

REVOLUTION or WAR #14

Journal of the International Group of the Communist Left (IGCL)
February 2020



Against Capitalism's "Solution" to its Inescapable and Dramatic Contradictions, Massive International Class Struggle!

International Situation

International Proletarian Struggles

2nd Communiqué on the Strikes in France (January 3rd 2020)

The Question of Working Class Demands (Correspondence)

The Strike at the General Motors in United States (Workers Group)

Wave of Strikes in Finland (ICP *Le Prolétaire*)

Debate within the Proletarian Camp

How to Join the IGCL and a Communist Group?

Gulf Coast Communist Fraction's Response to the IGCL

Letter to Emancipación/Nuevo Curso on its Claimed Historical Lineage with the Trotskyist Left Opposition of the Years 1930s

The Communist Workers Organization, the journal *Kommunist* (1918) and the Period of Transition

Text of the Workers Movement

The Family According to the Marxist Conception (*Prometeo* #1, 1924)

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4 dollars/3 euros

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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.

Warning for the English version of this journal

We were unable to correct and verify the English translation of several texts in this issue. We apologize for the difficulty of the reading and we hope that there is no political misunderstanding. If any doubt, one can always refer to the French version.

Against Capitalism's "Solution" to its Inescapable and Dramatic Contradictions, Massive International Class Struggle!

Proletarian struggles and "social revolts" have multiplied since last summer all around the world, affecting all continents. Capitalist society is in a period of massive class confrontations worldwide because of the economic impasse and the drive towards imperialist war. The outcome of these beginning historical confrontations between the capitalist class and the proletarian class will decide the path towards generalized imperialist war, the only path for capitalism if it is not destroyed, or the path towards pre-revolutionary period. To be clear, only the proletarian international insurrection, its destruction of the capitalist state and the exercise worldwide of its class dictatorship can prevent the whole of humanity from falling into a global catastrophe.

In the last six months, we have seen further evidence of the untenability of capitalist social relations. The ruling class has no other course to offer than intensified militarization of its economic rivalries, which requires the imposition of austerity on the home front, accompanied by the class collaborationist argument that these economic sacrifices must be borne by "all" (as usual the cost of imperialism is paid for by intensifying the exploitation of the proletariat) to increase competitiveness in relation to other imperialist powers, whether officially allies or foes. In the post Cold War era, the terrain of these conflicts was mostly economic, specifically as regards to direct confrontation between major powers. However, recently we have seen how intimate is the connection between military commitment and commercial interests, and how willing imperialist powers are to escalate their commercial conflicts to the point of military conflict. A dispute over access to energy resources off the coast of Cyprus has escalated to the point that Greek authorities openly contemplate a military clash with Turkey. The latter has sent military forces to Libya to assist the government in Tripoli in the fight against the Russia-backed general Haftar. In Libya too, control of oil resources is an immediate stake, concerning numerous competing powers, as it is in Syria where Trump gloated they had seized the oil. Imperialist fronts are developing across North Africa, the Sahel,

and the Middle East. In these arenas of conflict, access to energy resources, pipelines, and shipping routes are a direct stake for the different national bourgeoisies.

The austerity, unemployment, and degradation of the living and working conditions of large swathes of workers have provoked revolts with varying degrees of proletarian character across the globe, ranging from petty bourgeois led struggles appealing to British and US imperialism in Hong Kong, to struggles with a marked proletarian character, in which the unions and capitalist left parties nevertheless are strongly present to sabotage them. While some of these revolts have been oriented around typically petty bourgeois demands, such as the resignation of the government when there isn't a viable alternative to capitalist rule, others have featured working class demands and been motivated by degradation of living and working conditions. Proletarians have mobilized in countries around the globe, notably in Lebanon, Iraq, Chile, France, the US around demands for employment, higher wages, payment of wages, against increasing the pension age. These struggles are a response to the attempt of the bourgeoisie to make the proletariat pay for its crisis and finance the drive to war by intensifying exploitation, and as such they are connected to the fight against imperialist war whether the participants of those struggles are conscious of it or not. That is why we can say that these massive class confrontations will determine the outcome of the historical alternative revolution or war.

In this period, given the stakes there is a pressing need for revolutionaries to become the effective vanguard of the class, a task which requires confrontation of bourgeois political forces intervening in the class struggle as well as debate and discussion among comrades and groups in the revolutionary camp to clarify what is objectively in the interest of the class and what are appropriate orientations to put forwards during struggles. These are key aspects of the process of reappropriating the communist program and the formation of the party.

Stavros, February 1st 2020.

International Situation

The various episodes of massive social struggles and revolts that have crossed all continents in recent months respond to the class offensive of all the national bourgeoisies and their states. Economic crisis, economic and imperialist rivalries and the prospect of war can only lead to an exacerbation of class antagonisms under the impulse of the ruling classes. The period that has begun can be characterized as that of massive class confrontations whose outcome will largely determine the march to generalized imperialist war or the opening of a pre-revolutionary perspective. The information and study of these various class confrontations is one of the tasks assigned to communist groups in order to be able to define a general understanding of the course of historical events, always determined by the balance of power between the classes, by the class struggle, and to develop their capacity of intervention as political vanguards of the proletariat.

Limited by the space and the frequency of our journal we had to make a choice among these different workers and popular mobilizations - among those with proletarian characteristics. In addition to the information that the international bourgeois media could not pass over in silence, the reader can refer - we invite him/her to do so - to the revolutionary and more particularly communist press. The websites of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (<http://www.leftcom.org>), of the PCI-Le Prolétaire (<http://www.pcint.org/>), to mention only the most active communist groups¹, or the review *A Free Retriever's Digest* (<https://afreeretriever.wordpress.com/>) and *Nuevo Curso* (<https://nuevocurso.org/>) have widely mentioned and taken position on different struggles on the American, Asian and European continents.

We have made the choice here to inform and take a stand on three proletarian struggles which seem to us, by their respective characteristics and dynamics, to show both the path to follow and the future of class struggle; and, through their limits, the main terrain of class confrontation, the one that the proletariat must assume and lead if it wants to be

able to thwart the union and political traps that lead to defeat and clear its revolutionary path. The strikes of December-January in France - the mobilization is still going on at the time of writing even if the strikes have for the most part ceased - have clearly raised the question of political confrontation with the bourgeois state, with its police force, of course increasingly violent, but especially with its leftist union and political forces, in order to be able to extend the struggle, here the strike, to all proletarian sectors in France. The strike of the General Motors in the United States puts into perspective, even contradicts, the myth of a blue-collar American working class that can only vote for Trump. At the same time, it confirms that any remaining struggle in the corporation, here the automobile sector, imposed by the union apparatus as an organ of the capitalist state, is doomed to failure. Finally, largely ignored by the international media, the proletarian initiative in Finland - a country that is the world champion of happiness according to a bourgeois study - of a strike at the Post Office and its extension to all the main sectors of the country has succeeded in making the Finnish bourgeoisie retreat, momentarily of course. Contrary to the proletariat in France, which did not succeed, despite its combativeness and experience, to dispute the control and direction of the struggle to the trade unions, the proletariat in Finland took the initiative of the struggle and imposed its timing, weakening all the more the Finnish state and its trade union and political forces' mastery and control of the confrontation.

We are only at the very beginning of historical class confrontations. But already experience teaches us that the proletariat will not be able to avoid engaging resolutely in the political struggle, in political confrontation, against the bourgeois state forces that are the unions and the left and leftist parties - as much bourgeois as the parties of the right. Claiming, fighting, disputing, controlling the political direction of each struggle, its terrain and its deadlines, against union sabotage is the path that the workers of General Motors have not been able to see, the one that the proletarians in France have glimpsed but have not been able to assume, the one that the proletariat in Finland has been able - probably in particularly favourable circumstances that are likely not to re-occur - to assume in part and thus provoke a retreat of the bourgeoisie.

Revolution or War, January 30th 2020

¹ . We could also mention the ICC website (<https://world.internationalism.org/>). Nevertheless, the positions of this group on workers' struggles almost always lead back to a defeatist position on workers' struggles, the theory of decomposition obliges, and to a petty-bourgeois idealistic vision of the class struggle which manifests itself by denouncing as traps, or maneuvers of the bourgeoisie, struggles because they are not "pure and self-organized" freed from the trade-union and leftist forces. We cannot develop here.

2nd Communiqué on the Strikes in France (3 January 2020)

We are only publishing here our latest communiqué on the situation in France, which retraces the whole dynamic of the workers' mobilization since last September. We accompany it with a final update on what has happened since it was written on 4 January. Readers, especially those not living in France, who would like to go back in more detail on the progress of this mobilization and on the intervention of the revolutionaries, can refer to our statement of 2 November 2019. (<http://www.igcl.org/Active-Support-to-the-Strikers-of>) and our 1st communiqué 8 December (<http://www.igcl.org/Communique-on-the-Strikes-in>).

[**Warning:** in the original French version, the editor got the dates wrong. This communiqué was written on Friday, January 3 instead of Friday, January 4 and he also confused January 7 as Monday instead of Tuesday, January 7, the day of the official government-union discussions. We have corrected that in this English version. We thank the readers, and the comrades of the ICT, who alerted us immediately to the confusion.]

The strikes that began on the 5th of December continue in a number of sectors, particularly those related to public services. Readers living outside France should note that there has been a mobilization against the abolition of pension systems in favour of a new system that significantly postpones the effective retirement age and considerably reduces pensions, sometimes by as much as 30%. The strike continues to paralyze a large part of public transport, especially in the Paris region, despite attempts to intimidate, pressure and repress by the management and managerial staff of striking companies (mainly SNCF, national trains, and RATP, metro, bus and part of the trains in the Paris region) and the police, especially during demonstrations and picket lines. Despite government provocations and media propaganda, the movement still enjoys the support and sympathy of a majority of the population according to polls ².

After the two weeks of Christmas holidays, the teachers will return from vacation on Monday the 6th. The next day, Tuesday 7, the government will receive all the unions. The fact that there have been no formal discussions or negotiations since December 18th shows that the government has tried to play the card of *rotting* the strike without trying to resolve the situation and the exhausting daily hardships of hundreds of thousands of travellers going to work; and on the other hand to lock the strikers into a long and exhausting strike that is physically and financially exhausting - many are one month into the strike, which means they already lost one salary! It is very likely that this Tuesday the government will grant some small concessions of a secondary nature, to the so-called "reformist" unions, the CFTD and UNSA, so that they can call for the strike to be stopped with a minimum of

² . Still these days, and according to the polls of the bourgeoisie, more than 50% of the French population supports the strike movement, only 35% are against it, and 15% do not speak out... More than 70% of the "active" people, that is the working people, support the strike!

credibility in the eyes of their "base" and "public opinion". If this is the case, the media will headline on the trade union division, the ebb of the strike and the decrease in the number of strikers. On Thursday 9th, the "most left-wing" trade unions, the CGT, FO, SUD, FSU, gathered in an *intersyndicale* ["inter-union"], will organize a 4th day of action and "inter-professional" demonstration. Depending on the extent of participation in the strike, in Education in particular, or even in other sectors, and the outcome of Tuesday's negotiations, the day of the 9th will mark the end, or the beginning of the end, of the strike and the failure of the mobilization to make the government back down, or else a redistribution of the cards, a disruption of the lines and forces confronting each other in this mobilization. But then we can think that the driving force of the current strike, the railway workers and the RATP workers, exhausted, will have to be taken over by another sector or other sectors.

How did it come to this? What has been the course of the struggle until today and what have been the different successive battles? And how have or should have the revolutionaries intervened in these?

In the previous Communiqué of December 8th ³, after recalling the current international context of struggles and popular revolts, we tried to present the process that led from the massive strike at RATP on September 13th to the day of union action on December 5th and the start of the renewable strike. In particular, we recalled the importance that the extension of the wildcat strike at the Châtillon SNCF TGV maintenance centre at the end of October, itself preceded by a three-day stoppage of national traffic following an accident, could have taken if it had extended. It would have taken the initiative and control of the struggle away from the unions by anticipating the day of action on December 5th. The end of this strike, "victorious" because the management hastened to give in to local demands, closed this moment and in fact gave back the control

³ . <http://www.igcl.org/Communique-on-the-Strikes-in>.

to the unions until December 5th, and even until the 10th. We concluded this communiqué with the following statement, which seems to have been verified to date:

"Certainly, the bourgeoisie and its unions are in control of the situation; in particular and most certainly, this will be so between now and Tuesday and Wednesday [December 10 and 11, days of the second day of action and the meetings between the unions and the government]. Nevertheless, the will to fight is strong and a kind of arm-wrestling has been engaged with the government. And it is also where the proletariat can engage in a deadlock. The risk for all proletarians is to simply and passively wait for the transport blockade with the hope it may make the government withdraw its project instead of entering into the open struggle themselves".

From December 10 to 17...

The day of action on December 10th saw less participation in the strike and demonstrations than on the 5th (800,000 demonstrators versus 1.5 million according to the CGT). In our opinion, this drop in participation can in great part be explained by the lack of real perspectives for the generalization of the movement beyond the sectors traditionally in struggle (railway workers in particular). At the end of that day, it seemed that the control of the situation by the state, mainly government and unions, had been further strengthened... until the Prime Minister spoke the same evening.

While everyone expected him to announce some concessions (such as the withdrawal of the *pivot age*⁴), which the "moderate" unions would have been quick to salute in order to call for a return to work, he reaffirmed the whole project as it stood to the great displeasure of the CFDT, which was then obliged to join the day of action planned for the 17th. We cannot go back here on the possible immediate reasons, tactics, clumsiness, etc. for such an uncompromising attitude. On the other hand, we know that *objectively*, due to the crisis and economic situation of capitalism, the national bourgeoisies have seen their "economic" and "financial" room for manoeuvre considerably reduced.

