

REVOLUTION or WAR #15

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

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In the Face of the Crisis, Refuse Sacrifices for the War Economy!

International Situation

1st Communiqué (March 15th 2020)

It's not up to the Proletarian to Pay for the Covid and the Crisis

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Letter to the Gulf Coast Communist Fraction: Participating to Electoral Campaigns for Propaganda ?

Spain 1936:

Can There Be a Proletarian Revolution without Insurrection and Destruction of the Capitalist State?

Excerpts of Bilan #18 (April 1935) on the "Proletarian State".

Text of the Workers Movement

Where to Begin? (Lenin, 1901)

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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.

In the Face of the Crisis, Refuse Sacrifices for the War Economy!

The regular reader will be surprised to see this issue of our biannual journal coming out just four months after the previous issue. The main reason for this is that RoW #14 was published before the global explosion of the pandemic and the brutal halt of a large part of international capitalist production. Certainly, we were able to publish on our website the communiqués and statements that are collected in this issue. One will thus be able to verify the relative unity of view and positioning of the main political forces of the Communist Left¹, in particular the Internationalist Communist Tendency and the ICP-Proletarian, to which we will add the statement of the group Emancipation (Nuevo Curso). Nevertheless, it seems to us indispensable to try to provide a wider response and thus contribute to the politically arming communists and vanguard proletarians to face the historical rupture in progress. Indeed, the latter *"will cause social turmoil, up to and including uprisings and revolutions"* (*Blomberg Opinion*, 11 April). Since the bourgeoisie has visibly prepared for it, it is up to the international proletariat and its political minorities to do the same.

The first phase of the crisis, when the shock of the pandemic, the unpreparedness of the health systems and the massive confinement dictated both state measures and proletarian reactions – essentially to protect themselves in the workplace – is coming to an end these days; particularly in Europe. For all, the extent of the economic crisis is emerging from the last mists of lock-down. For the proletariat, the bill is going to be a heavy one, it already is: massive unemployment, falling wages, worsened working conditions, rates and schedules, drastic reduction of all so-called social measures, health, partial unemployment, etc. In addition to these conditions, we are going to see, we already see, massive police surveillance and repression, of which the period of confinement was only a foretaste for the exploited and a review of their forces for all states.

The bill will be all the more painful as the recession will inevitably be followed by a financial crisis. The 4 to 5 trillion dollars and euros, Japanese yen and Chinese yuan – to mention only the currencies of the major imperialist powers – that the central banks have put on the markets have only served to prevent a break-up and paralysis of the financial

system and a stock market collapse, as was the case in 2008-2010, but worse and without any comparison in terms of the liquidities issued. Everybody understood that most of the incredible sums put on the table, *"the Money-Printing Presses Are Fired Up and Ready to Go"* (*New York Times*, March 23), would not be used for the "revival" of production because of the insufficient profits it can make for increasingly greedy capital. As a result, only states can force a minimum amount of capital into the production sectors. They can only do so through state measures, so-called Keynesian measures, that is to say, through a further strengthening of state capitalism: recovery plans – how many are calling for a new Marshall Plan! – and abysmal public deficits with wartime dimensions.

And this is where crisis and war come directly to conjugate into the present, feeding each other. The crisis that breaks out aggravates as never before the international competition between national capitals. It is a real economic war, of which the pandemic has provided a highly caricatural illustration. One need only remember the merciless struggle for masks between states on Chinese tarmacs. Capital was only able to face the pandemic, with great difficulty, not with sanitary measures, but with police and military measures. In this respect, the economically declining American bourgeoisie is shamelessly playing to the full with its incomparable military power and with the stranglehold of the dollar on the world market, including for the purchase of masks or even to buy for itself the exclusive rights to the future anti-Covid vaccine. Trump's violent anti-Chinese campaign is supported by the entire American bourgeoisie and the noose is tightening around China and gradually strangling it. This is the same imperialist policy that the U.S. had pursued against Japan in the 1930s before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

It is the imperialist weapons which will dominate and dictate the economic struggle to the death between national capitals. Each national capital will refocus on the so-called strategic sectors, i.e., the sectors of each production apparatus indispensable to carry out this economic war, and will give up, or at least will not come to the rescue of the other sectors that will go bankrupt. On the other hand, everyone will try, and is already trying, to preserve, at least at a minimum, and as far as they are able, the air sector, which is just as paralysed by the recession: the airlines of the major powers, and even more so the aeronautics industry, Airbus and Boeing, will be preserved at all costs. Like the car industry, the aeronautics industry is too closely linked

1 . With the now usual, chronic exception of the International Communist Current for whom every event is reduced to its opportunist dogma of Decomposition and who rejects the historical alternative of proletarian revolution or generalized imperialist war, thus preventing itself from grasping the real concrete stakes, the dynamics of the acting forces and the... *historical course* of events.

to the *strategic* arms industry. And make no mistake, the militaristic orientation is not exclusive to the American bourgeoisie. "*The European recovery plan must integrate European defense*" (*La Tribune* - French newspaper, 4 May).

The policies of "relocation", or even nationalization, of public deficits, aimed at refocusing the strategic forces of each apparatus of production around national capital and state, are going to be dressed up in so-called "social", even left-wing colours, as the Chinese *Global Times* points out: it is "*employment, not GDP, that is key in a wartime economy*" (17 April). This does not mean that left-wing governments will necessarily come to power – each ruling class has its own history and political tradition – but that "left-wing social measures" will return to the forefront of "national debates". At the risk of misleading proletarians, or even revolutionaries, by driving them onto false ground. The experience of the Popular Fronts and the New Deal of the 1930s must serve us for this ideological and political battle that the capitalist class is launching in all countries.

The dynamic of workers' struggles and social revolts that had prevailed in the second half of 2019 was shattered by the shock of the pandemic, the lockdown and the brutal outbreak of the recession. Since then, the proletarian reactions were aimed at protection against the risk of contagion, which reduced any generalization of the struggle to... refusal to go to work and confinement. However, proletarian anger and combativeness have not disappeared. The phase of "de-confinement" opens wider perspectives

for any workers' mobilization in the face of the conditions of resumption of work, health, but also wages, rates, schedules, etc., and massive lay-offs. The demands of increased exploitation linked to the deadly economic competition between national capitals will make the proletariat face both crisis and imperialist war, i.e. the historical reality of capitalism, the only alternative it can "offer". The stakes are terribly dramatic and impose themselves on everyone. The massive confrontation between classes will centre and play out on the sacrifices that the bourgeoisie seeks to impose on the proletariat to meet the needs of the international economic war and the preparation for the generalized imperialist war.

Already, the consciousness of this alternative is emerging more or less clearly within the proletariat. Minorities of proletarians are questioning, worrying and getting closer to the revolutionary positions and especially those of the Communist Left. It is up to the latter, to its most dynamic forces, those who fight most clearly for the international consolidation, the political clarification and the future constitution of the party, to answer these questions, these worries and these new militant wills. Another lesson of the 1930s, including Spain 1936 (see the contribution in this issue), was that theoretical and political confusion and absence of the party were additional elements in the proletarian defeat and the march to generalized war. May today's generations remember this and act accordingly.

The IGCL, 14 May 2020.

Pamphlets (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 révisionnisme (IGCL from the IFICC, only in French and Spanish)
Unions Against the Working Class (1976, reprinted from the ICC Pamphlet).

International Situation

Below are the communiqués we have issued since the outbreak of the pandemic and the economic crisis, as well as two statements from the ICT and Emancipation (NC). We have omitted our first communiqué (<http://www.igcl.org/It-s-not-the-Coronavirus-that>), dated March 1, which introduced one statement from Nuevo Curso. It ended as follows: "Product and factor, albeit a very particular and temporary one, of the contradictions of capital, the coronavirus epidemic becomes in its turn a minor but real and full-fledged element of the massive confrontations between the classes, which are the prelude to the resolution in one way or another of the historical alternative of revolution or war". To this day, we maintain this perspective.

The communiqués and statements that follow mark the evolution of the situation since then. The one of March 15 integrates different articles of the ICP-Proletarian (www.pcint.org), the ICT (leftcom.org) and Emancipation (<https://nuevcurso.org/>). Without defending precisely the same positions and orientations, all of them are clearly situated on the class terrain. The main nuance that should be noted, and that should be debated, is the importance of the generalized imperialist war as a bourgeois response to the brutal crisis that is exploding today and that is a factor of the current situation. The May 1 document of the ICT in its original Italian version clearly refers to the question of generalized war even if it does not make a direct link between its perspective and the measures used by the bourgeoisie to cope with the crisis. The May 12 Emancipation text emphasizes much more clearly this link, or rather this "interaction," between crisis and war. We have no doubt that the reality of the facts as well as the open debate that we deliberately assume for our part will help the dynamic forces of the proletarian camp to grasp the magnitude of the historical stakes as they are concretely posed. This aims to enable us to collectively respond to the situations that come and to assume the role of vanguard and political leadership of the proletariat in the best possible way.

May 14, 2020

**No to National Unity in the Face of the Pandemic Caused by Capitalism!
No to Sacrifices for the Safeguard of Capital!
It is not up to the Proletarians to Pay for the Coronavirus and the Crisis!
(IGCL, 15 March 2020).**

In addition to our position, we invite readers to read the communiqués published on March 11 by ICP-Proletarian (pcint.org, not in English yet) and on March 14 by the group Emancipation (Nuevo Curso) and the article of the Internationalist Communist Tendency, Italy: Class Struggle in the Time of the Coronavirus, on which we rely to a great extent and which we all quote below. All these positions are in the same direction to denounce the covid-19 pandemic as a product of capitalism and the calls for national unity and to support the few proletarian reactions that have been expressed – especially in Italy. They call on the entire international proletariat to follow this example. That, despite their differences, sometimes profound, different communist groups among the most active of the "partidist" camp, whether they directly claim to be from the Communist Left or not, can intervene on the same side of the class barricade is important to underline and welcome.

In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, the speeches of Trump, Macron, Trudeau, Merkel, Putin, Xi Jinping and other imperialist leaders all sound alike. They are calls for national union ² while at the same time strengthening police control of populations in the name of isolation and quarantine measures. Remove the word coronavirus and epidemic and put a call for the warlike defence of the nation and reality is coming. In fact, a real curfew has been introduced in countries such as China, Italy, Spain and even France, aiming above all to

control the population...

