

# REVOLUTION or WAR #13

Journal of the International Group of the Communist Left (IGCL)

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On the Period of Transition between Capitalism and Communism

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The 1918 "Bukharin Fraction" contrary to the Communist Left

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*(Our review is also available in French)*

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#### ***Call on Support***

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](mailto:intleftcom@gmail.com).

## Class Struggle and Historical Future

The historical alternative *revolution or war* is not just a slogan or a theme of communist propaganda. Nor is it a simple and vague historical perspective for tomorrow. It is already a central element of the current situation. Since the economic impasse of capitalism, the crisis, can only deepen, *revolution* and *war* become factors whose contradictory and dynamic, *dialectical*, relation determines more and more directly the course of the situation. Without the consciousness of this historical dilemma, it is difficult to understand the actual course of events and to adapt the positions that the proletariat - starting with their communist vanguards - must adopt according to the moments and the places. The use of abstract and general principles is not enough to answer immediate questions and issues. Nor to guarantee against the betrayal of the class principles, proletarian internationalism and dictatorship of the proletariat in particular.

The relationship that unites the two opposed poles, *revolution* and *war*, is *the class struggle*. Contrary to what many like to think, or wish, including within the Communist Left<sup>1</sup>, the class struggle is always the *driving force of history* and its process is the main determinant of the course of the events and the conditions for resolving the dilemma *revolution or war*. To the point that "*the defeat of the proletariat is the condition for the unleashing of imperialist war*" (the journal *Bilan* #34<sup>2</sup>, September 1936).

*Capitalism is war*, Lenin said. Constrained by the bitter and fierce defence of their national capital, every bourgeoisie and every capitalist state are inexorably pushed to engage in a march towards generalized war. Trump is the clearest and most caricatured expression of this, just one of many. All-out trade wars, imperialist provocations and assaults, abrupt breaches of signed treaties and international alliances, revival of armaments, particularly nuclear missiles, weaponization of space, the most shameless blackmail, even ultimatums, on the weakest powers have worsened - because they were already in action before under Obama - and multiplied. In return, the other imperialist powers, especially the main rivals, are not to be outdone. Their survival depends on it. Such is the dynamic, the gearing or the infernal mechanism, of economic and imperialist rivalries.

However, it is precisely in this moment of increasing tensions that the capitalist economy *slows down* again

and strongly; that the probability of a new open crisis, financial or otherwise, is hardly any longer in doubt ; that the global recession, or *economic slowdown*, that is coming up, can only herald even more ferocious attacks on the living and working conditions of populations in general and, first and foremost, on the international proletariat.

The dynamic of the class struggle is an objective reality. The crisis and war **now** force the bourgeoisie to attack the international proletariat head-on and everywhere. It therefore has the initiative of the struggle and the new crisis can only strengthen its determination to provoke and confront the proletariat. The general strengthening of the repression apparatus is an expression of this. The current bourgeois campaign and the demonstrations encouraged and organized by the states against global warming, which aim to drown the proletariat in the *people* and drag it into the defence of the democratic state, is another. Is not the concord of all, including antagonistic social classes, already be called upon to *save the planet*?

The emergence of new revolutionary energies, in progress<sup>3</sup>, and their regrouping are essential to the constitution of the political vanguard and the party whose proletariat will, and already needs, to orient itself and organize its class struggles as efficiently as possible; and even more so to impose the *proletarian revolution* on the *generalized imperialist war*. To develop as well as possible, to "*define political positions that are the only points of reference when the great turmoil breaks out and militants risk being swept away like fetuses of straw*" (*Bilan* #34, *idem*), these forces must seek to reclaim the history of the workers movement and particularly of the Communist Left. This work also involves discussing and clarifying historical debates, deep divergences or simple nuances, across this Left. Like the fight against expressions of opportunism within this latter, political confrontations and debates are an essential element in the struggle for the party, for a politically united and historically effective party.

Thus, "*nothing would explain the inertia offered by various groups of the Communist Left to the initiatives of our fraction to tackle the work of political enlightenment and to establish on an iron foundation the organization that will be able to lead the struggles of the working class for the victory of world revolution*" (*Bilan* #33, August 1936, we emphasize).

*Revolution or War*, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

1 . "*The general dynamics of capitalist society (...) is no longer determined by the balance of forces between classes*" (Resolution on the international situation of the 23rd Congress of the ICC, <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16704/resolution-international-situation-2019-imperialist-conflicts-life-bourgeoisie>).

2 . Journal of the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left in the years 1930 in France, translated by us.

3 . cf. in particular the special issue of our journal on Communist Left groups, *RoW* #12.

## International Situation

### "Saving the Planet" Requires the Destruction of the Capitalist State and the Exercise of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!

No one doubts today, especially in the face of global warming, that capitalism is "destroying the planet" and threatening the very survival of the human species. Even the most fervent followers, ideologues and propagandists of "capitalism economic liberalism", such as the *Financial Times* and *The Economist*, which in recent days have declared that it was "time to a reset" for capitalism, that "business must make a profit but should serve a purpose too" and "profoundly chang[e] the economy"<sup>4</sup>. Up to the point of launching a global media and political campaign encouraging and promoting more than 5000 demonstrations against global warming throughout the world. The reality of the opposition between capitalism and nature is obvious to all - except for some Trump and Bolsonaro who can thus serve as *useful idiots*, as *stooges*, to give more credit to the current ecological mobilization. All ideological bourgeois currents, from economic liberals, Keynesians, left-wing anti-liberals, to the most radical anti-capitalists - ex-Stalinists, Trotskyists and leftists - are calling for a general mobilization. Some capitalist companies even invite their employees to "strike" so that they can go on demonstration!

That capitalism "*estrang[es] from man nature and himself*"<sup>5</sup> was already established, noted, explained, criticized and denounced from the very first theoretical and programmatic steps of the revolutionary workers movement, through its theory, Marxism. Nothing new in itself, therefore, for the conscious proletarians and communists. But according to the capitalist media and most state apparatus, there is an absolute urgency since tomorrow it will be too late because of irreversible consequences. According to the latest IPCC report<sup>6</sup>, "*at the current rate of emissions, global warming will reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052. Without increasing the ambition of the signatory countries of the Paris Agreement and without immediate implementation of the necessary measures, global*

*global warming is expected to reach 3°C by 2100"*<sup>7</sup>.

#### ***Sustainable Development and Degrowth ?***

To answer this, there would essentially be two options: *sustainable development* or, for the most radical, *degrowth*. The opposition between the two is only apparent because they remain on the same ground. Both delimit the scope of political action to the capitalist ideological, political and state framework. Even the most radical limit the struggle within the framework of capitalism, the *people* and *citizens* ignoring any contradiction and class division within them, bourgeois democracy and its state when they demand that "*Government (...) tell the truth (sic!) by declaring a climate and ecological emergency ; [that they] act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025; [and] create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice*" (<https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/demands/>).

*Sustainable development* or *degrowth* - in whatever form and degree - does not call into question the factor of global warming: capitalism; that is, the ever-renewed and expanded accumulation of capital, the ever-increasing pursuit of profit, and widespread commodification. And the political solutions that accompany both are inevitably false solutions from the point of view of preserving the planet; and real impasses and ideological and political traps from the point of view of the revolutionary class, the proletariat. It goes the same for ecological ideology as well as pacifist. Capitalism is war - another classic thesis of Marxism - and pacifism, whatever the conscience and sincerity of each pacifist, is only a means and a moment of preparation for imperialist war. Capitalism is also the **inevitable** destruction of the environment and ecologism, whatever the conscience and sincerity of each ecologist (often also pacifist by the way), is only a means and a moment of the recruitment behind and in defence of the *democratic* state in view of the generalized imperialist war.

4 . Quoted by the French radio France Inter: <https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/l-edito-eco/l-edito-eco-20-septembre-2019>. The second is translated by us.

5 . Because wage labour which "*tear[s] away from man the object of his production*" and "takes nature from him", *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, K. Marx.

6 . *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*.

7 . <https://www.ecologique-solidaire.gouv.fr/quil-faut-retenir-du-rapport-du-giec-sur-rechauffement-climatique> (translated by us).

## **Why and How Communism is the Only "Solution"?**

Only Communism can put an end to wars and production that devastate the planet. Of course, we are not talking about so-called communism, in fact a particular form of state capitalism due to historical conditions that were also particular, of the former USSR or Stalinist China, which made the growth of industrial production the criterion of the superiority of their so-called socialism over capitalism. And whose object was ultimately only aimed at war... Nationalization and state control have never been socialist or communist measures like Marx and Engels already in their time<sup>8</sup> have never ceased to warn.

*"If, in socialism, there is accumulation, it will be presented as an accumulation of material objects useful to human needs and these will not need to appear alternately as currency, nor will they need to undergo the application of a "monetometer" to measure and compare them according to a "general equivalent". Therefore, these objects will no longer be commodities and will only be defined by their physical and qualitative quantitative nature, which is expressed by economists, and also by Marx, for the purpose of exposure, by use-value.*

*It can be established that the rates of accumulation in socialism, measured in material quantities such as tons of steel or kilowatts of energy, will be slow and slightly higher than the rate of population growth. With regard to mature capitalist societies, rational planning of consumption in quantity and quality and the abolition of the huge mass of anti-social consumption (from cigarettes to aircraft carriers) will probably determine a long period of declining production indices and therefore, if we use old terms, disinvestment and disaccumulation"*<sup>9</sup> (A. Bordiga).

*Saving the planet can only be achieved if we produce for human needs and not for profit. But also, and much more immediately, by removing the threat of generalized imperialist war to which capitalist crisis inevitably leads. That is why the fight against the capitalist state and its destruction is the real urgency for the salvation of the planet. However, this fight can only be fought by the social class that is "s[unk] to*

*the level of (...) the most wretched of commodities"*<sup>10</sup>, *the labour force commodity, that is the proletariat. Because it alone "is a really revolutionary class [and can sweep] away by force the old conditions of production [and] the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class" (Manifesto of the Communist Party). And thus can restore human being's unity with nature, "his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die"*<sup>11</sup>.

The present campaign against global warming - however real and dangerous it may be - aims instead to drag the populations, especially the younger generation, behind capitalist states and democratic ideology *in the name of the people*. And to divert their attention from the class struggle and the international proletariat. At a time when the capitalist class is redoubling its attacks against the proletarians everywhere because of the economic impasse and the growing imperialist tensions and wars. At a time when a massive confrontation between the classes is becoming the central issue because the fate of humanity will depend on its outcome: towards a society without exploitation, no class, no misery, no war, or towards a generalized imperialist war.

To those who really want to fight capitalism and its dramatic consequences of all kinds: it is not in demonstrations encouraged, promoted and even organised by States that they will be able to advance *"the cause of saving the planet"*. It is by joining proletarian struggles, workers' struggles, strikes, demonstrations, etc. and by getting closer to proletarian and revolutionary minorities, especially those of the Communist Left. Because so, and only so, will they be able to find a militant commitment and a theoretical and political coherence that will allow them to integrate and actively participate in the struggle for the true *safeguarding of the planet and humanity*: the historical struggle of the international revolutionary proletariat for Communism.

The International Group of the Communist Left  
(www.igcl.org), September 20th 2019.

<sup>8</sup> . Not even Lenin by the way - and contrary to what Stalinism, and also partly Trotsky himself, claimed - despite the particularly dramatic conditions in Russia after October 1917 and the emergency state capitalist measures that had to be taken in the face of the destruction of the war, international isolation, the paralysis of the productive apparatus and the famine and misery that resulted from it... But that is another question.

<sup>9</sup> . A. Bordiga, *Structure économique et sociale de la Russie d'aujourd'hui*, Éditions de l'oubli, collection of article and texts written in the 1950, translated by us from French).

<sup>10</sup> . *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, K. Marx.

<sup>11</sup> . (*idem*).

## **On the Crisis : Where is the World Going ? (Nuevo Curso)**

**L**acking space in this issue, time and strength too, we are not in a position to present a state, even if only a summary one, of the worsening economic crisis of capital that worries the bourgeoisie itself so much. The measures taken from 2008 onwards and the "subprime" crisis have not succeeded in "relaunching the machine" as in previous crises. Roughly, they had consisted in the "nationalization" of the private debt accumulation in order to avoid the sudden collapse of the financial system; and in the massive introduction of liquidity (in particular through the Quantitative Easing) by central banks to compensate for the lack of credit, defiant banks no longer lending themselves. All this at the cost of the exponential indebtedness of the States and public deficits. Certainly, these economic measures specific to state capitalism succeeded in avoiding the brutal blockage of the capitalist economy and its catastrophic collapse. But they did not "overcome" the 2008 crisis and "really boost the economy" to the point that these exceptional measures became permanent; to the point that the European Central Bank decided to boost the use of Quantitative Easing again these days<sup>12</sup>; to the point that the American bank, the Fed, is forced to lower its rates, which they had previously tried to raise. All this expresses that capitalism has become addicted to measures that should only be exceptional. And that the generalized debt continues its mad rush... that it will have to be paid for one day somehow or another – most likely by a generalized imperialist war.

Is it necessary to underline that the gigantic cost of the bankruptcy of that time, for which it is nevertheless necessary to pay in the meantime, and its multiple consequences has rested and still rests on the non-capitalist world population, mainly on the shoulders of the proletariat? This has led to a dramatic deterioration in living and working conditions since then and to increased and widespread impoverishment. The effects of 2008 are therefore still being felt and its various consequences, including economic and financial, have not been overcome at the very moment when economic activity is "officially" approaching the recession, as in Germany, or is slowing down "officially" in China or the United States, to mention only the main world capitalist powers, and even as the situation in the so-called "emerging" countries is deteriorating or even collapsing, as in Argentina. In short, the

"exceptional" state measures – such as the negative interest rates of States<sup>13</sup> – to deal with the 2008 crisis, which only kept capital afloat, are still in place today even as the open crisis reappears. They cannot be reused with the same "efficiency" in the event of a sudden crisis and this is one of the concerns of the ruling classes – at least of their most "enlightened" economic specialists and governments. As a result, in addition to attacks on the proletariat, imperialist rivalries can only get even worse. Contrary to what the media are beginning to hammer at by trying to make us forget the evidence, the growing imperialist trade, monetary and tariff wars and tensions, especially Trump's economic and imperialist policies, are not the cause of the economic slowdown and the coming open crisis but its consequence and expression. There is no doubt that the coming open crisis, the recession in particular, will only exacerbate imperialist rivalries and push for the major imperialist powers to engage more and more in the march towards generalized war.