Then it seemed to us that the window of opportunity of the extension, closed since the 5th, was reopening - albeit timidly. This is why we distributed our leaflet of the 11th *Do Everything to Help the Private Sector to Engage in the Strike!*⁵

4 . Everyone could retire at 62 but with a "lifetime" discount on their pension of 5% per missing year of contributions - 42 are needed - until the age of 64. Actually, the effective age is pushed back to at least 64.

5 .<http://www.igcl.org/Do-Everything-to-Help-the-Private>.

"Training, encouraging, helping, the private sector workers to engage in struggle and strike action is the priority of the day if we want to make the government move back! Blocking transport will not be enough. The proxy strike, which puts most of the weight of the struggle on the railway workers and RATP [Paris region Transport] workers alone, can only lead to a deadlock and exhaustion of the strikers. The window, the opportunity, the occasion, to train and extend the strike to the proletarians of the private sector is still there. At least by next Tuesday the 17th and the demonstrations of that day. After that, it is quite possible that the strike, reduced to railway workers and RATP workers for the most part, will be reduced to a 'arm-wrestling' struggle with no other aim than to last as long as possible. At this game, the bourgeoisie and the entire state apparatus will be the strongest. They will control the situation, if only through the unions, and will wait for the struggle to end on its own. As for the railway workers in 2018".

Our leaflet was favourably received wherever it could be distributed⁶, but we were not the only ones to put forward this slogan of extension to the private sector. In particular, many *inter-professional* [*interpro*] assemblies, organized on local or regional bases, composed largely of strikers, adopted this orientation and tried to put it into practice: picketing (at RATP bus depots in particular), delegations and leaflet distribution to companies, blocking of certain ports (Le Havre, Rouen...) or industrial zones, agitation for strikes in shopping centres, street demonstrations, either at city or neighbourhood level, holding of meetings open to all, etc. Actually, an opposition tended to appear within these organizations on the issue of extension, between the basic trade unionist apparatuses and a part of the participants in these assemblies. To a certain extent, the opposition that had emerged between the wildcat strikers at the Châtillon maintenance centre at the end of October and the union SUD mainly (see our communiqué of December 8th) has been reproduced identically: some trying to bring back the deadlines for the days of action, i.e. on the trade union ground, and others trying to break this trade union control over the high points and orientations of the struggle itself.

Nevertheless, the orientation of "national" extension and generalization did not take place during this period and, despite participation in the strike and demonstrations as important as the 5th,

6 . Even though some railway workers told us that at some meetings they had to endure the hostility of the trade unionists, or even their attempt to prevent the distribution, when they reproduced it.

the 17th came, in fact, to close this open window on the generalization of the strike. Once the risk passed (especially since three days later the highly mobilized teachers were on holiday), the bourgeoisie immediately pushed its advantage: the same evening, the government announced the resumption of discussions with the unions for the 7th of January. The UNSA and the CFTD renewed their call for a Christmas truce, in short, to stop the strike. And the *Intersyndicale* fixed a fourth day of action for January 9th! The postponement of these deadlines, in particular the day of action set for the 9th, was experienced as a real sabotage of the mobilization by many assemblies of strikers, which further strengthened the development of local assemblies and interpro initiatives.

The Two Weeks of Holidays

For two weeks, the strikers found themselves almost alone, including in the media. Teachers on school holidays for two weeks, as some of the country's proletarians were as much concerned about family celebrations as they were about mobilization, Christmas and New Year's Day in the middle of the week, the government was able to safely and provocatively display its own departure on holiday accompanied as it was by the disappearance of the union leaders. While the strike continued! The strikers had no other choice, no other prospect than to make it last until January 9th, *holding on and holding on again and again*, day after day, using up a lot of energy in this fight that was locking them in a little more each day. But it is not just about the strikers. It is also the whole proletariat in France, its great masses working in the private sector, whether industry, commerce and services, who have installed themselves in the strike by "proxy", wishing that the railway workers and others last as long as possible, even bringing them their *sympathy*, but unable to join them in the open strike.

Our leaflet and the direct intervention for the extension was becoming out of date at that time, its orientations and slogans losing any effectiveness. It was necessary to adapt our direct intervention according to the evolution of the immediate balance of power in this struggle, that is to say according to the relative success of the bourgeoisie in locking up the strikers of the SNCF and RATP mainly, if not only, in the long strike.

"We reproduce here the leaflet that PCI-Le Proletaire [ICP-Proletarian] is currently distributing and dated last night. We share its positions, the analysis of the immediate situation and the orientations of struggle that the communists must put forward these days, that is to say during the Christmas and New Year weeks, despite the holidays

and union sabotage. Especially the call, today, at this very moment, after the episode which closed on the 17th big street demonstration, for the organisation of strike committees, inter-general assemblies, picket lines, etc., to be organised to "expand and unify the movement". We invite all those who share its orientations to spread this leaflet around them and in the general assemblies and demonstrations. (...). The IGCL, December 22".

It seemed to us then that the weight of the intervention had to focus on "local initiatives", such as *interpro* assemblies, to encourage the most combative workers to organize and lead the battle against the union manoeuvres; or even to be able to carry out one or more local or geographical extensions. For us, the orientations put forward by the ICP leaflet corresponded to the necessities of the struggle at that very moment:

"Against this sabotage, open or not, of union apparatuses completely integrated into the bourgeois network of maintaining social order, salvation lies only in the organization of the struggle on class bases. Already in many places strike committees have been set up to lead the struggle, "inter-professional" general assemblies are being held to extend and unify the movement over the differences of trade and corporation, effective picket lines are being set up, and calls for national days of mobilization are being made by the strikers to get around the blockade of the union apparatuses. These initiatives are still limited, but they point the way forward for workers in the current and future struggles against all bourgeois attacks" (leaflet of the ICP, December 21st, pcing.org).

For the time being, it seems to us that this orientation should be maintained at least until Monday. This period, which will end tomorrow [Saturday 4th] with "local" demonstrations called mainly by SUD and many CGT local sections, has seen a continuation of mobilization and various local initiatives. At the same time, the repression both on the picket lines and in the demonstrations, just yesterday in Paris for example, by the police and the RATP management in particular, the (relative but growing) tensions between strikers and non-strikers, have worsened, a sign that the bourgeoisie feels that today, with the situation under control, it can begin to think about increasing repression even more and inflicting the widest and deepest possible defeat.

Reality, Difficulties and Limits of Strikers' Assemblies and "Interpro" Ones

We have noted that a more or less open opposition

has tended to emerge within the "grassroots organizations", strikers' assemblies, *interpro* assemblies, etc.,. We also noted that some of our correspondents regretted the fact that a certain criticism of the unions was put forward after December 17th and 18th in the ICP leaflet. It is indeed difficult, when the strike has been going on for a month at the cost of financial sacrifices and constant exertion, to openly question the conduct of the strike. However, the assemblies of strikers and others cannot be summed up in a succession of interventions in which each one tells that his/her workplace has been on strike at x% since the 5th, that everyone remains determined, and that the strike will continue until the end and the applause that punctuates these apparently voluntary, energetic and radical declamations. It is easy to be reassured among those that are already "convinced". It can be comforting and warm. But it is not enough to make the fight and the strike effective. The assemblies must discuss, debate and decide on the orientations and decisions to be taken by confronting the various proposals. Otherwise, they are left to the control and goodwill of the trade union apparatuses, including the rank and file ones. And the fact that the strike is formally voted on every day does not change anything. Here are excerpts from an interview of a striker of the SNCF published on the site Paris-luttes info (<https://paris-luttes.info/le-nombre-est-la-mais-il-manque-13200>), which rather well points out the opposition that we noted above within the General Assemblies and the difficulties which the proletariat in struggle is confronted with even today in this mobilization.

*"In the Vaires-sur-Marne depot at the General Assembly [GA], there are quite a few of us, ranging from 50 to 200 people, we are open to other sectors in struggle, teachers, RATP, hospital workers, postal workers... We very quickly created the Vaires-sur-Marne Strike Committee which meets twice a week to propose actions, it was obvious to everyone: the strike belongs to the strikers and to no one else. This allows the strike to be animated outside of the Paris trade union demonstrations. (...). That being the case, the GAs throughout the country, we don't know exactly what is going on. **It's a shame, because in 1986 there was a Central Strike Committee, a national coordination that allowed us to collect all the information on the actual number of strikers, but also to coordinate the slightly more radical operations.** A strike committee is now being formed in the Ile-de-France [Paris] region, but it still has a lot of limitations. (...).*

*– What do you think of the attempts at coordination, such as the GA *interpro*, which took place in Paris? I*

have the feeling that they remain quite largely limited to militants (Trotskyists, autonomous, trade unionists) and have difficulties to spread? [Question of the Paris-luttes-info].

*– Yes, as I said earlier, the *Interpro* GAs and different coordinations have their limits, even if the will to give the strikers a democratic place to meet is positive. The fact is that there are always the same people, the same union, autonomous, political and other activists. The question is how can these coordinations or GAs be widened when most people have an exacerbated distrust of co-optation and recuperation. Who benefits from this? We'll never win anything if, no matter which organization we're in, we can't question ourselves and leave the initiative to others, push as many people as possible to speak up, express their ideas, have the texts come out of a common emanation, etc"* (Interview with T., railway woman and yellow vest, Paris-luttes-info, 31 December 2019).

This experience seems to us to confirm the orientation we are putting forward above, at least until Monday. The intervention of the revolutionaries should today be concentrated in these assemblies in order, as the ICP leaflet indicated, to gather the energies and the important minorities of proletarians, strikers or not, who remain mobilized. More concretely, and with the approach of a week in which it is highly probable that the last battles will be fought, the capacity of these minorities, comprising thousands of proletarians, to consolidate and centralize at the national level would be a first step towards an alternative to the fate of this mobilization on which the unions are working. As the comrade in Paris-luttes-info says, the outline of a national coordination, or at least initially of regional, local coordinations, would allow it to make a national appeal, to adopt motions, to distribute leaflets for the extension of the strike, to march under its banner during demonstrations with its own slogans and, especially at the present time, to dispute the unions for the true leadership of the struggle.

So that is where we believe we are today, Friday the 3rd, in this proletarian struggle. In addition to the objective of informing the greatest number of people in France as well as comrades in other countries and continents, we submit this analysis of the development of the strike and the adaptation of our intervention - admittedly limited because of our weak, very weak, forces in France - according to the moments and needs of the struggle to proletarians at large and to the communist and revolutionary groups.

The IGCL, Friday January 3rd, 2020.

PS. Just as this communiqué was being made public, we have learned that the *Intersyndicale* is adding another day of action on Saturday, the 11th, two days after the 9th, "To involve private sector workers who are not on strike", according to the unions. We are not able to say at this time whether this new union day responds to a strong labour push in the private sector and seeks to short-circuit the local attempts and initiatives of the *Interpro* and other GAs for the extension or whether it is simply aimed at speeding up a possible end to the strike...

Since January 4th ...

Playing once again the time and the decay of the strike, the government finally postponed until the day after the union day of action on 9 January the announcement of the provisional withdrawal of the pivotal age to allow the CFDT and UNSA unions to call an end to the strike. The scenario - which we announced in the previous communiqué - planned since mid-December to provoke the reflux and the end of the movement had to be pushed back to Friday January 10 because of the fighting spirit of the workers. However, the maneuver was not totally successful to the point that, in addition to the continuation of the strikes, the bourgeoisie's polls did not indicate a decline in majority support for the strike and an even greater majority rejection of the government's plan.

At the same time, and while exhausted railway workers and RATP workers were desperately calling on other sectors, especially the private sector, to join them in the strike, the CGT was calling for refineries to be blocked - knowing that it takes a good month minimum for there to be a shortage of petrol at service stations - and for ports to be blocked... 72 hours only on days of action. The proletarians on strike since December 5 learned that the *Intersyndicale* bringing together in particular the CGT and FO, very well established in the refineries, the CGT being the only dockers' union, had blocked for more than a month the extension - and not the ports - including in the sectors it controls. The result was that the union days of action definitively took precedence over the workers' dynamic to the point of becoming the only perspective for "mass" action, which ended up isolating the strikers. Taking advantage of their exhaustion - 45 days on strike! -, the *intersyndicale* therefore called for a new day of action on Saturday, January 11, two days after the previous one, on the pretext that private sector workers who could not strike during the week could thus come to demonstrate. In doing so, in the name of "extension", it definitively closed the way to extending the strike to the private sector and took

definitive control of the movement despite the continued fighting and mobilization.

Caught between the unions calling for the resumption of work, CFDT and UNSA, the government's refusal to yield anything, and the media on the one hand and, on the other hand, the *Intersyndicale* having effectively sabotaged the extension, the strikers from SNCF and RATP - the other sectors on strike, often in the minority, mainly in the civil service not having the strength of the first two - found themselves forced to return to work, little by little, from Monday January 13. Since then, only a few nuclei or isolated sectors - national radio and garbage collector for example - have continued the movement. However, anger and combativeness remain and many local and momentary initiatives, in particular demonstrations, continue to be developed by groups of workers, often grouped together in *interpro assemblies* - i.e. in struggle or mobilization committees -, often led and controlled by leftists and grassroots trade unionism. This combativeness, now a minority, forced the *Intersyndicale* to organise other days of action, such as the 24th January or the 29th. The latter saw the number of participants plummet. The presentation of the law to parliament will be an occasion for the *Intersyndicale* to call for new days of action, which it has now completely mastered. Barring a rebound foreign to the very dynamics of the workers' struggle, it is highly probable that the movement will end in an immediate failure of the proletariat in France.