The Coronavirus is Bursting the Capitalist Economic Crisis

The economic and political attacks against the proletariat can only be redoubled by the outbreak of the economic crisis, recession and financial crisis, of which the coronavirus is only the exogenous factor, an *accident*. The bursting of the open crisis was not only predicted for 2020-2021 according to many bourgeois economists but from the beginning of January 2020 according to economic indices that indicated a slowdown. In previous economic crises,

² . Speeches similar to those at the time of the *Charlie Hebdo* Paris bombings, January 7th 2015.

gold was a safe haven for speculators - this is no longer even the case. The ECB³ says that it cannot use all means as it did in the 2008 crisis - the negative interest rate policy and *Quantitative Easing* have their limits - but only a few.

In the immediate term, the trade war is still going on. For example, Trudeau is going to provide \$275 million to Canadian researchers to find a vaccine. Every imperialist power wants to find it first. Heard on French television on March 14: "*vaccine research will only be profitable if the epidemic continues*"... As Engels wrote in his introduction to *Dialectics of Nature*, "*the division of labour that had meanwhile become dominant in natural science, which more or less restricted each person to his special sphere [we could add to his own country], there being only a few whom it did not rob of a comprehensive view*".

Coronavirus Reveals Capitalist Perspective of Widespread Imperialist War

"The closing of borders between nations is further proof that the bourgeoisies of different countries think in the same way: they think above all about defending their economies, their businesses, accusing other countries of being carriers of diseases, treating them as "aggressors" against whom one must defend oneself as in times of war: the aggressor is always the other one" (Communiqué of the ICP-Proletarian, 11 March 11th 2020, pcint.org, translated by us).

The pandemic allows *calls for returns to "less globalized" national economies*. For example Trump which closes the American border to Europeans except for the United Kingdom at first (it is well known that the coronavirus does not infect the British). This is another step towards imperialist polarisation. As for Macron, he wants to strengthen the weight of the French imperialism in Europe by criticizing the nationalism of other European countries and by advocating, once again, a strengthening of the European Union, at least of its hard core, today in the name of European scientific research. In the same vein, former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, for whom "*the coronavirus will be a change of era for Europe*", calls for the "*recentralisation of health services (...) and investment in infrastructure that Europe needs*" (interview on French radio RTL, 12 March). The abandonment of the sacrosanct German dogma of budget deficits at zero (made official by Merkel), statements on the need to "relocate" key sectors of national production, protectionist measures, the explosion of state deficits and debts as never before that states are urgently taking, etc., are tantamount to concentrating and orienting the pro-

duction apparatus around the states and the economic and imperialist defence of each national capital **in opposition to the others**, even if it means regrouping in close alliances, another characteristic of imperialist polarisation, as in the case of the major powers on the European continent. The coronavirus pandemic and the crisis which it is causing are also an opportunity, for the former, and a moment, for the latter, to the strengthening of imperialist tensions and the march to generalised war.

Capitalism Unable to Control and Check Coronary

One has to ask why the panic among all governments. There have been so many cuts in health and education services that the health situation was particularly dire before the pandemic. In France, exhausted doctors and nurses were asking for increased health budgets. And this autumn, Macron, far from supporting them as he hypocritically does now, sent the anti-riot police to gas them. As we write, more than two months before the start of the pandemic, capitalism is still unable to provide enough protective masks for the populations most at risk! So let's not even mention the lack of respirators for patients with acute pneumonia. As was already the case in China and Italy, health specialists are talking about the risk of having to choose between the sick, including in the central countries of capitalism, between those who can benefit from emergency care and those who will be sent to die at home or in the street! While the bourgeoisie is capable of mobilizing billions to save the banks or send an armada to bombard entire countries.

Once the pandemic over, the hypocrisy and praise of politicians will stop and attacks on health care workers will resume. Another example that has been going on for years is that people have to wait several hours in an emergency room before seeing a doctor in Quebec. Health care workers in most countries are exhausted or on sick leave with budget cuts. An increase in serious cases of infection, as in Italy, has led to the collapse of the health care system in the absence of resources, hospital beds, respirators, and personnel.

Capital's Only Remedy: Renewing Attacks on the Proletariat

The incitement of voluntary measures of internment (discreetly called isolation) by the media is a foretaste of measures that could be put in place to counter anti-war movements or the bankruptcy of states that could no longer pay civil servants. In many countries assemblies of 1000 to 100 people are banned. Other countries go even further, such as

³ . European Central Bank.

China and Italy, with compulsory containment measures that affect entire cities and regions of tens of millions of people.

"It is in fact the social prevention that the bourgeoisie implements to defend its power, its domination, its privileges. If, on the one hand, it shows that it does not have the capacity to prevent epidemics and to prevent these diseases from spreading rapidly throughout the world, hiding for reasons of purely economic interest - as has been irrefutably demonstrated - the seriousness of the disease when it appeared, on the other hand, it reveals that it has a very different objective from that hypocritically proclaimed "defence of public health": the defense of the capitalist economy, at a time when the economic crisis has already knocked on the doors of China, Italy, Germany and therefore the whole of Europe. The militarization of society is moving in this direction and Italy, in this case, can serve as a school for other 'democratic' countries" (Communique of the ICP, op. cit).

State propaganda on the coronavirus clears capitalism for the outbreak of the economic crisis and thus justifies the redoubled attacks on the working class. Indeed, the calls for national unity hardly hide the fact that the epidemic only further exacerbates class contradictions and the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. In Italy, for example, in working class neighbourhoods, proletarians are left to themselves; preventive measures are not applied; evictions of tenants continue to be carried out; bar and restaurant employees, tourist guides, substitute teachers, etc. are without income and for an indefinite period of time despite this they must continue to pay rent, food, medicine, disinfectant, etc.

*"The coronavirus epidemic, recently reclassified by the WHO as a pandemic because it affects all continents, shows today how the bourgeois ruling class is using an event of this kind to apply - in a period of particular economic difficulties for many world powers - a directly **anti-proletarian** policy" (ibid.).*

National Union or Struggle against Capital?

"Outside the workplace, everyone stays at home as much as possible, wearing masks outdoors, keeping at 'safe' distances, or in quarantine. By contrast, in crowded factories, with inadequate information, there are overcrowded changing rooms, and no disinfection. Apparently, it's much too expensive for the bosses to comply with the instructions on healthcare: and it's "irresponsible" of workers to demand them. (...) An evocative image of this situation is the 5.00am bus that, crowded with people piled on top of each other, takes the workers to the petrochemical plant in Marghera, near Venice. And there

are many reported cases of workers being threatened with the sack just for asking for the coronavirus regulations to be applied (Italy, Class Struggle in the Time of Coronavirus, Internationalist Communist Tendency⁴).

In this context, how can the proletariat fight? States in the hope of preventing resistance limit gatherings to, for example, 100 people in France and 250 in Quebec. The proletariat will also have to face the trade unions which, as in wars, support their bourgeoisie. As a small example, the first meeting of the Base Common Front⁵ on Saturday in Montreal was cancelled. In spite of everything and in the Italian context, *"The message from the bosses is "shut up and work even though we can't offer you even the minimum conditions to guarantee your health". This seems to be the slogan of the bosses everywhere, which has sparked the spontaneous strikes in Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Puglia. Hundreds of factories have stopped working. (...) We condemn the bosses, and support and spread the demand of all the workers: nobody should work if their health is at risk!" (idem).*

In his interview, quoted above, Mateo Renzi urged the other European bourgeoisies *"not to make the mistakes we made in Italy"*. In the light of what we learn from the sections of the ICP and the ICT in Italy, we better understand the profound meaning of the warning, especially since he was quick to add that *"the most important public demonstrations should be blocked"*. The warning of the former Italian prime minister was not only aimed at the mere extension of the pandemic but also at the possible explosion of workers' and popular reactions. No doubt it was also based on the few demonstrations hostile to the Chinese government that the press could not completely silence.

Even in the emergency in face of a pandemic caused by the very conditions of capitalist exploitation and the circulation of goods, the reality of today's productive capacities, which capitalism has pushed forward as never before, would make it possible to reduce production in order to prevent proletarians from catching the virus at work and in transport, while continuing to ensure the material well-being of the world's population. All the more so as it would make it possible to produce protective masks, respirators, to take in the critically ill, etc., if all the means available were aimed at general good health. But for

4 . <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-03-14/italy-we-re-not-lambs-to-the-slaughter-class-struggle-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>

5 . Trade unionists who want to be critical of union leadership only.

this to happen, the needs of capital accumulation would have to be abandoned and the overwork, the surplus value, extorted from the proletarians by capital itself, would have to be considerably reduced. That is why calls for national unity are by no means a response to the pandemic. That is why the struggle of the proletariat is the way. Just like imperialist war or crisis, a pandemic does not put class struggle on hold. The bourgeoisie itself proves it to us still today.

It is not up to the proletarians to pay for the paralysis of production due to the pandemic and for the crisis. This is why we endorse much of the March 14 communiqué produced by the Emancipation Group (emancipacion.info), whose Spanish-language intervention organ is better known as Nuevo Curso. We submit for reflection all the slogans and demands that the comrades put forward in the current situation.

"Not closing factories and workplaces, even when they become hotbeds for the spread of the coronavirus, is tantamount to sending workers to be infected with a serious disease. To offer temporary or total dismissal as the only alternative is criminal blackmail. (...).

But if the spread has multiplied it is because the priorities of each country's bourgeoisies and their governments are focused on maintaining social order,

*preventing their national capital from being devalued, and trying to keep production "normal" by inertia. Their ideal is that we should uncritically obey the dictates of each moment and not worry or criticize but remain "united" as long as they deem necessary to the production of profits. We cannot accept this. The risk for working families and the general population is too high. That is why it , **it is time to go on strike in all workplaces not engaged in essential production** to ask for:*

- *The closure of all non-essential production and the implementation of general confinement ;*
- *Reversal of all dismissals, both permanent and temporary, and compensation as medical leave for workers throughout the period of confinement;*
- *The extension of testing to the entire population with symptoms;*
- *The urgent reinforcement of medical and health teams, and the setting up of a large enough number of emergency structures and hospitals to allow the monitoring and isolation of patients at risk" (Com-muniqué March 14th of the political group Emancipation (emancipacion.info), better known under the name of its intervention publication Nuevo Curso : <http://fr.emancipacion.info/coronavirus-sauver-des-vies-pas-des-investissements/>).*

The IGCL, March 15th 2020.

Coronavirus and Catastrophic Crisis: The Tragic Responsibility of Communists (IGCL, March 19th 2020)

"The Coronavirus Calls for Wartime Economic Thinking" (The New Yorker, March 16th 2020⁶). "We are at war" (French President Macron, March 16). "I look at it. I view it as a, in a sense, a wartime president. I mean, that's what we're fighting. It's a very tough situation" (Trump, March 18th).