There are several articles in the Communist Left press to which we invite our readers to refer. In particular, we draw their attention to two articles of the ICT, *Panoramica sulle condizioni in cui versa el capitalismo globale* and *"Dotte considerazioni" sul futuro del capitalismo "dopo" la fine dell'attuale crisi*<sup>14</sup>, only in Italian to date, which provide a general Marxist analysis of the worsening of the economic crisis that can serve as a useful reference. Failing that, we have decided to publish this short article by Nuevo Curso, which gives useful propaganda elements to any immediate class position in the face of the crisis and the bourgeoisie's speeches.

*Revolution or War, September 20th 2019.*

12 . "For his last decision before leaving his post at the European Central Bank (ECB), Super Mario[Draghi] unveiled a major monetary stimulus plan to support economic activity, which is down in the euro zone. He lowered the deposit rate to -0.5% and announced the implementation of a new quantitative easing plan (QE)" (French newspaper *La Tribune*, September 13th 2019).

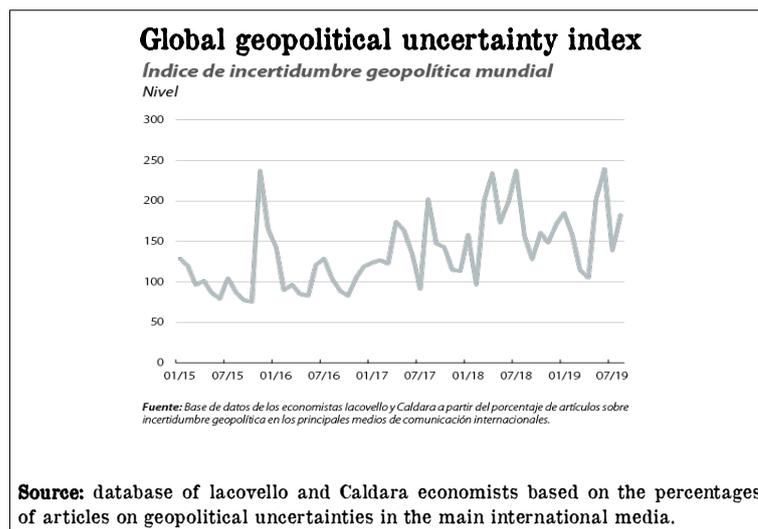
13 . The creditor who "lends" his money to the States is not remunerated but on the contrary pays interest on his deposit! That is, he prefers to invest his money at a loss in the central banks' cash registers rather than in the economy and production because he is convinced... that his initial capital will lose less. This aberration from the capitalist point of view alone illustrates the immediate impasse and contradictions facing capitalism today. Of course, this accumulation of capital that does not go into production also contributes to the vertiginous inflation of speculative bubbles in all fields, even in football, for example, where the budgets of professional clubs and players' salaries are exploding...

14 . <http://www.leftcom.org/it/articles/2019-06-07/panoramica-sulle-condizioni-in-cui-versa-il-capitalismo-globale> ; <http://www.leftcom.org/it/articles/2019-08-24/%E2%80%9Cdotte-considerazioni%E2%80%9D-sul-futuro-del-capitalismo-%E2%80%9Cdopo%E2%80%9D-la-fine-dell-attuale>

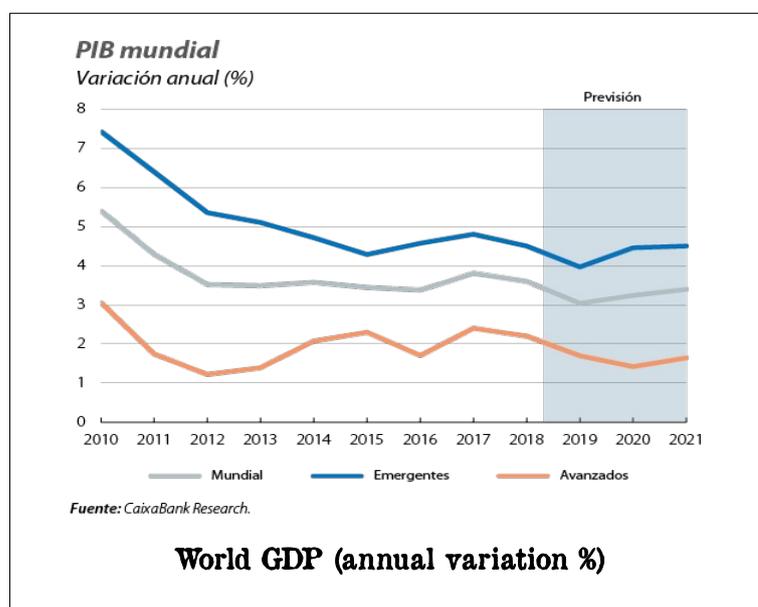
## Where is the World Going ? (in Graphs) - Nuevo Curso

In Argentina, Spain, Italy, even France, the media are sending us an increasingly empty message. They try to entertain us by imposing electoral emotions, hurricanes and violent crimes, while talking to us about "difficulties" as if they were local problems that, with a small sacrifice and "good government", could be solved. In reality, in capitalism as in everything, it is the totality, the state of the system as a whole, that determines the future of the parts. Global reality is not the sum of "national realities". On the contrary, today more than ever, it is the global situation of a global capitalism in crisis that determines the prospects in each country. In order to get an idea of what is happening for this second part of the year, we will summarize it with 7 graphs published this week.

1 - The first element of the world situation is the increase in imperialist tensions. The trade war, with its string of military pressures, wars and political frictions. From Ormuz to Hong Kong, via Brexit, Algeria, Syria, Cyprus... and now to the Amazon.



2 - The accumulation cycle is almost exhausted in central countries. Profit rates are very low – which is why the value of production is barely increasing – and even if the system is boosted by central banks in an increasingly desperate way, expectations and, above all, economic activity cannot be "revived".



**3** - The stagnation of GDP is accompanied by a decline in economic activity, particularly industrial activity – the production of real goods – which leads to and accelerates even greater drops in activity. In other words: productive capacities are destroyed all over the world because the system does not know how to use them to generate profits.

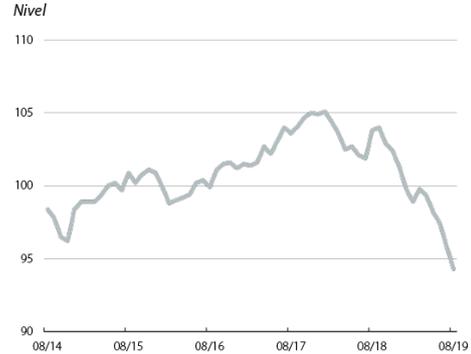
**PMI indicators \*of overall activity and IFO index\* of activities of German companies**

**Indicadores de actividad global: PMI**



Fuente: CaixaBank Research, a partir de datos de Markit.

**Alemania: índice IFO de actividad empresarial**



Fuente: CaixaBank Research, a partir de datos del Instituto IFO.

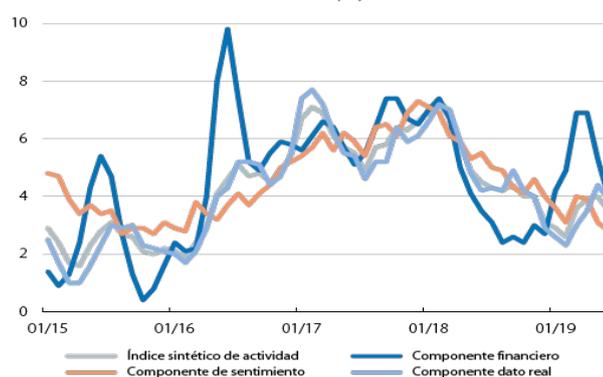
\*"The PMI index, for "Purchasing Manager's Index", is an indicator that provides information on the economic situation of a sector" (ig.com, IG Bank).

"The IFO Business Climate Index assesses the business climate in Germany at a specific point in time and measures expectations for the next 6 months" (investing.com).

The situation is so serious that the flight towards speculation is mainly concentrated in the countries cynically called "emerging". But these are no longer rising speculations, exaggerated expectations about future values and capabilities, but bets on falls and collapses that multiply instability, as we see in Argentina.

**Emergentes: indicador sintético de actividad**

Variación intertrimestral anualizada (%)

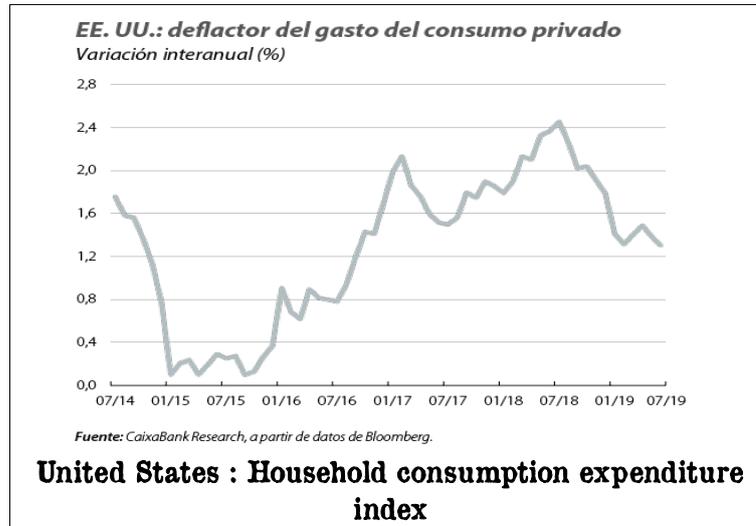


Fuente: CaixaBank Research, a partir de datos del IIF.

**Emerging countries: synthetic activity indicator**

**4** - It is not just that "business is running bad" for the bourgeoisie. It is that the only thing it can do to maintain its profits... is at the expense of our living conditions. On the one hand, by reducing the cost to national capital of maintaining operating conditions (health, basic services, etc.), and on the other hand by saving banks by directly appropriating savings in the form of pensions, by increasing real working time, precariousness, etc. From Bolsonaro to Macron, from Macri to Putin, from Sánchez to Costa, all defend similar "reforms" with

similar objectives and different discourses. Even in the United States, for the moment the theoretical "winner" of the trade war, the impoverishment of workers is a constant trend that manifests itself in the stagnation of their consumption capacity. In other words: even in the country with the best employment data of the year, the system fails to improve the material lives of workers, not even on its own terms... which in turn feeds bad production expectations: why produce more if it can not be bought?



### What is to be Done ?

Whether you are in Argentina, Mexico, Spain or Australia... the main task today is the same because the global situation that drives attacks on your living conditions and yours is the same as that which drives impoverishment for everyone everywhere in the world. **The logic of capital is not without appeal.** Or rather, it is only on its own terms. If we accept that the company's profits or the profitability of national capital must be realized in order for our needs to be met, they will be increasingly attacked. And there is no sacrifice that pays. Because what makes the system so bad is structural. This is not a specific problem that could be solved through elections, "reforms" and trade agreements. The machine can only continue to operate by eating the workers. So it's time to put our needs first.

Nuevo Curso, September 8th 2019 (<https://nuevocurso.org/>)

**Public Meeting of the IGCL in Montreal, 1.30 pm, Sunday October 27<sup>th</sup>**

**The destruction of the environment by capitalism**

**at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Provigo, 2225 rue Rachel Est, Montréal (métro Préfontaine).**

## **A Look Back at the Yellow Vest Movement in France and the Inter-classist Revolts in the World**

**T**he yellow vest movement challenged revolutionaries and many proletarians, at least those aware of the need to fight for the defense of their class interests, in relation to their experience, their vision, even their scheme, of the development of the class struggle. There were those who glorified the movement for its apparent radicality, in particular its ability and willingness to face state police repression, or for its "self-organization" via social or other networks, until they defended that "the French revolution began on 17 November 2018"<sup>15</sup>; and those who rejected the movement because of its "inter-classist" character – until, for the hopeless ICC of the theory of Decomposition, they denounced it as a trap set by the bourgeoisie<sup>16</sup>. For our part, we have not been free of doubts and hesitations to characterize this movement to the point of affirming that "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"<sup>17</sup>. A week later, after the clashes on the Champs-Élysées and under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, Macron backed away from a number of demands put forward by the "yellow vests", some of which were undeniably proletarian in nature. Even if limited and temporary, this retreat of the ruling class was the first since the strikes of 1995, despite various mass mobilizations, millions of strikers and demonstrators, during the decade 2000, as well as in 2013 against yet another "reform" of pensions and 2016 against the "labour law". All of them, sabotaged by the union tactics of the Action Days, had ended in defeats until the railway workers' last one, more than thirty days of strikes spread over months behind the unions in the spring of 2018.

Today, since the yellow vests are only a very small minority with a powerless weekly ritual, it would be tempting for the revolutionaries, and especially for the components of the Communist Left, to turn the page, to return to their certainties, to pretend to believe that the end, or slow death, of this movement has given reason to those who rejected, or even denounced, this revolt, without returning to the questions with which they, and the proletariat as a whole, were confronted on this occasion. Move on,

there is, there would be, nothing to see as the police officer says to the curious onlookers at the scene of an accident. Yet the revolt and the massive demonstrations that are taking place in Hong Kong, whose characteristic is also clearly interclassist and in which the proletarian component as such seems largely absent – unlike France –, no workers' demands to our knowledge, shows us that this type of revolt is undoubtedly destined to be repeated as an expression of the exacerbation of all kinds of social antagonisms due to the capitalist crisis. Just as the Arab springs of the late 2000s had seen the development of "popular", inter-classist movements and revolts, often for essentially democratic demands, sometimes intertwined with clearly proletarian struggles, or even directly animated and led by them as in Egypt and even, to a lesser degree in Tunisia. This type of "inter-classist" movements, heterogeneous and confused, will also reproduce themselves in mass, even initially "precede" massive proletarian struggles, and revolutionaries, like the proletariat as a class, will have to position themselves as best they can in face of these movements.

