourgeois demand that the entire state apparatus has taken up and imposed as a central issue of the situation that overshadows, if not forgets, the demands for wages and living conditions. At the same time, the management of the weekly demonstrations was limited to the violent repression which, in addition to the thousands of serious victims caused by flash-balls and *sting-ball grenades* (both banned in most European countries), aimed to reduce the massive popularity of the movement in the "public opinion". On this occasion, official speeches by politicians, the media and editorialists competed for the most brutal call for repression and haughtiness for this "stupid, hateful, factitious, even fascist people": Sarkozy's former Minister of... Education, a philosopher by profession and a delicate and distinguished great bourgeois from the rich Paris neighbourhood, even called the police to use *"their weapons once and for all! (...) Enough, these henchmen of the extreme-right and extreme-left or coming from the suburbs that come to beat up police officers. (...) We have the fourth largest army in the world, it's capable of putting an end to this crap!"* (Luc Ferry, Radio Classique, January 8, 2019). The class hatred of the May 1871 *Versillais* against the Parisian communards is to reappear very quickly. Although it should be noted that these provocative speeches calling for widespread repression and even murder probably had the effect of helping to revive the mobilization of the yellow vests, the fact remains that since then, the political initiative has remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The entire State apparatus then mobilized to focus all political life around the organization of this "great debate": the president, ministers, deputies, prefects, mayors of towns and villages, the media, all political parties, to the point of dividing the yellow vests themselves on whether or not to participate. And even those who advocated the non-participation, rightly thinking that it was only a "trickery", and in the absence of any other perspective of struggle, locked themselves into this dead-end by arguing for the continuation of demonstrations by the need to put pressure on the... great debate! The circle is complete. It is only necessary to tighten it little by little without breaking the rope by a clumsiness ¹⁰.

10 . Yesterday, January 26, one of the very popular and "pacifist" spokespersons, Jérôme Rodrigues, received a flashball shot to the eye as he was filming the scene – a live facebook – and calling on the yellow vests to leave the Bastille Square. And while there was no confrontation or danger of any kind to the police at that time. He risks losing his eyes permanently and has been put in an artificial coma according to this morning's

That is where we are today. The ground is marked out by the bourgeoisie, which holds the timing of the events up to the call of the main union, the CGT, for one day of action and strike on February 5, at which the most radical yellow vests with the help of Trotskyists, the NPA [*Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste*] in particular, are calling for begin an unlimited strike. In the case that the fire resumes, the backfire is already in place. It is done and all the grounds are now occupied by the entire bourgeois state apparatus. Only rage and anger can keep Saturday's mobilizations going for long or short.

The yellow vest movement is now in a political stalemate with no real prospect, while the Macron government and, behind it, the entire state apparatus have regained control of the events. What was the strength and dynamism of the yellow vest movement in the first instance, until Macron's statement on December 10 can we say, became its weakness and limitations once the government resumed its political initiative. Its "interclassist" character, identifying itself with the French people and not with the proletarian class, has fuelled and maintained illusions about people's democracy, i.e. de facto bourgeois democracy, and has caused the class demands that tended to emerge to be drowned and suppressed in favour of a *referendum on a citizens' initiative* and, finally, in favour of the organisation of the *grand débat* by the government and the State on the ground of bourgeois democracy. However, even the local yellow vest committees most closely linked to the working class, within the limits of our knowledge, such as those of Commercy and Saint Nazaire, are dragged into the field of this deadlock, the "self-organization" and the ideological mystification of democracy in the name of the people:

"Since Commercy, we are now calling for a major national meeting of the local People's Committees. On the strength of the success of our first call, we propose you that we organise it democratically, in January, here in Commercy, with delegates from all over France, to gather the list of demand and share them. We also propose you that we all discuss together the consequences of our movement. Finally, we propose you that we decide on a collective organisation of the yellow vests, authentically democratic, based on the people and respecting the stages of the delegation. Together, let us create the assembly of the assemblies, the Commune of Municipalities This is the meaning of history, this is our proposal.

press. Such a police blunder may very well cause a sudden fit of mobilization, or even change the terms and timing of the mobilization such as the government has succeeded to set them up so far.

The establishment of self-organization structures such as General Assemblies is now a central issue for the Yellow Vest movement. long live the power to the people, by the people, and for the people!" (Second Call of Commercy's yellow vests, December 30, 2018 ¹¹).

In the midst of the general confusion and social heterogeneity that prevailed, and continues to prevail, within the yellow jackets, only the maintenance of the wage demands, an increase in the minimum wage and salaries, the "indexation" of the pensions, to name only the main ones, can impose their fight and reject the ground of bourgeois democracy in which the "great debate" wants to lock them up and suffocate them. The increase in wages and "purchasing power" was, is still at the time of writing, the only **political...** demand, the one in which the whole proletarian class can identify itself as a class, which can still allow a real immediate resistance to the counter-offensive of the government and the bourgeoisie.

Despite several local conflicts or strikes, sometimes directly or indirectly linked to the yellow vests, the working class as such, from its workplaces and as a class, did not enter into a direct struggle. With the exception of a few, too few, examples such as these days the strike at *Arc International* in the city of Arques in the North, or those at the *Geodis* warehouse in Bonneuil in the Paris region, the occupation of *Pole emploi* offices [unemployed offices] in Vitry, Rennes and Lorient, the yellow vest actions at hospitals (information taken from the *Collectif Agitation et Gilets Jaunes IDF*) ¹². It would then have provided another perspective to the social revolt that could have broken the framework and timing of the "great debate" by imposing class demands as a central issue. That was the only way. This is still the only way, even if it becomes highly improbable with each passing day.

We were not the only ones to put forward the slogan calling for the formation of struggle or workers committees to fight for this perspective that could have displaced the political framework and terms of the confrontation imposed by the government and the bourgeoisie since December 10. It must be said, to the best of our knowledge, that it has not been achieved.

11 . See the immediate report, today, of the meeting for a national coordination of the yellow vests at the call of Commercy made by *Matière et Révolution* : <https://www.matierevolution.fr/spip.php?article5237>.

12 . The distribution of this leaflet Place de la République on 26 January, where the yellow vests were to meet after the demonstration, was banned by some yellow vests: "*no politics within the yellow vests!*". This led to a difficult discussion in which few of us criticized this simplistic "apolitism" and argued that it was necessary to take hold of the **class** political dimension in this struggle as in any struggle...

And that thus no real class political alternative could be presented and, even less, represented a material factor of the situation.

Nevertheless, this movement of the yellow vests, what ever it can last, marks *a before and an after* in the very dynamics of the class conflict in France and a reference for the international proletariat. In particular, to the great displeasure of the trade unions and their tactics of *Days of action*, it showed that an "uncontrolled" and unorganized movement – uncontrolled and unorganized from the point of view of the state and bourgeois ideology – could push the bourgeoisie back ¹³. It also showed that the refusal to accept the threat and repressive violence of the State, the willingness not to yield to the repression and to continue to demonstrate massively despite the risks, could force the bourgeoisie to give in, under certain conditions and at certain times, to the demands. Finally, this particular episode of the class struggle has brought into the struggle stratas and generations of proletarians who had remained foreign to it up to these days and whose expression in future struggles and consciousness we cannot prejudge. It is too early to deduce that a new generation of revolutionary militants can, directly or indirectly, emerge mechanically from it.

Yet it is also this task that revolutionaries must tackle through propaganda and intervention. The (our) weakness and virtual absence of the communists as a political material force in the demonstrations and roundabouts, as difficult as it was to intervene actively given the political reticence of the yellow vests and their displayed "interclassism", is an element of weakness, not in itself of this particular movement which only highlights it, but of the current international and historical balance of power between classes. We do not develop this point further in the context of this communiqué, whose immediate purpose is limited to providing an immediate position on the situation for all those directly concerned and for the entire international revolutionary camp.

The International Group of the Communist Left,
January 27th 2019.

13 . We ourselves underestimated the potential of this movement and dismissed, too quickly, any possibility of "gain" for the proletarians in our communiqué of 2 December: "*On this ground, the working class individuals who are isolated and drowned as proletarians in a mass with heterogeneous and even often contradictory interests, isolated and drowned in the 'people', will gain nothing*". The clear-cut statement, probably because we were trapped in a scheme, has been contradicted by reality – at least in part. The fact that we were not the only ones who were wrong on this particular point does not detract from the need to understand where the error lies and what its dimension is. In particular, we do not think that it calls into question the general analysis of this movement and its limits because of its "interclassism".

What the Workers in Yellow Vests Can Learn from the Proletarian Struggle in Iran

We publish here a contribution by a comrade from the Netherlands from the English-language newsletter, *A Free Retriever Digest* (<https://afreeretriever.wordpress.com/>), which regularly selects articles from the *International Communist Left*. Even if we do not share all the arguments and positions that the comrade puts forward, it seems important to us to bring this reflection to the attention of as many people as possible. It has two main merits: the reflection and the position comes from a comrade who does not live in France, which allows us to have both a more distant position and an internationalist approach, and an idea of the international echo of yellow jackets. But above all, it tries to respond to the difficulties that revolutionaries may have encountered in understanding this "interclassist" revolt and being able to orient themselves there. It is also of interest in providing information on the development of the 2018 mass strike in Iran that we were unable to cover in this issue of the journal.

What's Going on? Have those Yellow Jackets Blocking Roads and Power Stations Been Workers?

No, certainly not all yellow jackets were workers. This movement in France started as a "people's movement", in which workers were lumped together with members of the middle layers, small entrepreneurs and farmers. It opposed the increase in fuel prices by the Macron government, a measure affecting the entire population. By designating Macron as the person in charge, the "yellow jackets" movement linked the struggle to the demand for a change of government, new elections and some changes in the political system. These "political" demands did not affect the power of the state and capital. They were also partly inspired by the ultra-right that hoped to benefit from it by gaining power nationally. The movement of the yellow jackets was not a movement for demands of the working class.

But as the movement spread, more and more workers joined it, especially unemployed, pensioners and pupils, and students from working-class families. This group is referred to as "workers in yellow jackets". As part of the working class, they have specifically joined in with the demand for an increase in the minimum wage (in French "SMIC"). This created a proletarian dynamic of its own within the movement of the yellow jackets, one that took a completely different direction than the latter's petty-bourgeois goals. The Spanish blog '*Nuevo Curso*'¹⁴ has rightly pointed out that the workers in yellow jackets have thus reacted to decades of failure of the trade union

movement and the so-called "workers' parties" (from PS and PCF to Trotskyists and Maoists) to defend the workers against attacks on their wages, working conditions, employment, benefits and provisions. And behold, as workers' demands came out stronger, the ultra-right quickly withdrew, and Macron was forced to make commitments. *For the first time in decades, the state bowed.* Not in response to the significance of the "yellow jackets", but to prevent a mass movement by workers. Thus, the workers in yellow jackets were a phase, a step within a longer lasting movement, in what the council communists have called "*the movement of the workers*" – against a "workers movement" that has conformed itself to the persistence of capitalism and the state, defending the latter *against* the workers' struggle.

Faced with the dying out of the yellow jackets movement, this text tries to draw lessons from the workers' struggle in the Middle East, and especially in Iran, in favor of a continuation of this movement of workers in France and throughout the world, and of the beginning of a new phase of proletarian struggle against the attacks of capital.

Why should we learn from the struggles in Iran?

Many workers in France and beyond think that the French working class is the most radical and combative in the world. Blockades and fights with the riot police seem to confirm this view. This is largely the appearance with which the post-Stalinist C.G.T. and the street fighters of the *Black Blocks* in particular hide how the trade union movement in



Demonstration of the Yellow Vests on the Champs-Élysées in Paris with the French flag...

14 . '*Nuevo Curso*', 15 December 2018: [Los chalecos amarillos se desmovilizan... ¿Y qué de malo hay?](#) ("The yellow vests demobilize... What is so bad about it?")