The rupture is historic and brutal. In addition to the victims of the pandemic and the health tragedy, the recession is sudden and deep. Entire, often essential, sectors of world production are paralysed. At a standstill. The bill will be exorbitant. We'll see later how capitalism makes the world proletariat pay for it. In the meantime, *war against the virus* has been declared. The police and the army are the only vaccines, containment and curfew, against the coronavirus that capitalism has been able to find.

The same goes for the crisis. *"You can't think in normal terms. This is more like a wartime crisis than a normal economic situation"* (Ian Shepherdson, the founder of Pantheon Macroeconomics cited by *The New Yorker* in the article above). The general drop in production will exacerbate trade and imperialist

rivalries as never before. In the sinking of world capitalism, the desperate struggle of every national capital to board the few lifeboats will be savage, fierce and violent.

In order to gain access to the few lifeboats and exclude the others, some talk of "reorienting the economy" – in opposition to the so-called liberal excesses of globalization – around each national state, even if it means, they all declare today in panic, nationalizing certain sectors indispensable to the defense of national capital. Others differentiate between *essential* and *non-essential* goods, the former to be preserved, the latter to be abandoned. For the crisis will destroy entire sections of the national production apparatus. It goes for the weakest economic sectors as the weakest people in the face of the coronavirus. The health services are thinking

6 . *The Coronavirus Calls for Wartime Economic Thinking*" (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-coronavirus-calls-for-wartime-economic-thinking>).

about the criteria to be used to choose between those who will be saved – due to lack of personnel, beds and ventilators – and those who will be sent back to die at home or in the street. The same will soon apply to the weakest sectors of the economy, which are sickened by the crisis. The state, the supreme representative of each national capital, will decide which sectors are to be safeguarded at all costs and which are to be sacrificed, or left to die. The essential criterion will not be of an economic order but of a political and imperialist order: the strategic sectors for the defence of national capital are the *essential goods* that each state will seek to preserve at all costs. For behind the crisis and imperialist tensions, the generalised imperialist war is looming ever more. The militarized response to the coronavirus pandemic is an illustration of this, a particular moment and accelerator. The process, one could almost say the mechanism, determined by the contradictions of capital, inevitably leads to generalised imperialist war if the former is not destroyed and overcome.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, capitalist crisis and imperialist war are conjugating in the present. The dynamic relationship between the two now compels every bourgeoisie to impose absolute misery, with "non-essential" goods disappearing, and equally absolute discipline in the workplaces and in the streets for the production of "essential

goods" in defense of national capital. The march to imperialist war demands that the bourgeoisie provokes a generalized confrontation against the proletariat in all countries. The coronavirus and the crisis it causes leave no room for doubt: the time has come for massive, violent, dramatic, international confrontations between the classes. Their outcome will resolve in one way or another the alternative of *revolution or war*.

The storm is of unprecedented proportions and the Communists are now just a wisp of straw, in danger of being swept away and further dispersed by the turmoil. One of the tragedies of the historical drama that is unfolding is likely to be, because the irresponsibility and inconsistency of the Communist forces, the absence of an effective World Communist Party in the very confrontation that is beginning. There is still time for the main so-called "partyist" forces, resolutely fighting for the constitution of the party, to rise to the height of their responsibility and work accordingly, quickly and concretely, to clear the way for international consolidation around the historical positions of the Communist Left and its main groups. It is up to them, first and foremost to the Internationalist Communist Tendency, to take their role seriously and to take charge, overcoming all sectarianism, of the development and strengthening of the proletarian camp as a whole.

The IGCL, March 19th 2020.

May Day 2020: Against the Virus that is Capitalism (Internationalist Communist Tendency, May 1st 2020)

We reproduce below the ICT's statement on the current situation on the occasion of 1 May. We strongly agree with this document to the extent that we make it our own. If we could, i.e. if there were no containment, we would disseminate this position as widely as possible. The IGCL.

The world proletariat has in the past celebrated May Day in some dramatic situations: from the imperialist world wars which forced workers to kill, die and produce for their class enemy – their own capitalist class – to the many occasions when the ruling class has unleashed its repressive machine to crush those struggles aimed at making exploitation less onerous, and the chains of the bosses' oppression a little less heavy.

This year, the working class, our class, will be unable to take to the streets. In many cases, workers will not even be able to resort to the usual methods of struggle (pickets, occupations, marches) due to a sneaky enemy, apparently unconnected to capitalist social relations: coronavirus. In reality, this virus is the legitimate offspring of capitalist society, like the "localised" wars that are tormenting millions of people, like the emigrants looking for a less miser-

able life, like the refugees forced to flee and survive in inhuman conditions, like the environmental disaster that is hitting the living beings of the planet. The relationship between climate upheavals, depredation of the last remaining natural spaces and the spread of "new" pathogens is now a fact ascertained by the vast majority of scientists, at least of those not totally subservient to the powers that be. It is in this capitalist context that the new pandemic has arisen.

The coronavirus pandemic is battering the whole world. It has upset a social and economic order that appeared immutable. It has dramatically laid bare the reality of human relations in this society based on the exploitation of one human being by another in the name of profit.

After years of cuts, thousands, if not millions, of workers have to cope with a broken and dysfunc-

tional health system. Worse still, many more in the so-called emerging countries are faced with a situation where even a half-decent health system has never existed. In these countries, exploitation does not even have the social cushions — which have been under attack for a long time — that exist in the "West": precarious work, underemployment, starvation wages: in short, "nineteenth-century" exploitation, is the rule. Worst of all are countries like the USA which, despite being the centres of "advanced" capitalism, leave millions and millions of proletarians without health care worthy of the name, because their wages are too low to pay for private insurance. Not to mention the millions of "invisible" super-exploited immigrants without a residence permit who are essential for many sectors of the economy (e.g. agriculture), many of whom remain unemployed, without unemployment benefits, and with no access to medical treatment in general.

The overall picture that emerges is of a health system incapable of curing everyone and which chooses not to save the elderly and the ill, the groups who, so far, have been the greatest victims. They are the sacrificial lambs for a system which, at the same time, has no problem making everyone work into their late 60s and beyond. No matter how much suffering and how many sacrifices the world working class has to endure, as long as this exploitative system exists, it will attack indirect wages (social and health services) and deferred wages (by reducing pensions and delaying retirement age). Wherever these 'flagship' welfare schemes remain, they will be used up to fuel the under-powered engine of the capitalist economy.

Millions of people, wage workers, are forced to work every day in extremely harmful environments under worsening conditions. In these factories and workplaces any discussion regarding the dangers of the pandemic comes up against the bosses' interests, and the only thing they consider legitimate: their profits.

Never before has the historical crisis of capital been so enormously amplified. This pandemic has exposed the glaring incompatibility between the interests of the bosses and the working class. Never has the fundamental question been more sharply posed: our lives against their profits.

This system, both in the present situation and in the longer term, pretends that we are all equal as citizens as far as our health needs are concerned. The current reality shows that this is not the case.

The coronavirus crisis is highlighting what a state the capitalist system has been in for years and if the pandemic lasts much longer, things will get much,

much worse. The rebound effect, which the usual "gurus" predict for the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2020, is a pious illusion. Their projections are based on worthless statistics, just like their analyses of the positive trend of the world economy before the 2008 crisis which, with very few exceptions, they had not predicted.

Now they are predicting a reduction in global GDP of 10-15% by the end of the year with an increase of hundreds of millions of unemployed and underemployed workers. The economic recovery, if indeed there is to be one, will need a lot of time before it can assert itself, and will only be temporary and unresolved in this decadent phase of the capitalist system. Even if, hypothetically and with a great deal of luck, the spectre of Covid-19 goes soon, it is not as if everything will resume as before a week later.

China is economically on its knees: the latest data have estimated its first fall in GDP for half a century. The USA is up to its ears in debt and deficits and, in the space of three weeks from the end of March to the beginning of April, 26 million workers have asked for unemployment benefit, but this is only the beginning. Moreover the apparent prosperity of the United States is only based on the supremacy of the dollar and the most powerful armed forces in the world. Central Europe, Germany included, was already in a technical recession before the pandemic. The signs of a slowdown in the world economy were already obvious last year and the future looks increasingly bleak.

The fresh money that the European Central Bank and the Federal Reserve (both already into trillions of dollars) are supposed to be forking out will inflate the coffers of the banks but go to very few companies. Speculative bubbles will continue since firms' profit rates are too low to justify new investments; though there will be exceptions like the big players, which enjoy the intervention of the State when bank funding is insufficient.

After the very old, health workers and those who are clear victims of the cuts in health services, murdered by capitalism, the others to be hit are the factory workers, and the most oppressed sectors of our class which beyond "normal" exploitation have to endure the racist oppression of the bourgeoisie, working in the most precarious of situations where they are the least paid and most easily blackmailed. It is no accident that the "hotspots" of the epidemic have started precisely where the bosses have forced, and are forcing, workers into work, even if this means enormously increasing the possibility of infection because distancing is either impossible or very difficult. Moreover there is either no personal

protective equipment or it is inadequate. The greatest numbers of deaths are to be found in the workers' suburbs of New York and some of the industrial provinces of Northern Italy, to give just two examples.

However, the business world, indifferent to the massacre in progress, is pressing for a return to "normal" as soon as possible, that is, to the production of surplus value in all firms, to the detriment of the health of those both inside and outside the workplace. We hope therefore that workers once again struggle to defend their lives and the health of everyone. The mobilisations in recent weeks, in Europe and in other areas of the world, which have forced the unions to run to keep up with angry workers, have shown us how to transform impotence into resistance, on the basis of our immediate needs, instead of making sacrifices in the name of profit. But this is not enough.

From now on, we need to link the defence of the health of every worker to the perspective of a different society. We need a new social model that no longer puts production in conflict with human health, or with the delicate balance of the natural environment, already massively endangered by the destructive rapacity of capital. Never before has the contradiction between the collective health and

well-being of humanity been in such stark contrast to the logic of profit. Otherwise, the logic of capitalism will be a war [IGCL's note * end of article] which would destroy just about everything, giving the capitalist system economic room for a new cycle of accumulation.

The virus attacking us is capitalism. Fighting this disease means building the communist alternative to this system of exploitation and death. This means connecting with workers to build and secure the political instrument of working class struggle: the internationalist and revolutionary class party, the future International.

We have always been committed to this task but today it is more important than ever, given that the situation is changing rapidly and time is of the essence.

There is an alternative to this system. The task of building it falls on those who are tired of being exploited and used by capitalism. Let's get ready for our appointment with history.