Workers' struggles, totally controlled by the unions, such as the General Motors strike (still ongoing at the time of writing), the strike of 24 September for metros and buses - 85% of strikers - which blocked the Paris region, or the lockout - eighteen months! - of the ABI aluminum plant in Quebec<sup>18</sup>, are not in a position to offer a perspective to the proletarian components of a confused inter-classist movement such as the yellow vests. This is different, for example, from the class struggle of the public employees of Chubut in Argentina who, although "lost" in Patagonia<sup>19</sup>, sought and, in part, succeeded in extending their struggle by confronting the unions through wild demonstrations, blockades, and of course strikes. Only the proletarian dynamics and methods of the mass strike can respond to the proletarians engaging in this type of "inter-classist" movement. Heterogeneous and confused, they will also reproduce themselves en masse, even "accompany" massive proletarian struggles and revolutionaries, just like the proletariat as a class, will have to position themselves as best they can in front of these movements.

15 . Matière et révolution, *La révolution française a commencé...* [the French Revolution has begun... (!)], January 11th 2018, <https://www.matierevolution.fr/spip.php?article5221>.

16 Leaflet of the CCI, November 29th 2018, <https://fr.internationalism.org/content/9801/face-a-misere-et-a-degradation-nos-conditions-vie-comment-lutter-faire-reculer>.

17 . Our 1st *Communique on the Social Revolt in France*, December 2nd 2018, <http://igcl.org/Communique-on-The-Social-Revolt-in>.

18 . See only in French the ICP-Le Proletaire ([http://pcint.org/01\\_Positions/01\\_01\\_fr/190824\\_aluminerie-becancour.htm](http://pcint.org/01_Positions/01_01_fr/190824_aluminerie-becancour.htm)) : *Aluminerie de Bécancour (ABI, Québec), Après 18 mois de lock-out, tirer les leçons d'une défaite*.

19 . See Nuevo Curso : <https://nuevocurso.org/chubut-los-sindicatos-y-la-extension-de-las-luchas/>

This is why we reproduce here the statement – its main part – of the group Robin Goodfellow on The Yellow Vest Movement (<https://defensedumarxisme.wordpress.com/>) to stimulate the reflection of as many people as possible. We do not share their theoretical and programmatic premises. Nevertheless, it provides Marxist references, both theoretical and historical, which must be taken into account when dealing with the problem posed by these movements. Certainly, because it rejects the periodization of capitalism in two phases, ascendancy and decline, it tends to consider inter-classist or popular movements in the same terms as in the 19th century. As a result, and unlike most other components of the Communist Left, it still considers the democratic demands that this type of movement carries as an objective and a step and not as a dead end for the proletariat<sup>20</sup>. In the same way, it puts forward in this document demands which, although "just" in themselves, are posed independently of the very course and immediate objectives of the workers' struggle. It is possible – and this will need to be clarified – that this approach to the demands is linked to the concept of Permanent Revolution as presented in this document<sup>21</sup>.

The text is introduced by a quotation from Lenin which, beyond the fact that it refers to the struggles of "national liberation", highlights the dynamic approach that revolutionaries must have on "mass social struggles". If we are not sure that we have the same understanding of it as Robin Goodfellow, the fact remains that Lenin's argument is an essential reference to understand these "interclassist" phenomena and the very dynamics of the proletarian mass strike. Similarly, we probably agree with the comrades, in itself, as a matter of principle, that "a communist party should intervene in this movement and challenge its leadership to the petty-bourgeoisie by asserting its demands and slogans". But we probably also disagree on the latter as they put them forward. Until the once again limited retreat of Macron on December 4 and especially on December 10, we had difficulty seeing which orientations and slogans should be put forward. The absence of a real core of members from our own group<sup>22</sup> in France

allowing significant intervention on our part does not diminish the need to reflect and define the intervention of a communist group to a minimum extent. In our opinion, and unlike Robin Goodfellow, the axis of the communist intervention should have criticized and denounced democratic demands and illusions of all kinds, referendums, self-organization via social networks – from this point of view, the brutality and violence of state repression provided a powerful argument to denounce bourgeois democracy, the "French Republic" and the belonging to the "people" – and to oppose it by the proletarian demands that appeared as the weight of the working class individuals participating in the yellow vest movement was increasing, rising the minimum wage, pensions, unemployment benefits, etc. and thus open on the methods of struggle specific to the proletariat which, alone, can oppose the capitalist state with "effectiveness" by presenting the perspective of its destruction, the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat and another society without class nor exploitation. In this sense, our intervention would not have sought so much to strengthen the "unity of this movement" but, not fearing to be against the current at least in the first instance, to polarize and bring out its proletarian component. It is therefore a whole reflection on a particular and new phenomenon, and an expression of the new historical situation that is opening up and which we call "massive confrontations between classes", to which we invite all communist forces, especially those fighting for the constitution of the future world party of the proletariat.

Limited by the number of pages of the journal, we were forced to cut two parts of this text with long and numerous footnotes. Although interesting in themselves, it seems to us that their withdrawal does not detract from the reflection and contradictory debate on the position taken by the comrades. We informed them of this and submitted them in advance the parentheses we introduced.

The IGCL, September 2019.

20 . See its statement on the independence of Catalonia (not in English, we translate) : "Failing that, by remaining within the strict immediate framework of the Catalan question, the proletarian party should: within the framework of the recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination, defend the right to a free consultation of the inhabitants of Catalonia" ([https://defensedumarxisme.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/sur\\_la\\_catalogne1.pdf](https://defensedumarxisme.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/sur_la_catalogne1.pdf)).

21 . Although far removed at the programmatic and theoretical levels, Nuevo Curso and "its" political group Emancipación, which embrace the concept of *Permanent Revolution*, also puts forward a "programme" of demands independently of the course and immediate needs of the struggles.

22 . From that date on, we sought the appearance of workers' or struggle

committees that could also have defended and massively diffused a class orientation on that occasion. To our knowledge, only the group *Matière ou révolution* intervened, certainly by greatly overestimating this movement, calling for workers' committees everywhere and distributing leaflets. Unfortunately, it would have been difficult for us to participate actively in it because if we could agree to "develop the autonomous organization of workers [and] build committees everywhere in companies and neighbourhoods", on the other hand, the political orientation given to them as "a means of launching such a proletarian insurrection against the attacks of the capitalists and their state" seemed to us unrealistic at best, at worst – if only because "masses" followed this watchword – completely adventurist and... leftist. See Yellow Vests: Workers' Committees everywhere! (<https://www.matierevolution.fr/spip.php?article5148>).

## **The Class Struggle in France – 2018-2019 – The Movement of the "Yellow Vests" (Robin Goodfellow).**

*"To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a "putsch". 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 and 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*, 1916<sup>23</sup>).*

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

### **A Movement with Unheard Forms**

The detonator of the "yellow vest" movement was the fuel tax increase<sup>24</sup>. Since then the movement has gone far beyond what was initially seen as a protest by provincial motorists. It has come to raise several questions, including that of taxes and tax reform. This is one of the most shared demands, which is consistent with the fact that the movement first presented itself as a tax revolt.

For Marxism, the demand for a tax cut is part of an interclassist struggle that interests above all the bourgeoisie and even more so the petty bourgeoisie without bringing much to the proletariat<sup>25</sup>. Yet the proletariat is not indifferent to this question and constantly defends its fiscal policy<sup>26</sup>.

The movement's demands, particularly in fiscal matters, show that the proletariat, while playing a decisive role in the yellow vest movement since it has brought its social power and added its own demands, remains under the political and ideological leadership of the petty bourgeoisie.

The immediate struggle that characterizes the proletariat is clearly a struggle for wages (including pensions and social minima) while knowing that the objective pursued by the revolutionary proletariat is the abolition of wage labour. Of course, and because of its massive intervention in this yellow vest movement, proletarian demands for wages and pensions quickly emerged. This emergence of the wage issue quite quickly forced Macron and his government in defence of the bourgeois order to make concessions. Although they are crumbs, as the Movement has very well understood<sup>27</sup>, the December

24 . We must probably add, without doubt, the passage to 80km/h on the roads and the fines it will cause

25 . *"Taxes!" Matters that interest the bourgeoisie very much, but the worker only very little. What the worker pays in taxes goes in the long run into the costs of production of labour power and must therefore be compensated for by the capitalist. All these things which are held up to us here as highly important questions for the working class are in reality of essential interest only to the bourgeoisie, and in particular to the petty bourgeoisie, and, despite Proudhon, we assert that the working class is not called upon to look after the interests of these classes" (Engels, *The Housing Question*, 1872, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/ch01.htm>).*

26 . For more details, see our text on the fiscal policy of the proletariat.

27 . For example, if we take a demand that interests the proletarian class: "the increase of the minimum wage by 100 euros". It only anticipates and accelerates a campaign promise that was to upgrade the SMIC [official French minimum salary] by the end of the five-year period; it includes the automatic upgrade of the SMIC scheduled for January 2019; and for the rest, it consists of an increase in the "activity bonus", which will cost the employers nothing (so it will be paid by tax). And this bonus does not count towards the calculation of pension entitlements. The same goes for the retreats. The reduction in the CSG ["social solidarity" taxes] for smaller pensions leaves intact the decision to no longer index them to price increases, etc.

10th's concessions represent much more than all the days of union inaction that had no other purpose than to stifle the struggles. This too was well understood by the movement of the yellow vests. It was by learning from the practices of trade union bureaucracies that the movement came to the conclusion that they should be excluded, while they have consistently denigrated it by highlighting and pinpointing its most reactionary dimensions.

The movement has taken on unheard forms that can be explained, in part, by the changes in the composition of the classes.

*[The following is a passage providing very interesting sociological and economic data that provides a better understanding of the diverse social composition of the yellow vests and its characteristics, IGCL note]*

### **A Horizontal Organization Based on Direct Democracy**

On the other hand, social networks have made it possible to free oneself from representations of "intermediate bodies", such as trade unions, and put all parties at a distance. In doing so, after the spontaneous and local occupation of the roundabouts and the first demonstrations on 17 November, there was very quickly added the recurring call to demonstrate every weekend, in the heart of the great cities and especially in direct proximity to places of power and wealthy neighbourhoods. This too has a new character, which contrasts with the trade union days of action and their standardized parades, convened on weekdays on marked routes and far from "sensitive" places, walks long deserted for their total impotence. On the contrary, the Saturday demonstrations gradually mobilized new waves of proletarians (with or without the vest), especially from the suburbs of the big cities. All these factors have contributed to giving this form to a movement that is directly confronted with state repression and that affects all of France and is emulated throughout the world.

### **The Communist Movement and the Yellow Vests**

#### **Simplistic Class Analyses**

The communist movement was divided between the proponents of an aristocratic indifference<sup>28</sup> and the

28 . [http://pcint.org/40\\_pdf/01\\_Positions-pdf/01\\_01\\_fr-pdf/181122\\_gilets-jaunes.pdf](http://pcint.org/40_pdf/01_Positions-pdf/01_01_fr-pdf/181122_gilets-jaunes.pdf)

<http://www.igcl.org/Gilets-Jaunes-L-interclassisme-est>  
(<http://fr.internationalism.org/content/9799/mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-contre-attaques-bourgeoise-proletariat-doit-riposter-facon>)  
<http://fr.internationalism.org/content/9805/dossier-mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes>  
<https://lefilrouge17.blogspot.com/2018/11/gilets-jaunes-ni-participation->

followers of a movement whose class contradictions are watered down<sup>29</sup>.

To those who denigrate the movement because it does not walk behind the "flag of the proletariat", it should be recalled that it has already obtained more than all trade union mobilizations, supposedly under this flag, and which were all means to stifle proletarian struggles and lead them to defeat.

To denigrate the movement, all arguments were used and the whole range of "politically correct" (sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination against homosexuals, alcoholism, smoking, polluter,...)<sup>30</sup> and, icing on the cake, the assimilation of violence with what has just been listed was constantly highlighted. It is then sufficient to extrapolate from real facts highlighted a meaning and a tendency of the movement that justify above all to stay out of it if not to fight and repress it. Like the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois democrats, many communist sects have only shown all the class contempt they are capable of<sup>31</sup>.

It is obvious that the movement is interclassist and that the proletariat, while asserting its own demands, is behind the petty-bourgeoisie of which it politically constitutes the left. The proletariat does not exist as an independent political party, but most

ni.html#more  
<http://www.international-communist-party.org/Francais/Actualit/2018/GiletsJaunes.htm>  
<http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT1812FR%20vF.pdf>  
<https://nuevocurso.org/que-son-los-chailecos-amarillos/>  
Devant l'évolution du mouvement, les positions se sont parfois un peu infléchies  
<http://www.igcl.org/Communique-du-GIGC-sur-la-revolte>  
<http://www.igcl.org/Communique-sur-le-mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-drapeau-rouge.pdf>  
[http://pcint.org/40\\_pdf/01\\_Positions-pdf/01\\_01\\_fr-pdf/181206\\_gilets-jaunes-drapeau-rouge.pdf](http://pcint.org/40_pdf/01_Positions-pdf/01_01_fr-pdf/181206_gilets-jaunes-drapeau-rouge.pdf)  
29 . <http://grand-large.over-blog.com/2018/12/a-propos-des-gilets-jaunes.html>  
<https://proletariatuniversel.blogspot.com/>  
<http://spartacus1918.canalblog.com/archives/2018/12/12/36936423.html>  
<https://www.matierevolution.fr/>

30 . Starting with the dismissive answers given by the government to the first claims of the yellow vests. Thus, MP Ruffin, taking up a popular sentiment, could mock: "Macron, it's Marie-Antoinette: you can't get your gas? Buy a new car. You can't buy fuel oil anymore? Change your boiler! "

31 . A special mention for the ICC, which, as a good philistine moralist, condemns in particular: a) the "moral defilement" and the "nauseous scent" of the movement (<https://fr.internationalism.org/content/9836/mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-lapolitisme-danger-proletariat>); b) "urban guerrilla" practices, doctrinally professing that certain forms of violence "are totally ineffective and can only contribute to the escalation of violence, social chaos (sic!) and the strengthening of the police state (sic!)" ([https://fr.internationalism.org/files/fr/suppl\\_ri\\_473.pdf](https://fr.internationalism.org/files/fr/suppl_ri_473.pdf)); c) "the occupation of "the most beautiful avenue in the world", which would be the despicable expression of a petty bourgeoisie that "dreams of rising towards the upper layers of the bourgeoisie" and envies "the showcase of capitalist luxury"; d) the demand for Macron's resignation, "symbolizing the desire to be Caliph in the place of the Caliph" (<https://fr.internationalism.org/content/9799/mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-contre-attaques-bourgeoise-proletariat-doit-riposter-facon>).

representatives of the communist movement seem unaware that this situation has existed for more than 90 years. This is why this period is characterized as a period of counter-revolution. We can certainly say the following: "We are still in a period of counter-revolution. We can only comment on this movement and defend revolutionary theory to facilitate the reformation of the Communist Party of tomorrow". At the same time, this party will not emerge *ex nihilo* but it will be produced by the class in struggle. This struggle itself is part of a process. As we have already explained, we are monitoring more closely, without departing from the greatest caution, the evolution of the class struggle in recent years, because it is possible that new perspectives may be opened up to the proletariat. In any case, we can only blame the aristocratic attitude of looking at this movement with white gloves and pinching your nose. And we refer to Lenin's quotation placed in the spotlight. A communist party should intervene in this movement and challenge its leadership to the petty-bourgeoisie by asserting its demands and slogans.