Its inability to contest the initiative of the fight, its organisation, its demands, its objectives - especially extension - is the main lesson that can already be drawn from this struggle. By letting the unions define the timing of the struggle through the days of action, including in December, the proletariat remained under control and could not free itself, or go beyond the union framework and the general control of the situation by the state. Wanting the extension and generalization of the struggle requires that the proletariat effectively take its political leadership and initiative against the inevitable opposition of all the trade union apparatuses, including the apparently radical and grassroots ones. Apart from the strike and the organisation of its extension, in particular the general assemblies, the regrouping in struggle committees or *interpro assemblies* of the minorities and the most combative sectors is not enough if their orientation amounts to turning the workers' dynamic back on the timing and terrain of the union days of action, that is to say on the terrain of the big trade union and the government. (January 30th).

Quick Critical Comments on our December 8th Communiqué and the Working Class demands and our Response

While we have received supportive comments and agreement with our orientations puts forwards, we have also received some criticism. They mainly concerned two points: our denunciation of the unions from the 18th and their participation, in fact, during the festive season, in the famous Christmas truce, that is to say, in the government's policy of rotting in order to exhaust the sectors on strike. It was criticised, in particular by striking railway workers, for undermining the unity of the assemblies, even though "despite everything, the unions were calling for 9 January". Very quickly on this point: for us, the unity of the workers is not in the unity of the unions, but in the dynamics of the general assemblies to extend and unify the struggle, here the strike, a dynamic to which the unions, whether "right" (CFDT, UNSA) or "left" (CGT, FO...) are always opposed and seek to sabotage. The other criticism concerned the attention we paid to the demands in our december 8th communiqué⁷. We publish below an exchange with a comrade.

Hello,

It would be time to get in touch with Francis Cousin and the maximalist group "Guerre De Classe" in order to get out of your reformist ambitions. Retirement at 60 and wage increases are not revolutionary solutions, they are union demands that keep us locked in the capitalist straitjacket. Will retirement at 60 put an end to the exploitation of man by man? No, it will only slightly mitigate its effects. Wage increases to do what? To buy social peace and get the proletarians back to work without flinching? We don't want to color our chains. To hell with your patches like Engels said!

LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION! LONG LIVE THE ABOLITION OF CAPITAL FOR A HUMANE LIFE AT LAST!

<http://guerredeclasse.fr/2019/>

Regards, ReC.

Our response :

Dear comrade,

We are sorry to answer you so quickly and summarily, as your criticism deserves a more thorough answer, even though this is a historical debate which, in our opinion, has already been settled in the past. You will forgive us for the quickness of this reply and its perhaps polemical tone.

The "reformist" isn't necessarily who you think he is. It is rather the one who reduces or limits any demand to its economic dimension alone without understanding its dimension above all political in any class struggle of the proletariat. Whether he/she seizes it in order to make it the one and only goal, and thus divert the class struggle from its confrontation with the capitalist state, or whether he rejects it as an abstract and "radical" principle, even moral, because it could corrupt a pure and ideal struggle (which, in the end, leads just as much to ignoring and deviating from the political confrontation with the entire state apparatus), does not change the common approach of method - both "erroneous" - and of incomprehension of the very dynamics of proletarian struggle and class struggle. Economic and political dimensions intersect and are two moments of the process of class struggle .

For "Marxists", the struggle over the choice of demands - when it is raised, no absolute - aims at imposing demands in which the greatest number of proletarians, at a given time and place, can recognize themselves and engage in the collective struggle. Economic demands are not an end in themselves, but a moment and a means for the development and unification of the struggle. We accept the criticism of the proposals we are making today - the demands we put forward may not be those that correspond to the needs of the extension and generalization of the struggle. But we maintain that in general there is a struggle to be waged against the demands put forward by the unions and leftists today, this Monday and Tuesday, against the "simple withdrawal" of the project. In connection with the current general control of the bourgeoisie, with the unions in the lead, over the development of this struggle, this demand of the unions politically gives the government, the left parties and the unions the upper hand and imposes the bourgeois ground and it must be fought.

⁷ . <http://igcl.org/Communique-on-the-Strikes-in>.

Why the discount? Our proposal is debatable and open to debate. The suppression of any discount on pensions, which affects everyone and in fact delays all retirements beyond the legal age (-5% per missing year), not only can gather a maximum of proletarians and help them to engage them in the struggle beyond the corporations and the different pension systems (on which the bourgeoisie wants to lock us to divide) but, moreover, it imposes on capital the ground and the logic of the proletariat which rejects any consideration of "good management" or any other economic argument... Now if comrades or workers advance the demand of 55 years for all, we have nothing against it if it becomes a real and concrete objective in which a maximum number of proletarians recognize themselves and take it up in the struggle. We do not have an absolute "accounting" on the demands but just a political appreciation according to the moments and places, according to the dynamics of the proletarian struggle. The same applies of course to wage demands even if any progress on this level is immediately questioned by capital. The class struggle for wages is also a moment of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for... the abolition of the wage-labour. Marx explained it very well himself.

More deeply, we invite you to read (or reread) *Mass Strike, Party and Trade-Union* of Rosa Luxemburg (among others). And we remind you that February 1917 started with a demonstration of proletarian women for bread, an economic demand, and the insurrection of October 1917 took place, not in the name of such a radical idea as the Revolution, but for the stop of war and for peace - a demand with both political and economic character - that only the insurrection and the dictatorship of the proletariat could ensure.

So, beware of radical postures which, very often, are only the other side of what you call "reformism".

Communist Greetings, J. for the IGCL.

Pamphlets of IGKlasbatalo and the IFICC (orders at intleftcom@gmail.com)

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

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

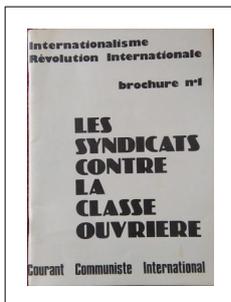
Groupe des Travailleurs Marxistes (Mexique, 1938) (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French and Spanish)

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

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

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

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



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

General Motors strike in the United States - Workers Group, November 1, 2019

The comrades of the Workers Group in the United States published the following article which gives an account of the strike at the General Motors plants last fall. Indeed, in the country where supposedly all blue-collar workers voted for Trump, there would still be workers' struggles! That's the first lesson of this strike. The comrades make very clear the alliance of the unions with the U.S. auto companies and the capitalist state. They also show the limitations that the workers have suffered in this struggle, especially their inability to fight the union's stranglehold on the struggle. Since then, the comrades have published a second part to their article⁸. This part does not really go back to the strike, but only deals with the trade union question in general and the organisation that the workers in struggle should have. If we do not share the vision that presents the trade unions "as labor contractors and wage mediators" against capital - for us trade unions today have above all an anti-worker **political** role at the service of the capitalist state -, we agree with the organizational means that the comrades put forward in this article. We hope to be able to come back to it in a - the ? - next issue.

Revolution or War.

Solidarity, 'Sacrifice' and Sabotage (Workers Group, Nov 1, 2019)

The Humiliating Defeat of GM Workers Offers Many Lessons about Today's Trade Unions and Tomorrow's Labor Struggles. The end of the 40-day strike by the United Auto Workers against General Motors has left many autoworkers across the U.S. with feelings of anger, frustration and some serious questions about where they and their co-workers go from here.

When the strike began on September 16, many of the over 49,000 autoworkers belonging to the UAW were not only supportive of the action, but also very clear about their demands and what they would consider a victory: the end of the multi-tier system, an end to the growing number of temporary workers by giving them permanent status, a rollback of the concessions handed to the company by the UAW in every contract since 2007, a commitment to not close any more plants, and a guarantee that new products are built in the U.S. by UAW autoworkers. Modest thought they are, these demands would have been the first gains that workers would have made in contract negotiations since the late 1970s.

Moreover, because of the practice of "pattern bargaining," not only GM, but also Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers would have benefited from the fulfillment of these demands.

However, it was clear very early on that the demands of the autoworkers — their open and adamant support for their temporary co-workers, their belief that over a decade of "sacrifice" to keep GM afloat after its bankruptcy and government bailout should be rewarded, and so on — were not shared by the UAW officials chosen to negotiate with GM management. *This should have come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the UAW.*

The reality is that the UAW as an institution never wanted to go on strike; the reason they authorized it was fear and pressure. But we're not talking about

fear of and pressure from the autoworkers themselves, but fear of and pressure from the ongoing federal government investigation into the close ties between the UAW officials and the management of the Big Three auto manufacturers.

Over the past years, numerous investigations into incidents of corruption, embezzlement and graft by top UAW officials have moved from Regional officials into the heart of the union's headquarters and uncomfortably close to the office of union President Gary Jones. Several past presidents, vice presidents and regional officials have been indicted or designated as "persons of interest" by the government for their roles either in the use of union funds to enrich themselves or in the receipt of bribes from management to ensure that concession deals are pushed through.

The investigations have so eroded morale and trust among autoworkers that the UAW was desperate and willing to try anything to restore even a small portion of confidence in their leadership, including resorting to a strike — albeit one that was heavily stage-managed.

In many respects, the strike, as organized, was little more than theater. The UAW gave GM ample time to build up a stock of vehicles and other necessary products to help them weather the work stoppage. By the time the action began, GM had a solid supply that could last them **87 days**. In other words, even a strike lasting two and a half months would not harm GM's ability to sell vehicles with desired options, thus allowing them to continue to generate profits while not having to pay for the power needed to produce vehicles (be that the labor-power of the autoworkers or the electricity needed for the machines).

Moreover, it is abundantly clear now that the strike was *designed to fail*. This is not only because, as

⁸ . <http://wp2p.workersgroup.org/2019/12/01/solidarity-sacrifice-and-sabotage-part-2/>

usual, it was governed by the “injunction politics” that have robbed workers of their ability to win battles against the exploiting classes for decades, but also because it was never meant to hurt the company or its shareholders (the UAW being a major one). The demands of the workers were never seriously considered to be part of the agenda, only a propaganda tool to keep them “on the line.”

And then there was the mysterious meeting between GM CEO Mary Barra and her top staffers, on one side, and UAW President Gary Jones and Vice President Terry Dittes a few days before the tentative contract was announced. Little has been said or confirmed about this meeting, but what has been leaked centers around two words that no worker wants to hear: **Taft-Hartley**. If the rumors are true, the meeting was to inform the UAW that if a deal was not reached soon, then President Trump would have invoked the Taft-Hartley “slave-labor” act and ordered autoworkers back to the plants, *deal or no deal*.

The Problem with Unions

Even though unions represent only *6.3 percent* of all workers outside of government jobs, they continue to be seen as the only effective means of fighting for the interests of the class in the workplace. This is understandable, from an historical perspective, but nevertheless a core problem for workers today.

Historically, unions have been seen as a primary means for workers to organize and defend themselves from the daily attacks by the exploiting classes. From the first craft unions of the 19th century to the industrial and amalgamated unions of the 20th and 21st, unions are still seen as the only viable means of securing and ensuring job security and a better standard of living — even if, in reality, none of these are actually achieved.

The enactment of laws like the National Labor Relations Act fundamentally changed the character of unions. No longer were they, or could they be, an organized expression of the demands and desires of workers themselves. Capitalist “legalization,” with its labyrinth of bureaucracy and regulations that demanded a mirror within the unions, transformed them into a *collective mediator* and negotiator of *the price of a worker’s ability to carry out labor*. Thus, instead of its main mission being to defend what workers have won in the past, its role is now to create an “equitable” agreement with the exploiters *on their terms*. “Stability” and “fairness” — and, most of all, preserving capitalist “competitiveness” — is the order of the day. **The workers be damned.**

In addition, the legalization process took workers themselves out of the very functioning and

leadership of unions, with positions above the local level increasingly (and now consistently) being filled mainly by elements from the exploiting classes: lawyers, “labor relations” experts, professional statisticians and consultants. Occasionally, they include a few workers who once worked for a few months on the floor, mostly for color and cover. *Is it any wonder that the staff workers at any large “international” union headquarters are often subjected to the most disgusting union-busting methods?*

This transformation, which actually began more than a century ago (the first targets being the railroad unions), initiated the process of integrating unions into the capitalist system as the aforementioned collective mediators of the price of labor-power. That transformation also opened the floodgates, accelerating and intensifying the flow of the exploiters’ ideology into the working class.

The dominance among unionized workers of nationalism, sectoralism and chauvinism, as well as the intensifying of the ideology that tells workers they are “dummies” and incapable of running things for themselves, is specifically designed to maintain the class-based divisions that keep all workers in a position of precarity, fear and subordination.

An excellent example of this is the reaction of the UAW and many autoworkers to the wildcat strikes by Mexican workers in the *maquiladoras* against the Big Three. Last February, when tens of thousands of autoworkers struck in Matamoros against the low wages and horrific working conditions in the factories — two things that autoworkers in the U.S. and Canada have complained about since the beginning of outsourcing — the response of the UAW was to ... *hold flag-waving nationalist rallies and call for a boycott of products made in Mexico!* At a time when cross-border solidarity between U.S. and Mexican workers, fighting for the same demand against the same companies, could have hobbled the Big Three and weakened them in advance of contract negotiations here, the UAW *strengthened the hand of the bosses* by keeping workers divided along national lines and preventing real unity.

The view of the unions that gains can only be fought for when the companies are profitable does nothing but shackle the well-being and interests of workers to that of their exploiters. Even worse, it keeps workers divided against themselves, even within a single industry. The needs of the working class are subordinated not only to one sector of the capitalists, but even to a sub-sector, where groveling is the only accepted form of survival.