Internationalist Communist Tendency, May Day
2020

Note * : The original Italian version speaks of "generalized war" [guerra generalizzata] that seems to us more precise, particularly for the dramatic period which is now opening with this crisis... [IGCL note].

What Is America Trying to Do ? (Nuevo Curso)

There isn't a day going by without the press highlighting some off-key comment or response from Trump. The message again and again is that he's a racist and he's crazy. But there's "system in his madness." And more than likely, the underlying objectives, which point to an escalating conflict with China, will still be held by whoever holds the White House in November—if Trump hasn't run amok by then.

Covid has accelerated the plunge into the crisis of the world economy. And the US is not doing well. Today, despite the reckless rush to resume production – which will probably cost thousands of deaths – the employment data are historically low, only comparable to the years following the crash of 29. Exports have fallen so much that China has been forced to lower tariffs on key products in order to meet the terms of the truce in the trade war.

In an economy that was already being displaced in key sectors for capital placement such as IA and 5G by the Chinese rise, the pandemic has introduced an extraordinary element of chaos. Entire sectors of American capital that already felt they were being left behind, that Chinese competition was "unfair",

expressed their fear and anger by demanding reparations from China... for the Covid. And of course Trump is using them. The Chinese government may try to respond to the campaign by rebutting and countering it with cross-accusations, but the bottom line is somewhere else, and all parties know it.

What was globalization?

The US led the opening of global capital markets and the dismantling of tariffs as long as it served capital accumulation. Bringing production to China, Mexico and other countries while maintaining domestic markets and opening up others increased the return on invested capital. It also brought new capital flows to countries hosting maquilas and factories. So-called "globalization" triggered precarization in the countries with the most concentrated capital, but it also created millions of industrial jobs in previously impoverished countries. Capital pretended to "rejuvenate" and took pride in reducing extreme global poverty even though over-accumulation made it clear that labor continued to lose its share of world income. In other words, the value of what is pro-

duced was increasingly lower in relative terms to the market created by production itself. The trend towards crisis continued and materialized in an exuberance of credit and fictitious capital that went as far as the financialization of key sectors (construction, transport, food distribution, etc.). The financial crash of 2008 made it clear that there was a limit to this bubble which allowed the fiction of anti-historical “development” to continue.

What is trumpism?

Less than a decade later, the fear of losing key technological races against Chinese capital, which was until recently a subordinate capital, and the accumulated erosion of the domestic market, which was expressed as the fragility of social cohesion, produced a strange protectionist alliance in the United States. The anger of a petty bourgeoisie that felt the threat of bankruptcies, massive land evictions in the countryside and pauperization, joined the anger of capital centered on the internal market – such as the extractive industries – and to a part of financial capital that bet on a change in the rules of the game of global capital and feared that waiting any longer would be too late. The result was a rupture in the American bourgeoisie that ended in Trump’s agonizing and controversial victory. And with it the move from “multilateralism” to the one-by-one renegotiation of trade and military agreements putting literally the entire US arsenal on the trade negotiating table. This had nothing to do with Democrats vs. Republicans beyond certain forms and embellishments, protectionist tendencies in the Democratic Party were also expressed under the rise of its “socialist” wing and have ended up being hegemonic in the whole of American capital. Trumpism was giving them good results although, perhaps, they might prefer other forms.

The core that is not going to change

What is increasingly clear to US capital is that it needs to recover the bulk of its productive machinery in order to maintain its global position. Covid has only reinforced this idea, precisely contradicting what Trump says. It is not because China is the cause of the epidemic, but rather because any random element, such as an epidemic elsewhere in the world, can take away extremely fragile and distributed production chains in a “just in time” system designed to extract the last drop of financial gain by eliminating even local warehouses.

Strategically, it is obvious that if the trend moves towards an increasingly open confrontation with China, maintaining the degree of supply dependency

in China that the US currently faces is suicidal. But if “renationalization” and the trade war are to be sold as a national cause, it needs to be argued from another angle. The one that has always been Trump’s forte: “bring back the good jobs”. The discourse, despite what the European press reflects, is well constructed and bleats the idea of “stopping the feet” of capital, hinting at a subsidized path for companies. We can read the following today from Robert E. Lighthizer, the Trump government’s trade official:

"It was pure regulatory arbitrage: companies could avoid US labor and environmental standards by manufacturing abroad while enjoying tax-free access to our market. These trade agreements also undermined a key competitive advantage for the United States: a commitment to the rule of law and an independent, functioning legal system. The agreements allowed companies to litigate disputes with foreign governments over expropriations and other matters, not through local courts, but through so-called investor-state dispute resolution provisions. In doing so, the federal government effectively purchased political risk insurance for any U.S. company that wanted to send jobs overseas.

Many companies have realized that offshoring creates risks that often outweigh the incremental efficiencies. Long supply lines flow at the whim of local politics, labor unrest, and corruption. In some countries, such as China, there have been government-wide efforts to steal intellectual property for the benefit of domestic companies that become the main competitors of the victims of theft.

At the same time, the trend in trade policy was also changing rapidly. Businesses have seen that President Trump did not support their blind pursuit of efficiency in the global economy. Instead, he focused on jobs, particularly in manufacturing, because he recognized the importance of productive work not only to our GDP, but also to the health and happiness of our citizens. Business success and economic efficiency, of course, remained important considerations. But they were no longer the beginning and the end of trade policy.

The new policy was to aggressively implement previous trade commitments, renegotiate labor-destroying trade agreements like NAFTA and the Korea Free Trade Agreement, and confront China’s predatory economic and trade policies. Many companies protested that this policy change created uncertainty. President Trump’s response was simple: If you want security, bring your plants back to the United States. If you want the benefits of being an American company and the protection of the U.S. legal system, bring the jobs back."

This economic nationalism is more than just a fairy tale, it's a state policy. The US government is negotiating with Intel and other chip and semiconductor companies to reopen the factories they once had US territory.

China in the wake of Covid

China is increasingly cornered. The combination of an epidemic with a trade war has brought it to the brink of mass unemployment. Although it is creating a small credit bubble to regain a foothold, its imperialist framework is in the doldrums: China's "new silk road" will take time to recover and is far from being a sufficient market, the Central Asian countries are already restructuring debt and those in Africa are trying to wriggle out of arrears as best they can.

Chinese capital is having a hard time. Its profits are plummeting, GDP is contracting in a way unseen since 1976 and obviously its influence is shrinking, starting with the US itself, where its investments are falling to 2009 levels.

The US is pushing beyond the trade war with China

Believe it or not, Covid has accelerated the withdrawal of US global military pressure that has been building up since Obama. Even in the Persian Gulf, the US is removing missiles from Saudi Arabia and beginning a certain pacification with Iran. The primary goal is to redistribute military spending in key regions with its "allies", in Europe with NATO members, in Asia by charging Japan and Korea with some of the costs of their own deployment.

The goal of US foreign policy and militarism is in-

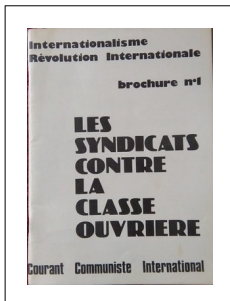
creasingly focused on the only competitor that can dethrone US capital from global centrality: China. Symptoms of a spreading anti-Chinese war ideology are leading presidential candidates to compete over who has a tougher stance on China.

War tensions are growing by the day, and not a few people are talking about a new "cold war". They are optimistic. It is no longer Trump but the US military and intelligence apparatus that has accused China of conducting a wave of cyber-crime to steal the results of research on a Covid vaccine. Meanwhile, US military pressure in the South China Sea is increasing and gaining increasingly active allies in countries like Indonesia. The slope of the war is so steep that attempts by Taiwan or South Korea to appease China and its direct allies in order to escape from military bloc formation are hopeless.

In China they are fully aware of the dangers that a warlike conflict with the USA, even limited to the control of the seas, would entail. But the debate is centered on whether to accelerate the nuclear program even more as a way to slow down the descent into war.

In Europe there are two bad echoes. The first is banal but significant: we only need to look at the University of Oxford, which just yesterday presented a report according to which the most nationalist and socially militarized societies in Europe – Greece and the former Stalinist states – are the most resistant to disasters like the Covid. The second is more than worrying. The planned EU-China summit, originally prompted by Merkel, has fallen off the official agenda of the German EU presidency. Why?

Nuevo Curso, May 12 2020



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.

Debate within the Proletarian Camp

Letter to the Gulf Coast Communist Fraction: Participating to Electoral Campaigns for Propaganda Purpose?

The IGCL to the GCCF,

Dear comrades,

We want to respond to your letter⁷, dated November 30th on your website, and continue the debate about the basic positions of a communist organization nowadays, and more particularly the *Points of unity*⁸ of the GCCF. Specifically, we want here to comment and critically respond only to the arguments that the letter provides on our objections⁹ to point #12. It says that "*communists may stand in elections to expose the sham of bourgeois democracy*", which we disagree with. We'll deal with the other points in another letter, which don't present such a head on disagreement.

But before all, we want to underline the seriousness of the reflection and arguments of your letter. We are convinced that the debate we're developing will interest and concern many readers, contacts and sympathizers of the international Communism Left currents and their political expressions. In our opinion, the letter participates in deepening political questions, sometimes even through a unique approach, that can enrich and clarify the general political debates and confrontations within the proletarian camp.

Can revolutionaries and communist groups stand in elections on tactical grounds for pure propaganda in our historical period? *"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"* your letter argues, after it rightly recalled *"that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be established outside and against the bourgeois parliament or legislative bodies"*. According to it, the *"standing in elections [would be tactical] and for purely propaganda purposes"*. The way the letter argues to defend exceptional running in elections is to be

considered before rejecting it. It rightly rejects any anarchist drift and abstract slogans that would lead to political indifferentism. On this point, it refers to the Italian Left, which disagreed with the CI's position on the issue of parliamentarism and electoral participation. The Left rightly proclaimed that its abstentionism had nothing to do with anarchist or anarchistic abstentionism, and that its disagreement with the majority of the CI was of a tactical and not principle nature.

1) Was the Italian Left position on parliamentarism really tactical only?

It matters to recall that the Italian Left declared this question as tactical only because the Communist International (CI) had adopted definitively the participation in elections at its second congress, July 1920, with the *Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism*. The Italian Left, whose organization's name was precisely the Communist **Abstentionist** Fraction before the CP of Italy was set up, wanted to express its faithfulness and respect to the CI discipline. It is important to recall that it was mainly focused, after the battle for the *21 conditions for entry into the CI* in which it had been at the forefront, on the political fight to impose the general discipline to the principles of the CI over the right wing tendencies and fractions that were adhering to the International, particularly in Italy and France; and which actually opposed, and sabotaged the effective, that is political, centralization of the International. So, it is worth relativizing, at least putting in perspective, the real meaning and utilization of the argument of tactic of that time by the Italian Left on this peculiar question.