The absence of the class party for several decades has not prevented the proletariat from carrying out political action, and therefore class struggle, by putting pressure on the State and by extracting many of the advantages of the past in the law (health, schooling, working time, salary, etc.) over the past century, while allowing the ruling classes to make the most of them. And this has only been achieved at the cost of their permanent challenge, only on condition

that the proletariat renounce its historical goals, that it does not exist as an organized political party, independent and opposed to all other parties, which is the indispensable condition for the triumph of its historical program: the classless society. During this whole period, the proletariat has been only the extreme left of democracy.

If the action of the proletariat does not depend on the existence of any party, its function is to generalize and unify the spontaneous movement of the

proletariat. It is only in the party that science, consciousness, will and instinct converge to transform the action of the proletariat into class action conscious of its historical goals. But this party is a creation of the class; it will reappear through a long process of struggles. It will not be a creation *ex nihilo* but a product of the class in struggle, a struggle that itself is part of a process. It is nevertheless interesting that this yellow vest movement keeps all bourgeois or reformist parties out of the way, including those who have never governed. This should be stressed, but the ICP, for whom the fetishism of the party is very strong, because hearing that all



**Demonstration of the "yellow vests" of 26 January 2019 and clashes with the police (at the bottom under tear gas smoke) Place de la Bastille in Paris. This does not prevent the demonstrators in the foreground from continuing to march towards the square and the clashes (IGCL's photo and commentary).**

"parties" are put aside, it immediately condemns the movement because it would act outside the parties hostile to the proletariat but also, what is even worse, outside the International Communist Party. It seems that the ICP would only take into consideration a movement where the proletarians, in need of a communist program, would come knocking on the door of the ICP's premises to get unsold copies of the "Proletarian" crammed into its cellar. The movement,

moreover, although one could think that it is also encouraged by the government in order to weaken the extreme right and to a lesser extent the left party *France Insoumise*, tends to constitute parties<sup>32</sup> (yellow vests list for the European elections) but they do not go beyond the petty-bourgeois framework.

However, it is misleading to present the movement as that of "small bosses" (implied a capitalist petty bourgeoisie), as does the ICP or the ICC, or to assert, as "the common thread", that it is a movement of the traditional middle classes ruined by the development of capitalist production, i.e. what belongs to the former middle classes (farmers, artisans, small traders). Marxism also classifies them under the label of the petty bourgeoisie insofar as they aspire to become capitalists and also because the borders are porous between the petty capitalist bourgeoisie which employs few or intermittently workers and this petty middle class bourgeoisie which does not employ any or very occasionally. At the same time, which gives them a hybrid and unstable character but also a potentially revolutionary dimension if they adopt the point of view of the proletariat<sup>33</sup>, these old middle classes are regularly precipitated into the proletariat by the ruin of their activity. The example of the peasantry, for instance, burdened with debt and subjected to falling production prices, living on incomes well below the minimum wage while working twice as long, so eloquently shows this.

Contrary to what the *Fil rouge* (<https://lefilrouge17.blogspot.com/>) says, alongside the decline of the traditional former middle classes, we are witnessing the resurgence of a middle class (self-employed) under the effect of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production in the most developed countries and France in particular<sup>34</sup>. The development of small and micro enterprises, and the recognition that they contribute to job creation, must be seen as one of the modalities of the relative decline of French capitalism on the world market. These companies, for various reasons that we will not develop here, have less added value per person than large companies. This is both a sign and a modality of a relative weakening of the most developed capitalist

countries. The most precarious legal statuses such as that of micro-entrepreneur (auto-entrepreneur) make it possible to bypass the social laws specific to wage labour and make possible what is the lot of many farmers: working a lot to earn very little. Already Kautsky, then Lenin, who took him over, had pointed out that many independent professions were only a desperate attempt to escape from the reserve industrial army. The same is true today for many actors who have social statuses that are only the antechamber or the exit hatch of Pôle Emploi [French Employment Agency] when they are not forced to do so by certain companies in order to be able to work with them<sup>35</sup>. The so-called uberisation phenomena (but as the example of Telefonica that we have discussed on our blog<sup>36</sup> shows, these are not only cases related to the new information technologies<sup>37</sup>) and the struggles they provoke in return (for example the Deliveroo couriers, the protests of taxis against unfair competition, the Uber drivers on the price of the ride, etc.) are part of the modernisation of forms known in the past as hired labourers, homework, semi-proletariat. A good part of these middle classes by force only dream of one thing: to become proletariat! In the oscillation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, they easily lean towards the proletariat. In any case, Marxism has never treated these classes (including the capitalist petty-bourgeoisie) as if they formed a reactionary mass with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

Whether the movement is interclassist and under the influence of a bourgeois ideology or the middle classes, no one will deny it. The dominant ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. But not only what great movement but even what revolution was not interclassist? Wasn't the Paris Commune crossed by patriotism and the reminiscences of the French Revolution? Within the council of the Commune, the workers themselves were in the minority and the internationals<sup>38</sup> rubbed shoulders with the blanquists and Jacobins. Did this prevent Marx from saying that it was essentially a workers' government? Didn't Engels see it as an achievement of the dictatorship of

32 . On another level, Jacline Mouraud, one of the figures in the yellow vests, announced the creation of a party.

33 . "If by chance, they are revolutionary, they are only so in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat" (Communist Manifesto).

34 . In its latest issue, the INSEE [the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies] distinguishes within the non-employed workers (3.2 million people) the non-agricultural occupations (2.8 million). Micro-entrepreneurs represent 31% of the latter. The 1.9 million traditional non-employees are divided into 43% company managers and 57% individual entrepreneurs. The overall growth in the number of employees is due to micro-entrepreneurs whose average monthly income is €450.

35 . "More and more training organisations are asking service providers to be self-contractors" (Witness quoted by *Le Monde* on 31/1/2019). "More and more subcontracting work is delegated to self-contractors who find themselves at the end of the chain and earn less. It is all craftsmanship that is getting poorer" (Alain Griset, President of the Union of Local Companies, quoted by *Le Monde* on 31/1/2019)

36 . <https://defensedumarxisme.wordpress.com/2015/09/11/telefonica-un-bilan-de-la-greve/>

37 . In the United Kingdom, since the 2008 crisis, the number of self-employed entrepreneurs has risen from 3.5 to 4.8 million people. Almost half of construction workers have this status. In addition, there are one million zero-hour contracts and 800,000 temporary workers. (*Le Monde*, 31/01/2019)

38 . The French section of the International Workingmen Association, itself, was composed of many currents where petty-bourgeois tendencies predominated.

the proletariat?

In revolutionary Russia, the Petrograd Soviet hosted, at the initiative of the Bolsheviks, representatives of the soldiers, i. e., for the vast majority, peasants, i. e. the petty bourgeois (old middle class). The Petrograd soviet, gave by right, places in the office to representatives of the various parties (Mensheviks, socialists-revolutionaries, Bolsheviks,...). The government emerging from the October Revolution is a workers and peasants government. Moreover, to come to power, the Bolshevik party took over the petty-bourgeoisie's agrarian program; the latter (the parties that represented it<sup>39</sup>) being unable to detach itself from the bourgeoisie and apply their program. At the same time, Lenin keeps calling for class differentiation and the independence of the proletariat. He encouraged agricultural workers to form trade unions, to form independent soviets or at least their own forms of organization within the peasant soviets if the first solution was not possible, as well as for semi-proletarians (poor peasants with partial wage earners)<sup>40</sup>. It demands changes in the appointment of deputies in order to give more weight to the representatives of the proletariat.

### **On the Backwardness of the Movement**

It cannot be denied that there have been and still are

expressions that show the backwardness of some components of the movement. To the extent that they cross society, they also cross the yellow vests, but we can observe many opposite cases such as, for example, the role of women in the direction and initiative of the movement – it is notably a woman (black moreover) who launched the petition against the increase in fuel taxes.

*[This is followed by a passage on anti-Semitism, the last passage of which we reproduce in note<sup>41</sup>. We invite readers who can to read this passage, IGCL note].*

Finally, whatever the role of the extreme right and the ultra-right, which is also highlighted to discredit the movement and to polarize the upcoming elections, intervening in them is one more reason not to leave it under its influence. According to observers, the abstentionists are very present and they are beyond the parties, whether it was [the leftist] *France Insoumise* or the [rightist] *Rassemblement National*, which all went easy to calm down the movement in the hope of capitalizing in the ballot boxes on the occasion of the European elections.

Of course, no one will see the presence of the tricolour flags as a sign of an exemplary struggle. Nationalism of the stadiums for some, and especially with other symbols, a reference to the French Revolution for the most part, it confines the movement as best it can within the framework of bourgeois socialism<sup>42</sup> or petty-bourgeois. And, as much as the movement has emulated in the world, it has never bothered to sketch an international unity. Now to oppose it, as a pledge of "purity", with the emblem of the red flag, while all symbols such as the vocabulary of the communist movement have passed to counter-revolution, is absurd. As for those who take the movement into consideration, they start speaking on behalf of the "people", while others

39 . Only the left wing of the socialist-revolutionaries, the petty-bourgeois party, will detach itself and share power with the Bolsheviks, making it abundantly clear that the government was indeed workers and peasants.

40 "We must combine the demand for the immediate seizure of the land with propaganda for the setting up of Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies. The bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed. The agrarian programme must be carried out in a new way. (...) It is the task of Marxists to make the question of an agrarian programme clear to the peasants; the weight of emphasis on this issue must be shifted to the Soviet of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies. We must be prepared, however, for the peasantry uniting with the bourgeoisie, just as the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies has done" (Lenin, The Petrograd City Conference of the RSDLP (Bolsheviks) April 1917) Without necessarily splitting the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies at once, the party of the proletariat must explain the need for organising separate Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and separate Soviets of deputies from the poor (semi-proletarian) peasants, or, at least, for holding regular separate conferences of deputies of this class status in the shape of separate groups or parties within the general Soviets of Peasants' Deputies (Lenin, The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution, April 1917). « Deputies. In order that the rich peasants—who are themselves capitalists—may not wrong and deceive the agricultural labourers and the poor peasants, it will be necessary for the latter either to confer, to combine, to unite separately, or to set up Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies of their own » (Lenin, Speech at a meeting of soldiers of the Izmailovski regiment, April 1917). "Agricultural labourers and poor peasants, i.e., those who, because of the lack of sufficient land, cattle, and implements, earn a living partly by working for hire, must strive their hardest to organise themselves independently into separate Soviets, or into separate groups within the general peasants' Soviets, in order to protect their interests against the rich peasants, who inevitably strive towards an alliance with the capitalists and landowner" (Lenin, Draft Resolution on the Agrarian Question, 1st Congress of Peasants' Deputies). All these quotations come from Lenin Collected Work, volume 24 : <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-24.pdf>.

41 . "The assimilation of communism and the Jew, developed by the white Russians, will also be taken up by Nazi ideology at the same time as it will push the most perceptive wing of the international bourgeoisie (including, in their own way, the Nazis) to promote Zionism in order to give a national and nationalist basis to the aspirations of the Jewish proletariat. The victory of Zionism and the consequent loss of Jewish forces from the communist movement are one of the aspects of counterrevolution" (Extract of one part of Robin Goodfellow's article that we have "cut").

42 "What this reveals, on the other side, is the foolishness of those socialists (namely the French, who want to depict socialism as the realization of the ideals of bourgeois society articulated by the French revolution) who demonstrate that exchange and exchange value etc. are originally (in time) or essentially (in their adequate form) a system of universal freedom and equality, but that they have been perverted by money, capital, etc. [23] Or, also, that history has so far failed in every attempt to implement them in their true manner, but that they have now, like Proudhon, discovered e.g. the real Jacob, and intend now to supply the genuine history of these relations in place of the fake" (K. Marx, Grundrisse 1857-1858, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/grundrisse.pdf>).

dream of making the classes disappear or otherwise tell us that we must learn to speak to several classes at once. In short, we quickly relapse into petty-bourgeois socialism.

### **On Permanent Revolution**

There is always a gap between will (the dynamics of movement) and consciousness. The movement is complex, multifaceted, interclassist, full of contradictions. It has evolved, under the influence of the proletariat, towards demands linked to purchasing power (presentation which leaves the possibility of an interclassist alliance) and through demands for direct democracy whose *Referendum on Popular Initiative* (or citizen's) aims at political action that attacks the executive<sup>43</sup> and potentially can go far beyond. For the yellow vests, the representative democracy of the bourgeois republic is discredited. So much so that they do not want representatives themselves. The movement is thus calling for a direct democracy that would allow them to take up an issue. We will come back to this subject later.