France divides the workers' struggle into one of different sectors, professions, regions and enterprises. When this division has paralyzed the extension of the struggle and the last workers are exhausted, fights with the riot police and, if possible, court cases against "violent" workers serve to put an end to the struggle. The blockades by the yellow jackets and the street fights with the riot police seem to confirm this image of a radical proletariat in France. However, when we compare the struggles in Iran with those in France, we see some striking differences.

Striking differences

While the struggle of the yellow jackets in France began as a "people's movement" of the middle classes which was joined by workers, in the Middle East at the turn of last year it was, conversely, a strike movement of oil workers in Iraqi Kurdistan that spread to the enterprises in Iran and finally brought the proletarian youth in all big and small cities onto the streets to shout slogans against the war. A second difference was that the riots in Iran took on a political character from the outset, by turning against both the "reformist" and the "conservatives" within the state. In the 2009 elections, by contrast, parts of the middle class that were manifesting for "reforms" still dragged workers along with them in an internal factional struggle of capital. In the riots at the turn of 2017–2018, for the first time since the mass movements that led to the fall of the Shah in 1979¹⁵, workers in Iran acted as an independent class. In their wake they set in motion parts of the middle layers, from shopkeepers to farmers, and categories such as students and women. As long as the mobilization endured, the Basij police was lured into a cat-and-mouse game via social media and was often forced to withdraw. The regime did not dare to deploy the heavily armed "Revolutionary Guards" (Pasdaran).

In subsequent mass struggles in Iran and Jordan we also see that the movements at enterprises (strikes) and those on the streets alternate. This depends on the possibilities offered by a mass struggle to resist the repressive forces on the streets. The street is the best place to find support among other workers and the population in general. On the other hand, in France

we see that enterprise workers are almost entirely encapsulated by the state-recognized trade union movement. In *the strikes of the sugar cane workers of Haft Tapeh* (Khuzestan) a "free trade union" plays a minor role, but the strength came mainly from the General Assemblies (GA) of strikers who at least tolerated their spokespersons at the strike committee, and perhaps even elected them. In the struggle at Haft Tapeh, despite certain restrictions, the GA and a committee overcame the lack of organization that had caused the street protests of December 2017-January 2018 to bleed out. Therefore not only the existence of political demands, but this form of organization and the proposals for the creation of a 'Shora' (a workers' council) as well, offer much better prospects for the struggle in Iran than those in France, where the unions still have a firm grip on the workers.

A limitation that still has to be overcome by both the workers in the Middle East and in France (and other countries with a long industrial history) is *the unification of the struggle of the non-working proletarians* (young people, unemployed, pensioners) *and of the employed workers*. In Tunisia and in southern Iraq unemployed have moved to companies and demanded work. In southern Iraq, in part, they were demobilized soldiers having fought in the army against Islamic State



Workers on strike in Haft Tapeh and no Iranian flag in sight.

(Daech). In the future, striking workers can include unemployed people in their enterprises, let them participate in their General Assemblies, or include them in their Workers' Council through delegates of these Assemblies and of non-working people as delegates of Assemblies of unemployed. This, of course, not in order to lock oneself up in the enterprises, but to massively take to the streets and stand up to repression. It goes without saying that former soldiers are important to what then will quickly turn into an armed struggle in defense against repression, ultimately to destroy the state. However, the revolution is not an exclusively or mainly military issue, it is the conscious self liberation of a productive class that carries the future of a production and distribution for the needs of the population, without profit, capital and money. In this perspective it goes along with restarting production by enterprises at strike to provide for food, public transport and energy in popular and working class neighborhoods.

15 . For an account of the so-called "Islamic revolution" in Iran, see for instance Wikipedia: [Iranian Revolution](#).

That is the way as well to win over the hesitant middle layers to revolution.

What to do and what not

So much for the lessons that can be learned from the struggle in France and in the Middle East. It should be clear that progress in the workers' struggle is not a mechanical process. The road ahead is still long. In the Middle East we have seen five waves of mobilizations in 2018¹⁶. Internationally, many more waves of struggle, with upsurges and declines, even defeats, will follow. Workers' struggle does not automatically emerge from crisis, war or repression. Class consciousness is not the result of external intervention either. It cannot be circumvented by handy slogans, putsch tactics or by concessions to bourgeois ideology within the working class. The lessons from the class struggle must be learned at a mass level, in mutual conversations and in the struggle itself. The most conscious and most militant workers, who together will constitute the vanguard, play a decisive role in this process, along with those parts of revolutionary minorities able to integrate the historical lessons drawn by the internationalist communist lefts of Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, etc. from the revolutionary workers' struggle of 1917 – 1923 into the struggle's current practice. The connection between the vanguard within the working class and the current small revolutionary groups can best be made within nuclei of revolutionary-minded enterprise and unemployed workers, as these were constituted by the communist left in the past¹⁷. The workers' struggle in the Middle East in 2018, in response to the consequences of the economic crisis and imperialist wars, has shown the beginnings of working class independence, both in its demands and in the goals posed, and qua organization and international extension as well. Thereby the international



« The red flag appeared in Paris in 1848: the workers asserted themselves for the first time as a political subject and waved the red flag in opposition to the tricolour flag. Lamartine had it removed in February ». (from the blog Nuevo Curso).

proletariat rediscovers the mass struggle – which the communist lefts saw as characteristic of the new period of capitalism, that of imperialism – and both the necessity and the possibility of a proletarian world revolution, in which the masses of workers overthrow capitalism and create a communist society.

Iran's proletariat, openly suppressed by state terror, could more easily rediscover the forms and content of the mass struggle than was the case in France and other older industrialized countries, in which the dictatorship of capital hides behind democratic deceptions; in which the state holds the working class in its grip through the tentacles of its trade union movement, and where bourgeois ideology dominates

the thought and actions of the workers. This difference in the point of departure is comparable to the relative ease with which the workers in Russia came to act independently as a revolutionary class in 1917 and the problems of the revolution in Germany and other industrialized countries. The struggle in the old industrialized countries is more difficult, more protracted and deeper.

The French left-wing communist group IGCL has pointed out the danger that is already emerging in the old industrialized countries and that will worsen if the workers' struggle does not continue, but collapses: the identification of workers with "the people"; the rallying of workers behind the bourgeois flag of nationalism¹⁸. Specifically the left wing populist post-Stalinists of Mélenchon's '*La France insoumise*'⁽¹⁹⁾ in France and of Wagenknecht's '*Die Linke*'⁽²⁰⁾ and '*Aufstehen*'⁽²¹⁾ in Germany take up the competition on voters against the populist ultra-right, with nationalist slogans and a "critical" stance on immigrants, thereby following the example of the erstwhile Comintern's nationalist campaigns.⁽²²⁾

Fredo Corvo, December 31, 2018

16 . See for a balance sheet: [Iran: What after the repression against the workers of Haft Tapeh and the steelworkers in Ahvaz?](#) (blog article on Libcom, 24 December 2018).

17 . The group '*Proletenstemmen*', more or less linked to the *Group(s) of International Communists* (GIC) in the 1930s, consisted of unemployed who went to the companies in strikes and helped to extend the fight. See GIC: [Stellingen omtrent revolutionaire bedrijfskernen, partij en dictatuur](#) ("Theses on revolutionary enterprise nuclei, party and dictatorship"). The Italian communist Left had enterprise groups with a similar function.

18 . See for instance: [The IGCL on Marxism and the National Question](#) (*Revolution or War* #10, September 2018), or its *communiqué of December 2, 2018* (footnote 9).

19 . "France insubordinate"

20 . Comparable to the ex-Maoist '*Socialistische Partij*' (SP) in the Netherlands.

21 . "Stand up"

22 . See [On the movement of the "Yellow Vests" in France: Communiqué on the social revolt in France](#) (IGCL, 2 December 2018) and the history summary by Ph. Bourrinet: [De arbeidersraden in Duitsland 1918-23 \(deel 2\)](#). [An English translation for 'A Free Retriever's Digest' is in preparation]

Lenin and... the Yellow Vests in France ?

The unheard of character of the yellow vest movement in France has raised many questions among revolutionaries because of its own characteristics, which we can describe, in short, as interclassist. We have received a number of criticisms following our publication and our support for the first position paper of the ICP – Proletarian (<http://igcl.org/Yellow-vests-INTERCLASSISM-IS>). Among these, the comrades of the group Matière et Révolution (France) referred us to Lenin's text on the 1916 debate on the right of nations to self-determination. Although this text deals with "interclassist" movements with regard to the national question, the following passage is nevertheless worth reading and reflecting on in the face of the questions and problems that the "yellow vests" are raising.

"Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is. The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But objectively, the mass movement was breaking the back of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it—without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses errors. But objectively they will attack capital, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for difficult reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately "purge" itself of petty-bourgeois slag".

(Lenin, *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed up*, 1916²³).

Pamphlets of IGKlasbatalo and the IFICC (orders at [intleftcom@gmail](mailto:intleftcom@gmail.com))

Student Struggle and Assemblies of Neighbourhood (Internationalist Communists - Klasbatalo)

La dégénérescence de l'IC : le PCF (1924-1927) (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French)

Groupe des Travailleurs Marxistes (Mexique, 1938) (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French and Spanish)

La question de la guerre (1935) (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French)

Morale prolétarienne, lutte de classes et révisionnisme (IGCL from the IFICC, only in French and Spanish)

Unions Against the Working Class (1976, reprinted from the ICC Pamphlet).

23 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm>

On the Ideological Role of Neo-Malthusianism

In recent years there has been a revival of a neo-Malthusian ideology, which serves the ruling class as weapon against the proletariat. It is being used to justify the imposition of austerity measures on the grounds that the “comfortable” standard of living (*i.e.* sufficient purchasing power to obtain the necessities of dignified existence such as food and electricity) of sections of the proletariat of the developed world places an unsustainable strain on the biosphere and threatens the long-term survival of the species. A real problem – the destruction of the natural environment upon which the existence of humanity depends – is thus explained in a mystified manner, that the human population as a whole bears equal responsibility. The purpose of this mystification is to hide the fact that it is the obsolescence of capitalism that threatens humanity with war and ecological destruction, and thus to protect the privileges of the capitalist class and its parasitic existence. This whole exercise requires a shameful degree of intellectual dishonesty. It is therefore no surprise that the apologists of the ruling class today so adore that “*bought advocate, a pleader on behalf of their [the proletariat’s] enemies, a shameless sycophant of the ruling classes*”²⁴, parson Malthus.

The transition of capitalism from its historically progressive phase, in relation to feudalism, to its current phase of historical obsolescence demanded also an ideological transformation. While in the 19th century bourgeois economists such as Ricardo could to an extent be impartial in their arguments, because this allowed them for example to demonstrate the regressive role played by the landed aristocracy, this is no longer the case today. According to Marx, whereas Ricardo desired production for production’s sake and saw its revolutionizing potential, Malthus used scientifically established premises to come to conclusions that were acceptable either to the aristocracy or to both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat and only desired capitalist production inasmuch as it could provide a comfortable existence for the most reactionary and parasitic parts of the ruling classes, namely the aristocracy and their lackeys in the Church.

“Ricardo disinterestedly defends bourgeois production insofar as it [stands for] as unbridled a development as possible of the social forces of production. He is unmoved with the fate of the agents of production (...) He maintained the historical validity and necessity of this stage of development (...). Malthus wants bourgeois production insofar as

it is not revolutionary, insofar as it is not a historical force, but merely creates a broader and more convenient basis for the “old society”.” (idem).