What exactly was the position of the Italian Left? How did it base it? *"The task of Communists at the present moment in their work of ideological and material preparation for the revolution is above all to remove from the minds of the proletariat those [democratic] illusions and prejudices. (...) This work is of a very [great] importance and comes among the first problem of revolutionary preparation. (...) The Communist parties will never obtain great success in propaganda on behalf of the revolutionary Marxist method if the severing of all contacts with the machinery of bourgeois democracy is not put at the*

7 . See RG #14 (<http://igcl.org/Letter-of-the-Gulf-Coast-Communist>)

8 . <https://gulfcoastcommunistfraction.wordpress.com/points-of-unity/> or still <http://www.igcl.org/New-Points-of-Unity-of-the-Gulf>.

9 . See [Letter to the GCCF on its new Points of unity](http://www.igcl.org/July-20th-2019), RG #12 (<http://www.igcl.org/July-20th-2019>).

basis of their work for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' councils" (*Theses on Parliamentarism* presented at the 2nd Congress of the CI by the Communist Abstentionist Fraction, we underline)¹⁰.

The thesis #10 deals directly with the tactical dimension. *"In spite of all the public speeches and all the theoretical statements, the very great importance which is attached in practice to the electoral campaign and its results, and the fact that for a long period the party has to devote to that cause all its means and all its resources in men, in the press, and even in money, helps to strengthen the feeling that this is the true central activity to achieve the aims of communism; on the other hand, it leads to complete cessation of the work of revolutionary organization and preparation. It gives to the party organization a technical character quite in opposition to the requirements of revolutionary work, legal as well as illegal"*.

The theses finally conclude that *"the success in the electoral struggle will always be judged only by the number of votes or seats obtained. Every effort of the Communist Parties to give a completely different character to the practice of parliamentarism cannot but lead to failure, the energies spent in that Sisyphean labour, whereas the cause of the Communist revolution calls these energies without delay to the terrain of the direct attack against the regime of capitalist exploitation"*.

The fact the Italian Left called itself **Abstentionist** denies that it only gave only tactical character to this participation in the electoral campaign. The theses it presented at the CI Congress gave the theoretical and political foundation for such an abstentionist position in *"the present historical period (...) opened by the end of the World War with its consequences for the social bourgeois organization, by the Russian Revolution which was the first realization of the conquest of power by the proletariat, and by the constitution of a new International in opposition to the social-democracy of the traitors (...) and in those countries where the democratic regime achieved its formation a long time ago..."* (*ibid.*).

2) Standing for election for propaganda purposes?

Now, let's see your arguments in the framework of this historical heritage. Your letter puts forwards and defends that *"standing in elections on tactical*

grounds (...) is only potentially useful during a period of real class combativity". There is a fundamental difference between the period of the early class struggles dynamics of the 19th Century and their present dynamics, whose main characteristic is the *Mass Strike* as Rosa Luxemburg described it. In the first case, the massive class mobilizations could be articulated and even complemented by the participation in electoral campaigns - we can't develop more on this specific point in this response and one can refer, among other documents of various Left Communist currents, to the Thesis #6 of the above text of the Italian Left¹¹. In the second case, *"in this historical period, running in elections is rarely, if ever, a productive tactic for communists"* your own letter says. It would have been worthwhile for the letter to give an example of any *"rare productive tactic"* to base historically and materially your position. Let us note that, as such, the two sentences of your argumentation contradict each other.

Let's see first an historical experience to debate and clear, using a *scientific* method, this question. In May 1968 in France, the dissolution of the National Assembly and the opening of an electoral campaign was the turning point of the mass strike and it opened up its reflux. May 30, the French President of that time, De Gaulle, dissolved the National Assembly of the Deputies in the midst of the general strike at a moment the latter was *hesitating* with no more clear perspectives - in part because of the unions and Stalinist Communist Party's actions and maneuvers¹². This dissolution and the announcement of the electoral campaign - the elections took place June 23 and 30 - were the main weapons for

¹⁰ . They were thus rejected by the Congress, which adopted to the ones *on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism* advocating the participation of communist parties in the elections in the name of *revolutionary parliamentarianism* (article in English in *Programme Communiste* #66, 1975).

¹¹ . We did not find any English version on Internet of the *Thesis on parliamentarism* presented by the Italian Left at the Second congress of the CI. We only have it in the printed *Programme communiste* #66, 1975, which was an issue with French and English articles.

¹² . May 27, after "negotiations" with the government, the Stalinist CGT leader of that time, Georges Seguy, came to the huge Renault factory of Billancourt in a suburb of Paris - today disappeared. He presented favourably the agreement (called *"accords de Grenelle"*) and began to call for stopping the strike. The thousands workers attending this general assembly immediately began whistling and booing. The same occurred in many workplaces all around the country. The strike continued but without real perspectives. The workers could not contest the unions' leadership of the struggle and they let them lead it despite their growing distrust. With no concrete perspectives to develop - nor were the few communist groups and circles present able to provide any -, the ruling class took the occasion to regain the political initiative by... using the democratic card and the elections. Then, despite the continuation of the strike until late June, the dynamics of the class confrontation had been reversed on May 30 with the dissolution and the state had now on, increasingly and until the end, the control on the timing and the terrain of the confrontation.

the state to regain control on the situation by derailing the whole "population" and most parts of the proletariat's attention from the proletarian one, the one of the mass strike, onto the bourgeois democratic terrain, imposing its timing and political stakes. It successfully derailed and then defeated the class struggle. Any revolutionaries' participation in it would have been directly in opposition to the strikes. Even the Trotskyists denounced the June 1968 elections and refused to participate and use it for *propaganda purpose* as they usually do and defend. We could refer to other historical experiences of the same "nature", such as the German Revolution's failure in which the constitution of a *Constituent National Assembly* January 19th 1919 had been a key element of the bourgeois successful bloody counter-revolution¹³.

Behind your position and the arguments put forwards by the letter, we believe there is a difference of understanding of the real dynamics of the class struggle¹⁴. When the proletariat is already massively mobilized and struggling, it begins to consider itself, act and think, as a collective class - and not as an addition of individuals. It would be seriously and dangerously mistaken to exceptionally participate in the electoral democratic campaign at the very moment the class actually tends *"to pull [itself] away from the electoral terrain and onto the proletarian class terrain"* and assert its collective class character. In our historical period, it would participate in driving back the workers to the bourgeois terrain, while they are tending to get away, distance themselves, from democratic ideology and electoral mystification as well as the capitalist state apparatus. For the revolutionaries, *"running in elections"* in such a situation would be objectively and actively participating to focus on the bourgeois electoral moment, a privileged moment for bourgeois ideology, and derail the workers from the proletarian terrain and struggle; from their tendency to act and think as a collective class to revert them to individual thinking and action.

Now, when there is no particular working class mobilization, there are no "open" collective class dynamics of struggle and the great masses of

proletarians do not *tend* to act and "think" as a collective class, but as individuals. That is they, as individuals, globally remain on the bourgeois terrain and are massively submitted to democratic and individualist ideology proper to capitalism. Thus the "one man/woman, one vote" democratic slogan of the bourgeois elections is particularly adapted to maintaining and even strengthening the ideological submission of the greater parts of the proletariat to bourgeois ideology and political campaigns. The electoral periods are precisely the moment when the whole state apparatus, the whole ruling class, is mobilized and "occupying" all the political and ideological terrain. That is to say that the bourgeoisie is precisely on the offensive and allows no space today - contrary to the 19th century - for revolutionary propaganda in the framework of the election process. So, it is impossible to make any even partially efficient "mass" propaganda in the face of the overwhelming democratic and electoral campaign... unless one believes that the propaganda means of the present communist political minorities can compete with the present mass media and the whole state apparatus. And that the spreading of class consciousness can be reduced to individual processes and can develop thanks to *Reason*.

To conclude this point, running in elections nowadays, whatever is the country, would be tactically a huge loss of energy for no "result", nor "success". Politically it would be helping the ruling class to oppose the proletarian class dynamics to "pull itself away" from the bourgeois terrain and objectively participating in its campaign and offensive against the proletariat. At the level of principle, it would ultimately be very dangerous for the revolutionaries. For one part, the futility of this tactic for the proletariat, the sentiment of powerlessness and useless struggle, weakens political and class convictions. On the other, such a practice would inescapably lead to opportunist concessions to bourgeois democratic and petty bourgeois individualist ideologies, undermining the understanding of the class struggle dynamic as a collective one rather than the sum of individuals.

"Because of the great importance which electoral activity assumes in practice, it is not possible to reconcile this activity with the assertion that it is not the means of achieving the principal objective of the party's action, which is the conquest of power. It also is not possible to prevent it from absorbing all the activity of the movement and from diverting it from revolutionary preparation" (*Theses of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction, Il Soviet* #16 and 17, June 1920, we underline, <http://www.pcint.org/>).

Fraternally, the IGCL.

13 . It should not be believed that this use by the bourgeoisie of electoral mystification to counter mobilizations belongs only to history (or to European countries). The same was true of the "student" movement in Quebec in 2012, whose "turning point", the beginning of its ebb, was provoked by the triggering of an electoral period: *"the movement was emptied of its substance thanks to the September 2012 elections"* (Student Struggle and Neighbourhood Assembly, brochure of the Communist Internationalist Klasbatalo).

14 . We'll certainly raise and develop this question while commenting your letter on point #13.

Spain 1936: Can There Be a Proletarian Revolution without Insurrection and Destruction of the Bourgeois State?

"The key question of every revolution is undoubtedly the question of state power. Which class holds power decides everything. (...) It is the key question determining everything in a revolution's development, and in its foreign and domestic policies" (Lenin, One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution, Sept. 1917).

The "Spanish Revolution" remains a mystification, a myth for many, which is largely maintained by the left and the leftists, Trotskyists and Anarchists who have made it *their stock-in-trade*. Unfortunately, there are revolutionary forces that still support it today. Among them, comrades of the communist group Emancipation (better known under the name of its Spanish blog *Nuevo Curso*) defend that there was a "Spanish revolution" in 1936, that "on 19 [July] the 'unexpected' general insurrection of the Spanish proletariat disarmed the armed reaction [Franco's military coup] and took power over 4/5 of the territory"¹⁵. Claiming a so-called "Spanish Communist Left" around the figure of the revolutionary militant Grandizo Munis, they take up its tradition and positions, especially on Spain. As we showed in our previous issue¹⁶, these positions are not those of the international Communist Left, but those of the Trotskyist Workers' Opposition of the 1930s, when the Trotskyist current was still part of the workers' movement, although already very weakened by the political opportunism that was eating into it.