Workers Group, November 1st 2019
(<http://wp2p.workersgroup.org/>).

Finland: Wave of Strikes in the "Happiest Country in the World" (International Communist Party – *Le Prolétaire*)

In March 2019, the United Nations published its World Happiness Report⁹: for the second year in a row Finland was ranked first. Finland is a small Nordic country with a population of 5.5 million and a reputation for being a model welfare state. The media around the world have reported on its plans to create a guaranteed universal income for all its inhabitants to eradicate poverty.

But the reality is less rosy and it seems that Finnish proletarians do not have the same opinion on their living and working conditions as the bourgeois statisticians of the UN. If we start with this famous "universal income" instituted in 2017, it was actually only at an experimental stage for two years. It only applied to 2,000 long-term unemployed, drawn by lot, and its amount was only 560 euros, a sum equivalent to the unemployment benefits it replaced, the only advantage for the beneficiaries being that it was granted even to the terminally unemployed. In the end, the measure was not renewed because of the hostility of the employers and the lower middle classes, who complained that the level of social expenditure and the taxes that finance it were too high.

Finland was a prosperous country which, like other northern European countries, was for a long time able to finance a welfare state capable of guaranteeing social peace and binding the proletariat to the capitalist system and the bourgeois state. This is no longer the case; the country has been hard hit by the economic crisis of 2008, the consequences of which were felt for years. A symbolic example of this is the fall of Nokia; the former telecom giant only escaped bankruptcy by divesting itself of a large part of its activities and cutting thousands of jobs in Finland and around the world. Similarly, forestry and the paper industry, which is traditionally the country's largest sector¹⁰ and still accounts for just over 20% of the country's exports, have suffered a severe crisis. Most paper production has been relocated to Asia and Latin America and the weakest companies have disappeared.

The economic difficulties of this former capitalist paradise have also affected or threatened large

sectors of the petty bourgeoisie; this has led to the emergence of an extreme right-wing political party which has become in a few years the third political force in the country, "The Real Finns". In their programme there is a strong emphasis on the "defence of the bosses of small and medium-sized enterprises", alongside the defence of the "Finnish identity"¹¹ and anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic positions.

After their spectacular score in the parliamentary elections of 2015 (19%), the True Finns entered the government led by the Centre Party with the National Coalition Party, two traditional right-wing bourgeois parties.

The central objective of this reactionary government was the recovery of Finnish capitalism, which meant restoring the rate of profit by lowering the "cost of labour" and reducing social spending.

The main tool has been a "competitiveness pact" negotiated with trade unions, which is supposed to reduce labour costs by 3.5%. This was a package of austerity and anti-labour measures, the main ones being a wage freeze and an increase in working time (3 extra unpaid working days per year), an increase in the retirement age to 65 years from 2025 (which will vary thereafter according to the increase in life expectancy), a reduction in unemployment benefits, a 30% reduction in the payment of holiday pay for civil servants, an increase in employees' social security contributions (and an equivalent reduction in company contributions); on the employers' side, on the other hand, the "pact" provided for a reduction in taxes.

By worsening the situation of the working class and the masses, these measures have improved the health of the enterprises; however, they have not been able to bring the country out of a recession caused by the decline in its export market share in a sustainable manner. The growing unpopularity of the government led the Real Finns to leave the government in 2017, causing a crisis within the government, with the "moderates" leaving the party to remain in the coalition. This crisis and its more open positioning on the far right did not weaken the party, contrary to what political analysts believed. The April 2019 parliamentary elections were in fact

9 . cf. «World Happiness report», 20/3/19.

10 . 60% of the exploited forest area belongs to private owners (26% to the State and the rest to logging companies, etc.): there are more than 600,000 of them (i.e. almost 14% of the population), half of them having only small properties (less than 2 hectares).

11 . In particular, they are hostile to compulsory Swedish language learning at school. Swedish is the country's second official language, with the Swedish-speaking minority constituting about 5% of the population.

marked by the retreat of the parties that were in government, in particular the Centre Party of the former Prime Minister, which experienced a real collapse. The Social Democratic Party won with 17.5% of the vote, but was hounded by the True Finns (17.2%). The new government was formed by an alliance with the Greens (which with 12% of the votes had a historic result), the "Left Alliance" (ex-PC) and... the Centre Party, which was disowned by its voters.

Despite the election promises of the left-wing parties, the new government only foresees a reduction in the austerity policy of the previous government; in particular, it has committed itself to carry out the "reform" of the social security and health system aimed at reducing costs by cutting back on benefits, initiated by the Centre Party. This did not prevent it from receiving the support of the trade unions, which were much more sensitive to its promises of productive investment than to the interests of the proletarians.

Victory of the Strikers

It did not take long for Finnish workers to realise, if they had any doubts, which side the new government was on. The Post Office, a semi-public institution, had decided to transfer 700 employees to a subsidiary as part of its quest for profitability, thereby cutting their salaries by up to 30%!

The project only just known, the workers went on strike on November 11. For almost two weeks, 10,000 postal workers followed the movement, in solidarity with the threatened workers and to demand wage increases. But the conflict extended beyond the Post Office: solidarity strikes were called on November 25 in land and air transport, ferries, etc.

When the threat of a blockade of the ports or even a general strike loomed, the management of the Post

Office withdrew its project, no doubt at the instigation of the government, which was worried about a blockage of the economy (exports, mainly by sea, account for 40% of GDP). A few days later the Prime Minister was forced to resign under pressure from the Centre Party, which criticised him for his weakness in relation to the workers; it was the Minister of Transport who was elected in his place on December 8, becoming perhaps the youngest acting head of government in the world – she is 34.

This undeniable success of the proletarian struggle served as an encouragement to workers in other sectors. Thus, from December 9, 100,000 workers in industry (chemicals, wood and oil, etc.) and services went on strike for three days, demanding wage increases and an end to unpaid work and, more generally, anti-social measures that the new government has absolutely no intention of repealing; since September, a strike over unpaid overtime has been widely followed.

The withdrawal of the Post Office project is only a first victory for Finnish workers in the face of the attacks on them, which the current government, under pressure from the capitalists, does not intend to spare them. But this victory can and must serve as a lesson for future struggles and as an example for proletarians in other countries: it is by breaking with the well-established practices of class collaboration and social consensus, by launching an unlimited strike and by calling on workers in other sectors that it is possible to make a government back down.

There is no doubt that the Finnish trade unions will do everything in their power to try to get this lesson forgotten.

It is up to the proletarians of Finland and elsewhere to remember it and put it into practice!

Le Proletaire n°535, December 28th, 2019 (translated from French by us).

Debate within the Proletarian Camp

How to Join the IGCL and a Communist Group?

Several comrades in different countries have recently asked us about the conditions and process for joining our group. We thought it would be useful to publish one of our answers to which any reader or sympathizer could refer. Over and above the specific conditions of membership linked to the principles and political platform of the IGC, it seems to us that the method we are presenting here should apply to any Communist group today. Any comments or criticisms will also be welcome, whether they come from individual activists or from already established political groups or circles.

The IGCL to comrade L,

Dear comrade,

What are the terms and conditions for joining our group? Membership to any communist group, *a fortiori* the communist party of tomorrow, of new members is an individual process that is based on a political consciousness, or conviction, and militant will: "A party lives when there is the existence of a doctrine and a method of action. A party is a school of political thought and consequently an organisation of struggle. The first characteristic is a fact of consciousness, the second is a fact of will, or more precisely of a striving towards a final end" (*Party and Class*, Communist Party of Italy, 1921¹²). Political consciousness refers first and foremost to the communist program and, more immediately, to the political platform of the group or party. The will refers to the militant commitment within an organized and centralized collective body, *the party*.

The Political Platform

From a formal point of view, the agreement – as well formal – with our basic positions (<http://igcl.org/+Our-political-positions+>) is the condition and the main criterion for any membership of our group (as with any communist group). But, as you will see, all these positions do not really constitute a political platform in which each position, which we call a class position, is argued and presented in a global framework. This is due to several reasons, one of the main ones being that, **to date and without prejudging future circumstances**, we do not consider that the IGCL can, or should, aspire to constitute the pole, or even one of the poles, of international grouping. Even if we do not exclude the possibility of gathering and integrating new comrades into our struggle, of course, we

include all our activities, in addition to intervention in workers' struggles, around the struggle for the party and international regroupment; that is, concretely around the Internationalist Communist Tendency, which we consider to be the main organization of the historical forces and currents of the Communist Left and the only one in a position to be and act as an historical and international pole of regroupment, or reference, nowadays.

Nevertheless, our positions of principle, the basis for any membership of our group, lie within the framework of the political platforms of the ICT and the "original" ICC, i.e. the one that does not integrate the question of the idealistic and opportunistic theory of decomposition that this organization adopted in the 1990s. This is not simply due to chance – the political origins and trajectories of our members having been influenced rather by one or the other of the two currents as the case may be – nor to our limits alone as a group. We believe that the main "historical" divergences between the two historical currents overlap with most – not all – of the essential questions facing the proletariat and its political minorities today and which they will have to answer in the period ahead. These debates should be assumed, organized and systematized by these forces and even should to be conducted within the same organizational framework, at least in this common space that constitutes the proletarian camp, or the *party in the making*. This is the meaning and one of the main axes of our political orientation since our constitution.

As for the individual definition, or positioning, on our positions of principle, you can refer to the approach and statement that one of our sympathizers, now a member of our group, had adopted in 2014: Statement on ICT and ICC Platforms (*Revolution or War* #2¹³). For us, this is an example of the method that should be used for any process of regrouping and joining a communist

12 . This text was published in *Rassegna Comunista* April 15th 1921 and written by Bordiga : <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1921/party-class.htm>.

13 . <http://igcl.org/Statement-on-the-ICT-and-ICC>.

group and ensuring its maximum success in the long term.

The Political Orientations

The agreement "verified, i. e. discussed between the comrade wishing to join and the group as a whole, with all the points of the platform, in our case our basic or principle positions, is a prerequisite for any membership. But this one must also be based on a global agreement with the main political orientations of the group, or party, i. e. with the "tactics", so that there is a minimum homogeneity and political unity for the organisation to act as effectively as possible – principles and tactics being closely linked and being required to be coherent. It is in this sense that the IGCL constitution conference in 2013 adopted Theses on the International Situation (RG #1) and a text, *Critical Review of a Contribution to an Balance-sheet of the International Communist Left*, which "was adopted as an Orientation Text by the November 2013 Conference of constitution"¹⁴ (RG #2) which defined our orientation towards the proletarian camp.

Of course, and unlike the platform and questions of principle, it is not a question of agreeing word for word, point by point, with texts addressing tactical issues. Our theses on the international situation date from July 2013 and, since then, the international historical situation has evolved, confirming some of our points, invalidating others, and raising others still that the theses did not address. Nevertheless, the fundamental theoretical and political framework of this document is defined by the historical alternative *Proletarian Revolution or generalized imperialist war* as the ultimate expression of all the contradictions of capitalism and thus the main factor of the evolution of its situation; and in particular the evolution of the historical relation of forces between capital and labour, between the capitalist class and the proletariat. This question is therefore also an essential point for integration into our group today because it determines all our activity and intervention in the class and the proletarian camp for which a minimum of homogeneity and political unity are necessary for their development and effectiveness.

The same applies to the political orientation to be developed in the fight for the party. The conception of the proletarian camp as a whole, i.e. with its strengths and weaknesses, its unity and contradictions – in particular its division between

partydist and *anti-partydist* forces¹⁵ –, the permanent danger of the penetration of political opportunism within it and therefore of the fight to be waged against it, and the fact that the party of tomorrow can only be constituted on the basis of the programmatic heritage of the Communist Left¹⁶, is a point to be discussed and clarified before joining the ICGL. Indeed, today, this orientation, just like the one defined by the historical alternative, determines all our activities and our intervention in the proletarian and revolutionary camps. This vision bases our position that the ICT is in the current period the only organization in capacity and... in duty to polarize all the forces, old and new, that are resolutely part of the fight for the party, the forces that we call the *partydist* forces. Nevertheless, in itself, this latter position cannot be considered as a criterion for membership: there is no guarantee, nor even unfortunately any indication in the current policy of the ICT, that it will one day assume this function as it should and that the historical situation will not end up changing the situation, redistributing the cards, within the proletarian camp.

The Militant Commitment and the Political Organization

Finally, there is another "criterion" for joining our group (as with any communist group): that of the conception of the political organization, its functioning and the relationship between the militant and the organized and centralized international collective body. This point is related to the question of militant will. But it is also a question of fundamental principle and, moreover, one of the most difficult to debate and clarify. It is largely in daily militant practice that the new member and... the organization clarify and verify the validity and accuracy of the conception and militant **collective and centralized** – we insist – practice. That is why we try to publish at least extracts of our internal activities reports for our general meetings. We refer you to the Activities Report¹⁷ (RG #12), which our 2nd General Meeting adopted last June. Beyond the few elements of our daily life and functioning mentioned therein that could shed light on the reality of our activities and functioning, we draw your attention in particular on what we present, and

¹⁴ . <http://igcl.org/Critical-Review-of-a-Contribution>.

¹⁵ . If we cannot address this issue here, it should be noted that it is far from being limited to the *party's* sole formal claiming.

¹⁶ . This does not mean excluding, or ignoring, by "principle", other revolutionary forces that may exist and that do not claim the Communist Left.

¹⁷ . <http://igcl.org/Activities-Report-for-the-2nd>.

claim, as the *party method* to be developed and put into practice, including in today's small circles. You can also refer to the report for our 1st general meeting (RG #6) in 2016.