For Marxism, revolution is part of a necessary process. To arrive at 1793, it is necessary to go through 1789, to arrive at October, February was necessary. This analysis, i.e. the strategy of permanent revolution, concerns not only the anti-feudal bourgeois revolution but also the democratic republic. It is always a question of pushing democracy to the end, of ensuring that the obstacles to confrontation between the proletariat and capital are as smooth as possible so as to bring out in its nakedness the relationship of exploitation, the relationship between capital and labour. For it to be the turn of the proletarian party, the other parties must have exhausted themselves in power or disregarded by being unable to deal with the questions raised by the revolutionary process<sup>44</sup>.

43 . Very early on, the movement had as its motto: "Macron resign !". The request for a referendum must be understood as a step in the process of its revocation.

44. *"Although the German workers cannot come to power and achieve the realization of their class interests without passing through a protracted revolutionary development, this time they can at least be certain that the first act of the approaching revolutionary drama will coincide with the direct victory of their own class in France and will thereby be accelerated. But they themselves must contribute most to their final victory, by informing themselves of their own class interests, by taking up their independent political position as soon as possible, by not allowing themselves to be misled by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeoisie into doubting for one minute the necessity of an independently organized party of the proletariat. Their battle-cry must be: **The Permanent Revolution**"* (K. Marx, Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League, March 1850 – <https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm>).

*"During the last debate on "the position of the German proletariat in the next revolution", members of the minority in the central committee expressed views that directly offend those of the last circular and even the Manifesto. The international vision of the Manifesto has been replaced by the national point of view of German craftsmen. The materialistic point of view of the Manifesto has given way to idealism. Instead of real*

### **Axes of Orientation**

Within the axes of demands and propaganda we can put forwards:

- support for victims of police violence;
- amnesty for convicted prisoners;
- the demand for the repeal of laws that limit freedom of expression and obstruct freedom of demonstration;
- the abolition of all indirect taxes; proportional income tax; the abolition of inheritance above a certain threshold.

And to recall some points of the communist program that echo the immediate movement :

- Reconciliation of city and countryside; harmonization of population on the territory; suppression of large cities, etc...;
- Deepening democracy;
- Need for the autonomy of the proletariat, the class political party, the conquest of political power and a proletarian government, revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat

Robin Goodfellow, March 1st 2019

*[This is followed by an appendix that we do not reproduce here, IGCL's note]*

*relationships, the minority prefers will alone as the driving force of the revolution*

*While we say to the workers: you may still have to spend another 15, 20, 50 years of civil war, not only to change existing relationships but also to change yourselves and train yourself for political domination, you, on the contrary, you tell them: we must now take power or go to bed. Just as the democrats abused the word "people", you use the word "proletariat" as a simple sentence. For this sentence to have any meaning, it would be necessary to transform all the petty bourgeois into proletarians and, consequently, to represent the petty bourgeois and not the proletarians in concrete terms. Like the democrats, you have replaced revolutionary development with sentences about revolution" (Marx, intervention de Marx à une réunion de la ligue des communistes, 15 septembre 1850, MEGA2, I.10, p.578 ou Collected Works, t.10, p.626, translated by us since we could find this quotation on the web)*

*"A revolution is a long-term process: cf. 1642-1646, and 1789-1793 - and for conditions to be ripe for us and for them, all intermediate parties must still come to power one after the other, and ruin themselves. And that's when it will be our turn - and even then we may be temporarily beaten again" (Engels, Lettre à Bernstein, 12-13 juin 1883, in La social-démocratie allemande, p.176-177, translated by us).*

## Greetings to *Klasbatalo's* Affiliation to the Internationalist Communist Tendency

**W**e welcome the membership of the group *Klasbatalo* of Canada to the ICT<sup>45</sup>. In fact, it objectively strengthens not only the ICT but also the Communist Left as a whole. First, it is important to quickly clarify to some uninformed readers the subtleties of the development of the Communist Left in Canada. They may remember the original *Klasbatalo* of the 2000s; the one that had dissolved in 2013 at the same time as the International Fraction of the Communist Left (ex-IFICC) to form our group, the IGCL. Initially, this new *Klasbatalo* was reformed – more or less formally – by comrades who had resigned from the IGCL in 2014 and 2015. Rightly, and responsibly – we even encouraged it in its time – they contacted the ICT as the article tries to explain. Subsequently, other comrades joined the group to begin discussions with the ICT for their membership. We can regret that the use of the name *Klasbatalo* may lead to confusion, especially since the comrades do not make any critical assessment of the *Klasbatalo* of the 2000s, nor do they position themselves in relation to its history and its impact on the Canadian and especially Montreal milieu. Do they claim it? And if so, to what extent? On what positions? What political weaknesses? Nevertheless, their membership in the ICT is in itself a step forward in the fight for the party.

We hope to be able to develop fraternal relationships, especially since we are present in the same city as the comrades, Montreal. This would break with the sectarian and opportunistic policy, sometimes even directly provocative and hostile, that the former ICT group in Canada, the IWG, had pursued against us at the time. Our understanding and practice of international regroupment – which, we repeat once again, must be articulated around the ICT – turns its back to any spirit of competition or rivalry with it, particularly *to win members*. However, very often in North America, it tends to consider the question of grouping only from the perspective, at the least reductive, of the accession of new members to its own ranks, which leads it to consider any open and public debate aimed at breaking politically with leftist positions and clarifying the positions of the Communist Left as a whole as superfluous. This can only weaken the forces and militants who join it in the long term. In the past, this lack of political rigour in the integration of new members had left the door open for the IWG (...) "*to go with the movement too often in a sort of left populist way and did not always make their own distinctive and revolutionary contribution*" according to the ICT itself. To be precise, its former group in Canada adopted "*too often*" leftist, Maoist-type positions, interventions and practices with which its main members had never really broken and against which we had warned the ICT at the time.

To date, *Klasbatalo version 2* completely ignores the existence of the IGCL in Montreal when we could jointly develop a political space and dynamic of the Communist Left as a whole. For example, and despite our invitations, it refuses to participate in our public meetings. Similarly and more importantly, the ICT article does not report the content of the discussions on the platform before the integration. While it points out that the discussion required "*to make further minor changes to [Klasbatalo's] Platform*" – a platform never published to our knowledge. What were these changes? Secondly, are there two platforms, one of the group and the other of the ICT? If so, why? And what are the differences between the two? There is no doubt that the report of these discussions could serve as a reference for other circles or individuals and "open" the debate to the proletarian camp, in particular to its components that are part of the struggle for the formation of the party, to its *partidist* forces.

Our past experience with the IWG and the weaknesses of the ICT's intervention in regroupment encourage us to be vigilant and critical from the outset. We would not want the mistakes and abuses of various kinds that the ICT and its former group in Canada had experienced to happen again. On several occasions, it criticized us in internal correspondence *for interfering in what was none of our business*. However, the politics and the future of the main organization of the Communist Left today are also *our business*. Not only because this policy, via the IWG and... the beginnings of this 2<sup>nd</sup> *Klasbatalo*, has had various direct negative practical consequences on our own existence in Canada, but also and especially because the proletarian camp, *the party in the making*, is at stake as a whole. The life and proper functioning of the ICT *is also our business* and should be that of all those who really fight for the party.

So, greetings to *Klasbatalo*! Critical greetings, but fraternal greetings.

The IGCL, September 2019

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45 . <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-08-05/welcome-to-klasbatalo-as-canadian-affiliate-of-the-internationalist-communist>.

## Debate within the Proletarian Camp

### On the Period of Transition between Capitalism and Communism

**W**e take the initiative to publish in our pages Fredo Corvo's introduction to GIK's Fundamental Principles because this introduction contributes in its own way to the debate on the transitional period within the party in the making. Indeed, the introduction retraces and situates the debate on the transitional period within the framework of the Communist Left and more particularly between the Italian and Dutch Left. This is a fundamental point because it is only in this theoretical-programmatic framework that the question can be addressed and deepened even today. If this question remains an "open" question and if, on the other hand, our group does not have the means today to make a clear-cut statement, the fact remains that this question can only be addressed on the basis of the programmatic and theoretical framework of the Communist Left. This effectively excludes Dauvé and other "communizers" to whom Fredo refers in that they are basically only refined anarchists who use "Marxist" verbiage.

The fundamental principles that set the framework for this question are the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the final destruction of value as a social relation, commodity and wage in the first place, which today excludes from the communist field any measure of state capitalism, even if such capitalist measures may have been necessary for the class dictatorship in Russia.

While Fredo Corvo and the GIC's theses fall within this framework, which "authorizes" the debate, we do not share all the assertions and diverge on certain assessments, in particular on Lenin, where, according to Fredo and the GIC, there is confusion between the notion of socialism and state capitalism. Any militant who takes the time to read *The impending catastrophe and how to combat it*, *Left-wing childishness and the petty-bourgeois mentality*, and *The tax in kind*<sup>46</sup> will see that Lenin is more than clear about the non-socialist nature of the first measures of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia. State capitalism is only a means to fight small production while waiting for revolutionary reinforcement from the West. Comrades may disagree with the measures taken by the Bolsheviks, but then it will be necessary to take a position on the debates of that time. Did the populists, the socialists-revolutionaries or the Mensheviks advance more appropriate, more revolutionary positions? For our part, we fully claim the positions of the Bolsheviks.

Similarly, we do not agree with Fredo's assertion that the critique made by Bilan of the Fundamental Principles suffered from a lack of knowledge of the theoretical framework of the GIC. On the contrary, the reading, for example, of *Marxism and State Communism*<sup>47</sup> by the GIC reinforces the critique of Bilan: the GIK always puts forward formal economic measures in front of the question of political power, which is for us a very dangerous slide towards apolitism. Indeed, even on the question of the nature of communism, the GIC is actually not very far from the direct democracy dear to anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists: "But if we look at this dictatorship of the proletariat from the transformation of social relations, from the reciprocal relations of men, then this dictatorship is the *true conquest of democracy*. Communism does not mean anything else than that humanity enters a higher cultural stage, because all social functions come under the direct guidance and control of all workers and [they] thus take their fate into their own hands. That is, democracy has become the life principle of society. Thus, an essential democracy, rooted in the management of social life by the working masses, is exactly the same as the dictatorship of the proletariat"<sup>48</sup>. On the contrary, in accordance with the "Italian" tradition of the Communist Left, communism is not the extension of the purest democracy, but its concomitant abolition with the abolition of classes and the State. A classless society will be able to function harmoniously without the democratic mechanism. But before reaching this final goal, there will be a whole process of which the insurrection will be only the founding act. The establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its exercise until the abolition of the classes cannot be done without the intervention of militants who, being aware of the final goal of the struggles, will be led to exercise political leadership in relation to the rest of their class, thus giving the proletariat the political capacity to defeat the bourgeoisie and abolish capital. This group of militants is the Communist Party.

*Revolution or War.*

46 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/ichtci/index.htm>;

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>; <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/apr/21.htm>.

47 . [http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/GIC%20\(1932\)%20Marxism%20and%20state%20communism.1-0.pdf](http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/GIC%20(1932)%20Marxism%20and%20state%20communism.1-0.pdf)

48 . [https://afreeretriever.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/afrd-vol203-supplement\\_gic.v1-1-1.pdf](https://afreeretriever.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/afrd-vol203-supplement_gic.v1-1-1.pdf), we underlined.

## Introduction to the G.I.C. Text on the Economy of the Transition Period (Fredo Corvo)

**T**his article introduces the major political-theoretical work of GIC, and attempts to clarify the main misunderstandings that still mark its reception.

### 1- Origin and meaning of the 'Fundamental Principles'

The work *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* (further: *Fundamental Principles*) of the Group of International Communists (GIC) is an important text of the Communist Left on the economic problems of the transition period from capitalism to communism. The GIC describes the relevance of the *Fundamental Principles* as follows:

“As soon as the rule of the working class has become a fact in an industrialized country, the proletariat is confronted with the task of carrying through the transformation of economic life on new foundations, those of communal labor. The abolition of private property is easily pronounced, it will be the first measure of the political rule of the working class. But that is only a juridical act which aims at providing the legal foundation for the real economic proceeding. The real transformation and the actual revolutionary work then only begins”<sup>(49)</sup>.

The current meaning of this text is not limited to answering the questions that will arise immediately when the working class has taken political power. The *Fundamental Principles* are of further interest in the debate between the views of the Italian and the German-Dutch Left on the lessons of the workers' revolutions of 1917-1923. This debate still encounters mutual ignorance of the views of one another. Because of the lack of complete translations of the 1935 final Dutch edition of the *Fundamental Principles*, and sometimes because of the presence of limited extracts, and a lack of knowledge of the preliminary studies to the *Fundamental Principles*<sup>(50)</sup> all kinds of misunderstandings have arisen that hinder

the discussion until today.

### Beyond Marx, Engels and Lenin

The *Fundamental Principles* are an elaboration of the concept of a new society, which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels derived from the inner contradictions of capitalism and from the autonomous action of the working class in their time, especially in the bourgeois revolutions of 1848 and in the Commune of Paris of 1871. In the first edition of the *Fundamental Principles* (in German), the GIC reports that it was not until they had completed their studies that they became acquainted with Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*. As a result, the economic measures the GIC proposed had already been put forward by Marx<sup>(51)</sup>. Detesting any scholasticism, the GIC has critically analyzed the reformist views of a planned economy that were developed after Marx and Engels. The GIC shows in the first six chapters that the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union applied a state capitalist conception of the planned economy that they had adopted from reformism. In addition, in its final 1935 Dutch edition, the GIC criticizes the planned economy variant of libertarian communism, as this was to be applied by anarcho-syndicalism in 1936 in Spain<sup>(52)</sup>. But above all the GIC bases itself upon the revolutionary council movements in Russia and Germany from 1917 to 1923.