Now that the historically revolutionary role of capitalism has been exhausted, apparent impartiality with regard to the historical development of society is no longer admissible. Neither is an attachment to objectivity and materialism. While a consequent materialism is tolerated when its application is narrow, indispensable as it is in science and technology where it allows the production of marketable commodities and increasing labour productivity, its application is avoided when it comes to studying society as a whole because the conclusion that would be drawn would be that capitalist development represents a transient period in history that, while necessary for creating the material means for a society of material abundance, ultimately cannot rationally dispose of these means, *i.e.* it cannot unleash the full productive potential of humanity to satisfy human needs -- which it is technically possible to do in a way that simultaneously protects the natural environment -- enslaved as it is to the motive of accumulation of capital. Therefore, while modern society has science it is not truly scientific. Science is completely dominated by capitalism and is tolerated only within narrow limits. Outside of these limits, *i.e.* when it comes to understanding the material and social relations that are at the basis of society as a whole, bourgeois ideologues have no recourse other than subjectivism and reification.

Reification refers to the tendency on the part of bourgeois economists and ideologues to transform social, institutional, and class relations into universal categories and eternal natural laws. This tendency is typical of intellectual activity under the capitalist mode of production. Bourgeois ideologues work in a way that is directly opposite to actual historical development; they assume capitalist social categories as given, as the premise for historical development, and then deduce historical development from these premises, which are supposed to have existed eternally as natural laws. Thus, Malthus sees widespread poverty, misery, disease, unhealthy working conditions, and argues that these are the result of a natural law that drives all life to reproduce faster than the pace of growth of agricultural output or, in its modern version, beyond the carrying capacity of the ecosystem upon which we depend. These undesirable social phenomena, which are the concrete results of capitalist social relations, are transformed into the lamentable but ultimately beneficial consequence of a natural law --

²⁴ Marx (1861-1863) *Economic Manuscripts: Theories of Surplus Value*.

unrestrained population growth – that characterizes all living beings. Under Marx’s withering critique, “*Malthus’s famous natural principle of population finds the place it deserves: it is a variable effect, the cause being the economic conditions of each specific mode of production.*”²⁵ However, reification must not be reduced merely to an incorrect perception of reality. It serves a definite purpose for the ruling class. If one accepts that society is organized according to eternal laws of human nature one essentially adopts a fatalistic attitude that very well suits the ruling class; it is possible to change socially determined laws, but you cannot change eternal natural laws.

While for Malthus the existence of a surplus population is the result of the natural law that compels all living beings to reproduce beyond a level that the system that they depend on can support, the Marxian understanding of surplus population is tied to the concept of the reserve army of labour. The ongoing refinement, driven by the need to increase productivity and profitability, of industrial technologies and the growth in automation is part of a process that changes the organic composition of capital, or the ratio of constant to variable capital, in favour of constant capital. As production becomes more capital intensive, many workers are made redundant and contribute to the swelling of the ranks of the unemployed, exerting a downward pressure on wages and changing the type of jobs that are available in that industry. This has the simultaneous effect of removing capital’s ultimate source of profit, labour, from the production process, as well as impoverishing the domestic “consumers” and therefore diminishing the ability of the domestic market to absorb what has been produced. This whole process and the contradictions that are inherent to it, including the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, depend on private ownership of the means of production, production for exchange, and the law of value.

Malthus’ “mistake” is not an innocent one. Ideology is not just an empirically incorrect point of view, but a mystification that serves the objective interests of a ruling class (in the historical setting in which he existed this was the rentier class) and that has a material force. It is in this context that we can interpret Malthus’ prescriptions to “solve the population problem”: increasing the production of luxury goods at the expense of food and other consumables to discourage the impoverished masses from proliferating, as well as creating situations that enable welcome increases in death rates, while at the same time preaching moral restraint.

25 Dangeville, 1978

Neo-Malthusianism

Malthus argued for the need for a class of unproductive consumers, for “buyers who are not sellers”, to provide a market for the capitalists to realize their profits by selling the commodities they produce at their value. This included the non-productive classes such as landowners, parsons, the clergy, etc. This argument was meant to prove to the capitalists that they needed the non-productive class to which Malthus belonged. However, Malthus does not explain how these buyers acquired the means to act as buyers, “... *how they must first take away from the capitalists a portion of their product without furnishing an equivalent in order to buy back less than an equivalent with what they have thus taken away*”²⁶. Nevertheless, despite the transparently stupid and self-serving nature of this argument, there is a notable parallel between it and the Keynesian proposals for state intervention into the business cycle, either by manipulating the interest rate to favour investment or through more direct means of increasing aggregate demand such as through state purchasing. We can add to this the proposal for a universal basic income. It is all about creating effective demand. Little matter that a peaceful way out of the crisis is doomed to failure because it is the very operation of capital accumulation that guarantees overproduction or, what amounts to the same, underconsumption. The main thing is to create the illusion of a way out of the contradictions of capitalism that is still within the framework of capitalism.

Beginning with Keynes and his followers, the bourgeoisie have sought to re-purpose Malthus’s ideas, to transform them from being advocacy for the parasitic and regressive rentier class in the context of the ascendancy of capitalism into an argument for the welfare state and an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism during the period of capitalism’s decadence. Moreover, Malthusianism and its modern form respectively served and continue to serve as an apology for misery and starvation. It is by adapting Malthus’s argumentation that the *Economist* in 1848 justified allowing Irish peasants to starve²⁷. Similar to

26 Marx (1861-1863) *Economic Manuscripts: Theories of Surplus Value*. As cited above.

27 “...*the people, rapidly increasing, have been reduced, by acts for which they are chiefly to blame, to a sole reliance on the precarious crop of potatoes. It would be unjust to Ireland – it would be a neglect of a great duty which is imposed on us at this time – if we did not point to this calamity, assuming as it does this aggravated form, as in a great measure the natural result of that crime which has precluded the people from other available resources. That the innocent suffer with the*

Malthus, the *Economist*, the voice *par excellence* of the British bourgeoisie, argued that starvation, while unfortunate, is ultimately necessary because it acts as a check on unrestrained population growth.

The failure of Malthusian thought to account for the rate of increase of agricultural yields, or his demonstrably false view that a higher living standard is causally linked to a greater population growth rate, rather than leading to a rejection of Malthus's views have instead led to their adaptation and modernization in the form of neo-Malthusianism, which ties the growth of the human population to the destruction of the biosphere. While before, Malthus considered the relationship between population growth and increases in crop yields, which he supposed would not keep up population growth, neo-Malthusians use the concept of the *carrying capacity* of the biosphere to argue that it is necessary to reduce human population. How this reduction is achieved varies from the more benign recommendations to borderline genocidal ones. The mistake of the neo-Malthusians, of course, is to view the impact of the human population on the biosphere as dependent mainly on the size of that population, without taking into account the mode of production of society, which determines how humanity interacts with nature and therefore the impact that it has on it.

Technical solutions to environmental degradation and climate change do exist. Devices have been demonstrated that can physically remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, acting essentially as artificial plants. If several hundred million such devices were produced and distributed around the globe, it would be possible to globally regulate the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere. For comparison, in 2017 an estimated 73.5 million automobiles were produced. If capitalist society has the capacity produce hundreds of millions of cars in the span of a few years, that capacity put to rational use, which is only possible under communism, could enable solving the problem of human-caused climate change. In addition, methods have been proposed to increase albedo and, in that way, reduce global average temperature.

Given these potential technical solutions to ecological degradation, does a “Green New Deal” perhaps represent simultaneously a way out of the crisis and a way to remediate the environment, all without having to overcome capitalism? If Britain could spend around 50% of its GDP on its military during the First and Second World Wars, would not a similar commitment to tackle climate change be possible?

guilty, is a melancholy truth, but it is one of the great conditions on which all society exists. Every breach of the laws of morality and social order brings its own punishment and inconvenience.”

Don't hold your breath. The reason that the capitalists would much rather invest in armaments than major infrastructure projects is because there is a prospect of renewed capital accumulation after a major war. Military spending is not waste spending from the point of view of the bourgeoisie²⁸, whereas a Green New Deal would be.

Effectively, neo-Malthusianism serves to cover up the failure of capitalism to satisfy human needs as well as its total lack of perspective for the future, justifying poverty and austerity on the grounds that we are overburdening the Earth as a result of an inherent biological drive to proliferate, rather than as a result of the inability of capital to find profitable investment opportunities in the satisfaction of human needs. Keynes argued that it is possible to reach an equilibrium point at which there would be full employment, but the only circumstances under which that has been the case have been the world wars. Combining our impressive technical capacity with the mass of humanity that capitalism discards as a surplus population – traps in slums, and creates arguments to justify its elimination through genocide or starvation – for the purpose of providing universal access to basic necessities to every human being on the planet as well as to remediate the natural environment, would certainly allow us to attain these ends. In a communist society, a fraction of the resources that are squandered by imperialism every year on preparing for generalized world war would suffice to provide every human being with access to sanitation, water, electricity, internet, education, quality food, and leisure. .

It is none other than our outdated and harmful mode of production, which threatens to unleash war of an unprecedented scale of destruction, that prevents this from happening. The separation of the world into antagonistic nation states, the anarchic nature of production, and the contradiction between the socialized character of production and the private appropriation of the product, prevent coherent technical solutions to the ecological problem from being implemented or even seriously considered. Control of the climate becomes an inter-imperialist stake as different national bourgeoisies will prefer the global thermostat to be set at different temperatures depending on their particular interests.

As a species, we are not even close to the limits of population that the Earth could plausibly support. Food could be produced in a way that recirculates water, reducing water consumption by 95%. Energy could be obtained from nuclear fission and solar power, including by putting solar power collectors in space. Most of the material we would need, including

²⁸ Paul Mattick. *Marx and Keynes*. Page 137-138.

volatiles and metals, could be obtained in space in much greater quantity than on Earth. But while a material possibility, this cannot happen within the framework of capitalism, in which every technical and scientific advancement serves imperialism above all else. For the technical capacity to be deployed to its fullest potential towards rational and collectively decided ends, the capitalist mode of production must be overcome. In the event that this obsolete mode of production persists, it will generate misery on a progressively greater scale and pose a risk to the long term survival of the human species.

What is clear is that there are no solutions to the problems created by capitalism that are purely technical, independent of class interests that are at play. Practically, the prerequisite for implementing the technical solutions to environmental degradation and food insecurity on a scale that is of consequence

is the conscious abolition of capitalist social relations. Despite the utopian illusions in the possibility of an ecologically sound capitalism, in North America often seen as resulting from a large number of ethical individual purchase decisions or perhaps a Green New Deal, the only social force capable of fundamentally changing society is the one that daily reproduces it, the international proletariat.

By asserting its class interests, the proletariat simultaneously resists the drive to imperialist war and through its struggle gains consciousness of the objective historical need to abolish capitalism, opening the perspective of a society in which collective human ingenuity can be devoted exclusively to satisfaction of human needs while stewarding the natural environment.

Stavros, January 2019

Public Meeting of the IGCL in Toronto

We will hold a public meeting March 3rd 2019, 2 pm at the Sidney Smith Hall of the Toronto University. The agenda will be the relation between the economic crisis, the class struggle and the imperialist war.

Tribute to Comrade Peter of the International Communist Party

We want to pay tribute to Comrade Peter, member of the International Communist Party in Canada, who passed away in late 2018. We express our solidarity with his family and all the militants who struggles with him, especially the comrades of the ICPProletarian.

Some of us knew Peter and had developed fraternal and even, we can say, friendly relationships with him. Our sadness is all the greater for it.

We invite everyone to read the tribute to Comrade Peter made by his organization in *Le Prolétaire* # 530.

The IGCL.