These are therefore the three "criteria" – formal agreement with the platform, general agreement with the orientations, willingness to militant commitment in a centralised international collective body – on which we believe that a *genuine* political integration can be achieved in any communist group, and of course within the IGCL itself as it exists today. *Genuine* integration or adherence we insist, because it is not a question of integrating new comrades in itself – of "winning militants" to make up a large number – without them being really convinced of the positions of principle, the general orientations and the functioning of the group and in real capacity to be able to defend them within the class and the other political forces on behalf of the group, or the party, on the one hand; and on the other hand in capacity to integrate themselves just as truly, effectively into the conscious, international, organized and centralized collective activity of the communist group. Militant commitment and membership is therefore not, in our view, just a declaration of agreement and membership. This is a genuine political process, it cannot be otherwise, between the organisation and the new member in which political discussions and clarifications of issues of principle and tactics are accompanied by a growing common militant practice in which the new militant, even if formally not yet a member of the group, is invited and encouraged to participate. And in which the group and the militant can verify the concordance between the programmatic and principled agreement and their actual militant understanding in practice. This is true for the new militant or member, of course. But it is also true for the group as a whole, which also checks for itself on

this occasion the coherence between its principles and its current practice.

(...).

So, in concrete terms, we propose you that we engage in a systematic discussion of the points of our platform, or positions of principle, in relation to the two platforms of the ICT and the ICC. Of course, we are also open to any other questions from you – especially about current events. We try to favour written correspondence, which "obliges" a minimum of method and seriousness to present positions and arguments; and this for both the militant and the group as a whole. The discussion process we propose to you is not a discussion between a teacher and his student, but a dynamic process in which the "two parties", although unequal – the collective, organized, centralized and historically linked political body of the Communist Left does not have the same historical and political "weight", nor the same responsibility, as the militant individual – enrich each other and learn from each other.

Besides, certainly in a second time, but it can be quite fast, we could study the possibility of a first meeting in France or Italy (we suppose that you live in Italy). Physical meetings are occasions to move discussions forward and can even help, or complement, correspondence and written contributions. In particular, they make it easier to eliminate misunderstandings or confusion that distance and writings do not always manage to clear up.

(...)

Do not hesitate to let us know if you have any disagreement or questions about the content of this letter and the orientations we are proposing to you.

Fraternal Greetings, the IGCL, August 15th 2019.

Full Part of Our Basic Positions : the Historical Lineage

"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."

Letter of the Gulf Coast Communist Group (November 30, 2019).

In the issue #12 of this journal, late July, we published the new basic positions of the Gulf Coast Communist Fraction (<https://gulfcoastcommunistfraction.wordpress.com/>), its new Points of Unity, as well as our Comments (*). We reproduce here the comrades' response and we welcome the quality and seriousness of their arguments. We'll respond to them in the next issue. We have already sent them a first reply which deals with the question of participation in the elections which the comrades consider possible, and even "necessary", according to the mobilization of the working class. We criticize and fight this position. The second reply deals mainly, and again, with the trade union question. It underlines in particular the difference in understanding of the dynamics of class struggle - which is also reflected in the justification of the GCCF to participate in elections in certain exceptional situations as the reader will see below. Without entering here into the argument itself, we believe that the comrades tend to ignore the very dynamics of the class struggle and to consider it in a static way. In particular, their vision tends to lead them to consider the proletarian struggle and the extension of class consciousness in its ranks as an addition of individuals and individual consciousness when it is essentially a collective struggle, whether it is an immediate and local struggle or a mass mobilization, which goes beyond individuals and their individual consciousness. We will certainly come back to this in the next issue of our journal.

Revolution or War

*. See the GCCF blog (<https://gulfcoastcommunistfraction.wordpress.com/>) or our webpages : <http://igcl.org/New-Points-of-Unity-of-the-Gulf> and <http://igcl.org/july-20th-2019>.

Dear friends,

We would like to thank you for the letter that was sent to us, in moving forward in the debate and confrontations necessary for the regroupment of the Communist Left, we send you a response clarifying and addressing some of the comments you made on our revised points of unity.

First of all, it should be made clear: you refer to our points of unity as a "platform", but it is not that, it is something simpler; it is the basic unifying positions that constitute our collective, but not a platform detailing our mid-term tasks, strategies for taking power, or our tactics for intervening in struggles. We do foresee adopting a platform, but our grouping is still developing a perspective and still in the stage of what you described as a 'discussion circle'. With this clarification established, we can move on to addressing your comments on our formulations.

The contention on point 2 is that this phrasing is "unclear" and can leave a space open for concessions to leftism, bourgeois radicalism, etc. It is precisely the opposite case. "Overcoming" captures more what we were intending to mean than "replacement". Perhaps we were trying to be too technical with terms, but we use "supersession" in the sense that Hegel or early Marx used it: a sublation, a determinate negation, a simultaneous preservation and cancellation of the thing. This is more precise than to say something like "abolish" capitalism, because there's more room to have multiple meanings behind "abolish". We don't want to simply and purely "negate" capitalism like the anarchists do, we want to sublimate/supersede

capitalism. We want to preserve socialized production and cancel/negate private ownership of production. To say we want to simply "abolish" or purely negate capitalism can be interpreted to mean to cancel/negate both socialized production and private ownership, amounting to resorting to a more archaic mode of production instead of superseding into a higher mode of production.

We agree with your assertion regarding point 12 that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be established outside and against the bourgeois parliament or legislative bodies, but this doesn't necessarily preclude the possibility of standing in elections on tactical grounds and doing so for purely propaganda purposes. If combative workers are mobilized onto the electoral terrain, it may be necessary for revolutionaries to stand in elections to attempt to pull the workers away from the electoral terrain and onto the proletarian class terrain. We do understand that, in this historical period, running in elections is rarely, if ever, a productive tactic for communists. However, to elevate our abstentionism from the level of tactics to the level of principles is to inhabit the ahistorical anarchist conception of the parliamentary question; our abstentionism is a tactical one. Even Amadeo Bordiga polemicized against the anarchist version of abstentionism in 1913¹⁸.

In the rising phase of capitalism, communists ran for seats in the legislative bodies to pressure the bourgeois state to grant concessions to the

18 . The "Bordigist" Current (1912-1952) by Philippe Bourrinet. <http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/bordigist.pdf>, 2014

proletariat through reforms; but in the declining phase, with the advent of state-capitalism, the executive body has overtaken the legislative body as the locus of political power within the bourgeois state, meaning there is no longer any use for communists to try to gain seats in any legislative body of the bourgeois state. This conceptualization can also be found in Marc Chirik's early pamphlet on decadence theory: "*In this (ascending) period, the state, even though it already tended to raise itself above society, was still largely dominated by interest groups and factions of capital who mainly expressed themselves in the legislative part of the state. The legislature still clearly dominated the executive: the parliamentary system, representative democracy, still had a reality, and was the arena in which different interest groups could confront each other.*" ...but in the descending period, "*the legislature, whose initial function was to represent society, has lost any significance in front of the executive, which is at the top of the state pyramid*"¹⁹. We cannot win reforms that truly elevate the proletariat – it is only against the system of reformism and bourgeois "representation" that we propose the tactical possibility of using elections to denounce the sham that is their basis. We do not however believe this is a tactic that can just be used at any point in time – it's a tactic that must be used minimally and is only potentially useful during a period of real class combativity. Additionally, we ask the International Group of the Communist Left what their assessment is of the Internationalist Communist Party (*Battaglia Comunista*) running in the 1948 parliamentary elections in Italy? Do you sympathize more with the Bordigist faction that would eventually constitute into the International Communist Party (*Il Programma*), or do you agree with PCInt's intervention in the elections?

There may be a misunderstanding with regards to what is being referred to in point 13. Let's look at the section of the text that may be the cause of the confusion: "*It is hypothetically possible for communists to collaborate with other communists who mistakenly believe that it's possible for communists to build from the ground-up unions that still have the function they had in the rising phase of capital, but to work with those who unionize and intervene on the behalf of the existing union-apparatus is to amount to working with those who act on behalf of the state-apparatus.*" This is an

implicit reference to the Bordigist parties that believe it is possible to build "red unions". We are simply not rejecting the possibility of working with other genuine militants who have confused positions on the role of the union-form in the decadent phase of capitalism. To address the hypothetical posed: What do we do if the union-bureaucracy is forced, for a brief moment, to advocate for the extension and unity of a struggle? We support the extension and unity of the struggle, of course. We do not, however, endorse the union-bureaucrats, and we keep ourselves very honest and clear regarding their nature as saboteurs of class struggle. As soon as the struggle intensifies outside the control of the bureaucracy, there is no doubt they will change their tune, and it would be foolish to abandon vigilance towards them just because today they are advocating for the extension of the struggle – tomorrow they will be its gravediggers.

Agreed that point 15 is vague. Communists do not make a fetish of pacifism and armed struggle will most likely be necessary. The point is that the revolution cannot be reduced to a military campaign, to the building up of a military force and the conquest of "workers' territory" through military maneuvers. We would affirm that the formation of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War was a necessary decree for the Bolshevik Party, but also reflected the isolation of the Russian Revolution and not at all a policy to prefer in conditions that don't make it an absolute necessity. We agree with the International Communist Current's statement that the military terrain is "*home ground of the bourgeoisie*"²⁰. This is also why we would have agreed with the ratification of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, because throwing the Bolshevik Party into a battle with the German Empire on the military terrain could have only meant guaranteed defeat and an even quicker degeneration of the revolution than what had, in fact, occurred.

To conclude our response to your letter, it should be noted that this is a positive contribution in the strengthening of ties between the groupings of the Communist Left and the progression of the 'party-in-process'. In fact, Gulf Coast Communist Fraction perceives this letter as a contribution to the development of its own collective from a 'discussion circle' to a full political component of the future party.

Fraternally, Gulf Coast Communist Fraction.

19 . *The Proletarian Struggle under Decadence* by Marc Chirik in *International Review* #23, 1980.
(https://en.internationalism.org/ir/023_proletariat_under_decadence.html).

20 . *Why the Alternative Is War or Revolution* by International Communist Current in *International Review* #30, 1982.
(https://en.internationalism.org/ir/030_war_or_revolution.html).

Letter to Emancipación-Nuevo Curso on its Historical Claiming of the (Trotskyist) Left Opposition and the 4th International in the years 1930s (November 15th 2019)

The IGCL to Emancipation/Nuevo Curso,

Dear comrades,

In our letter of July 10th 2019 after the Congress of Emancipation, we proposed to you "*a contradictory debate*" about your claim of historical lineage with the 4th International that the congress had adopted: "*Our tendency is born as the International Communist Left, driven by the opposition of the Russian Left against the degeneration of the International. It constituted external fractions of the left (...). It founded the 4th International in 1938 when the path to a new world war was opened by the capitulation of the International without struggle against Nazism in 1933 and especially after the defeat of the Spanish Revolution in 1937...*"

(<https://nuevocurso.org/nuestra-tendencia> translated by us). To date, you have not responded to this proposal. We regret this all the more since, in addition to the possible clarification of the disagreement between us on this issue, a number of former Trotskyist militants or ex-sympathizers are contacting us directly to initiate discussions. However, the main difficulty for these comrades is, in our opinion, to understand **the essential need to make a programmatic, theoretical, political and even militant break with Trotskyism**. The debate between us on this issue would therefore have a much broader scope than just the one of our relations.

1) Trotsky's Left Opposition and Munis's Fomento Obrero Revolucionario

To present the *Left Opposition* (of the 1930s) and then the 4th International (officially constituted in 1938) – that is, the political current around Trotsky before World War II – as part of the Communist Left, when the two currents clearly broke off in the early 1930s, is an historical and political error with significant negative consequences if the point is not clarified. Of course, it is necessary to differentiate between Trotskyism as a proletarian political current in the 1930s until the war and that embodied by the 4th International after the outbreak of the 2nd World Imperialist War, which openly abandons class principles by siding with one imperialist camp against the other. While there is therefore a difference to be made, this class betrayal is the final outcome of the previous opportunist process that

affected the Trotskyist movement from its "official" constitution in the early 1930s. And it marks the definitive passage of Trotskyism as a political current, and with it of its political groups and parties, into the bourgeois camp, that of counterrevolution. Few groups and individuals from the Left Opposition then managed to remain faithful to proletarian internationalism... **especially since this could only be done by breaking with the 4th International**.

It is with one of these rare expressions, that of Grandizo Munis and the Fomento Obrero Revolucionario (FOR), that Emancipation actually claims its historical continuity. This political current effectively succeeded in breaking with the 4th International in 1947 (see the letter from Natalia Trotsky, Benjamin Peret and G. Munis to the PCI, the French party of the 4th International ²¹). Even if we can find Trotskyist *remnants* in some of the FOR's formulations and positions, its programmatic document, For a Second Communist Manifesto ²² (1961), clearly puts forward class positions: on the USSR, left parties, trade unions, national liberation struggles, etc. But it must be noted that they are in opposition, in rupture with the original positions of the Left Opposition and the pre-war 4th International and its theoretical and programmatic framework as it appears in particular in its 1938 Transitional Program ²³.

2) Left Opposition or Communist Left?

And that is the danger for Emancipation/Nuevo Curso (NC). To date, NC's positions are clearly class positions that we welcome and regularly reproduce. But they do not fit into the programmatic framework of the pre-war 4th International and the Left Opposition. They are even its open criticism in terms of theory and principles and its negation at the political level. This means that the class coherence of Emancipation and Nuevo Curso is based only on the individual capacities of its members, or some of them, to maintain themselves

21 . We could not find any English version of this letter. Only in French : https://www.marxists.org/francais/4int/postwar/1947/06/nt_19470600.htm

22 . <http://marxismo.school/Int/For%20a%20Second%20Communist%20Manifesto>.