For a correct understanding of the *Fundamental Principles* it is necessary to understand the political framework in which the GIC proposes its economic measures. As is clear from the aforementioned quotation, the GIC presupposes a successful proletarian revolution in which the workers dominate an industrial area of reasonable size. In this revolution the working class, massively organized in councils, *has smashed the bourgeois state* and, from that moment on, exercises *the dictatorship of the proletariat* through the same councils over a society and an economy that still display almost all the characteristics of capitalism. To the degree that the resistance of the defeated capitalist class and other classes declines, and the proletarian revolution spreads throughout the world, *this 'workers' state' withers away*. This is very briefly the political

49 GIC, *Marxism and State Communism: The Withering Away of the State* – Amsterdam: Groepen van Internationale Communisten, 1932. – 18 p. The quote is identical to the first paragraph of Max Hempel (pseudonym of Jan Appel), *Marx-Engels und Lenin: Über die Rolle des Staates in der proletarischen Revolution*, in *Proletarier* (Berlijn), no. 4-6, May 1927. Both texts largely correspond to the *Fundamental Principles* and can be regarded as a preliminary study.

50 For a complete overview of various publications with links to the full texts, see [aaap.be](http://aaap.be). If you are looking for a short summary of the *Fundamental Principles*, you can choose from the following titles, arranged here from simple to complex: by [Spartacus 1961](#) (Dutch original), by Mattick 1938 [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#) (English original), or by Mattick 1934 ([English original](#)).

51 See *Fundamental Principles of Communist and Distribution*, 1930, Ch. XIX.

52 GIC, *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*, 1930, Ch. I to VI. GIC, *The Basic Theoretical Foundations of the Work "Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution"*, 1931. The 1935 edition is supplemented with answers to several critics. Unfortunately it has never been translated from Dutch into other languages.

framework that the GIC is often wrongly thought to have neglected in favor of the ‘economic’ aspect. It should be noted that the conceptual contrast of ‘economics’ and ‘politics’ thus used, is a typically Leninist approach. The *Fundamental Principles* do not neglect the ‘political’ aspect, but the GIC takes a position different from Lenin, stressing that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the massive exercise of the power of the working class by the councils, and not a dictatorship of a party with the help of the state. The reader of the *Fundamental Principles* should not expect further analysis of the Russian revolution, because that was not the purpose of this text. The *Fundamental Principles* are concerned neither with the higher forms of communism, but focus on the time immediately following the revolution and on the economic measures that [have to] ensure that the workers continue to exercise power over society.

Within this political framework, the GIC focuses on the economic aspects of the transitional phase. The working class uses its power over the means of production to abolish wage labor in all its aspects. It does so as a revolutionary class, resolutely starting to end the division between brain work and manual labor, by revolutionizing all social relationships, as a mass organized in general enterprise assemblies and councils. This organization was meant by Marx when he wrote about the “association of free and equal producers” With this association, the relations of production make an immediate leap from production for profit to production for the social needs. In the longer term, the working class will steer the economy from a scarcity economy toward abundance, allowing for the dissolution of other classes into the “association of free and equal producers” in which work will change into the development of each individual's unique personality, and taking according to need will stretch across an ever larger part of the production.

[Following is a brief biography of Jan Appel, who was the main writer of the *Fundamental Principles*, which we cannot reproduce due to space constraints. It is then accompanied by a reminder that this text was prepared by "three preliminary studies". The first "refers directly to the practical experience of the revolution in Russia" and the second is "the problem of the relations between industry and the agricultural sector". The third study, *GIC, Marxism and State Communism: The Decline of the State*, "criticizes the identification of nationalization with socialization and of state capitalism with socialism" note of the IGCL].

## 2- Misunderstandings and anti-critique

In the foregoing, reference has been made to the misunderstandings that have arisen over time due to

inadequate translations and summaries of the *Fundamental Principles* and unfamiliarity with the three preliminary studies. This section introduces the most important of these misunderstandings and corrects them with references to the 1935 version of the *Fundamental Principles*.

The first critique was that of Herman Gorter at the presentation of Jan Appel's first draft. Unfortunately, this critique was only passed on by word of mouth. Gorter's appeal of 1926 to Lenin's *The state and revolution* for his view that production should be arranged as in the postal service and the railways was answered by Appel's critique of Lenin in the original German version of 1927 of the GIC pamphlet *Marxisme en staatscommunisme; het afsterven van de staat* <sup>(53)</sup>.

### Presupposed ideals of absolute equality

At first Anton Pannekoek was also skeptical and did not want to write a foreword to what he thought was a Utopian plan. After reading, that proved too easy; it was more a critique of the view that the organization of production had to come from the state <sup>(54)</sup>. In his book *Workers' Councils* (1946) Pannekoek devoted ten pages to a summary of the *Fundamental Principles* <sup>(55)</sup>. In his standard work on the Dutch and German communist Left, Bourrinet suggests that Pannekoek in *Workers' Councils* ‘implicitly’ criticizes the *Fundamental Principles*. Among many other misconceptions that only show that the author is not acquainted with the version of the *Fundamental Principles* revised in 1935, Bourrinet falsely presupposes that the GIC uses an absolute idea of ‘justice’ and ‘equal distribution’ <sup>(56)</sup>.

In his introduction to the republication of the first German edition Paul Mattick was already critical in 1970 on the distribution based on hours worked, which the GIC proposed at the beginning of the transitional period. In addition this text contains all sorts of interesting points for discussion that go beyond the scope of this text. The “possible wrongs of a distribution bound to labor time” that Mattick showed, namely that in spite of formal equality there is no equality of work, nor of living conditions of the workers, were known to the GIC as well as to Marx,

53 GIC, *Marxism and State Communism; The Withering Away of the State* – Amsterdam: Groepen van Internationale Communisten, 1932. – 18 p.

54 Anton Pannekoek, *Herinneringen*, 1982, p. 215.

55 Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils*, 1946 [Shop organization](#).

56 For the most recent, partly rewritten edition, see *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900-68)*, Brill, p. 358/363. The first edition of this Thesis has also been distributed by the ICC as its own ‘collective work’. See also Corvo's critique [Council communism or councilism? - The period of transition](#).

as was the essential solution, the evolution toward a higher stage of communism, where taking according to needs and giving according to capacities will prevail. Mattick simplifies the problem in his assumption that “*in the advanced capitalist countries (...) the social forces of production are sufficiently developed to produce means of consumption in abundance*” and “*that under the conditions of a communist economy an abundance of means of consumption can be produced that renders a calculation of individual shares [in communal labor] superfluous*”<sup>(57)</sup>. Firstly, we do not know what devastation as a result of the destruction of the environment, the imperialist wars, the economic crises and the civil war between capital and labor, will be inherited from capitalism by a victorious working class. Secondly, Mattick does not ask the question “*who will work if consumption is free?*” The transition from scarcity to abundance in the higher forms of communism is not just a question of the technical development of the productive forces. The revolution is also the “self-education” of the human productive forces, by which the proletariat can “*succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew*”<sup>(58)</sup>.

Within the group **Daad & Gedachte**, on the narrow basis of its own summary of the *Fundamental Principles*, discussions emerged in the late 1970s about the existing inequalities in pay when calculated on the basis of hours worked. In addition to interesting proposals to compensate for these inequalities, however, the group advanced ‘equality’ ideals that are missing in the GIC writings<sup>(59)</sup>.

At the beginning of the transitional period, when it is a society that still has characteristics of capitalism, the word “freedom” in the “association of free and equal producers” has a negative connotation, as opposed to oppression, and not yet that of the free development of individually unique properties. Likewise, the word “equality” in the period immediately after the proletarian revolution reminds us that the formal equality of civil law in “equal producers” hides all kinds of real forms of inequality. Equality is dealt with in the *Fundamental Principles*, 1935, in Chapter IX under the heading “*‘Rechtvaardige’ verdeling?*”:

*“In communist production we therefore demand that working time be the measure of consumption. Each worker determines by his work at the same time his share of the social stocks of consumer goods”.*

Or, as Marx says: “*He receives a certificate from*

*society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labor (after deducting his labor for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labor costs. The same amount of labor which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another”* (See the end of Chapter III.).

*This is misinterpreted as a ‘fair’ distribution of the national product. And that’s true in the sense that no one can eat with leisure, as the shareholders do when they only collect the dividend. But with that justice is exhausted. At first glance, it appears that all wage differentials are abolished, and that all functions in social life, both spiritual and manual labor, give equal rights to social stocks. On closer inspection, however, this law of equality works very unfairly.*

*Let us take two workers, both of whom give society the best of their powers. But one is unmarried, while the other has a family with five children. Another one is married, while husband and wife both work so that they have a ‘double’ income<sup>(60)</sup>. In other words, the same right to social resources becomes a great injustice in practical consumption.*

*The distribution of labor according to the working time standard can therefore never be deduced from justice. The standard of working time has the same shortcomings as any other standard. That means: A fair standard does not exist and can never exist. Whatever criterion one chooses, it will always be unfair. And that’s because using a scale means ignoring individual differences in needs. One person has few needs, the other many. One man can thus satisfy all his needs with his allocation on the supplies, while another lacks all kinds of things. They give society their whole being, and yet the first can satisfy his needs and the second one can not.*

*This is the imperfection inherent in every scale. In other words, the definition of a consumption measure is an expression of the unevenness of consumption.*

*The demand for equal rights to social stocks has nothing to do with justice. On the contrary, it is a **political demand** par excellence that we set as **wage laborers**. For us, the abolition of **wage labor** is the central point of the proletarian revolution. As long as work is not the norm for consumption, there is a ‘wage’, be it high or low. In any case, there is no direct connection between the wealth of the goods produced and this wage. Therefore, the management*

57 See: [Introduction / Paul Mattick](#).

58 Marx/Engels, [The German Ideology](#).

59 Daad & Gedachte, *Maar hoe dan? Enige gedachten over een socialistische samenleving*: [Discussie](#).

60 Note by F. C. : This example falsely indicates that bourgeois marriage and the bourgeois family will persist during the transitional period. But the communists will propose an individualization of incomes that will ensure that those who form a household do so on the basis of personal affection only and will not be forced by mutual economic dependency.

of production, the distribution of goods and thus also the added value produced, must go to 'higher instances'. However, if working time is the criterion for individual consumption, it means that wage labor has been abolished, that there is no longer any surplus value produced, and therefore no 'higher levels' are needed to distribute 'national income'.

The requirement of an equal right to social resources therefore does not depend on 'justice' or any kind of moral assessment. It is based on the conviction that only this way wage workers can **keep** control of the economy. From the 'injustice' of the equal right, communist society begins to develop" (61).

### **Incomprehension of the political framework**

From the point of view of the Italian left in exile, a more political critique has been made on the *Fundamental Principles*. However, Mitchell, in a very lengthy consideration in **Bilan** from 1936 to 1937, ignored the political premises found in both the preliminary studies and the 1935 edition of the *Fundamental Principles*. As a result, his conclusion is in part equivalent to stating the obvious:

"In the next revolution, the proletariat will win regardless of its cultural immaturity and its economic shortcomings, provided it does not rely on 'the construction of socialism' but on the development of the international civil war" (62).

Hennaut had already written in 1936 a French summary of the *Fundamental Principles* for *Bilan*. With knowledge of the Dutch edition, Hennaut formulated in 1935 in *Bilan* much more cautiously and more precise what *Bilan* meant, namely the question of the proletarian state:

"(...) that a revolution, how 'mature' it may be, can never be a mechanical process. It is possible that this is not the view of our Dutch comrades, and that the gap to which we refer is due only to the necessity of abstraction, for the sake of clarity, to present economic development as completely separate from the political. However, it is important to provide more clarity in this regard. It is true that they explain somewhere that the state remains necessary for the proletariat after the seizure of power. It is a 'state' of a special character, which in reality is no longer a state, as Lenin, according to Marx, has shown. It concerns a state that can 'only die off', while Marxism has shown that the state is always the means to oppress one class against another. It is possible that, for the sake of clarity, the term 'proletarian state' should be replaced by a more correct one. But with this argument, one will

understand our criticism. The presentation of the Dutch explains the necessity of a 'proletarian state' which can not escape its function as a tool to suppress the counter-revolution" (63).

The Italian Left in *Bilan* and *Internationalisme* has brought forward interesting positions on the state in the transitional period. Unfortunately, the discussion between the positions of the Italian and the Dutch communist Left has been stuck for decades because of disregard of the political framework that the GIC has used (64). Some of these persistent misunderstandings were spread by Gilles Dauvé.

After May 1968, the German-Dutch Left was rediscovered in France. This rediscovery took place in the shadow of petty bourgeois and artisan illusions about an economic "workers self-management" of isolated occupied factories – for example, the watch factory LIP - within capitalism. After some council-communist texts were newly translated or republished from previously obscure sources, Authier and Barrot (the latter being a pseudonym of Gilles Dauvé) published in 1976 a first historiography in French of *La gauche Communiste en Allemagne 1918-1921*. The authors took over Bordiga's critique of a supposed obsession of the German communist Left with forms of organization (councils, party) at the expense of their content, the communist program. Bordiga pointed out that as long as the ruling Communist Party of Russia only adhered "programmatically" to the world revolution, Russia would be governed by a dictatorship of the proletariat (65). Bordiga did not identify state capitalism with socialism, as Lenin did in *The state and revolution* before the October Revolution. Bordiga appealed to Lenin's statements at the time of the fight against the Left Communists and later in the defense of the NEP. A Lenin who had become more critical after the October Revolution defended state capitalism as an economic advance towards socialism, but he did qualify it as capitalism. On these not insignificant intricacies in the defense of state capitalism by Lenin and Bordiga, it is important to emphasize that Bordiga accepted the Leninist substitution of mass activity and mass organization of the class by the minority organization of the party, whereas the Dutch and German Left shared the view of the workers' councils as mass organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This view, however, is dismissed in Leninist style from the substitutionist point of view of Bordigism as the priority of the

63 A. Hennaut, *De Nederlandse Internationale Communisten over het program van de proletarische revolutie*.

64 Dutch language reader: 'G.I.C., *Grondbeginselen der communistische productie*' I. *De politieke randvoorwaarden*.

65 See notably 'Bilan d'une révolution (1967, 1991)', conclusion of part I, *Les grandes leçons d'Octobre 1917*. In German.