The clarification of the nature of Spanish events cannot be reduced to a simple historical debate on the legitimacy of a current, the International Communist Left, at the expense of the Workers' Opposition, which would only refer to theoretical and principled questions. It extends to the issues of today, more particularly to the situation that is developing these days, and with which revolutionaries and the proletariat as a whole are beginning to find themselves confronted. Indeed, the violence and the depth of the crisis that the coronavirus merely precipitated – it's not the root cause – are already forcing the bourgeoisie to take "state" measures, aiming at concentrating even more the national productive apparatuses around each state, while abandoning the sectors that are presented to us today as "non-strategic", that is to say, not indispensable to the relentless and merciless defence of national capital that the crisis imposes on the world stage. The phase that is beginning is already reviv-

ing state, economic, political, ideological policies, having the same historical function that the policies of the Popular Front or the New Deal had in the 1930s: to definitively defeat the international proletariat and to prepare the generalized imperialist war. As such, the Spanish question is crucial and full of lessons, since the defeat and massacre of the proletariat in Spain was the final episode of the counterrevolutionary course, indispensable to definitively clear the way for the generalized imperialist war.

In 1942, when Munis wrote his book on the Spanish experience, *Lessons of a Defeat, a Promise of Victory*, the Spanish and international defeat was widely consumed and the World War had won all continents. Nevertheless, he continued to defend the thesis of the *Spanish Revolution*. As early as July 1936, it was clearly rejected and fought against by the then international Communist Left, in fact almost only by the so-called Italian Left through its French-language review *Bilan* (1933-1938). At the heart of the divergence between the two currents, the Workers' Opposition and the Communist Left, is the question of the relation of the proletariat to its insurrection, to the destruction of the capitalist state, to the establishment and exercise of its class dictatorship. "We remain faithful to Marxism when we maintain in all circumstances, in all events, the banner of the violent destruction of the capitalist state, the seizure of political power by the proletariat, which is the basis of any social transformation of society" (*Bilan* #36, Oct. 17-Oct. 36, Oct. 1936¹⁷).

The Trotskyist Workers' Opposition, including the Munis of 1942, claimed the first four congresses of the Communist International (CI) and the policies of united front and "workers' government," that is, government formed on the basis of alliances with the Socialist Parties. It was in Germany that this policy of alliance with the SP and the USPD (German Independent Socialist Party) to form "workers' governments" was first put forward and put into practice by the German Communist Party (KPD), but also by the German Communist Workers Party (KAPD), and finally adopted and theorized by the CI. In doing so, it abandoned the lessons of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and the theoretical lessons that Lenin had developed in particular in the *April*

15 . <https://nuevocurso.org/tipo/historia/historia-del-proletariado/memoria-historica/>

16 . See our letter to Emancipation in *Revolution or War* #14 (<http://www.igcl.org/Letter-to-Emancipacion-Nuevo-Curso>).

17 . All the quotations of *Bilan* we make in this text are translated by us from their French original version.

Theses and in *The State and the Revolution*: proletarian's autonomy in face the bourgeois state, proletarian insurrection, destruction of the capitalist state, dictatorship of the proletariat. Faithful to these, only the Communist Left of Italy, leading the CP of Italy from its foundation in 1921 until 1924, openly opposed within the CI itself – particularly through the interventions of its principal leader Amadeo Bordiga – this united-front policy with the Socialist Parties that had gone to counterrevolution and opposed also the substitution of the slogan of "dictatorship of the proletariat" for "workers' government", which was adopted in the CI's 3rd Congress in 1921. This is why, even today, the international Communist Left claims only the first two congresses of the International. It is precisely this fundamental divergence at that time, a divergence referring to questions of principle and theory, therefore, that separated the two currents, that of Trotsky and the Communist Left, on the nature and significance of the events of July 1936 in Spain and on the nature of the war, "civil" or imperialist, that followed.

In his book, Munis essentially develops four arguments, which he repeats tirelessly throughout the pages and chapters, to justify the thesis of a proletarian revolution in Spain :

- the proletarian masses were ready for revolution, *"nothing could oppose to the torrential avalanche of the masses [which had] gradually become conscious of their socialist task"*¹⁸ ;
- On July 19, 1936, *"the state and capitalist society collapsed after the triumph of the working class over the reactionary insurrection"*, that is, Franco's military coup d'état, to the point that *"by exaggerating a little [sic!], we can say that Spain was bourgeois and capitalist on July 18, proletarian and socialist on July 20"*;
- *"the Central Committee of Militias was undeniably a revolutionary government (...) on 19 July [having] brought into being in Spain a multitude of organs of revolutionary power (...) even more explicit than that of the Russian Revolution"*, organs that Munis calls *"government committees"*.
- *"accompanying the general collapse of the capitalist state, private property was liquidated the day*

18 . We translate from the French version republished by the Éditions sciences marxistes in 2007. All the quotations presented here come from the second part of the book, mainly from chapters 12, 13 and 14. The repetition of the same arguments and the succession of contradictions throughout the pages and chapters, which in no way detracts from the "pleasure" and the interest of the reading but makes the subject matter and the political coherence particularly confused, forced us to choose scattered quotations and to gather them together for the clarity of our argumentation.

after July 19, 1936 (...). A new system was born, the socialist system (...) thanks to the organization of the Colectividades [Colectivities] that followed the expropriations carried out by the various militias and Patrol Vigilance and by the government committees".

Proletarian Masses Ready for Revolution?

Faithful to the Trotskyist premise of the *Transitional Program* that *"the multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution"* regardless of the course of class struggle and events throughout the 1930s, Munis believes that in 1936 *"the national and international balance of power was even more favorable than in 1917"* and that *"the masses [had] gradually acquired a consciousness of their socialist task [to the point that] in the course of international struggles the masses have rarely had so many opportunities for revolution. At the beginning of 1936, their situation was optimal, frankly socialist"*.

This favourable valuation of the international and historical balance of power in the 1930s puts fully aside the counter-revolutionary course throughout the 1920s and 1930s following the German defeat, which was definitive in 1923, and the isolation of the Russian Revolution; and that it may have had some influence on the Spanish situation in the 1930s. The bloody historical, political, ideological and physical defeats of the Russian, Italian and German proletariat under Stalinist, Mussolini and Nazi terror, which had been at the forefront of the post-war international revolutionary wave, and the degeneration of the Communist International, were followed by often no less bloody failures of international workers' struggles and mobilizations, as in China in 1927, each time more profound. The economic crisis of 1929 and the subsequent renewal of proletarian combativeness did not change this dynamic of defeats, and these became moments in the historical process leading to the generalized war. Admittedly, these massive proletarian mobilizations, such as the massive strikes of May-June 1936 in Belgium and France as well as the proletarian insurrection in Spain in July 1936, were not inevitably destined to become additional moments of the course to the war and indispensable to its continuation. Consequently, it was then precisely up to the weak political forces remaining faithful to communist internationalism to take into account the international proletarian retreat and to firmly establish the class defence line, a line preserving the autonomy of the exploited and revolutionary class and its specific economic and political interests vis-à-vis the bourgeois state; and on which the international proletariat would have been able to recognize itself and regroup in a defensive position even if the probabilities were very reduced. Now, it was precisely in Spain that the establishment of this class line of defence was most likely to be erected, due to the very fact

of proletarian combativeness, acute class instinct and "revolutionary" aspirations (and not the "*consciousness of the socialist task*"), however confused they were, reigning among the great masses. But precisely, as an expression of the unfavorable historical course, no revolutionary force, no party, or fraction sufficiently influential, emerged to establish this line and spread it with a minimum of scale among the masses.

For Munis and the Trotskyist vision, "*a simple shift to the left on the part of the large workers' organizations*"¹⁹, *the public decision to liquidate the capitalist state and organize the new revolutionary power, would have been enough to win. (...) Workers' organizations faithful to capitalism is the tragedy of the proletariat, not only in Spain but worldwide*". This way of posing the problem, a class ready for revolution and "workers' parties faithful to capitalism", ignores the fact that the capacity of the proletariat to equip itself with its party, as the highest expression of its class consciousness, is precisely an indicator of the degree of extension of this consciousness among the proletarian masses and an element of the balance of power between classes as well as revolutionary potentialities. In the Spain of July 1936, the absence of a significant party or even group, or fraction, still faithful to communism and capable of assuming tasks of political leadership and orientation in the turmoil contradicted Trotskyist and Munis's hopes about the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat in Spain. And it allowed, from the very beginning of the military uprising, to glimpse the contours and limits of the expected proletarian reaction, in particular with regard to the bourgeois state

"In Spain lacks a class party and there are no prospects for it to emerge in the heat of current events. And here we do not affirm a thesis that, to be didactic and scholastic, would be of immeasurable stupidity. It would consist in believing that the proletariat cannot intervene as a class in the situation because previously a group of theorists would not have compiled a program with a complete and impeccable architecture. (...) We base ourselves on concrete elements, on the situations that preceded the one that has just opened and that show that if the Spanish workers have managed to write – especially in the last five years – pages of epic that no other proletariat has yet to its credit, they have unfortunately found it impossible to forge their class party" (Bilan #33, En Espagne, bourgeoisie contre

prolétariat, July-August 1936²⁰).

The combativeness and "revolutionary spirit" of the proletariat enabled it to launch a general strike and to defeat, with very few weapons in hand, Franco's military coup d'état in the main cities. But its political unpreparedness, one of the manifestations of which was precisely the absence of a class party, made it very easily, too easily, diverted from the confrontation with the republican state, from the insurrection against it, and mobilized on the military front with the sending of the militias to Zaragoza, just four days after the so-called disappearance of the capitalist state. In doing so, the revolutionary class immediately abandoned its autonomy and classist terrain for "class collaboration" with the republican forces and against fascism²¹. "*By their incorporation into an army, [the workers] will no longer have the strength to find the path through which they defeated the military in Barcelona and Madrid on July 19*", Bilan was saying in October. Contrary to Munis's thesis, and despite its combativeness, heroism, radicalism and even revolutionary "aspirations" or feelings, the proletariat in Spain was far from being "*conscious of its historical task*".

Disappearance and Disintegration of the Bourgeois State?