23 . <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/>.

in these class positions, and not on a collective body politically united and centralized around a program and clear principles. What will happen in situations of historical upheaval and storm that will inevitably affect Emancipation, like any communist group, and cause difficulties, hesitations, doubts, confusions, divergences, oppositions, even crises, within it? What will then be the programmatic reference to maintain a minimum of unity and define the framework for debate and political confrontation? For a second manifesto of 1961 or the 1938 *Transitional Programme* adopted by the 4th International?

However, the transition from one to the other will be all the easier, in the heat of events, since the *Manifesto* does not formally or clearly break with the *Programme*. Even if the former considers that the latter should be "overcome", it does not reject it, even going so far as to reproach certain Trotskyist groups for "interpret[ing] the *Transitional Programme* in a right-wing way". Its Preface, written in 1965, even still claims organic and political continuity with the Left Opposition without making any balance-sheet of this experience and its historical failure: "In contrast to the reactionary degradation of the Communist International, the Left Opposition, which was at the origin of the Fourth International, expressed the ideological and organic continuity of the Revolution". Worse still, unfortunately, it takes up one of its foundations: "More than ever, the crisis of humanity is a crisis of revolutionary leadership, as Leon Trotsky said".

The Preface even claims that "most of the ideas and proposals contained in the *Manifesto* below were born from the fight against the degeneration of the Fourth International". There is no doubt that the militants around Munis had risen to class positions beginning with **their individual break** with the 4th. But the class positions that the FOR, as a collective and therefore political product and expression of the proletariat, had finally adopted, have emerged and are based on a history, on struggles and on a different theoretical and programmatic *corpus* **that were in rupture with the Left Opposition**. They are not the product of a *left* of the Left Opposition. But of the Communist Left whose struggle, or struggles, against the opportunism and degeneration of the CI and... then against the mere Left Opposition, provides the foundation and theoretical and political coherence of these class positions and serves as a reference for us even today. But, what debates within the Left Opposition have led from its 1930s positions to those of the FOR in 1961? What exactly was the political battle? Is the letter of June 1947 with Natalia Trotsky enough when it ends with a

"Long live the 4th international!""? What theoretical and political lessons? What contributions did this *left* of the Left Opposition make? Perhaps Munis' book *Lessons from a Defeat, Promise of Victory*?

3) The United Front ²⁴ Put Forwards by the Trotskyist Left Opposition

The fundamental difference between the Trotskyist Left Opposition and the Communist Left lies in the fact that the former claims the first four congresses of the Communist International while the latter, its known currents (mainly Italian and German-Dutch lefts), claims only the first two (1919 and 1920). The divergence of the time, already in the making at the 2nd Congress of the CI, focused on the adoption by the 3rd and 4th Congresses of the United Front tactics with the Socialist parties, which had nevertheless moved openly and definitively to counterrevolution through their participation in national defence and *Sacred Union* between the classes during the 1st World imperialist war; and through their bloody and murderous opposition to the Russian revolution and workers' insurrections in central Europe, particularly that of January 1918 in Germany. Trotsky and the Left Opposition remained faithful to this tactic, which was the opportunistic consequence of the retreat of the international revolutionary wave and the growing isolation of revolutionary Russia. And they even became their most ardent and convinced defenders... until advocating and putting into practice the so-called "entryist" policy in the socialist parties in the mid-1930s! Finally, the united front tactic unleashed the anti-fascist united front, the main ideological and political weapon for the recruitment of the proletariat into the imperialist war. We certainly agree on this last point.

Written in 1943-1945, Munis' book, *Lessons from a Defeat, Promise of Victory*²⁵, traces the development of class struggle in Spain from the 1930s until the defeat of the Spanish Republic against Franco and, within it, the intervention of the then Trotskyist Left Opposition, in particular the *Izquierda comunista* group of which Munis himself was a member. As such, we invite as many people as possible to read and critically, as it should be, study this invaluable document. But we are obliged to note that the book is completely within the programmatic and political framework of Trotskyism of that time. And, in particular, that it does not draw any significant

24 . We have taken the "united front" expression rather than "unique front" as the French and Spanish versions utilize in the IC official texts and minutes. It appears that the "united front" is usually utilized in English.

25 . *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria*. As far as we know, it has only been translated to French to date.

critical balance-sheet of the tactics of the united front itself²⁶ – not to mention *entryism* into the Socialist Party.

On the contrary, it defends and claims the tactics of the united front with the left parties, particularly with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), and even with the anarchist CNT-FAI. And this was in 1943, just after the dramatic and bloody Spanish experience due to the very fact of the proletariat's enlistment behind the united front and anti-fascism from 1936 to 1939. How did the Spanish group *Izquierda comunista* (including its delegate to the Workers Alliance, the organization of the united front in Madrid, Munis himself), put into practice the united-front tactic?

In 1934, "*Two small organizations (the Izquierda comunista and the Bloque Obrero y Campesino - Workers and Peasants Bloc*²⁷) took the initiative to create united-front organizations [Alianza Obrera, AO] that could have been transformed into organs of workers' power (...). For the first time in Spain, the Unique Workers' Front was accepted by such important mass organizations as the UGT [the socialist trade union which, already then, had largely demonstrated its capacity to sabotage struggles and its anti-worker character, note of the IGCL] and the socialist party. This fact could have been decisive for the triumph of the revolution, if the socialists had considered the AO as a real instrument of workers' unity and action..." (*Lessons of a Defeat...*²⁸).

This passage clearly shows us how Munis, in 1943, still defends the alliance with the PSOE which, by means of the united front, could have been, in his view and according to the "traditional" Trotskyist position, an instrument of workers' unity and in the service of the organs of the so-called "workers' power". Then, he continued on the same path by retracing the failure and impotence of the *Alianza Obrera*:

"But all the efforts of the Izquierda comunista to

evolve in this direction failed in the face of socialist stupidity [sic!]. (...) What could be done with such manoeuvring allies who totally denied the role of the Alianza Obrera and who were moving it further and further away from its indispensable transformation into a democratic united front organization, likely to serve as a basis for the future revolutionary power? (...) For its part, dominated by anarchists, the CNT was unable to understand that its presence within the AO would have broken socialist domination and made possible a transformation of enormous revolutionary scope. Between the political opportunism of some and the 'apolitical' opportunism of others, the AO had its hands tied" » (idem²⁹).

If there was any need for confirmation of the validity of the Communist Left's position against the impasse of the united front for the proletariat, Munis brings it to us very clearly³⁰. The whole chapter, actually the whole book, is the observation – we do not use his non-political qualifier of *stupid* – that the bourgeois and counter-revolutionary *intelligence* of the Socialist Party, subsequently accompanied by the *intelligence* of the same nature of the Stalinists, has always opposed and sabotaged the supposed path to the Spanish revolution; and, by the way, it is also the bitter observation of the impotence of the group to which Munis was a member. It's the ritual Trotskyist lament. It comes from its opportunist position in the 1930s on the social democratic parties. The first two CI congresses had clearly declared **their total and definitive passage into the bourgeois counterrevolutionary camp**. The Left Opposition and the 4th International abandoned these two congresses – at least on this central question – and became the apostles of the first opportunist drifts of the 3rd and 4th CI congresses, which served to justify the tactics of the united front, with the catastrophic political consequences that Munis himself, honest and sincere, was forced to point out.

4) Real or Fantasized Class Struggle?

It seems useful to us to quote another passage from the book that crowns the theoretical and political

26 . The 1947 letter signed by N. Trotsky, B. Peret and G. Munis explicitly mentions the united front tactic. It does not reject it in itself, on the merits of the question itself, but merely defends that the united front is no longer possible with Stalinism, because it is the spearhead of counter-revolution: "*Stalinism is today absolutely incompatible with any proletarian democracy. Wherever revolutionary power organs appeared, from Spain to Warsaw, Paris or Milan, it hastened to destroy them. Stalinism cannot allow revolutionaries to have their say. The SP-CP-CGT united front and government model cannot in any way facilitate the creation of organs of democracy and proletarian power*".

27 . Both, the *Izquierda Comunista* and the *Bloque Obrero y Campesino*, finally set up the POUM. Munis opposed this regroupment. He then, at the very beginning of the Spanish war, founded the Trotskyist Bolshevik-Leninist Spanish section.

28 . We translate from the French version, chapitre 7, Le "virage à gauche" des socialistes et leur revirement, Editions science marxiste.

29 . Each word or "concept" that we have underlined in this quotation refers to a political critique of principle that the Communist Left, especially Italian, had brought against the International, and then against Trotskyist opportunism (for example against the confusion introduced between the historical slogan of "dictatorship of the proletariat" and that of "workers' government" from the 3rd Congress). For the sake of brevity, we cannot address them, nor even identify them all, in this letter.

30 . Not to mention the incredible "overestimation" of the situation and the real forces and dynamics of the proletariat itself in the 1930s... while it was unable to create a communist group or party, even an extremely minority one, consistent and capable at least of orienting itself in the events. But that is another question: the relationship between the party and the class.

disarray that the united-front tactics finally produced on the revolutionary militant Munis: "*Workers' organizations faithful to capitalism is the tragedy of the proletariat, not only Spanish but global. Without them, the system of exploitation of man by man would have long since disappeared in the darkness of history*" (idem, chap. 9, we emphasize). Certainly, this statement is consistent with the Trotskyist position of the Transitional Program according to which "*the present crisis in human culture is the crisis in the proletarian leadership*". Actually, it reveals an *idealization* of the class struggle that has nothing to do with its reality. Indeed, how can a communist militant, all the more a group or the communist party, supposed to be guided by historical materialism, Marxism and its conception of the class struggle, conceive, believe, even worse imagine, hope, wish, dream, fantasize that the bourgeoisie may not use all its political weapons, and especially the most powerful ones, i.e. its left-wing political forces such as the socialist parties, against the proletariat? And finally lament and regret that the class struggle is... the class struggle, that is, above all a political struggle? And this after the revolutionary wave of 1917-1923 and the bloody failure of the workers' insurrection in Berlin in 1919, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht's assassinations by the ruling German Socialist Party? How can a consequent revolutionary current, or a party, be surprised and whine about the fact that the **bourgeois** socialist party, therefore counter-revolutionary, does not favour the path towards proletarian unity and revolution? And even sabotages it and kills the workers in struggle? There is another *tragedy*, theoretical and political: that of Munis and the sincere militants of the Left Opposition of that time in the face of the complete and bloody bankruptcy of their united front tactics.

Munis' position on the united front in 1943 was clearly opposed to that of the Communist Left, particularly that of the Italian Left. We cannot go back here to the struggle waged within the CI itself **since 1920** against the tactics of the united front. We refer to the Theses of Rome of the CP of Italy (1922) and the Theses of Lyon (1926)³¹. They provide a

31 . Particularly in points 33 to 36 for the Theses of Rome and in the chapter "Tactical Issues until the 5th Congress" for the Theses of Lyon. If the Italian Left also used the concept of "united front", it had a completely different political meaning, which is made very clear in the Lyon Theses. The German-Dutch Left also rose up, in 1920 too, against the emerging tactics of the united front. Gorter's *Open Letter to Lenin* and Anton Pannekoek's *World Revolution and Communist Tactics* are its main texts. If the two, especially the second, can share some particular arguments with the Italian Left, their criticism of the new tactics of the CI, their

theoretical and political coherence which, even in the case of disagreement and therefore of struggle against them, can help to reflect and establish a thorough position and understanding. We invite you to discuss them among yourselves and to develop a systematic critique of these theses, at least of their parts on the united front and the slogan of "workers' government", which the CI began to use instead of "dictatorship of the proletariat".

We have no doubt to date that Emancipation and Nuevo Curso reject any united-front tactics. The positions taken by Nuevo Curso's blog undoubtedly attest to this. But nevertheless, it remains a contradiction and a fundamental question with which Emancipation is confronted: was it a valid tactic to be used in the 1930s as Munis still defends it in 1943-1945? If the answer is yes, then it is necessary to explain why the united front tactic is no longer valid today, if only to ensure a minimum of homogeneity and political unity within Emancipation. If the answer is no, then a first breach opens up in the historical construction established by its congress, prematurely in our opinion and at the very least artificial at the risk of becoming a dogma.

Avoiding today the resolution, one way or another, of this issue, sweeping it under the carpet, would not resolve the contradiction. Inevitably, sooner or later, it will come back to hit Emancipation and its members hard. But in a time and situation that can only be much more difficult, even unfavourable, for its solution.

Fraternally, the IGCL, November 15th 2019.

PS. We plan to publish this letter in our next journal because of the general interest in this debate, according to us. Even, after the reading of *Revolution or War* 12 and the correspondence published, some readers already asked us if you were going to answer us. Of course, we can also publish any of your answer that might encourage debate and confrontation on this subject. The next issue will be published in February. We could assure you of its publication if it would remain in three or four pages (liberation serif 11). If it were wider, then we could see how to publish it in a next issue or in two parts...

fundamental understanding and positioning lie on another theoretical ground that makes them begin to open the door to what later became *councilism* in the 1930s. In particular, because Gorter and, less caricaturely, Pannekoek make a distinction and metaphysically oppose *leaders and masses*, the *party and the mass of the class*. We can't develop here.