Debate on the Union Question

We briefly mentioned the group Gulf Coast Communist Fraction in the previous issue. It published its first text in March 2018 on its website (<https://gulfoastcommunistfraction.wordpress.com/>). In the second, *The Need for Communist Fractions*, the group established its historical filiation within the framework of "the Italian Fraction Abroad (1927-1939), the French Fraction of the Communist Left (1939-1943), and the French Communist Left (1943-1952)". In close collaboration with *Workers Offensive (USA)*, under the active leadership of *Nuevo Curso (Spain)* and with the participation of the ICT and ourselves, the GCCF has since developed internal discussions so that its members can debate and define themselves more precisely on class positions and thus begin to claim the experience of the International Communist Left. In particular, the comrades published the basic positions of the group, *Towards a Points of Unity* (<https://gulfoastcommunistfraction.wordpress.com/2018/03/26/points-of-unity/>), that "all members of the fraction must agree on". We took position on this "platform" in a letter that the GCCF published on its website. In this letter, while welcoming the effort to position themselves politically as a method of clarification, we put forward some critical points and above all draw the attention of the comrades to the fact that it may be premature and artificial to require that "all members [agree]" on these points if these agreements do not result from a process of discussion, clarification and political definition to a minimum extent.

The GCCF Theses on the union question that we reproduce here are an illustration, through the political contradictions they contain, of this need for discussion, clarification and political definition within the group in connection with the whole proletarian camp. We make their publication followed by our own participation to the GCCF debate that we sent them. We are confident that the reflection on this fundamental issue will be of interest well beyond the comrades of the GCCF alone.

One clarification: the international discussion on the trade union issue is often made difficult, especially with comrades and groups in the Anglo-Saxon world, because of the closed-shop trade union system which does not exist, or only slightly, in other countries, particularly in continental Europe – especially in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, etc (with a few rare exceptions). The theses below often refer to this situation where workers are obliged to join a union in order to be hired and benefit from contracts signed by the union, whereas this is not the case in other union systems, neither for hiring nor for "benefiting" from company or branch agreements. As a result, it is often more difficult, especially for young comrades without direct experience of workers' struggle, to grasp the difference between participating in any meeting aimed at, or bringing together all employees of a particular workplace, whether in the context of a general assembly or a formal trade union meeting whether both are called or not by the unions, with the participation to the life of the trade union apparatus as such, which aims to oppose and sabotage any general workers' meeting. This difficulty is particularly apparent in these theses, especially since the discussion is obscured by the fact that some members of the GCCF were influenced, or even members, of an IWW local section... and whose local expressions are sometimes union and sometimes local leftist political groups.

Thesis on the Union Question (GCCF)

Introduction

If one observes the draft points of unity for our Fraction, they will notice a point that is glaringly absent from it: the union-question. The union-question was a significant point of contention among the members of our Fraction; some having strong unionist-sympathies, others identifying with the historical positions of the Dutch-German Left on unions, and the rest being neutral on the issue. Those members who carried unionist-sympathies were dues-paying members of the Industrial Workers of the World for a little more than a few years, though never part of an official general membership branch. For these reasons, the union-form was not dealt with in our points of unity. It wasn't until correspondence and coordination with *Workers Offensive* (based in Miami) that we further developed and solidified a position that was cleared of any unionist illusions. [1] We owe it to our discussions with *Workers Offensive* in formulating our theses.

Theses

1. A union is not simply a collection of workers united for a common goal; unions are a particular form of organization with a particular end—negotiation and enforcement of labor contracts.
2. By virtue of the properties inherent to the union-form itself, unionism can neither break with the capital-labor relationship in theory nor practice. Even the end-goal of "revolutionary" unionism—the total organization of the One Big Union—is totally limited by the presupposition of this relationship.

3. There isn't a meaningful distinction between "business" unionism and "rank and file" unionism. The division between the bureaucracy (those who negotiate/enforce contracts) and rank-and-file (those whom the contract is enforced upon) is an inevitable result of the labor contract as the defining feature of the union-form. As contracts continue to be won, "rank-and-file" unions will tend to produce a strata separate from the class itself assigned the task of negotiating/enforcing labor contracts.
4. Unions were initially a defensive form of organization during the rising phase of capitalism, but in its declining phase, the unions function as an instrument of capital regulating the price of labor-power. The few gains that could be possible within existing capitalist society are achieved by the direct confrontation of the class with the wage-labor relation, effectively expressing the negation of wage-labor, which the union-form is incapable of performing.
5. Even in terms of reformist ends, it has become increasingly apparent that the union-form is unsuitable for organizing workers in fighting for short-term demands, especially in the service sector. With the casualization of work and intensifying precarity, unions are incapable of protecting the interests of labor even as a mere factor of capital.
6. Communists should focus on organizing workplace cells that don't bind themselves to contracts with the employer as an alternative defensive organ of the class.
7. In cases of workplaces that are already unionized, it would be foolish for communists to abstain from participating in the unions of their own workplaces, as such a policy would leave the rank-and-file to the unchecked assaults of the leadership, thus ruining the possibility of a revolutionary minority having a presence in the workplace.
8. In cases where the majority of workers in a given workplace have decided to unionize, it would, again, be foolish for communists to abstain from this process in their own workplaces.
9. Though communists should join the rank-and-file in many cases, they should always refrain from becoming a part of the leadership.
10. Whether inside or outside of the unions, concomitant with the increasing self-organization of the class, the overall task for communists is to struggle against the unions as an instrument of capital.
11. The IWW is not an adequate counter-example to the Marxist critiques of unionism. On the national level, the contemporary IWW is not a union, it is, for the most part, a counter-cultural civic association.
12. In the majority of the GMBs, the IWW does not function as a union, but more as a general leftist political group that utilizes an eclectic form of organization. The Burgerville Workers Union is one of the few IWW branches that does function as a union, and the critique of unionism applies to it just as much as "business" unions.
13. The Burgerville Workers Union doesn't prove that widespread unionization of the service sector is possible, but demonstrates how unionization, in a specific context, can function as a public relations niche akin to "fair trade".
14. We affirm the thesis that the downfall of the old IWW was due to its failure to recognize itself as a political party, which has implications for today.[2] If anything, the contemporary IWW is limiting itself by positing industrial unionism as its end-goal, whereas we would encourage it to continue refocusing itself on solidarity networks and overt political struggle.
15. Depending on the particular GMB, limited coordination with the IWW in certain struggles is not out of the question for us.

The GCCF, July 2018.

Comments on the GCCF's Thesis on the Union Question

The Gulf Coast Communist Fraction has published Theses on the Union Question that we want to comment on here. As the introduction clarifies, the members of the GCCF were in disagreement on this question and obviously it is through an internal discussion that these Theses have been adopted. The fact that they contain some contradictions, even within individual points, illustrates that they can only be a transitory statement that the group will have to

overcome if it wants to develop a coherent intervention toward the working class struggles. Nevertheless, the fact that these comrades have not hesitated to publish this text despite the conditions of its realization and its limits is to be saluted and supported. The following critical comments aim to develop the reflection and discussion on this question not only among the comrades of the GCCF but among the whole international proletarian camp.

For us, the main weakness of this document is that there is no historical approach on the Union question, except a short mention in point 4. We warmly salute the fact that, since their publication, the GCCF agreed with this critical comment : "*When we published our 'These on the Union Question', our close associates from Nuevo Curso pointed out that there was something missing in our theses: a historical explication of how the union-form went from a defensive organ of the working class to an instrument fully integrated into capital.*" (*Introduction to B. Peret on the History of Unions*²⁹). As a result of this lack, each point of the Theses is stated in abstract without being related to the reality of the class struggle, that is to say that they tend to consider the capital-labour relation only as an economic relation and not as basically a political one.

Even though, for our part, we don't share the theoretical explanation that the German and Dutch Left provided for its denunciation of the unions, it is nevertheless the case that it was the first political current that "felt" that the unions had historically "died" as unitary organs of the proletariat and that they have passed to the service of the capitalist state. Thus, most of the work of criticizing and denouncing the unions was developed by it. In particular, Anton Pannekoek, both in the 1920s when he still defended and supported the Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks and the International, and in the 1930s when he became one of the most famous theoreticians of councilism, wrote important texts that are still worth reading and discussing today. In his article *Trade Unionism*³⁰ (1936), he begins by making a short history of the unions and the working class struggle in relation to capitalism's development. While in a prior historical period, the working class could oppose with some efficiency the ruling class in a single corporation or industry because it was essentially opposing "one boss" or one industrial fraction of the bourgeoisie, the conditions of the working class struggle changed so that these kind of "industrial" or "corporation" struggles were no longer efficient: "*The reason is obvious. An isolated group of workers might be equal to a fight against an isolated capitalist employer. But an isolated group of workers against an employer backed by the whole capitalist class is powerless. And such is the case here: the state power, the money power of capitalism, public opinion of the middle class, excited by the capitalist press, all attack the group of fighting workers.*"³¹

29 . <https://gulfoastcommunistfraction.wordpress.com/2018/09/23/benjamin-peret-on-the-history-of-unions/>

30 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1936/union.htm>

31 . The French version of the Pannekoek's quotation of *Trade Unionism* is a little different since it does not speak of the

This point is very important because it underlines the fact that, in relation to capitalism's development and domination of the whole society, the working class was confronting an increasingly united ruling class whose main expression is the capitalist state. This phenomenon, already underway in the late 19th Century, was incredibly accelerated during the 1st World War because of the needs of the war itself. It is particularly during the imperialist war and because of it that the capitalist state develops a totalitarian character up to the point of invading and occupying all the dimensions of social life and integrating all the different organizations of this social existence – that is what we call *state capitalism*, which cannot be reduced merely to its economic measures and policies. It is useless to explain here how *state capitalism*, particularly under its democratic form or regime, is now ruling and powerful as never before. For the proletariat and its historical as well as immediate struggles, the development of *state capitalism* to date has two main consequences:

- the permanent proletarian "spaces" and mass organizations on which the working class struggles were based, whether parties or unions (or still the *Bourses du travail*³²), disappeared or were "incorporated" by the state. Of course, this was an historical process that lasted decades but whose crucial date can be fixed in August 1914, the declaration of the 1st World War, and definitively closed with the following imperialist war that began in 1939, if not earlier;

- the occupation by the state of all the dimensions, or spaces, of social life means that its totalitarian character – very far from being limited to its fascist and stalinist regimes – prevents any permanent proletarian "life", that is a permanent and mass opposition to bourgeois ideology and politics, except during the massive class mobilizations.

Therefore, and since then, except during a few massive working class mobilizations and revolutionary periods, the proletariat can no longer organize itself in permanent unitary organizations, that is organizations that gather all the workers of a

workers powerlessness but of the "union powerlessness" :
« *L'impuissance du syndicalisme n'a rien de surprenant, car si un groupe isolé de travailleurs peut apparaître dans un juste rapport de force lorsqu'il s'oppose à un patronat isolé, il est impuissant face à un employeur qui est soutenu par l'ensemble de la classe capitaliste.* »
(https://bataillesocialiste.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/pannekoek_19360100.pdf)

32 . *Camera del lavoro* in Italian, *Bolsa del trabajo* in Spanish, that is the geographical or local organization of the unions distinct but complementary to the factory and industrial unions, particularly at the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th.

given factory, industry, city or country, independently of their political positioning, whether they are unions, or general assemblies, or strike committees or workers' councils. Once the struggle is over, these organizations disappear or, if they persist, are integrated by the state – generally as a new radical or rank and file union. The same goes for proletarian political parties: there can no longer be mass parties akin to the German Social-Democratic Party but only minority communist parties even during the revolutionary period.

Thus, from this introduction, one can easily deduce that, for us, the theses are reductive, and even weaken, the revolutionary understanding and approach on the Union question today. Let's now see the Theses one by one.

Theses 1 and 2

The these 1 states that the unions have "*a particular end – negotiations and enforcement of labor contracts*" while the these 2 claims, abstractly – that is without any historical approach or reference –, that "*by virtue of the properties inherent to the union-form itself, unionism can neither break with the capital-labor relationship in theory nor practice*".