According to Munis, "*once its coercive institutions were defeated and destroyed, the capitalist state ceased to exist (...). By destroying it on July 19, the Spanish proletariat got rid of the main obstacle to progress. (...) At the precise moment when the bourgeois state disintegrated, anarcho-sindicalism and the POUM made an act of allegiance to it, strengthening the unity of all workers' organizations against the organization of the new proletarian state*".

On many occasions, he himself contradicts his thesis on the *disappearance, disintegration, disaggregation, dissolution, and even destruction* of the state: "*of capitalist society, only the Popular Front coalition remained, teetering on the brink of the abyss. Its government was a useless shadow, an immaterial embodiment of capitalist power. (...) As soon as the first detachments of militiamen left for the sierra of Guadarrama and Aragon, the Popular Front and the government began to slyly destroy the work carried out on 19 July*". Not only does he recognize that the State was not destroyed, but also that its *immaterial incarnation* exerts a very material political action from the day after July 19. The Spanish government in Madrid is still there and the government of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, presided by Companys, remains in place with the support of the anarchist CNT and the POUM. Two days after Franco's defeat in Barcelona, the Central Committee of Militias, led by the CNT, was formed

19 . By this he means the main organizations of the Popular Front, the trade unions UGT and CNT, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the POUM and the then CP, PCE and PSUC (the Catalan Stalinist Communist Party infamous for the extortion, kidnapping, torture and assassinations it championed under the direct orders of the Stalinist NKVD), which have, at least for the PSOE and the UGT, already completely passed into the bourgeois camp or were passing into it like the CP since the death of the CI when it adopted "socialism in one country".

20 . http://www.collectif-smolny.org/article.php?id_article=1892#part2.

21 . The national resistance framed by the CPs during World War II was a continuation of this.

and Munis presented it as *"the new political power"*. Its first decision is to call the proletarians to leave for the Zaragoza front, from the 24th, to engage in the anti-fascist struggle and the defence of the republican state, to stop the general strike. By doing so, this so-called new revolutionary power of the Central Committee of Militias, at the head of which the CNT reigns supreme, pushed the proletarians to turn away and ignore the question of real power, class power, which the insurrection of the 19th had objectively posed without the proletariat being able to resolve it. This period that saw the bourgeois power stagger ended on the 28th with the alignment of the POUM with the CNT and the left parties, its definitive adhesion to the Popular Front, and its call, in its turn, to stop the strike where it was still going on. *"By its slogan of re-entry [to work], the POUM will clearly express the turning point of the situation and the success of the bourgeoisie's maneuvering to obtain the cessation of the general strike, then launching decrees to avoid the reactions of the workers"*²² [workweek, requisitioning of companies, "workers' control", etc.] and, finally, *pushing the proletarians out of the cities towards the siege of Zaragoza*" (*Bilan* #36, La leçon des événements d'Espagne).

If Munis still speaks of revolution and destruction of the State in 1942, from July-August 36 the Italian Fraction is very clear on the reality of July 19 and on the outcome of the confrontation. Where Munis sees a victory, *Bilan* sees a defeat: *"when they threw themselves into the streets on July 19, [the workers] could not point their weapons in a direction that would have allowed them to break the capitalist state and defeat Franco. They left the Giral [the head of the Spanish government in Madrid at the time], the Companys in Barcelona at the head of the state apparatus, simply burning down churches, 'cleaning up' capitalist institutions such as the Public Security, the police, the civil guard, the assault guard.... From 19 to 28 July, the situation would have allowed the armed workers, at least in Barcelona, to take full power, albeit in confused forms, but which would nevertheless have been a for-*

22 . The main demands that the CC of the militias made public on the 24th: *"36-hour work week; 10% increase in wages; reduction of rents; payment of strike days; compensation for the unemployed; control of production by the committees of factories, workshops, mines..."* (quoted by Munis). The Generalitat issued a decree endorsing most of these demands – *"it is necessary that the workers leave [to the front] with the feeling that they obtain satisfaction about their demands"* (*Bilan* #36, La leçon...) – which were not applied, with a few exceptions, to ensure war production for the military fronts. This time Munis rightly defends that *"workers' control of production only finds revolutionary application in connection with the general expropriation of capitalism and the exercise of political power by the proletariat"*. But it is still necessary to agree on what is and under what conditions can we speak of expropriation of capitalism and on what is the exercise of political power by the proletariat and under what conditions it takes place.

midable historical experience. The turn towards Zaragoza saved the bourgeoisie" (*ibid.*).

Government Committees and the Central Committee of Militias, Organs of Proletarian Power?

The chapter that follows the one on July 19 is entitled *Duality of Power: The Preponderance of Workers*. In other words, it contradicts the thesis of a monopoly of power, that is, the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and thus the destruction of the capitalist state and a proletarian revolution that was put forward earlier and is yet reaffirmed in this chapter. This vision tries to take up the schema of the Russian Revolution, particularly the period of effective double power, between the Russian state and its government and the workers and soldiers councils, which runs from February to the October 1917 insurrection. *"Without even knowing it, without even being conscious of it [sic!], the Central Committee of Militias was converting itself into a revolutionary government and its apparatus into the outline of a proletarian state apparatus. (...) The exercise of political power by the proletariat and the poor peasants nevertheless remained a reality of weight, inescapable. The entire area freed from military power was in the hands of a multitude of unconnected government committees at the national level, with no clear consciousness of their incompatibility with the old state. (...) Even during the Russian Revolution, there was no such clear-cut victory" (!)*.

Drawing a parallel between the soviets, or workers' councils – *"the Russian government committees"* according to him – in Russia and the *"multitude of organs of revolutionary power"* that appeared in Spain after July 19, Munis even states that *"the example of the Spanish organs of power is even more explicit than that of the Russian revolution"*. He even goes so far as to claim that *"in many villages, the Cenetist [CNT] militants proclaimed anarchy through a committee that corresponded exactly to the Marxist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat"*. The theoretical and of principle abomination lies not in the fact that anarchists are given a role in the affair, but in the affair itself, namely the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat presented to us here: an addition, at best a hypothetical federation, of local committees having established anarchy village by village! Far from these anarchizing aberrations, *Bilan*, on the contrary, defends that *"the workers of the Iberian Peninsula remain, despite their admirable heroism and sublime sacrifices, below all the experiences lived by the workers' movement"* (*Bilan* #36, October 17-October 36).

What was the reality like? It is clear that some of the *peasant collectives* and village committees were emanations of the poor peasants and their class struggle organs in the countryside. However, as Munis himself shows us elsewhere, these *colectividades* did not, and could not, go beyond being mere organs of immediate struggle and subsistence for the peasants themselves. As for the *government-committees* and other committees in the cities, he tells us that in fact most of them were not the emanation of general assemblies in the factories or neighborhoods, but the result of alliances and agreements between the parties and unions of the Popular Front, CNT and POUM included of course, but also the Catalanist *Esquerra Republicana* of Companys, which divided up the composition of the committees. On the substance, on the very dynamics of the class struggle in progress, the fact that some delegates were elected by the village or factory assembly or appointed authoritatively by the parties does not change that most of these committees were not the emanation, nor the expression, and even less a factor, of a dynamic of an **autonomous** proletarian struggle as was the case with the soviets in Russia, quite the contrary. The Trotsky of 1924 in *Lessons of October*, the one who was not yet a Trotskyist, so to speak, rightly defined the soviets as *organs of insurrection and organs of proletarian power*, and not as mere forms of organization. For the most part set up by the CNT, the UGT and the POUM, and directed by them, the "government committees" and the CC of the militias were at no time organs of the insurrection. On the contrary, it must be clear that the latter was constituted precisely to prevent it. *"Far from being an embryo of the Red Army, the columns [of militia] will be constituted on a ground and in a direction that do not belong to the proletariat"* (*Bilan*). If the committees and the CC of the militias were organs of power, it was of bourgeois power and its maintained state.

"The constitution of the Central Committee of Militias was to give the impression of the opening of a phase of proletarian power and the constitution of the Central Economic Council the illusion that we were entering the phase of the management of a proletarian economy. However, far from being organisms of dual power, they were indeed organisms with a capitalist nature and function, because instead of being constituted on the basis of a proletarian thrust seeking forms of unity of struggle in order to pose the problem of power, they were, from the outset, organs of collaboration with the capitalist state. The CC of the Barcelona Militias will be, moreover, a conglomerate of workers' and bourgeois parties and trade unions and not an organism

of the soviets type arising on a class basis, spontaneously and where an evolution of the workers' consciousness can be verified" (*ibid.*).

Destruction of Capitalism and Socialist Measures?

"The Spanish proletariat destroyed capitalism and its values", said Munis. "Accompanying the general collapse of the capitalist state, private property was liquidated the day after July 19, 1936. The proletariat killed two birds with one stone. By striking a blow to the state of the property-owning class, by destroying it, it struck a mortal blow to property itself, as naturally as the fall of a meteor. The factories, the land, the trade, the transport, the mines were in the hands of the workers and the peasants. As soon as the shooting ceased in the cities, the Spanish economic system began to function on a new basis. The management of the economy by and for the bourgeois class ceased. A new economic system was born, the socialist system" ²³.

Munis's book accumulates contradictory assertions, sometimes from one line to another, destruction of the capitalist state-maintaining state, revolution-not revolution, capitalism's disappearance-maintaining ²⁴, etc. These incessant contradictions express, among other things, a theoretical and political confusion of the widest kind vis-à-vis the elementary principles of Marxism and the historical experience of the proletariat. This confusion spreads to the point where Munis speaks of "socialist property" after July 19 1936, of "expropriation of the proletariat" (sic!) after May 1937. That private property has been "liquidated", that is, that either the bosses have fled, or that they have been imprisoned or even shot, does not mean that the private appropriation of the means of production has disappeared. That the factories are controlled by their workers, are "in their hands", does not mean that the proletariat no longer suffers the exploitation of capital. The fact that economic management is no longer assumed by capitalist individuals keeping property or share titles in their safes does not mean that capitalist relations are no longer. That money, paper money, is abolished in the peasant collectives of Aragon by the CNT-FAI or the POUM does not mean that exchange value is no longer valid. This would not even be the

²³ . This quotation and those that follow can be found in Chapter 17, The Property.

²⁴ . A few pages after the previous quotation justifying socialism by the liquidation of property, Munis tells us exactly the opposite, and rightly so this time: "Capitalism does not disappear because industry ceases to be individual property, because its essential characteristic is the alienation of the means of production in which it keeps the workers whose labour power it buys like any other commodity"!

case if the proletariat had destroyed the capitalist state apparatus and established its class dictatorship. So in the Spanish case where the "republican" capitalist state has remained in place, the disappearance or elimination of the "owners", mostly pro-Franco, of factories and land is only a moment of strengthening and concentration, not of a "socialist" economy even if it is draped in anarchist red and black and under so-called "worker control", but of national capital around the state, and more precisely of a capitalist war economy indispensable to the needs of the military front against Franco's regime, to the needs of the struggle between two equally bourgeois fractions, which soon became a local imperialist war.