61 *Fundamental Principles*, 1935, in Ch. IX under the title " 'Rechtvaardige' verdeling? "

62 Mitchell, *Problèmes de la période de transition*.

organizational form over the programmatic content, if not simply as “economism”. With a Bordigist appeal to the primacy of the program, Authier and Barrot have qualified the whole German-Dutch Left as “councilist”<sup>(66)</sup>, denying its ‘communist’ character.

The main crime the GIC has committed in the eyes of Authier and Barrot is its proposal to introduce the socially average working hour as a unit of calculation in an economy that still knows penury. By introducing a general unit of accounting the value relationship would be maintained. To prove that, they rely on Bordiga, who would have been sole to have repeated for long that communism exceeds every value. Calculations were only to be applied to physical quantities, “*but not in order to quantify, to regulate an exchange that no longer exists*”<sup>(67)</sup>. In this context Authier and Barrot refer to two fragments of his extensive work on *The Economic and Social Structure of Modern Russia*<sup>(68)</sup>. These fragments however say in the first place, that in socialism the accumulation of value is replaced by a production of use values (p. 191). Secondly, Bordiga points out that the Bolsheviks used money as a means of calculation in their planning, and he agrees with Bukharin where the latter expresses a preference for planning in kind or physical quantities (p. 205). The Bolsheviks applied this planning in kind during War Communism, a generally recognized total failure after which the NEP was introduced. Planning in physical quantities was analyzed by the GIC in *Fundamental Principles*<sup>(69)</sup>.

Authier and Barrot refer to Marx's critique of Proudhon as a second argument against working time as a unit of calculation. In 2013, however, David Adam has shown that the GIC's proposals are fully in line with Marx. In his political adventures<sup>(70)</sup> Barrot/Dauvé had developed into the main ideologue of the current of ‘communisation’. Confronted with Adam's argument Dauvé turned away from Marx:

“*In Marx's Critique of Socialist Labor-Money Schemes & the Myth of Council Communism's Proudhonism, libcom, 2013, David Adam rebuts my*

66 Authier/Barrot, “*La Gauche Communiste en Allemagne 1918 – 1921*”, Parijs, 1976 p. 18. [English translation](#).

67 Idem, p. 227. [English translation](#).

68 Bordiga, *Structure économique et sociale de la Russie d'aujourd'hui; II Développement des rapports de production après la révolution bolchevique*”, Paris, without year.

69 GIC, *The Basic Theoretical Foundations of the Work “Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution”*, Ch. III The Distribution of Means of Production and Consumption “in Natura” (by Barter) as a Bolshevik Ideal, in Dutch: GIC, *Grondbeginselen van de communistische productie en distributie*, Ch. XII [De opheffing van de markt](#)

70 See on this unappetizing history: Bourrinet, [Dictionnaire biographique d'un courant internationaliste](#), lemma Dauvé.

*former critique of the councilist vision of communism on the ground that the GIC's notion of value is the same as Marx's. The discussion is becoming rather tricky, no fault of D. Adam or mine, it is just that the question is complicated. In the past, I wished to refute the GIC in the name of Marx's analysis of value, with special reference to the Grundrisse. I now make the point that there is something highly debatable in Marx's vision itself, both in Capital and the Grundrisse, and that the GIC did follow Marx's footsteps and was wrong to do so: far from being a useful and fair instrument of measure, labor time is capitalist blood. This is more than a causative link: labor time is the substance of value. Marx was indeed a forerunner of the councilist project”*<sup>(71)</sup>.

For the sake of completeness it has to be noted here that Bordiga's work on *The Economic and Social Structure of Today's Russia* contains a chapter in which he refers to the labor certificates (with the number of hours worked) that Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* proposed as a right to consumption in the first stage of socialist society. Bordiga says that in the Soviet Union he has encountered all kinds of purely capitalist categories, money, savings, bank accounts, interest, credit, but never these *labor certificates*<sup>(72)</sup>. That makes Dauvé's appeal to Bordiga questionable at least.

Enough about persistent misunderstandings of the *Fundamental Principles* by lack of knowledge of its text, especially in the French-speaking world. Let the GIC finally speak for itself.

### **The economic dictatorship of the proletariat**

Under the title “The Economic Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, the GIC gave its political vision in its 1935 edition of the *Fundamental Principles*:

“*Finally, we must devote a few words to the dictatorship of the proletariat. This dictatorship is a matter of course for us, and one need not necessarily talk about it, because the structure of communist economic life is no different from the dictatorship of the proletariat. The implementation of the communist economy means nothing other than the abolition of wage labor, which enforces **the equal right** for all producers on the social stocks. That is the abolition of all privileges of certain classes. The communist economy does not give anyone the right to enrich himself at the expense of the work of others. Who does not work, shall not eat. The implementation of these principles is by no means 'democratic'. The working class is implementing them with the most violent, bloody fight. There can be no question of a*

71 Gilles Dauvé, “Value, time and communism: re-reading Marx”.

72 Bordiga, idem, Le ‘bon’ de Marx, p. 221 and following.

'democracy' in the sense of class cooperation, as we know it today in the parliamentary and trade union system.

But if we look at this dictatorship of the proletariat from the transformation of social relations, from the reciprocal relations of men, then this dictatorship is the true conquest of democracy. Communism does not mean anything else than that humanity enters a higher cultural stage, because all social functions come under the direct guidance and control of all workers and [they] thus take their fate into their own hands. That is, democracy has become the life principle of society. Thus, an essential democracy, rooted in the management of social life by the working masses, is exactly the same as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It was again reserved for Russia to make this dictatorship a caricature by presenting the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party as the dictatorship of the proletarian **class**. Thus, it closed the door for genuine proletarian democracy, the administration and the direction of social life by the masses themselves. The dictatorship of a party is the form in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is actually prevented.

In addition to the social significance of the dictatorship, let's have a look at its economic content. In the economic sphere, the dictatorship operates in such a way that it brings the new social rules to which economic life is subject to general application. The workers themselves can add **all** social activities to the communist economy by accepting their principles by implementing production for the community under the responsibility of the community. All together, they implement communist production.

It is obvious that different parts of the agricultural sector will not immediately follow the rules of communist economic life, that is, they will not join the communist community. It is also probable that different workers will understand communism in such a way that they want to run the enterprises independently, but not under the control of society. Instead of the private capitalist of the past, the business organization acts as a 'capitalist'.

In this respect, the economic dictatorship has the special function to organize the economic sector according to the general rules, the social accounting in the general accounting office fulfilling an important function. In the social accounts we find the registration of the flow of goods within the communist economic life. This means nothing else than that those who are not part of the system of social accounting can not receive any raw materials. Because in communism nothing is 'bought' or 'sold'. Producers can only receive products and raw

materials from the community for further distribution or further processing. However, those who do not want to include their work in the socially regulated work process exclude themselves from the communist community. Thus, this economic dictatorship leads to a **self-organization** of all producers, whether small or large, whether industrial or agricultural. In fact, this dictatorship immediately abolishes itself from the moment that producers bring their work into the social process and work according to the principles of social control and abolition of wage labor. This is then also a dictatorship that automatically 'dies' as soon as the entire social life is grounded on the new foundations of the abolition of wage labor. It is also a dictatorship that does not perform its power with the bayonet, but which is carried out with the economic laws of development of communism. It is not 'the state' that carries out this economic dictatorship, but something more powerful than the state: the economic laws of development" (73).

The *Fundamental Principles* certainly do not provide the final word on the economic measures that the workers' councils can take after their conquest of political power. But the GIC has so far provided the most comprehensive and profound analysis of the revolutionary experiments in the period 1917-1923. It is up to new generations of revolutionary workers to go further, standing on the shoulders of what has been accomplished 100 years ago.

Fredo Corvo, May 2018 (Proofreading: Jacob Johanson).

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73 *Fundamental Principles*, 1935, in Ch. XVI under the title De economische dictatuur van het proletariaat.

## Struggle against Political Opportunism and Revisionism

### The "Bukharin Fraction" of 1918 Contrary to the Communist Left

Since the publication in French of the complete writings of the journal *Kommunist* by the publisher Smolny, it seems fashionable in the revolutionary milieu to claim the tradition of the struggle of this ephemeral fraction within the Bolshevik party. Even the Communist Workers Organisation publishes some articles in an English translation in its journal *Revolutionary Perspectives*<sup>74</sup>. But to claim the tradition of this fraction and its struggle is inevitably to its correctness against Lenin and Trotsky on domestic and foreign policy issues during the early years of the October revolution. Just as giving this fraction the Communist Left<sup>75</sup> label inevitably leads to a claim of political continuity between the journal *Kommunist* and the groups of the current Communist Left.

However, the Communist Left, particularly in its "Italian" tradition, has always stood by the Bolsheviks on all the main issues raised by the comrades of the *Kommunist* fraction. The current popularity of this journal is in fact only a new way for the more or less councilist currents within the contemporary revolutionary political milieu to serve us with their eternal and invariable anti-Leninist lament: since the day 1 of the revolution, the Bolsheviks have only paved the way for counter-revolution and Stalinism.

The purpose of this article will thus be to demonstrate that the positions defended by the militants around the *Kommunist* journal, despite the fact that they were illustrious militants of the Bolshevik party in many cases, cannot be associated with the Communist Left. In fact, these comrades put forward rather anarchist positions and conceptions. We will divide our discussion according to the main themes that are discussed through *Kommunist*, i.e. first the question of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the tactics of revolutionary war, then the construction of socialism and state capitalism.

#### Brest-Litovsk and Revolutionary War

To fully understand the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk by the Bolshevik power in 1918, it is first necessary to put the historical context into perspective. After incessant defeatist propaganda

within the old tsarist army by the revolutionaries but also after this army suffered major defeats in the face of the enemy, the military front in the East was in complete collapse. The October revolution was the final nail in the coffin of the imperialist war in Russia. The former territory of the Russian Empire was therefore *de facto* no longer at war with anyone. It is clear, however, that the other imperialists wanted to take advantage of this situation by attempting an attack on Russia. And that is exactly what Germany did.

The signing of the treaty by the Bolsheviks was therefore in no way a compromise or betrayal of principles. It was only a question of using the diplomatic channel to avoid an invasion of the revolutionary territory which, in any case, would not even have had the capacity to defend itself seriously against its attackers, since it was still without an army!

The false alternative, in fact quite childish, to die or to betray, was perfectly expressed by Radek: "*If the Russian revolution is crushed by the bourgeois counter-revolution, it will be reborn from its ashes like the Phoenix; but if it loses its socialist character, and by this disappoints the working masses, this blow will have ten times more terrible consequences for the future of the Russian and international revolution*"<sup>76</sup>. The current revolutionaries may well see in these beautiful words, beautiful only from a literary point of view, a prophecy predicting what would become Stalinism<sup>77</sup>. But this would only be a rewriting of history by modifying it under the effect of the very real trauma that Stalinism has caused for the revolutionary movement. The use, out of context, of this quote by rather councilist currents today only serves to support their theory that the Stalinist worm was hidden from the very beginning in the Bolshevik apple. However, from a political point of view, what is the alternative that Radek proposed in April 1918? To perish in the hands of counterrevolution or to

74 . For instance : <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-09-11/ossinsky-on-bukharin-s-imperialism-and-the-world-economy>.

75 . In fact, the term « proletarian communists » is more used by the writers of that journal.

76 Karl Radek, *Five months on*, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-17/an-epitaph-for-the-october-revolution>

77 . See the very councilist, if not anarchist, content of Smolny's preface and postface. See also FICL's critique of Smolny : *Struggle against opportunism : The Defence of the Proletarian Character of the October Revolution is still a class frontier !*, [http://fractioncommuniste.org/eng/bci07/bci07\\_5.php](http://fractioncommuniste.org/eng/bci07/bci07_5.php)

betray pure and eternal principles. This perspective was completely defeatist in 1918 when, let us remember, the international revolution was just gaining momentum. If we go to the end of Radek's reasoning, should the Bolsheviks have ceded power out of fear of betraying the principles? To consider as a possibility the fact that revolutionary militants relinquish power from the very beginning of the revolutionary process because it is impossible to achieve revolutionary principles in the immediate future is not to show revolutionary intransigence. On the contrary, it is one of the many masks that opportunism can wear, in this case: anarchist immediateism and the abandonment in practice of the internationalist principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its exercise.

What was the alternative perspective proposed by the comrades of the Kommunist fraction? The famous revolutionary war. *"Before the triumph of workers and peasant revolution, it will be necessary to declare revolutionary war, that is, to grant armed support to the proletarians who have not yet won. This war can take different aspects. If we can recover our economy, we will take the offensive. But if it is impossible for us to gather the necessary forces, we will wage a defensive war (...), a holy war in the name of the interests of the proletariat; our struggle will resound like a fraternal call to arms. This conflict will ignite the inferno of world socialist revolution"* <sup>78</sup>.

They therefore wanted to propose an immediatist offensive tactic in the French style, that is, in the image of the revolutionary wars that took place during the French Revolution.

Lenin responded vigorously to the revolutionary war tactics in his polemical article *On the revolutionary phrase* <sup>79</sup>. Indeed, the latter retorted to the comrades

<sup>78</sup> Translated in english by us from Boukharine, Nicolas, cité dans Cohen, Stéphen, *Nicolas Boukharine, la vie d'un bolchévique*, Éditions Maspero, Paris, 1979, p. 77

<sup>79</sup> . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/feb/21a.ht>

of the Kommunist fraction that calling for revolutionary war when the army is demobilized, that is, without having an army at its disposal, is at best fine words in the air, at worst pure adventurism. *"It is clear to everyone (except those intoxicated with empty phrases) that to undertake a serious insurrectionary or military clash knowing that we have no forces, knowing that we have no army, is a gamble that will not help the German workers but will make their struggle more difficult and make matters easier for their enemy and for our enemy"* <sup>80</sup>. The only possibility of using the tactics of revolutionary war for Lenin would be in a situation where the revolution would be isolated, that is, a situation where the revolution would have won in one country but would not spread to others after a certain period of time. This tactic is therefore a last resort for

Lenin: *"Our press has always spoken of the need to prepare for a revolutionary war in the event of the victory of socialism in one country with capitalism still in existence in the neighbouring countries. That is indisputable"* <sup>81</sup>. In 1918, at the very beginning of the process of international revolution that began in October 1917, it is not yet possible to say that the revolution in Russia was isolated.