Already on these points alone, we would have a lot of comments, rectifications and elaborations to make. Let's focus on the main ones. The theses reduce the function of the unions to the economic dimension, that of negotiations of labour contracts. Thus, it ignores Marx's quotation according to which "*the trade unions are the schools for Socialism, the workers are there educated up to Socialism by means of the incessant struggle against capitalism which is being carried on before their eyes*"³³. Therefore, he did not see the role of the unions limited to the economic dimension but extended to the political and historical dimensions. So, the assertion according to which the union, "*by virtue of its [form] properties*", is inadequate to break "*in theory*" with the capital-labour relationship is not valid³⁴. According to these

points, the unions cannot break with capitalism due to their "form"; and not because of their function and place in the class struggle **as unitary organization of the class** in the past or **as... fully political organs of the capitalist state** as they clearly are today. However, in both cases their fundamental function and action is mainly... political because "*every class struggle is a political struggle*" (*Communist Manifesto*).

These 3

It rejects any "*meaningful distinction between "business" unionism and "rank and file" unionism*", which is correct in itself. But we don't understand exactly what distinction is made in this point. Certainly, is it due to the American closed-shop system. Consistent with the first two points, the short denunciation of rank and file unionism is also limited to solely the union organizational form and ignores its main political function: to control the most militant proletarians and to derail any collective expression of struggle onto the bourgeois political ground.

These 4

It deals with two different questions. The first one, even though still with the single negotiating role of the unions, attempts to get an historical understanding of the union question and makes a distinction of function between "*the rising and declining phases of capitalism*". We only can encourage this historical methodology to discuss and clarify any questions and positions of the communist program. The second sentence has the virtue of calling for the "*direct confrontation of the class with the wage-labor relation, effectively expressing the negation of wage-labor*". However, the second part can be very confusing. Not only does this part pass in silence over the direct, concrete and material, confrontation against the ruling class and the state – the political class struggle – but it also introduces an idea that class confrontation should express the negation of wage-labour. If this assertion is understood as meaning that the proletarian revolutionary struggle, its class struggle, expresses historically the negation of wage-labour, we can in itself, abstractly, agree with it. If it is understood as the rejection of any wage or material demands for the proletariat's daily conditions, then we are fully opposed and will fight against this vision – which is often put forward by those currents that we call *modernist*.

These 5

Despite the fact that it remains within the same *economist* vision of the unions, we agree that the unions are "*unsuitable for organizing workers in*

politique, tous les travailleurs conscients de la lutte à mener pour la disparition du salariat et du patronat" »]

33 . Marx's interview by Hamann published in *Volkstaat* in 1869 and reproduced by *La révolution prolétarienne* #26 in 1926 and *La critique sociale* in 2008 : <http://www.critique-sociale.info/94/entretien-de-karl-marx-avec-j-hamann/>. See also the mention of this interview in English in <https://libcom.org/library/communism-has-not-yet-begun-section-one-marx-engels-perspective-socialism-claude-bitot>.

34 . By the way, many unions of the past, particularly revolutionary unionism, have broken with capitalist social relations at the theoretical and "programmatic" level. See for instance the 1905 "program" of the French mass union CGT: "*The Congress of Amiens confirms the article 2, principle of the CGT* : 'the CGT regroups, outside any political school, all the workers who are conscious of the struggle to lead for the disappearance of wage labour and of the bosses ' [*« Le Congrès confédéral d'Amiens confirme l'article 2, constitutif de la CGT* : "La CGT groupe, en dehors de toute école

fighting for short-term demands". Of course, we add "nowadays", "in our historical period". Thus, it is not solely because of their form. For instance, the union form, namely that of one of the local unions, the *Camera del lavoro*, did not prevent it from playing an active role during the development of the mass strike in Italy in 1919 and 1920 :

" In Florence, as in dozens of other cities, it is still at the Camera del lavoro and 'workers' cooperatives' that the requisitioned goods (food, shoes, cloth) are carried in trucks with red flags on them. And it is the Camera del lavoro that decides to reopen the stores after imposing price reductions of 50 to 70%. In hundreds of cities, the Camera del lavoro and 'people's committees', 'requisition committees', 'price commissions' carry out requisitions, set prices, maintain order in the shopping streets where militants patrol to avoid vandalism » (Italie 1919-1920 les deux années rouges, Bruno Paleni, Les bons caractères, 2011).

Theses 6 to 10

They deal with the question of the communists' intervention and behaviour regarding the union. There is the difficulty of the differences between the "closed-shop" union system and the other union systems³⁵.

First of all, according to us, the communists, whether as political group and the party, or as individual workers in their workplace, have to attempt to intervene as much as they can and everywhere they can. Whether a meeting or an assembly is called by a union or not, whether it is within the union framework and organization or not, imposed or not by the closed-shop system, does not change the fact that the revolutionaries should always try to intervene if they can address the "mass" of the workers and call on them to prepare and organize... the struggle – or at least make propaganda and oppose the bosses' and unions' campaigns and ideologies. It is obviously this right concern that these Theses argue for and develop.

35 . It is important to point out that some points of the Theses refer to the specific characteristics of the unions "system" that prevails mainly in North American countries and Great Britain, the so-called "closed-shop", which differs from the European ones, particularly the ones predominating in Italy, France and Spain – to give the main examples. Often this difference makes the international discussion on the Union question difficult with misunderstandings because the immediate conditions of the revolutionaries' intervention in their workplace may appear different. The fact that, as their fellow workers, they often need to be unionized to get the job, may confuse the discussion on their intervention and relation with the union framework. It is beyond the scope of this text to deeply address this question but the key point is that today the communists have to break with the union's ideology and practice in their workplace whether they are constrained to be unionized or not.

As such, we support and agree with them. We also agree that the communist workers as well as the political communist groups should try to *"organize workplace cells"* every time and in every place they can.

We would like to particularly comment on these 7. *"In cases of workplaces that are already unionized, it would be foolish for communists to abstain from participating in the unions of their own workplaces, as such a policy would leave the rank-and-file to the unchecked assaults of the leadership, thus ruining the possibility of a revolutionary minority having a presence in the workplace"*. First, this point posits a specific "tactic" to adopt with the already unionized workplaces of the "closed-shop" system. As it is raised here, this question does not exist in the other systems. We don't understand what the thesis means, or refers to, when it talks of *"participating in the unions"*. If it is participating in the meetings open to all workers that the local union may organize, indeed we agree. If it means participating in the unions' internal apparatus life, then we'll disagree because it would be developing and maintaining not only the "unions' credibility" in the eyes of the workers on the grounds that "they are places where we can discuss", but also because it would be developing and participating actively in an "internal union life" that can only be contrary to the workers' struggles, even the smallest ones.

Then, this participation is argued for because otherwise it would be abandoning the rank-and-file to the union leadership. But what is rank-and-file ? The these 3 already mentioned rank-and-file... *unionism*. If this thesis mentions this rank-and-file, that is any kind or "radical", militant, base, unionism that exists everywhere in the world, the task of the revolutionaries is not to support them, or prevent them from being "defeated" by the union leadership, but to fight against the illusions it carries and the sabotages and traps it sets up against the working class struggles. Thus, certainly because comrades of the GCCF are still close to the IWW, this point calls for defending the rank-and-file unionism that the these 3 has denounced as pure unionism and whose form can't defend the proletarians' interest or struggle according to the whole theses. We can see in this point how an abstract and formal criticism of the unions can quickly lead to concessions to radical unionism – even more dangerous when its militants are sincere and honest as well as taking personal risks – and be useless, if not opposed, to the development of the workers' struggles and consciousness toward the concrete dangers of **unionism**, which can't be reduced to just the unions' leadership, who often lack credibility among the most militant workers, but are

borne by the most radical rank-and-file unionism whose main function, political one, is to bring back the workers to the "union ground and policy"³⁶.

This confusion about rank-and-file unionism is repeated again in the these 9, which makes a clear difference between it and the leadership while, in our opinion, the communists have precisely and on the contrary to underline and clarify the fact that rank-and-file and any radical unionism, whatever is its form and expression, **is the indispensable complement to the unions' leadership** so that it and the whole capitalist state apparatus can control and sabotage the daily working class struggles, as well as the revolutionary ones, and derail the workers from their class struggles and ground.

Before concluding, we fully agree with the these 11 on the IWW. The theses 12 to 15 are specific to the local situation and IWW practice. They are difficult to understand precisely. While these points seem to see the IWW as, in practice, a leftist group (these 12), the last point leaves the door open to some "cooperation" with some General Membership Branch, the local section, of the IWW, which is politically contradictory and even dangerous if one understands clearly, as the Communist Left does, that leftism is fully part of the capitalist political forces addressing particularly the working class struggles for the sake of the capitalist state.

Finally, it appears that these theses are an attempt of synthesis between different basic class, proletarian and capitalist (leftist), positions, the latter influenced by immediate and local unionist practices. The result is that they don't just express political confusions but above all actually present political concessions to unionism. We think it is important to insist on the need to break not only with the "official union" or union leadership and bureaucrats, but with *unionism* as a whole, its ideology and its practice as expressed particularly by the so-called radical and militant rank-and-file unionism whose militants are often leftists or influenced by leftism. Unions are nowadays entirely organs of the capitalist state and unionism has also become a capitalist ideology and practice against the working class struggle. To really and deeply break with unionism, it is important to not repeat the... German Left and the KAPD experience: while being, apparently and superficially, very radically against the unions, it never really broke with unionism as such. While its main slogan of that time, since 1920, was

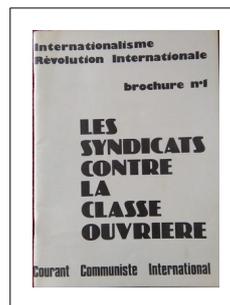
36 . Among so many examples in the working class struggles of crucial derailing and sabotaging actions of the radical and rank-and-file unions, since the 1960s, one can refer to our balance-sheet of the railway workers struggle in France of 2018 and the "radical" action of the French union SUD in our journal *Revolution or War* #10 (<http://igcl.org/Rapid-Assessment-of-The-Spring>).

the radical "leave the unions!", it finally called and set up the AAUD (Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands) and AAUE (Allgemeine Arbeiter Union-Einheitsorganization) that actually were... new unions, radical and "democratic" ones for sure, but still unions. That's an important experience that has been particularly criticized by other Left fractions, which we should discuss and refer to.

In our opinion, the key point for adopting and developing a clear position and practice in regard to the daily and historical working class struggles and in relation to the unions' opposition to them, is to keep in mind and draw the political consequences and meanings of the very fact that the class struggle is a political struggle, and that the proletariat is always confronted by the state apparatus. This experience comes from Marx and Engels' struggle against *political indifferentism* and anarchism, Lenin's against *Economism*, Rosa Luxemburg's against revisionism within the German socialist party and trade-union – see particularly *Mass Strike, Party and Union* –, the Communist Party of Italy's (and Bordiga's) against Gramsci's fetishism of the workers councils³⁷, up to the one that we have to lead today against modern *Economism*, that is what we call *Councilism*, and modern anarchist political indifferentism.

The IGCL, October 29th 2018.

French Reprinting of the ICC Pamphlet *Unions Against the Working Class*



For our readers from North America, we have reprinted the ICC pamphlet in French *Unions Against the Working Class* in French that it is difficult to find on this continent and which was written in 1976. It is also available in English. Even though our group, the IGCL, does not necessarily claim all the arguments and positions of this pamphlet, we think it is an historical document which matters to make known by the young generations and which can serve as a "programmatic" reference for today's communist groups.

37 . Bordiga, *Seize Power or Seize Factory* : <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1920/seize-power.htm> or *Revolution or War* #5 : <http://igcl.org/Seize-Power-or-Seize-the-Factory>.

Debate within the Proletarian Camp

How is the Historical Alternative Revolution or War Presenting itself?