The Communist Workers Organisation, the Journal *Kommunist* (1918) and the Period of Transition

Our article, *Bukharin's Fraction of 1918 Contrary to the Communist Left*³², about the *Kommunist* review published in issue 13 of our journal *Revolution or War* seems to have provoked several reactions from readers. It was in fact intended to be a detailed criticism of the positions of the *Kommunist* with the aim of showing that these positions do not belong in any way to the political heritage of the Communist Left, even less to its so-called Italian tradition. Indeed, we have shown how the Italian Left was completely on Lenin's side in 1918, and consequently against Bukharin, Radek, Ossinsky and others, as much on the question of Brest-Litovsk as on the question of state capitalism. And we have shown how Lenin and the Italian Left were fundamentally right. We don't come back to it here, the reader can always refer to our first article which looks at the question in more detail. If we attack the theses of *Kommunist* head-on, it is because a whole section of the current Communist Left takes up or tends to take up these theses as if they were part of the political heritage of the Left. The editorial line of the Smolny collective in its complete edition of the journal is quite edifying in this respect and this was criticized in its time³³. For its part, the Communist Workers Organisation has published articles of *Kommunist* in English translation with its own introductions.

These introductions have the merit of going back over the concrete difficulties and the political and theoretical problems that the proletariat and its party, the Bolshevik Party, were facing in a dramatic way in Russia. From its first days, the dictatorship of the proletariat had to face an economy already in ruins and devastated by war. How to feed the starving population³⁴ when the economy was already largely paralysed in an isolated country and when the imperialist world war was continuing its ravages? Thus, they are part of the indispensable debate and reflection on the period of transition from capitalism to communism.

However, it should be noted that many of these introductions tend to make concessions to the

political positions put forward by *Kommunist*, particularly on the issue of state capitalism in Russia, by presenting the Bukharin faction, "*the Left Communists of 1918 [as being] amongst the clearest about the way in which events were taking both the revolution in Russia and the world in general, but they were in no stronger a position to influence those events than anyone else. Therein lies the tragedy of the working class.*"³⁵. In this sense, we repeat, these positions are in contradiction with the historical positions of the Communist Left of Italy. That the CWO, a British group of the Internationalist Communist Tendency with a direct link to the Italian Left, defends positions opposed to the latter is not in itself a scandal, nor a crime of lèse-majesté. But it does require the CWO, the ICT, and the entire proletarian camp to further its reflection and to conduct a critical assessment of the inadequacies it would point out in the historical positioning of the Italian Left. Otherwise, to remain in political and theoretical vagueness and confusion can only put the ICT itself in front of political and theoretical contradictions, which will be insurmountable in the long run, sooner or later, and thus in danger in the face of the historical stakes that are coming up.

Has the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk "Squandered" the Prestige of the Russian Revolution?

Although the comrades of the CWO seem to reject the argument in favour of revolutionary war advocated by some *Kommunist* participants and accept the need for the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, they have a very curious appreciation of the impact of the treaty on the world revolution. Indeed, for the CWO, "*the controversy over Brest-Litovsk was whether buying a temporary breathing space for the revolution in Russia came at the price of undermining the very world revolution on which the future of socialism depended. Even today it is difficult to say if the signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk did "squander the international capital" of the revolution (...)*"³⁶. Unlike the comrades, we are certain that Brest-Litovsk did not damage the prestige of the Russian Revolution in the eyes of revolutionaries around the world. Wasn't it

32 . <http://www.igcl.org/The-Bukarin-Fraction-of-1918>.

33 . Fraction of the International Communist Left, *The Defence of the Proletarian Character of the October Revolution is still a Class Frontier*, http://fractioncommuniste.org/eng/bci07/bci07_5.php.

34 . "*In March, workers in Petrograd already were allocated a daily ration amounting to only 1,082 calories (the norm was 3,600 calories). The figures for April, May and June were 1,013, 899 et 714 calories per days*" (Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*, Indiana University Press).

35 . Internationalist Communist Tendency, *Radek on the International Situation in spring 1918*, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-04-02/radek-on-the-international-situation-in-spring-1918>.

36 . Internationalist Communist Tendency, *An Epitaph for the October Revolution?*, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-17/an-epitaph-for-the-october-revolution>, we underline.

precisely the prestige of the Russian Revolution that prompted the creation of the Communist International just some months after Brest-Litovsk? In fact, the militants of the time who opposed Brest-Litovsk did so because they were either foreign to Marxism or they were significantly diverging from it. End of story. The uncertain position of the CWO is thus a first concession, or at least a position that one would call centrist.

For its part, the historical position of the so-called Italian left has long been clear. *"The future has proved Lenin right and wrong those who superficially judged that it was necessary to continue the struggle against militaristic Germany, not caring either for these considerations of long programmatic scope or for these practical considerations (this time absolutely coinciding with the first (...). General Ludendorff stated in his memoirs that the collapse of the German front, after a series of incredible military victories on all sides, at a time when the situation was technically good according to all reports, was due to moral, i.e. political reasons: the soldiers no longer wanted to fight. Lenin's ingeniously revolutionary policy, while speaking a language of protocol transactions with the Kaiser's delegates, was able to find revolutionary means to awaken, under the uniform of the German automaton-soldier, the exploited proletariat who is led to massacre in the interest of his oppressors"* ³⁷.

State Capitalism, Cause of the Failure of the Russian Revolution?

But Brest-Litovsk is in a way a secondary subject for the editors of the *Kommunist* journal. Indeed, if this is where they originally united, the fact that they "lost the battle" and the Bolsheviks accepted the treaty made it so that the "proletarian communists" soon changed their minds and chose another battleground: state capitalism. On this question, it was very surprising to see that the CWO's introductions invariably sided with Bukharin and Ossinsky against Lenin, but also against the Italian Left, of which it claims to be the continuator: *"The Left Communists (...) were the first to raise the dangers of the Russian revolution creating a new form of capitalist exploitation"; "Its [the USSR] subsequent evolution towards an even more dirigiste state capitalism which continued to exploit the workers has vindicated Bukharin's view on this right down to our own day"* ³⁸.

37 . Amadeo Bordiga, *Prometeo*, #3, March 1924, translated from Italian by us.

38 . Internationalist Communist Tendency, *Ossinski on Bukharin's Imperialism and the World Economy*, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-09-11/ossinsky->

Indeed, for the CWO, the pages of *Kommunist* adequately explain how the Russian Revolution failed. *"The work of the Left Communists does not explain why the Russian Revolution failed (as this was entirely due to its isolation) but they do point to precisely how it failed, and in this they give us valuable insights for our own understanding of how the future emancipation of humanity will come about"* ³⁹. This unusual separation between the "why" and the "how" of the failed Russian Revolution introduced by the CWO leads to concessions. From the beginning of the October Revolution, the *right-wing Bolsheviks*, led by Lenin, are supposed to have replaced the initiative of the masses toward self-organization with a regime of state capitalism, which would have oriented Russia toward capitalism instead of socialism as early as 1918. However, the reality is much more complicated than this simplistic scheme borrowed from the anarchist tradition suggests. The CWO poses the problem incorrectly. The issue of "domestic policy" in Russia was not socialism through the activity of the masses itself or state capitalism with the re-establishment of the principle of single factory management. This is a vision centered on the factory, which was the specific ground of the anarcho-syndicalists. In reality, despite some ultra-modern industrial centers, Russia was essentially in the early stages of capitalism, which implies that large parts of its economy were still pre-capitalist. Thus, faced with the need both to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia while awaiting revolution in Europe and to revive an economy devastated by the destruction of the war so that the starving masses could simply eat, the dilemma facing the Bolsheviks in 1918 was more the following: to bet on the fragmented pre-capitalist economy largely reigning in Russia or on the few sectors, mainly industrial, highly developed and centralized? Considering that the second option is a prerequisite for communist society, the choice is not hard to make for the communists. And what is the only option for developing and accelerating the socialization of the productive forces in a backward country - 85% of the Russian population were peasants - while waiting for the spread of world revolution? State capitalism assumed, controlled and centralized as much as possible by class dictatorship.

As Lenin firmly pointed out during the controversy,

[on-bukharin-s-imperialism-and-the-world-economy.](http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-02-11/the-formation-of-the-red-army-1918_)

39 . Internationalist Communist Tendency, *The Formation of the Red Army 1918*, https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-02-11/the-formation-of-the-red-army-1918_

"Bukharin is an extremely well-read Marxist economist. He therefore remembered that Marx was profoundly right when he taught the workers the importance of preserving the organisation of large-scale production, precisely for the purpose of facilitating the transition to socialism. (...) But Bukharin went astray because he did not go deep enough into the specific features of the situation in Russia at the present time — an exceptional situation when we, the Russian proletariat, are in advance of any Britain or any Germany as regards our political order, as regards the strength of the workers' political power, but are behind the most backward West-European country as regards organising a good state capitalism, as regards our level of culture and the degree of material and productive preparedness for the "introduction" of socialism" ⁴⁰.

If we cannot share the unfailing enthusiasm of Trotsky, for whom the dictatorship of the proletariat could have lasted up to 50 years while waiting for the extension of the revolution to other parts of the world, there is no doubt that the bet of Lenin and Trotsky was quite correct in the dramatic concrete conditions of that time. The proletariat, with the help of its party, first conquers power, establishes the dictatorship of the proletariat, fights for the extension of the revolution to the rest of the world and, while waiting for the extension to take place, tries at the same time to ensure the minimum maintenance of an economic activity allowing to eat and to prepare at best in Russia the conditions of a still largely inexistent socialization as bases for the future communist society. For this, they try to push for the development and concentration of the most developed capitalist sectors in an economically backward Russia, which will take the form of state capitalism, with the bourgeoisie and the bosses abandoning the factories and fleeing the country, controlled by the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Bolshevik wager was that the party could temporarily, but firmly, hold the revolutionary course despite the isolation of the revolution. And they were right, at least for a while. But in contrast to *Kommunist's* thesis, it was not Russian state capitalism that was the cause of the retreat of the revolution in the country, but its international isolation.

Gradually, with the failure of the revolutionary attempts, particularly in Germany, and the retreat of the international revolutionary wave, the dictatorship of the isolated proletariat, in a Russia

wiped out by another two years of devastating civil war dictated by the imperialist powers, had its hands completely tied in terms of the possibilities for social transformation. "In 1918, in his study of state capitalism, Lenin dismissed the exaggerations of the extreme leftists about the real scope of the Russian revolution with a scientific analysis that laid bare the impossibility of achieving great results because of Russia's backward economic state" (*Bilan* #18, review of the Italian Fraction of the Left Communist, 1935⁴¹).

The basic economic laws of capitalism were still in force, except if one defends the Stalinist thesis of "socialism in one country" to which some considerations of *Kommunist* and the so-called Communist Left of Bukharin open the door when they criticise the state capitalism advocated by Lenin in the Russian conditions of March-April 1918. Ossinsky defends "the dictatorship of the proletariat and the consolidation of its basis by the construction of a proletarian socialism" ⁴² in the isolated Russia of 1918. The class contradictions linked to the maintenance of the capitalist mode of production, inevitable in an isolated country, a *fortiori* backward from the capitalist point of view, could only be exacerbated until the explosions, strikes and workers' demonstrations of 1921 and the Kronstadt revolt. In the face of this international isolation, one wanted to respond with voluntarist measures which unfortunately betrayed more and more the principles until the open counter-revolution: political united front, workers' government, popular front, socialism in one country, participation in the imperialist war. The international proletariat had to be won over to the cause of world revolution at all costs, and to this end, they went so far as to reintroduce social-democratic policies or at least an alliance with social democracy. This was the real betrayal.

Self-organization is Everything, the Goal is Nothing

This is the crux of the problem with *Kommunist*, and the CWO does not seem to be aware of it since the comrades seem to be taking up some of the arguments in favour of *Kommunist's* self-organization by reducing the issue to a simple problem of factory management: "Ossinsky makes it clear that more worker initiative, more actual

⁴⁰ . Lenin, "left Wing" *Childishness*, April 1918, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>

⁴¹ . Bilan, #18 *Parti-État-Internationale : L'État prolétarien*, http://www.collectif-smolny.org/article.php3?id_article=297

⁴² . Internationalist Communist Tendency, *Ossinsky Demands for Clear Answers (April 1918)*, <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-03-13/ossinsky-s-demand-for-clear-answers-april-1918>.

running of the economy by the workers is the only solution to the decline in the economy. Lenin now took the opposite view. If the revolution in Russia was to survive until the international revolution came to its aid then capitalist management techniques would have to be restored to save the economy. It was his answer to the cruel dilemma facing soviet power in April 1918. Ossinsky though persisted in his belief which Lenin had shared up until that point. This is why he ends by calling for yet greater involvement of the working masses in the economic sphere: 'Mass discussion on these questions will involve the workers in the construction of socialism which can only be realised by the workers themselves' "43. The measures of self-organization and self-management put forward in 1918 were nothing more than fine principles that did not take into account reality, that is, they did not take into account the material conditions necessary for the establishment of a communist society. Thus, Bukharin or Ossinsky could well protest that it was absolutely necessary for the proletariat to socialize production itself. These militants, however illustrious, forgot for a moment the ABC of Marxism: it is capitalism itself that socializes production, centralizes it, raises social productivity and makes communist society possible. Yet Russia was still far from this stage. Bukharin and his friends were basically just putting the cart before the horse, a bit like the anarchists.