The Bolsheviks' tactic is therefore clear and, above all, revolutionary. Peace must be signed at all costs to save time while waiting for the revolution to be extended, at least first in Western Europe. Moreover, this short respite will allow them to build a red army, which Trotsky actually did.

The most effective weapon for working to extend the international revolution could never be revolutionary war. The left-wing current of the Italian Socialist Party, the same current that would later assume leadership in the formation of the Communist Party

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<sup>80</sup> . Lenin, *The Revolutionnary Phrase*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/feb/21a.htm>

<sup>81</sup> Idem

of Italy, was already developing arguments parallel to those of the Bolsheviks in 1918 with regard to Brest-Litovsk and the revolutionary war: *"The argument of the partisans of the resistance, namely that the "holy war" - apart from its chances of success - would have constituted a real and authentic class struggle of the Russian proletariat against capitalist imperialism, does not stand up to the observation that the armies of imperialism are unfortunately made up of proletarians, and is equivalent to embracing the interventionist position that puts the German people on the bench of the International and Socialism. (...) On the contrary, the tactics of the "holy war" would have deepened the abyss between the two peoples and bound the German people to the chariot of its leaders, posing insurmountable difficulties for the future historical development of the Russian revolution; and it would have disrupted the entire social process of eliminating capitalist institutions, paving the way for a Russian neo-nationalism that would have suffocated socialism"*<sup>82</sup>. In short, this whole detour on the revolutionary war must not make us forget that the real weapon of the international proletariat to work for the global extension of the revolution was founded in 1919 under the impetus of the Bolshevik party: the Communist International. The foundation of this organization, a true world communist party, made it possible to set up in most countries a section of the party whose task it was to prepare for, be part of and lead the revolutionary struggle.

And finally, is the validity of the Bolshevik tactic, i. e. the signing of a peace treaty at all costs while awaiting revolutionary back-up from Western Europe, not completely justified when, not even a year after Brest-Litovsk, in November 1918, the revolution did indeed arise in Germany?

### **Construction of Socialism and State Capitalism**

The controversy over Brest-Litovsk will quickly become obsolete as the Bolsheviks, never a monolithic party but more a party with the same debates and differences that also cross the proletariat as a class in the process of unification, have finally agreed to sign the peace treaty with Germany. The focus of the *Kommunist* faction thus shifted to the issues of economic management and state capitalism. Indeed, in their controversy in the pages of the journal *Kommunist*, some comrades criticize the

"right-wing communists" and Lenin in particular for building socialism with the help of the capitalists, which could only lead to state capitalism, the antithesis of socialism. Under this revolutionary verbiage, there is so much confusion and freedom taken in relation to Marx's communist theory that we need to re-examine this debate in a global way, namely to link the debate on economic management from the beginning of the October Revolution to the ultimate goal of the revolution: communist society.

As a general premise for establishing a communist conception of economic management in Russian society in 1918, it must be reaffirmed that communism is the product of the capitalist great industry. This basic principle is present on all pages in the *Communist Party Manifesto* of Marx and Engels. However, in Russia in 1918, it must be noted that the economy is still far from the phase of great industry. With the exception of the few ultra-capitalist and modern islets in large cities, Russia is at a stage, very backward compared to the rest of Europe, of small property mixed with feudal vestiges.

This does not mean that revolution was not on the agenda in Russia. This would support the Menshevik<sup>83</sup> position that in Russia only bourgeois revolution was on the agenda. According to this position, the Russian social democracy was to constitute the left wing of the bourgeoisie during its revolution and leave it at that. It is not surprising that this fundamentally opportunistic position was strongly criticised by the social democratic left at the time. On the contrary, this international left, with Lenin in the lead, showed the international character of the next revolution and thus its fundamentally proletarian political character.

Proletarian revolution in Russia thus became possible despite the economic backwardness to the extent that it was linked to the rising international revolution. The balance of power between the classes of the time but also the political capacity of the Russian proletarians ensured that it was from Russia that the spark of the world revolution started. *"At the same time socialism is inconceivable unless the proletariat is the ruler of the state. This also is ABC. And history (which nobody, except Menshevik blockheads of the first order, ever expected to bring about "complete" socialism smoothly, gently, easily and simply) has taken such a peculiar course that it has given birth in 1918 to two unconnected halves of socialism existing side by side like two future chickens in the single*

82 Translated in english by us from Amadeo Bordiga, *Histoire de la gauche communiste*. Tome I, « 1912 – 1919 ». p. 372-373.  
[http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bordiga\\_amedeo/histoire\\_gauche\\_com\\_I/HGC\\_t\\_I.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bordiga_amedeo/histoire_gauche_com_I/HGC_t_I.html)

83 . It is worth noting that from the 1930s onwards, the councilist current partly adopted the Menshevik theory that Russia was only ripe for a bourgeois revolution. See among other things *The Theses on Bolchevism* : <https://www.marxists.org/archive/sprenger/1934/theses.htm>

shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany and Russia have become the most striking embodiment of the material realisation of the economic, the productive and the socio-economic conditions for socialism, on the one hand, and the political conditions, on the other"<sup>84</sup>. Thus, one of the most advanced political leaderships in Europe found itself leading an isolated revolutionary territory surrounded by enemies leading direct and indirect military interventions (by the support of the white armies), where the economy was among the most backward in Europe and had been ravaged by the imperialist war and then by the civil war. This is essential to keep in mind when judging Bolshevik politics in the early years of the revolution.

Russia having barely emerged from the precapitalist stage, the task of the Bolsheviks, while working to extend the revolution but at the same time awaiting its advent, could only be first to maintain the class dictatorship and, second, to establish the foundations of large industry in Russia. It is certain that a revolution in a major capitalist centre would have drastically changed the situation, allowing Russia to somehow skip the stages of capitalist development. Bolshevik politics were therefore based on the unity of domestic and foreign politics: internally, the development of large industry as a basis for socialization allowing communist society, externally, working to strengthen the world revolution through the foundation of the Communist International.

There was no ambiguity in Lenin's position. He was well aware that the Russian economy was not yet socialist and that by developing state capitalism the new "proletarian state" was only laying the foundations for a further communist transformation

of the economy. "Nor, I think, has any Communist denied that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism, and not that the new economic system is recognised as a socialist order"<sup>85</sup>. On the contrary, the comrades of the *Kommunist* journal were far from shedding any light on the revolutionary process, especially from an economic point of view. By opposing state capitalism in a principled way, these comrades were not able to see that large industry was necessary for the establishment of communist society.

These confusions are well expressed by Bukharin: "The socialization of production is the antithesis of state capitalism. It is the stage of transition from socialism to communism when the dictatorship of the proletariat disappears as useless and when the classes dissolve into the united and harmonious communist society without a State. Our slogan like that of the Communist Party is not state capitalism. It is: "towards the socialization of production - towards socialism!"<sup>86</sup>. State capitalism, on the contrary, was the last stage of the capitalist socialization of the economy and that is why the Bolsheviks advocate it until revolution extends in more developed countries. His slogan "towards the socialization of production" also betrays a desire to socialize production in Russia as it was in 1918.

Among other measures focused on economic management, the aim was to eliminate the capitalists from the management of factories so that management could be carried out by the workers themselves. This is well expressed by Ossinski:

"For nationalisation to have such a meaning and to become socialisation, it requires above all, the

« Our task, since we are alone, is to maintain the revolution, to preserve for it at least a certain bastion of socialism, however weak and moderately sized, until the revolution matures in other countries (...).

If in a small space of time we could achieve state capitalism in Russia, that would be a victory. How is it that they [the Bukharin Fraction] cannot see that it is the petty proprietor, small capital, that is our enemy? How can they regard state capitalism as the chief enemy? They ought not to forget that in the transition from capitalism to socialism our chief enemy is the petty bourgeoisie (...) state capitalism is something centralised, calculated, controlled and socialised, and that is exactly what we lack »

(Lenin, Report On The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government , April 29 1918).

84 Lenin, « *Left-wing* » *Childiness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>

85 *Ibid*

86 . Translated in english by us from Boukharine, Nicolas, « Certaines notions essentielles de l'économie moderne », *Kommunist*, #3, Éditions Smolny, Toulouse, 2011, p. 225-226

organisation of the economy of nationalised enterprises on the basis of socialism, that is, that capitalist control is eliminated and that, in the organisation of the enterprise there is no opportunity for it to regain control" (...) <sup>87</sup>. "We do not stand for the point of view of "construction of socialism under the direction of the organizers of the trusts". We stand for the point of view of the construction of proletarian society by the class creativity of the workers themselves, not by following the directives of the "captains of industry" <sup>88</sup>. However, this position has the defect of making important concessions to trade-unionist and anarcho-syndicalist theories. Communism is not the handing over of factories to the workers who work there <sup>89</sup>. Communism, on the contrary, destroys the factory as the basic unit of capitalist society. It is thus the whole of the now unified society that consciously coordinates production according to its needs. It is completely illusory and dangerous to think that giving power within the restricted walls of the capitalist factory to the workers is a socialist measure. Talk to disillusioned workers who have experimented with the modern co-management and self-management techniques put forward by the new management!

The Bolsheviks were right to use in a controlled way the knowledge and skills of some capitalists to bring Russia out of the precapitalist stage quickly. Obviously, they had to be used with caution, that is, without ever losing sight of the final goal of the revolution and by assigning them strictly to that goal. On the contrary, the comrades of the *Kommunist* journal only put forward various immediate panaceas that sound radical, but which are still foreign to Marxism: corporate socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, self-management, workerism, etc., and which instead of pushing forward economic evolution, drew it towards the precapitalist past. "It is because Russia cannot advance from the economic situation now existing here without traversing the ground which is common to state capitalism and to socialism (national accounting and control) that the attempt to frighten others as well as themselves with "evolution towards state capitalism" (*Kommunist* No. 1, p. 8, col. 1) is utter theoretical nonsense. This is letting one's thoughts wander away from the true road of "evolution", and failing to understand what this road

87 . N. Ossinsky, *The construction of socialism*, part 1, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-09-08/n-ossinsky%E2%80%99s-critique-of-state-capitalism-in-russia>

88 . N. Ossinsky, *The construction of socialism*, part 2, <https://libcom.org/library/construction-socialism-nikolai-osinsky-valerian-v-obolensky>

89 . See Amadeo Bordiga, *Seize the power or seize the factory?*, published in *Il Soviet* in 1920, <http://www.igcl.org/Seize-Power-or-Seize-the-Factory>

is. In practice, it is equivalent to pulling us back to small proprietary capitalism" <sup>90</sup>. In addition, these panaceas have founded a myth of the construction of socialism that prefigures in some aspects the stalinist myth of the construction of socialism in one country. However, as Marx explained about the Paris Commune, socialism cannot be built. It is revolutionarily liberated from the entrails of capitalism by the proletariat. "They (the working class, NTD) have no ready-made utopias to introduce par décret du peuple. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant" (Karl Marx, *The civil war in France*).

All these clarifications on state capitalism do not mean that for Marxism state capitalism is the universal regime during the transition period. On the contrary, it is to be recommended under certain conditions which are now almost completely exhausted. For Marx, in Germany in 1848 as for Lenin in Russia in 1917, state capitalism remained a tool that the working class had to use in the case of a revolution in a rather backward country, to push forward the backward economy and overcome small production, while waiting for the revolution to spread to other countries, especially the more developed ones.

In short, although some of the measures taken by the Bolsheviks may have seemed antagonistic to the principles of communism in the immediate, these measures were always taken according to the needs of the time and to shorten as much as possible the road to communism. The correctness of these measures came from their fidelity to the communist program and the fact that all their actions were directly dictated by the historical process of establishing communist society. It is the final goal that dictates our actions, not the day-to-day contingent politics. Where counter-revolution had shown its face, it was first when the perspective of world revolution was abandoned and replaced by the construction of socialism in one country <sup>91</sup>. Second, Stalinism claimed that state capitalism was already in fact

90 . Lenin, "Left-wing" Childiness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>.

91 . This did not happen overnight and without a struggle. The opposition, led by Trotsky, fought in the Bolshevik party to keep its programme of world revolution, but were defeated

socialism, hence the confusion still well maintained by the dominant ideology between state capitalist regimes, such as the USSR or China, and communism, a classless and stateless society. But all this was done not thanks to the legacy of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, but against that legacy.

It is precisely this important nuance that pro-*Kommunist* neo-councilists are currently rejecting. As a result, they tend to abandon the fundamental principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat (the abandonment of power); and, under the guise of

criticism of state capitalism, they sow confusion about the possibility of socialist measures in an isolated country that opens the way to the theory of socialism in a single country. Thus, ultimately, today's councilism reaches the theoretical background of Stalin and justifies it while trying to pass off this sauce as the Communist Left. It is a pity that groups of the Communist Left such as the ICT, at least its English pages, lend themselves to this anti-Bolshevik and anti-Marxist offensive...

Robin, July 2019

## **Pamphlets of Internationalist Communists - Klasbatalo and the IFICC (orders at : intleftcom@gmail)**

*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)

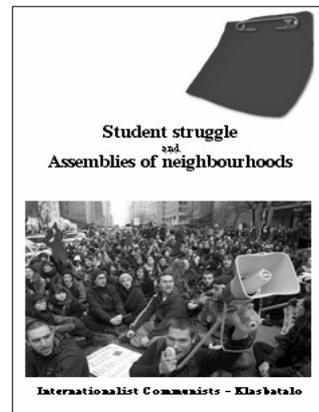
*Groupe des Travailleurs Marxistes (Mexique, 1938)* (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French and Spanish)

*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).

## **Two Pamphlets : *Proletariat Morality, Class Struggle and Revisionism* and *Student Struggle and Assemblies of Neighbourhoods in Québec, 2012* (Internationalist Communists – Klasbatalo)**



## 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