We draw the attention of readers, sympathizers and political groups claiming the Communist Left to the importance of the text of the Internationalist Communist Tendency that we publish here. Unfortunately, due to its length, we can only publish excerpts from it in the printed version of this journal. We refer the "paper" readers to our web page where it is reproduced in full – or on the web pages of the ICT³⁸. The cuts we have selected concern only the first and main part of the text on the economic crisis of capital. We have retained here only those passages which, in addition to providing the general elements explaining the economic impasse of capitalism since the late 1960s, highlight the link between the capital crisis and imperialist war. This last point is fundamental, particularly today, because the relationship between the two, crisis and war, has become particularly close to the point that it is now the direct determinant of the evolution of the situation, of these major tendencies, and particularly the extent, conditions and forms of the class struggle that capital leads against labour, the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. This is why, in broad terms, this article of the ICT should serve as a theoretical and political reference for reflection, debate and clarification of the current historical issues.

In its second part, the ICT text puts forward some elements to understand what is the most probable term of the historical capitalist alternative, generalized imperialist war or international proletarian revolution, while rejecting the idea, rightly so, that the course of the events, their dynamics, is mechanical and automatic. Some readers may wonder about the usefulness of such a concern in trying to "predict the most likely perspective" by thinking that it is useless to enter into speculation about the future and that it is enough to remain clear and firm on class positions, on internationalism in particular. However, denouncing the capitalist alternative in itself, abstractly, without any link to the real evolution of the situation and class antagonisms, is not enough. In this case, the revolutionary minorities, the political vanguards, the party, will remain at the tail of the events, they'll be late because they won't understand how the alternative is expressed in practice, in the confrontation between the classes, as the events unfold, or even by not grasping any possible reversals of the dynamics, and will thus be unable to successfully navigate through the storms of the upcoming historical drama.

It is precisely this point of the article that we wanted to support at the outset, as a political concern, and that we wanted to debate in the face of formulations that seem imprecise to us. But... during our internal discussion, we realized that this article of the ICT actually raises even more important questions about the party-class relationship and the very dynamics of proletarian struggle that we already raised in the previous issue of the journal (Some comments on the ICT text³⁹). That is why we forward this ICT text with critical comments. One last point: in our opinion, these differences are fully within the political framework of the proletarian camp, within the party in the making and, as such, our critical observations are intended to be fraternal and only aim at the general political reinforcement. That goes without saying, but it is better that it is said...

A Decade Since the Financial Crash (ICT)

The world economy is in poor shape and the American economy is in even worse condition. The 2008 crisis has not been resolved and many analysts fear a new financial explosion. Capital continues to stay clear of investment in production and is trying to recover without running up more debts. Company returns are low, profit rates are decreasing. Capital is moving more and more into speculation. It is the same old situation, except that the rescue costs of the previous crisis cannot be repeated in the next crisis. The sound of war can be heard in the distance, accompanied by the rising threat of a new, catastrophic barbarism. (...)

The great recession of 2007-8 and the subsequent

long depression which still continues, have weakened the overall economic framework. The global capitalist economy remains stagnant, with a low rate of productivity growth. Trade flows are slowing down and, above all, the profitability of productive capital has not improved. Meanwhile cooperation has been replaced by increasingly cruel competition (see Trump's tariff policy). According to World Bank economists' projections, world economic growth is expected to fall to 2.9% by 2020 and, therefore, the long depression that began in 2008 not only has not ended but will continue with its dangerous toll of trade wars, economic wars and increasingly violent and widespread wars of plunder.

38 . <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-01-22/a-decade-since-the-financial-crash>.

39 . <http://igcl.org/Some-Comments-and-Observations-on>.

In the USA, the public debt that in 2007 was about \$9tn (75% of GDP) had reached \$19.2tn by 2016, 105% of GDP⁴⁰. In recent years, under Trump, this has only increased and in future it will be even worse. (...).

This is how wars, which have never stopped since 1945, reflect the growing tension between the US and the other imperialist powers. Today competition is increasing on all fronts – manufacturing and industrial, commercial, monetary, and strategic – and is turning into open military confrontation. The motor force is still the economic/financial crisis. The crisis of profitability, which brings lower returns on manufacturing investment, generates more and more speculation. This in its turn has generated an immense mound of financial liabilities which bring the additional danger that an increase in US interest rates will spark an irreparable debt crisis and provoke another, much worse, world crisis than the one which the optimists define as already a thing of the past. (...)

Here then is the only way capital can try to get out of the economic and financial crisis in the short term: competitive devaluations, speculation, import duties, more intense exploitation of the workforce, dismantling of the welfare state. In the long run, however, only a substantial destruction of capital values can resolve the crisis in the profitability of capital. It is no accident that in the Second World War it was the productive sectors which were most devastated. Afterwards this allowed US imperialism to invest productively in renewed infrastructures and reconstruction of European industrial plants located mainly in Italy, France, Germany and even Japan. Moreover, the US was able to export its surplus financial capital to key economic sectors of the defeated countries. (...).

From a political perspective, beyond the need to analyse what is going on in the world, it must be firmly stated that the crisis is not an accident, an inevitable natural disaster or some sort of divine curse. It is the product of the existing mode of production, of a global capitalism which is in a deep economic crisis from which it cannot escape; which is generating a mountain of financial ‘paper wealth’ 12-14 times the world gross domestic product⁴¹; which

40 . According to J Rickards, by November 2018 the United States debt had reached roughly \$21.6 trillion. However, this figure can oscillate widely according to changing estimates of individual states’ pension fund obligations and their projected stock market valuations! dailyreckoning.com

41 . According to the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), in 2013 global financial activity generated \$993tn, compared to the estimated \$75tn value of global GDP. “... of this \$993tn only \$283tn can be classified as ‘primary’ finance such as shares, bank credit, etc. The remaining \$710tn are derivative products, exchanged outside of the regular markets with only a very small fraction of these transactions having any link to

is fleeing from production to devote itself to the palliative of speculation because profit margins in the real economy are no longer sufficient for productive investments. In short, it is the fall in the rate of profit which accelerates capitalist competition and the clash between imperialisms.

In this context the tendency to war is not a warning, but the concrete reality of all international relations and a state of affairs which involves all the main imperialist powers of the planet in various places in the world.

It is a situation that can only be resolved by going to the heart of the contradiction that underlies the entire capitalist edifice, that is, the relationship between capital and labour. In no way can the problem be solved in terms of redistribution, as the more or less radical reformists always suppose, but only by building a position of strength in the struggle between classes and therefore of political leadership in the form of the class political party. Such a party will call for a break in the contradiction of capitalism itself in order to lay the political and economic foundations for the construction of a new society, a society that is no longer based on the labour capital ratio, not aimed at maximising profit, without the wars that create destruction in order to rebuild, without the existence of classes which presuppose the economic and political dominance of one over the other. In other words, a society of associated producers who work and build for collective needs, where everyone contributes according to their particular skills and abilities. Otherwise it will still be barbarism, destruction and death for millions of proletarians; victims, first of exploitation, then of the war that must recreate the conditions for the production of profit itself. There is no other solution. Either the world proletariat will succeed in escaping from the cages of nationalism, from the thousand triggers for war that imperialism sets every day, or a bursting of one of the many speculative bubbles – possibly stemming from the Federal Reserve putting up interest rates – will be enough to intensify and generalise the tragedy of existing wars and turn the world into a gigantic cemetery.

Either War or Revolution

Either war, with its heavy burden of death, destruction and barbarism, or the revolution where the proletariat takes on the task of giving life to a new equitable, communal and human social frame. But for this to happen a strong international party is required to remove wage workers from the dominant thought

the real economy.” Report by Marco Panara, ‘Finanza, un trilione di dollari che soffoca l’economia reale’ in *La Repubblica*, 27 October, 2014.

of the ruling class, stuffed as it is with provincialism, nationalism, racism: as if these trappings of bourgeois ideology were, in any case, the pole star for the whole humanity. It is vital to undermine and demolish the dominant ideology of the ruling class, to begin to pose the question of a class-to-class frontal clash, to present an alternative to this system which can only exploit, produce crises, devastate the eco-system, bring disastrous wars which only herald worse imperialist conflicts that will allow for the destruction of enough capital value to rebuild, to create the conditions for a new cycle of accumulation. This in turn would inevitably have the same problems as before, but with an even greater capacity to destroy the world along with a proletariat unable to find the strength to prevent yet another barbarism. For our part, we are doing everything we can to stop this from ever happening.

The “dualism” of war or revolution is not an invention of the god Mars or the rebellious Prometheus in chains. There is no historical course that necessarily leads to war or revolution. The world will go towards war or revolution, not because history is already written in the Great Book, but only as the result of the balance of power between the ruling class and the subordinate class. And this is not written anywhere except in the consciousness of those who work in one direction or another. There are no historical courses leading to one side or the other. The only valid yardstick is to evaluate the balance of power between the classes, the economic underpinning that conditions their existence, the ideologies which dominate them, and the signals that come from one class or the other. If we were to venture a hypothesis today, on the basis of current elements, we should say that the war “solution” is the most probable. This is because in the current state of affairs the balance of power is on the side of the various imperialist bourgeoisies. Each of them attacks their proletariat by means of greater exploitation, by punishing job contracts, by increasing relative and absolute poverty. They make and break the most absurd governments by supporting them or letting them fall according to their own contingent interests. Abroad, that is, outside of their economic market, under the pressure of the crisis, they set up theatres of war, mostly fought by proletarians in the area under contention. It does not matter whether the proletarians are Kurds or Arabs, Shiites or Sunnis. The important thing is that they are being dragged into the ideological mechanisms of this or that imperialism and that they act as cannon fodder for the sole benefit of the interests of the imperialism that has ideologically subjugated them.

As regards the proletariat, the opposite is true. They

rarely oppose the economic attacks and the increasingly humiliating conditions of life that their respective bourgeoisies force upon them. We live in a period when the crisis is so deep that the margins for successful demands which once characterised the daily struggle are narrowed. Today workers struggle not so much for a wage increase, but for the most elementary social rights, such as housing and better conditions of life and improved services. When workers take to demonstrating in the streets, they do so to defend themselves from the attacks of the bourgeoisie. They do so to keep their jobs, to stop their factory being displaced by some other service or from being moved abroad, where another army of desperate people is ready to be exploited under worse conditions. This is the picture, the snapshot that makes us say that the current balance of power between the classes inclines us to consider the possibility of an even worse war in terms of intensity of destruction and the involvement of the international proletarian masses. But things do not always go as the snapshot of the moment suggests. Over a longer time frame, it is not the instant picture but an ongoing movie that could change the story. In other words, the balance of power between the classes can change during the course of events.

Let us not forget the October revolution which had the strength to express itself in the middle of the First World War. Then too there was a world economic crisis, the various European proletariats were under the banners of their respective imperialisms, nationalism was raging worldwide, yet the Russian proletariat raised its head, opposed the carnage of war, fought for the revolution against the barbarism of imperialism behind and with its party, its tactics and its communist strategy.

Then came isolation from other revolutionary experiences in Europe and the enormous economic retreat encouraged the forces of the counter-revolution, even within the Bolshevik party itself.

So the revolutionaries do not simply have the task of analysing how things are going, whether by a pre-determined destiny or by a whim of the gods, but of studying the economic and social situation as the capitalist crisis unfurled. Revolutionary communists have the task of creating the subjective conditions for the revolution, not in opposition to the balance of power between the classes, but in harmony with any sudden, unexpected changes in those same power relations which could signal a change of direction. Amongst the subjective goals that revolutionaries must aim for is the building of the international communist party without which any change of course in the relationship between classes, any resumption of the class struggle would end up with no day-to-day

tactic or strategy for achieving an alternative to capitalism. The proletariat would still be stuck ploughing the same tragic capitalist furrow, that generator of all crises and wars. Here too the October revolution taught us a great lesson. Without the Bolshevik party, tens of millions of peasants and millions of workers would have turned away from any revolutionary solution and would have been re-absorbed into the mystical nationalistic climate. What

followed is part of another aspect of history that we could call “revolution and counter-revolution”. Today we are faced with “war or revolution”, learning the lessons from the past which led to the victory of the Russian proletariat and identifying the adverse conditions and consequent errors that accelerated its defeat.