Lenin, for his part, clearly had the final goal in mind: communist society. In doing so, he understood that the world as a whole was in a phase ripe for revolution even though some countries, like Russia, were only at a very juvenile stage of capitalism. Always with the final goal in mind, he knew that the salvation of the revolution lay in its global extension alone, not in the tight management of Russian factories, whether by proletarians or not. The problem with the CWO is that it claims that *Kommunist* "give us valuable insights for our own understanding of how the future emancipation of humanity will come about" 44. For us, on the contrary, it is time to put away the abstract and anarchist principle of self-organization in the Museum of Historical Curiosities. As much as for the opportunists of the beginning of the 20th century the movement was everything and the goal did not exist, so for the opportunists of the 21st century self-organization is everything and the final goal is completely unknown to them!

"The fragmentation of production, in order to give back to the molecules of the factories or of the plot

43 . Idem

44 . loc. cit.

of land the 'freedom of management' would represent a tremendous step backwards which does not correspond in any way with the program of the proletariat. (...) Centralization makes it possible to regulate the whole of production according to both economic and political considerations and, to this end, the only organism that can allow the proletariat or its groups to go beyond the vision of contingency is only the class party. The problem of the need for the continuous control of the working class and the increasing adaptation of the workers in the management of industry and the economy, this problem which is, in the end, the key to revolution, can only be solved through the class party" (Bilan #19, 1935).

As we can see, the positions put forward by the so-called Bukharin fraction in 1918 prefigure at best what will be in the 1930s theorization of a councilist order preaching both workers' self-management and self-organization from the factories and the rejection of the proletarian character of the October 1917 insurrection and the Russian Revolution. At worst, they ended up helping to pave the way for the Stalinist theory of building socialism in a single country, Russia.

Nevertheless, apart from the question of the indispensable international extension of the revolution, the Russian Revolution provides us with an invaluable experience to seriously, "scientifically", address some of the problems that the proletariat and the communist party will inevitably face from the beginning of the transition period. As the CWO points out, and this is the merit of its introductions to *Kommunist's* articles, "by this time there was a growing mismatch between socialist intentions and the need for economic survival in the face of the horrendous economic situation which the Soviet power had inherited from the Provisional Government [Kerenski's]" 45. Even if under objectively and historically more favourable conditions, any future dictatorship of the proletariat in a single country, or group of countries, will be confronted with the same problem while waiting for the international extension of the revolution. This is for what the communists of today must prepare the party of tomorrow. But they can only contribute positively to it on the sole condition that they make their own the lessons and the theoretical and political framework drawn from the Russian experience... by the genuine Communist Left.

Robin, January 2020.

45 . Internationalist Communist Tendency, N. Ossinsky's *Critique of State Capitalism in Russia*, <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-09-08/n-ossinsky%E2%80%99s-critique-of-state-capitalism-in-russia>

Text of the Workers Movement

The Family According to the Marxist Conception (*Prometeo* #1, 1924)

We have translated below a 1924 article by the so-called Italian Left on the family which, indirectly, also deals with the question of feminism today. Indeed, the feminist and environmentalist campaigns - which we addressed in the previous issue with the reproduction of our leaflet of 20 September 2019 (<http://igcl.org/Saving-the-Planet-Requires-the-496>) - are among the main vectors of bourgeois ideology to divert the attention of proletarians from the class struggle and bring them back to the "people"'s terrain, all classes mixed and united, and behind the capitalist democratic state. That is to say, behind the main expression and the main actor of the destruction of the planet as well as divisions of gender, sex, colour, etc. within society. And that only the collective and class struggle of the proletariat can reverse and eventually extinguish insofar as it confronts this state and capitalism.

We draw the reader's attention to the method, the method of historical materialism, or "Marxism", which *Prometeo* uses to raise the question of the family and, indirectly, of the differences between men and women in history according to class relationships. And how it opposes the vulgar materialism that the defenders, already won over by the opportunism that was seizing the Communist International in 1924, use to show the supposed superiority of "socialism" in the then USSR over capitalism...

Revolution or War.

The Family According to the Marxist Conception

For all those who have waited impatiently for the publication, announced in the Communist Party newspapers, of *La donna nella società comunista* [Woman in Communist Society] by T. Luneidi and A. Faraggiana⁴⁶, reading the pamphlet was a disappointment.

The bibliography that served as a guide for the authors: Engels, Kant, Schopenhauer, Mantegazza, Vachter, Albert, Kollontai and especially Bebel, with the exception of Engels and Kollontai, does not inspire too much confidence. And "*especially Bebel*", as guarantor of the Marxist interpretation of the problem, leaves us immediately perplexed and in fear that the book will be marked more by ideological concessions of a reformist and petty bourgeois order than by rigorous study and historical-materialist criticism. Nor are we satisfied with the preface by Professor Giovanni Sanna, who has wanted to endorse the book.

And let us say that although we believe that the technical presentation of the case, its subdivision and proportion are well thought out, the treatment itself does not seem to us to be satisfactory, especially with regard to "Women in the Future".

We will also say, for the reader's understanding, that the book, which we deal with in these brief notes, has three essential parts: "Woman in the past, woman in the present, woman in the future". The first part on

the condition of women in Antiquity, during the advent of Christianity and in the Middle Ages is briefly approached from a historical point of view - of course - but not from a *critical-historical* point of view. The second part sets out very well and convincingly the criticisms of the current institution of matrimony, the inferior position of women in bourgeois society and their right to fight for equality with men in their condition as individuals and citizens. Finally, the third part, the one on which there are the greatest expectations, endeavours to show what the status of women will be in the society of the future and what the family of the future will be like. Taking as a starting point some achievements in the Russia of the soviets and comparisons, which are undoubtedly advantageous for our theses, between the bourgeois family in the capitalist countries and the family in the Russian proletarian state, it presents almost as our finality what the family institution in Russia is at present.

"To those who say that we want to destroy the family, we say: We don't want to destroy the family, but we want the hypocrisy, incomprehension and spirit of interest that dominate most bourgeois families on the one hand, and the misery and delinquency that are above all the scourge of proletarian families on the other hand, to disappear". And further on: "... Consequently, unions based on free love naturally lead to monogamy, which will mark the greatest progress of love in the course of time". This is how Luneidi and Faraggiana express themselves, in whom we can see

⁴⁶ . We found no reference or mention of this book and its authors on the web (note from *RorW*).

the concern to demonstrate that the present family is a heap of lies and interests, but that the future family will be in relation to the present what communist society will be in relation to the present bourgeois society; and, therefore, that the very interest that drives us to fight for the realisation of the communist regime must also drive us to fight for the realisation of a family based on free love; or in other words the present family with the inherent variant of the absence of civil and religious ties and the other one of the new environment.

However, we would have expected the authors to have replied "*to those who say that we want to destroy the family*" that it is not we who want to destroy it, but that, as a contemporary institution dependent on the private property regime, its *raison d'être* will cease to exist once its cause has disappeared.

First of all, let us remember that the family is based on a physiological and economic substrate and not on indestructible and eternal ethical principles. To say the opposite would be to accept the thesis of the bourgeois philosophers and would represent the reversal of our principles, to admit that the materialistic entity and relations depend on idealistic relations and not the opposite: it would be to admit that pre-existing ethical reasons have created an institution that has its own essence in the physiological and economic reality. The essential necessity of the perpetuation of the species has been and will be the essential motive of the couple, the economic form of the society has given and will give the form of this union.

To verify this, it is sufficient to examine the various historical periods and we will find a constant element of sexual union which, in accordance with the evolution of the economic form of private society, undergoes changes, particularly in the relationship between the spouses, but remains almost unchanged as a whole, as remains unchanged the fundamental basis of the society based on the principle of individual private property. One economic principle was the main reason for this; that of the division of labour: for men, work outside home, for women, housework; the two jobs are integrated, and as long as this integration continues, the family will also rest on its foundations. But when the family's economic motivation weakens, it too loses its cohesion. In fact, we see before our eyes that in those strata of the population where the economic foundation of the family has remained more homogeneous, only the family continues in its traditional forms of conjugal fidelity and holiness in the relations between its members. Among the peasants for whom the bell tower and the small house are the heritage of life and work without any real changes, there the division of labour is well defined and constant: for the father to plough or prune the sacred olive tree, for the mother with a full breast to feed the infant, then to lead the sheeps singing the

*villanella*⁴⁷; there the family has not undergone too many changes over the centuries. In the petty bourgeoisie, where the family economy is based on the wage or on the more or less constant income of the husband or on the interest or fruits of the more or less scarce goods of the wife, the division of labour is well defined and cannot be changed; the family therefore remains unchanged in its traditional forms of feelings, honour and aspirations. If, on the other hand, we enter into the study of the family as it is in those strata of the population which have undergone the most profound changes since the advent and consolidation of capitalism, we observe that the family exists almost only in name among the tycoons of capital and the proletarians. Indeed, in the case of the former, for whom marriage is a contract initiated and perfected outside the will of the parties, the family life of both spouses is a free exposition of individual needs, and the education of the children is entrusted to maids or governesses, then to colleges. Here the family exists only for the legitimate passage of the name, property and possibly the blazon. Within the proletariat, even if we exclude those strata of the proletariat where delinquency and prostitution are daily life, among the workers who, without distinction of sex, are recruited for exploitation in the big workshops, factories or mines, the family is reduced to the cohabitation of its members, and still not always. Here we are not talking about the family nest, the upbringing of children, etc. Some incredulous readers wonder, or are concerned to observe, what the sacred bonds of a family are reduced to when the father is abroad, wandering from workshop to workshop, the mother tormented by the thousand needs of life and the children abandoned to themselves.

The social form taken by the sexual union depends on the economic forms in force, and the current form of the family is closely linked to the private property regime.

Thus, without fear of going off the beaten track or being prophets of doom, it seems legitimate to us to affirm that with the abolition of private property, the family will finally disappear. In a society where the means of production will be collectivized and where production will satisfy the needs of all, where women will have acquired full equality of rights and duties with men, and where maintaining the home will no longer be the work of one sex, but of a category of persons of both sexes, the family will no longer have any reason to exist. Nor will it be the painful abandonment of a conquest, a heritage of family affections and traditions, but it will happen naturally because it will be the greatest convenience of all. Communism is not - as stupidly or maliciously insinuated by adversaries and *friends* - a reduction of

47 . The *Villanella* is a pastoral poetry of Italian origin, translator's note.

human individuality through the formation of individuals and consciences of a single mould; on the contrary, it represents the liberation from all the present chains imposed on the expression of the individuality of the majority of men and the maximum realisation of the personality of each one compatible with the needs of others. It follows, therefore, that if the family and its existence prove - by hypothesis - to depend on the will of men, rather than on the economic needs of society, then men in their totality or even partially will be able to keep it alive if it suits them.

So we do not want to destroy the family, but we only say that it will die out because its causes will disappear and therefore individuals will no longer feel the need for it because they'll have adopted other forms of relationships. What these forms will be, how the physiological needs will be satisfied and how they will fit into the modified standard of living of the communist society, what will be the final aspects and what will be the final solutions to the problem of child rearing, do not seem to us to be things we have to answer in order to be able to support our thesis.

We want to make a final observation for those for whom it may even seem cynical to consider the greatest family feelings, for which a thousand sacrifices are made in silence every day, as economic needs, which are often sacrificed to them. Family feelings and attachments are certainly inescapable realities of the human psyche, and as such they are also decisive factors in our actions. However, it should be considered that serene scientific research, free of rhetoric and sophistry, undeniably highlights the primacy and therefore the causal function of materialist elements over idealistic elements. The latter, in their turn, can be the reasons for materialistic variations as derived realities, and appear even more important than their cause; but by distinguishing all the causes of the effects and their multiple interferences, we can always trace back to a primary

cause of materialistic essence, and by far stronger and more important than the materialistic element which has been modified by an ideal motive which, taken in itself and as a primary cause, can also appear less strong and less important. We will therefore also have a transitional period, during which the institution of the family will remain alive by tradition and inertia, even if the material economic causes have in fact disappeared, until their living strength, precisely family feelings and attachments, finally die out. In other words, we will have a period in which elements of an idealistic order will support states of fact, thus appearing even more important and stronger than their cause; but it is essentially the persistence of the force and the importance of the primary cause, of a materialistic nature through causal elements, but derived from them.

In conclusion, it does not seem to us that, even for the purposes of propaganda, it is a question of opposing in itself - often in a not very happy way. An exact version of reality must be given; the truth must always be told without veil or distortion, it imposes itself easier.

On the part of Lunedi and Faraggiana, one would have expected not the affirmation that the future family will be infinitely better than the present one, just as communist society will be infinitely better than capitalist society; but purely and simply the demonstration of the concordance of the family institution with private property and the inevitable decline of the former with the disappearance of the latter

They would have reached this conclusion if they had taken Marx, Bukarin, Pokrowski, etc. as a guide in approaching this question, since "*Kant, Schopenhauer Mantegazza, Vachter, Albert and especially Bebel*", if I am not mistaken, are not the happiest interpreters of Marxist doctrine.

Ugo Girone (*Prometeo* #1, January 1924, translated by *Revolution or War*)

The Social Basis of the Woman Question, Alexandra Kollontai, 1909

"While for the feminists the achievement of equal rights with men in the framework of the contemporary capitalist world represents a sufficiently concrete end in itself, equal rights at the present time are, for the proletarian women, only a means of advancing the struggle against the economic slavery of the working class. The feminists see men as the main enemy, for men have unjustly seized all rights and privileges for themselves, leaving women only chains and duties. For them a victory is won when a prerogative previously enjoyed exclusively by the male sex is conceded to the "fair sex". Proletarian women have a different attitude. They do not see men as the enemy and the oppressor; on the contrary, they think of men as their comrades, who share with them the drudgery of the daily round and fight with them for a better future. The woman and her male comrade are enslaved by the same social conditions; the same hated chains of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the joys and charms of life".

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.