ICT, December 2nd 2018

**About the ICT text, *A Decade since the Financial Crash*:
The Question of the "Historical Course", the Dynamics of the Workers' Struggles
and... the Role of the Party**

As we announced in the presentation of the ICT text, we want to focus on the second part of the text *A Decade since the Financial Crash*, the very part that addresses the perspective of war and the historical alternative of *international proletarian revolution or generalized imperialist war*. We will start with a first clarification to enable to deal with the alternative and the current historical perspective by using the same terms and try to avoid misunderstandings. In several of its recent articles on imperialist conflicts, particularly in Syria, the ICT tends not to distinguish clearly enough between current local imperialist wars and a generalized imperialist war, the World War; it tends to present the latter as a mere continuity of the former, as an accumulation of local wars intensifying and spreading without taking into account enough, in our view, the difference in quality between them, the leap or the historical rupture that the World War's outbreak requires: in the Middle East, "... we can only conclude that we are already in the midst of a 'bizarre' world war where, apart from a few exceptions, notably China, the major imperialist antagonists are already colliding in one of the world's most important strategic zones. It is no figment of the imagination to think that the next financial crash (...) will lead to an even worse economic situation worldwide and bring with it the danger of more generalised war through an intensification of current wars or the outbreak of new ones".

Yet, the fact that the main imperialist powers confront each other in local imperialist wars has been a constant since the Second World War, as the article itself clearly points out. However, we have not experienced an uninterrupted world war since 1945 – by the way, the article does not say that. In "local" imperialist wars, the main powers only confront in external theatres, often through local secondary imperialisms. And when they intervene directly like the United States in Iraq or Russia in Syria, their armed forces do not clash directly; to the point that

military staffs warn each other of their air operations in Syria to avoid inadvertently shooting each other. In a world war, the situation is quite different: the main powers confront each other directly and... on their own territories. This distinction is important in order to be able to understand the consequences of both for the international proletariat, as expressions and results of the relation of forces between the classes, and to be able to determine the axes of orientation and intervention of the revolutionaries.

The Question of the "Historical Course"

"There is no historical course that necessarily leads to war or revolution. The world will go towards war or revolution, not because history is already written in the Great Book, but only as the result of the balance of power between the ruling class and the subordinate class" (A Decade since...). We agree with that such as it is written.

The notion of *historical course* is one of the main historical debates between two of the main currents of the Communist Left since the early 1970s: the one of the PCint-Battaglia Comunista, the IBRP – now the ICT – and the one embodied by the historical ICC. Today's formal ICC is totally disqualified from participating in this debate insofar as it liquidated the very basis of the concept of the historical course, the alternative war or revolution in favour of a third way, that of decomposition, at its 15th International Congress in 2003⁴². The concept of historical course aims to enable the communist groups, and the party, to define the dominant dynamic of a given period, the one that ultimately determines the pace and stakes of the development of class struggle and on which they

42 . See in the *Communist Bulletin* #21 of the Internal Fraction of the ICC : *"The economic crisis (...) continues to deepen. But contrary to the 1968 to 1989 period when the outcome of the class contradictions couldn't be but war or revolution, the new period opens the way to a third possibility: the destruction of humanity not through an apocalyptic war, but through a gradual advance of the decomposition"* (Resolution on the international situation, ICC, 15th Congress of 2003, http://fractioncommuniste.org/ficci_eng/b21/index-2.html).

draw the orientations and slogans of their intervention. In the 1970s, the ICC had tried to take it up again, but without understanding its full method. It had adopted a position based on the rise, real and exciting in itself, of the workers' struggles following 1968. It defined the historical course, the perspective, as being *"toward revolution"*. The youth and immaturity of most of the members of this organization, marked by the 1968 student movement and *councilism*, the absence of an "organic" link with the Communist Left organizations of the past, as well as the absence of theoretical and political re-appropriation by this emerging ICC, made this "forecast" widely understood and presented as mechanical, automatic, and it very quickly became a dogma for many articles in its press and for many of its members.

It was only after the conferences called by the PCint-BC and the debates that took place then, and more particularly thanks to the criticisms of BC, that the ICC changed its position from "course toward revolution" to "course toward massive confrontations between the classes" which, depending on their outcome, would determine and open up more broadly the dominant dynamic either towards generalized imperialist war or towards a revolutionary period. By adopting this change, the ICC was moving closer to the Marxist method by putting the class struggle back at the centre of the analysis and intervention as *"the only valid yardstick (...) to evaluate the balance of power between the classes, the economic underpinning that conditions their existence, the ideologies which dominate them, and the signals that come from one class or the other"* as the ICT article rightly points out.

It would be useless today to defend the label "historical course" as such. What interests us here is what the ICT article advances on this issue for the current period. After reaffirming once again that *"there are no historical courses leading to one side or the other"*, it nevertheless considers that *"if we were to venture an hypothesis today, on the basis of the current elements, we should say that the war 'solution' is the most probable"*. This is precisely what needs to be discussed and clarified today in order to arm the entire proletarian camp, the revolutionary forces, the Communist Left and its organizations, the new sympathisers who join it at the world level, in the face of the situation that is coming – or rather the situation that is now opening up – and the historical and immediate responsibilities of *the party in the making*. For example, depending on whether we consider more probable the perspective of class confrontations – which we think and specify below – or that of generalized war, the understanding

of the movement of the yellow vests marked by its "nationalist" and "popular" characteristics is not the same: either it expresses a moment of awakening of the great masses to proletarian struggle and to the fight against capitalism in France; or a moment of ideological defeat for the proletariat and march toward war as expressed by the similar raising of the French tricolor flag in the workers' demonstrations in the 1930s. Needless to say here the importance of either understanding for the concrete intervention to be developed in one case or the other.

What is the Most "Probable" Perspective?

How does the ICT article argue its "greater probability"? *"This is the picture, the snapshot that makes us say that the current balance of power between the classes inclines us to consider the possibility of an even worse war in terms of intensity of destruction and the involvement of the international proletarian masses. But things do not always go as the snapshot of the moment suggests. Over a longer time frame, it is not the instant picture but an ongoing movie that could change the story. In other words, the balance of power between the classes can change during the course of events"*. Now, it seems to us that the article is arguing, or reasoning, in reverse. The formula bases probability on a *snapshot*, i.e. on an immediate and static moment, and not on the *movie*, i.e. on the dynamics, on the facts in movement.

For our part, it seems to us that the most probable perspective should be based on the *movie* – even if we do not know the end of it – and not on this or that *snapshot*, by trying to bring together all the elements of the historical situation, and in the first place, those of the class struggle. We believe that the "most likely" perspective is that of massive confrontations between classes and not that of a generalized imperialist war **before these class confrontations**. To tell the truth, we believe that we are entering directly into this *period or phase*, if only because the capitalist class is forced, because of the acuteness of the crisis and the presence of the imperialist war (as a perspective), to redouble its economic and political attacks against the international proletariat. Depending on the class that will emerge "victorious" – in general and historical terms – from these confrontations, one of the two terms of the alternative will become dominant and will largely and, especially in the final instance, determine the dynamics of the events.

In both cases, a dynamic, or a process, for sure contradictory, will impose itself and can only be broken by an "accident", by any contingency, by a factor exogenous to the process of the events themselves. While rejecting any automatic vision, one

can think that if the proletariat were to suffer a series of significant political and bloody defeats in the image and dimensions of those it had successively suffered in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly in Germany, Russia and then Spain, following the international revolutionary wave of 1917-1923, it would be highly improbable that the dynamics of war would be broken by any contingency. But it is clear to us that, in the case of a proletariat asserting itself as a class and offering its revolutionary perspective, the probability of a rupture of this dynamic would remain present and should be a constant concern, especially for the party⁴³.

Since the formation of our group in 2013, we have always tried to establish this "probability" of... *historical course*, not on our ardent desires and dreams, but on a set of historical material facts – and their dynamics – and that we cannot develop within the limited framework of these comments⁴⁴. Its main element is the absolute necessity for the capitalist ruling classes to impose aggravation of the exploitation of labour, increasing poverty and violent repression to respond to the economic impasse of capitalism and prepare the generalized imperialist war. The current yellow vest movement in France, as well as the mass strike dynamics that developed throughout 2018 in Iran and Iraq, confirm, in our opinion, this probability or perspective. Not only because they are two major social movements that have opposed the miserable conditions of work and life that capitalism wants to impose, but above all because they have, in fact, objectively and concretely, directly weakened the imperialist capacities and wills of their own bourgeoisie... This is what the ICT itself, the CWO, notes in an introduction to an article on the strikes in Iran with the already significant title, *Iran: Class War against Imperialist Pretensions*⁴⁵: "workers simply refuse to accept any longer than they should make sacrifices for the imperialist ambitions of their leaders".

This is also the case for the movement of the yellow vests in France. And yet, they keep waving the tricolour flag and singing the Marseillaise at the top of their lungs! But the paradox is only apparent. Macron's international credit is damaged, Trump and the Turkish President Erdogan have echoed it by

mocking him, and his voice will carry less. But above all, his credit is weakened vis-à-vis the other European bourgeoisies because its commitment to pass the "reforms", i.e. essentially the attacks on the working class as a new one on pensions, is compromised by the withdrawal he had to make in the face of yellow vests. The latter will lead to non-compliance with the 3% budget deficit imposed by the European Union – a measure that is less and less respected in Europe – which was nevertheless a commitment of the French bourgeoisie in exchange for a material and concrete commitment of the German bourgeoisie in a more assertive European, in fact mainly Franco-German, military defence policy. It is therefore Macron's international credibility that is affected in the eyes of his peers and France's imperialist policy that is affected.

Depending on the historical and local situation, the level of the relation of forces between capitalism and the proletariat in general and locally is always directly or indirectly confronted with the question of imperialist war. As such, the proletariat is a more or less consistent and direct element and factor of the situation even when it cannot oppose head-on, or directly prevent, war.

What is our Real Disagreement with the ICT article?

Nevertheless, our disagreement with the article on this matter does not in itself concern the "probable" perspective, war or mass confrontations between the classes. There is, it seems to us, a difference in method that is important to point out because it may lead to differences on other issues.

First, the article presents the historical alternative in the following concrete way: "Either the world proletariat will succeed in escaping from the cages of nationalism, from the thousand triggers for war that imperialism sets every day, or a bursting of one of the many speculative bubbles – possibly stemming from the Federal Reserve putting up interest rates – will be enough to intensify and generalise the tragedy of existing wars and turn the world into a gigantic cemetery". This formula seems awkward to us. The historical alternative and, even more the very development of the proletarian struggle, does not arise in these terms. The alternative is not between a consciousness, reduced here to that of the "cages of nationalism", prior to the development of the proletarian struggle on the one hand; and on the other hand the crisis that may intensify and generalize war. For it is from the struggle against the crisis itself – whatever are its manifestations, including the bursting of a speculative bubble – and its material effects and consequences, including war, that the proletariat will

43 . For example, it could not be absolutely excluded that the verbal confrontation of winter 2017-2018 between Trump and Kim Jong-un could, even if it was highly improbable, have degenerated into a widespread nuclear confrontation from Korea, which would then, as a contingency, have broken the present dynamics of the events towards massive confrontations between the classes...

44 . See the contents of our journal (<http://igcl.org/-Revolution-or-War->).

45 . <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2018-05-10/iran-class-war-against-imperialist-pretensions>.

develop, develops, its struggle and that it will be able, among other things, to free itself from the "cages of nationalism"; and not from a previous consciousness of them or any other element of bourgeois ideology.

Unfortunately, probably driven by the clumsiness of the previous formula, the article continues on the same path when it states that "a strong international party is required **to remove wage workers from the dominant thought of the ruling class**, stuffed as it is with provincialism, nationalism, racism: as if these trappings of bourgeois ideology were, in any case, the pole star for the whole humanity. It is vital to undermine and demolish the dominant ideology of the ruling class, **to begin to pose the question of a class-to-class frontal clash**, to present an alternative to this system" (we emphasize the most significant points). But as a result, the party's role seems to be reduced to enlightening, awakening the masses' consciousness and succeeding in winning them from the influence of bourgeois ideology as a prerequisite for "a class-to-class frontal clash". The formula, in its turn, is dangerous because it opens the door to the vision of two forces, the bourgeois ideology and the party competing for the consciousness of the working masses, the latter being external to the mass that would be reduced only to a passive object, or dead matter, without its own struggle dynamics. It refers to a static comprehension of the proletariat that we have already noted in some articles of the ICT ⁴⁶. The key theoretical question here is the very process of the development of the class struggle, the very one that Rosa Luxemburg put forward in her *Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* ⁴⁷, the very one that Trotsky presented in his book *1905* ⁴⁸ and the one that Lenin developed in his *Report on the 1905 Revolution* ⁴⁹:

"Thousands of workers – not Social-Democrats, but loyal God-fearing subjects – led by the priest Gapon, streamed from all parts of the capital to its centre, to the square in front of the Winter Palace, to submit a petition to the tsar. (...) The uneducated workers in pre-revolutionary Russia proved by their deeds that they were straightforward people awakened to political consciousness (...). Within a few months, however, the picture changed completely. The hundreds of revolutionary Social-Democrats

'suddenly' grew into thousands; the thousands became the leaders of between two and three million proletarians. (...) In this manner a colossal country, with a population of 130,000,000, went into the revolution; in this way, dormant Russia was transformed into a Russia of a revolutionary proletariat and a revolutionary people. It is necessary to study this transformation, understand why it was possible, its methods and ways, so to speak. The principal factor in this transformation was the mass strike. (...) A distinctive feature was the manner in which economic strikes were interwoven with political strikes during the revolution. There can be no doubt that only this very close link-up of the two forms of strike gave the movement its great power".

This dynamic understanding of the proletarian struggle and its development underlies the approach to the question of the perspectives, the *course of the events*, i.e. the permanent evolution of the relation of forces between the classes, which must be drawn without making it an absolute dogma. It makes possible to adapt the activity, the orientations, the intervention and the slogans of the communist groups, of the *party in the making*, tomorrow of the party itself, to make it the effective political vanguard of the proletariat as its struggle develops.

*"The social democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the "revolutionary situation," to wait for that which in every spontaneous peoples' movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events. This they cannot do, however, by suddenly issuing the 'slogan' for a mass strike at random at any odd moment, but first and foremost, by making clear to the widest layers of the proletariat the inevitable advent of this revolutionary period, the inner social factors making for it and the political consequences of it. If the widest proletarian layer should be won for a political mass action of the social democrats, and if, vice versa, the social democrats should seize and maintain the real leadership of a mass movement – should they become, in a political sense, the rulers of the whole movement, then they must, with the utmost clearness, consistency and resoluteness, inform the German proletariat of their tactics and aims in the period of coming struggle" (Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade-Unions*, 1906 ⁵⁰).*

RL, January 2019

46 . See *Revolution or War* #10 : <http://igcl.org/Some-Comments-and-Observations-on>.

47 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>.

48 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1907/1905/index.htm>.

49 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jan/09.htm>.

50 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch06.htm>.

Response of the ICT (February 8th 2019)

At the time of finalizing this issue of the journal, we received a response from the ICT following the prior submission of our comments. It seems all the more important to us to publish it without delay – with the agreement of the ICT – as it provides political clarification to clarify which agreements and disagreements exist.

Comrades,

We think your criticism of the article is undermined by preconceptions that compels you to read what is not there, and to misrepresent what is there. Alongside that there's the usual ICC style that you cannot quite shake off.

We are not interested in the ICC's errors on the historical course. As we say in the text there are no predetermined cycles, and only the balance of power between the classes decides whether it is one cycle rather than another. One clarification though: their error in announcing that the historical course was going towards revolution was not just in the evaluation of 68 but in thinking that Stalinism, Maoism and petty bourgeois students, which politically dominated the movement then, were "positive" because, at the right moment, the struggle would have led on to true proletarian internationalism, by virtue of a path already marked out by the holy spirit. In short the usual idealistic approach.

But let's get to the point. You accuse us of viewing the future "world war" as coming about just through the generalisation of episodes of local war. In the current state of things we have used the term generalisation of local wars as a possible transition to a general war that initially involves the expansion of what already exists, and then move on to a direct and general (world) confrontation. We deliberately used the synonym of world war because this term, widely abused, should be used sparingly because the next war, if it does come about, will be different from the other two in terms of alliances, numbers involved, techniques and methods of war and above all of involvement of the masses. So world war or generalised war here indicates a direct confrontation between imperialist interests. Today however, for the moment, we are still in the first phase. You admonish us by saying that there is a great difference between a series of local wars where imperialisms do not clash directly, and one where the mortal confrontation is direct. Obviously we all know that a world war involves a direct imperialist confrontation and not just a series of proxy wars. It was no accident that we used the adjective "bizarre" (which you obviously missed) to support the concept of world war. Bizarre precisely because today the great imperialisms that fuel wars do not collide directly as in the two previous global encounters. Their behaviour is closer to that of the "cold war" than to a direct and generalised war. So generalised war can be synonymous with world war, but not confused, obviously, with the episodes of local wars even if the imperialist actors are always the same. But this is a debate for the sake of debate.

Now to the second point. Photo or movie? The article simply says that in the current state of things (the balance of forces between the classes) war is the more likely outcome, but then we added that things can change (it was no accident that the Russian revolution issued from the First World War), and it is on this perspective that we intend to work and not on the first, while you continue to attribute the static view of the photo and not the film, making the first metaphor the only topic on which to intervene polemically, shamefully neglecting the second on which we base our analyses in the article as a whole.

When we say that the most probable solution today, given the current balance of power is war, we do not exclude that a revival of the class struggle, and only it, can overturn the current balance of power and initiate a process of confrontation whose results are never predictable. It is only the class struggle, the proletarian struggle that can bring about, under certain conditions, a change in the balance of power between the classes.

On the third point we believe there is a mystification. We will answer you briefly because we don't want to repeat what we have said a thousand times in other documents. To take one sentence and distort its meaning is impermissible.

“Either the world proletariat will be able to escape the chains of nationalism, the thousand mechanisms of war that imperialism triggers every day, the explosion of one of the many speculative bubbles – perhaps due to the rise in interest rates by the Federal Reserve – will be enough to intensify and generalise the drama of existing wars and make the world a huge cemetery’. *This formula seems to us at least clumsy.*”⁵¹

51 . Passage from our comments in which we quote an excerpt from the ICT article, note of the IGCL.

"Clumsy" is just your interpretation. Here we just want to say that in world capitalism's current crisis any bursting of the speculative bubble will be enough to aggravate the economic situation, leading to new wars and their generalisation, opening the way to a third world war (meaning widespread war and no longer just the generalisation of the episodes of war). But if the international proletariat has not shaken off the dead weight of bourgeois ideology, it will inevitably follow "its own" imperialism. But we do not expect this consciousness of the proletariat to arise spontaneously (the great illusion). All this is explained in the closing part of the article. Only with the presence of a revolutionary and communist class party is it possible that spontaneous movements, which will be expressed more frequently and intensely as the crisis worsens, will become the terrain for intervention by the party itself and expressions of the political maturity of the masses. These are the struggles that, with the guidance of the party, will move onto a political level and dismantle the cornerstones of bourgeois ideology, like nationalism, or like the "necessary" wars to export democracy and, like all those siren calls that every bourgeoisie plays on, drags the proletariat behind the chariot of its interests. We do not expect the masses spontaneously to get rid of nationalism, to reject war or racism. We say that this can only happen on the basis of a strong revival of the class struggle guided by the class party. In our history, just as we have always fought against the idealism of the ICC, we have also fought against mechanistic Bordigism, which on these issues represent opposite poles.

If the class moves, albeit confusedly, without political objectives, and continues to remain within the framework of demand struggles, only the political vanguards (the potential party) can offer an anti-capitalistic political perspective.

Lastly, it is pure invention to assert that we view the function of the party as only a clarifying element, just as it is another invention to attribute to us the idea that the revolutionary clash is between the bourgeoisie and the class party. In this case too, our political journals have fought for 70 years against both the idealism which envisages autonomous maturation of class consciousness (see always the ICC) and against the authoritarian (substitutionist) vision of the Bordigists of the party as the infallible prefiguration of socialism, ready to assert its own dictatorship. Our dialectical effort, if you will allow us yet another synthesis is this: the party is the political instrument of the class struggle, holder of a tactic and a strategy, bearer of an anti-capitalist consciousness and of a social alternative that does not arise spontaneously from demand struggles. However, it is in these struggles that the party must intervene to play its role as a political reference point.

In conclusion, we never advocated a static view of the proletariat as if it were a passive subject. We believe that without an autonomous recovery of the class struggle (outside the unions and the self-styled left parties), no party is able to make the revolution, just as no pro-active movement against the bourgeoisie, even if hard and prolonged, can escape bourgeois schemes and the capitalist economic framework, without the presence of the class party leading it towards a victory against the capitalist state.

But these are old discussions, which we have already outlined, but which remain our approach to the question of the party's role, to class consciousness and to the dialectical approach to the party-class relationship. In this regard, we offer a passage by Onorato Damen which we consider particularly illuminating:

"The formation and modification of human consciousness, its transformation into will and action, are reflections at the level of social and political life of what is produced in the sub-soil of the economy but between the determining factors and a world determined by the superstructure there is a relationship which in its turn reacts on the base as an indispensable element in completing any historical event. No geometric scheme or arithmetic calculation can encapsulate this relationship between the world which determines and that which is determined. There is no eternally true and valid formula which says that this impulse comes from the subsoil of the economy or that one from what is happening in the superstructure.

In our case an adequate and timely crystallisation of revolutionary consciousness and the will to act does not always correspond to the objective conditions offered by the capitalist crisis. The first post-war crisis (1919) in Germany and Italy tragically showed us a proletariat instinctively brought to understand the need for a struggle for power but which lacked a revolutionary leadership. The history of workers' struggles is full of examples of favourable situations in which the proletariat missed the bus due to the presence of a Party not up to the task of leadership. This is the focal point not only for interpreting the dialectic but also for the nature and function of the class party." (Onorato Damen [1952] From "Outline of the Disagreement" which was the foreword to the "Five Letters". It can be found on p.27 of the English translation of Damen's book "Bordiga: Beyond the Myth").

Internationalist Greetings, Internationalist Communist Tendency

OUR POSITIONS

- Since World War 1, capitalism has been a decadent social system which has nothing to offer the working class and humanity as a whole except cycles of crises, wars and reconstructions. Its irreversible historical decay poses the single alternative for humanity : **socialism or barbarism**.
- The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.
- The statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba, etc., and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.
- Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.
- All the nationalist ideologies -'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination', etc.- whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.
- In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.
- All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist', and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organizations (Trotskyists, Maoists, anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.
- With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organization, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.
- In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organization through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

- Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organized mass action by the proletariat.
- The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.
- The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalization of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.
- The revolutionary political organization constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalization of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organize the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

- Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.
- Organized intervention, united and centralized on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.
- The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

OUR ORIGINS

- The positions and activity of revolutionary organizations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organizations have drawn throughout its history. The IGCL thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the Communist League of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the International Workingmen's Association, 1864-72, the Socialist International, 1884-1914, the Communist International, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Lefts, and the groups of the Communist Left which had specially developed in the 1970s and 1980s and which were stemming from these fractions