Munis finally falls on the terrain of this war in the course of the pages and chapters identifying the interests of the Spanish proletariat with the success of the war against Franco's army. He thus comes to praise the virtues of the superiority of "socialist production" over "capitalist production"²⁵: *"The productive superiority of socialism over capitalism was clearly demonstrated by the work of the workers and peasants Colectividades. (...) In 1936, workers and technicians (...) rejoiced in being able to develop a socialist industry and produce the materials necessary for the triumph of the new society. They quickly sent a large quantity of war material to the fronts (...). By the end of 1936, several factories had been built and started up, producing chemicals for war, which were difficult to find even in the more industrialized countries"*.

It suffices to let him speak, or write, to see confirmation that the capitalist relations had not disappeared, that they continued to impose their diktat on the so-called "socialist economy" and that the exploitation of the proletariat continued. *"Although the war absorbed an ever-increasing number of men, worker unemployment appeared in all industries not directly related to the needs of the front. At first, the Collectives continued to pay a daily wage to unemployed workers, but their resources were limited and trade relations were deteriorating. Since they did not confiscate financial capital, the Collectives had to live on their own capital. Most of them had to take out loans, which were always refused by*

25 . The Trotskyist view, Trotsky himself, finds itself alongside Stalinism to justify the "superiority of socialism" by productivity and growth rates allegedly higher than capitalism. This argument betrays a mistaken understanding – in the case of pre-war Trotskyism – the mark of political opportunism, of communism of course, and even of the management of the economy by the ruling proletariat during the transition period, when, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the classes and commodities relations are not yet totally destroyed.

the government". Proof if proof were needed that "capitalism and its values" had not been destroyed.

In fact, as *Bilan* writes, *"where the bosses had fled or were shot by the masses, factory councils were formed as an expression of the expropriation of these enterprises by the workers. Here the trade unions intervened (...) to defend the need to work at full capacity for the organization of the war without excessive respect for labour and wage regulations. Immediately stifled, the factory committees, the control committees of the companies where the expropriation was not carried out (in consideration of foreign capital or for other considerations) were transformed into organs that had to activate production and, in this way, were distorted in their class meaning. They were not bodies created during an insurrectional strike to overthrow the State, but bodies oriented towards the organization of war (...). From now on, the workers in the factories that they had believed they had conquered without destroying the capitalist state will once again become its prisoners and soon, in October, under the pretext of working for the realization of a new era, of winning the war, the workers in the factories will be militarized to work for socialism"* (*Bilan* #36, La leçon...).

It seems to us that we can end here with our demonstration. Neither revolution, nor workers' power, nor even dual power, still less socialism, existed in Spain in 1936.

Were the International Defeat and the Spanish Massacre Inevitable?

As combative, heroic, and even revolutionary, could be the proletarian masses in Spain, as acute could be the class antagonisms, the historical conditions proper to the country and the succession of defeats of the international proletariat did not allow the emergence of a proletarian political minority of Marxist vanguard, of a party, able to defend and spread a clear class line for the proletariat in front of the bourgeois state. No force was able to establish any *April Theses* for Spain, even less to try to spread, defend and put them into practice in Barcelona, in the factories, in the streets, in the neighborhoods. Lenin's lessons on insurrection, taking up Marx's lesson about the "insurrection as an art"²⁶, make it a central element of the revolutionary act destroying the state of the bourgeoisie and the indispensable premise for the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat. *"Just like Lenin in April 1917, we have to operate on the central core of the problem and it is there that the only 'real' political differentiation can*

26 . Lenin, *Marxism and Insurrection*, 1917 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/13.htm>).

be made. The capitalist attack can only be answered on a proletarian basis. (...) From the present situation where the proletariat is squeezed between two capitalist forces, the working class can only move to the other opposite by taking the path leading to insurrection..." (Bilan #34, Au front impérialiste (...), il faut opposer le front de classe, August-Sept. 36).

Forgotten, abandoned, ignored, betrayed, the proletarian insurrection as a principle that *Bilan* was practically the only one to defend still, would have at least allowed the revolutionary minority to warn the proletariat as early as July 36 of the dangers of letting itself be misled by the illusion of a power that guns seemed to give to the proletarians, of leaving in place the bourgeois state power in Barcelona, the mystification of the so-called "socialist" conquests which were intended for war production, and of rushing to the fronts to be massacred for the interests of the enemy class.

No doubt the Fraction could have gone further in the case of a hypothetical situation that would have seen some of its members go into exile in the mid-1920s in Barcelona rather than in Paris, Marseilles and Brussels. For contrary to the false criticism that the Italian Fraction manifested itself through a fatalistic vision, because of its recognition of a counterrevolutionary historical course that it never presented as an unstoppable mechanism, and through an indifference towards the proletarian struggle in Spain, there is little doubt that it would have developed the same militant will that its members displayed in France and Belgium, when they intervened in factories and meetings, sometimes with revolvers in their pockets to protect themselves against Stalinist repression. From July onward, abandoning the principles of insurrection and dictatorship of the proletariat, most of the last left opposition groups, and sometimes even of the Communist Left – within

Bilan itself – thought there were seeing a *revolutionary proletarian power* in the photos of Spanish workers in blue overalls, one hand on the gun, the other brandishing a raised fist, wearing red and black caps, marching in the Plaza de Catalunya, electing their officers and leaving for the front; and *proletarian internationalism* in action in the influx of brigadists from all over. As we have seen, it was nothing of the sort.

In this hurricane of confusion and panic causing so much class betrayal, *Bilan* was the only voice that held firm to the principles. *"One of two things: either the revolutionary situation exists and it is necessary to fight against capitalism, or it does not exist and then speaking of revolution to the workers, when, unfortunately, it is only a question of defending their partial conquests, means substituting for the criterion of the necessity of a measured defence to prevent the success of the enemy, that which consists in throwing the masses into the abyss where they will be crushed"* (*Bilan* 36, La consigne de l'heure : ne pas trahir, October 1936).

Bilan was the only voice that advanced orientations that could have avoided the catastrophe and imposed on all the struggling fractions of the Spanish bourgeoisie the terrain of class demands: *"The only way to salvation for the workers consists in their regroupment on class bases: for partial demands, to defend their conquests at the same time as they will base themselves on the persuasive force of the events themselves to raise as the only possible governmental solution, that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to launch the slogan of insurrection when the favorable conditions have matured"* (*Bilan* #33, En Espagne : bourgeoisie contre prolétariat, July-August 1936).

RL, April 2020.

BILAN 18: Party – International – State /VII : The proletarian state (April – May 1935, excerpts)

We publish below excerpts from an article in the journal Bilan of the Left Fraction of the Communist Party of Italy, the so-called Italian Left, from a series published over the years on the question of the state and, more specifically, on the proletarian state and the experience of the Russian Revolution. We strongly invite the readers to read the whole series, unfortunately only available in French, which can be accessed on the site of Smolny Publishing (http://www.collectif-smolny.org/article.php?id_article=49). This article addresses only one particular dimension of the transition period between capitalism and communism, that of the initial period of the exercise of class dictatorship in a single country, or groups of countries, when the "proletarian" state is confronted with other capitalist and imperialist states.

Drawing on the experiences of February-March 1918 when the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty with Germany was signed, and on the experiences of the war with Poland in 1920 when the Red Army reached the gates of Warsaw, the article tries to draw general lines of principle that the Bolsheviki and all the revolutionary forces of the time could not have acquired precisely because of the lack of previous historical experience. In doing so, it rejects any idealistic or anarchistic approach, or even leftist infantilism, such as the arguments of the Bukharin fraction against the signing of the treaty, which advocated – and which some still advocate today! – that it would have been better to abandon power in the face of international isolation, that it would have been better the Russian Commune be annihilated as the Paris Commune was, and thus avoid the tragedy of infamous and bloody Stalinism. As if, when the course of a workers' strike begins to falter and fall back, or even reach an impasse, revolutionaries could withdraw, abandoning their comrades in combat, in order to remain clean and free from any so-called compromise.

More seriously, fortunately, the text tries to address the contradiction that tends to emerge, in the absence of international extension, between the state of the transition period and the proletariat, which nevertheless remains an exploited class during this time. It rightly points out that the international opposition between the classes, of which October 1917 had been the most successful expression, tends to be replaced by the opposition between the proletarian state and the states of the imperialist powers as the perspective of international extension of the revolution is reduced and weakened. Faced with this contradiction, Bilan defends that "the only possible alternative remains proletariat/world capitalism and the proletarian state is a factor of world revolution only on the condition that it considers that the enemy it must defeat is the world bourgeoisie. We believe that it is in this sense that the question should be approached and reflected upon in order to best establish the principles that will guide the action of the party from the first days of the dictatorship of the proletariat. [This article has been translated from French by ourselves]

Party – International – State /VII : The proletarian state (Bilan, excerpts)

(...). The principles are therefore so many foundations supporting the path of action of the world proletariat; their appearance and their consecration in statutory texts are a product of historical evolution itself and, as far as the proletarian state is concerned, we have seen again a coincidence that has always occurred before: the new tasks of the working class will have to be tackled without having **all** the necessary and indispensable theoretical and political elements. This zone of the **unknown** and **unknowable** is, according to Engels, the tribute that social science must pay until the productive technique has generated such a high expansion of production that the classes will have ceased to be a historical necessity and the free satisfaction of needs will allow the life of communist society.

We have already said that the understanding of a situation is only possible according to two fundamental elements: the action and the role of the pro-

letariat, the concretization of this action in correlation with a system of principles. We have also indicated that, for the proletarian state, the impossibility had again manifested itself to establish the policy of this state on the basis of programmatic elements established in the period preceding the victory of the Russian proletariat and which could embrace a whole stage of historical evolution. It is for not having rigorously adhered – in the analysis of the situations – to the fundamental criterion of the action and role of the proletariat that the experience of the Soviet state is now ending with its incorporation into the world capitalist system. If the world proletariat had interpreted the different situations of the post-war period through its political function and the irreconcilability of its contrasts with capitalism, the objective conditions would have been realized to establish the theoretical foundations of the workers' state in the course of the evolution of the class

struggles of the world proletariat accompanying the experience of the Russian proletariat.

In 1917-18 and 1921, at both turning points in the world situation, the Russian party gave tactical solutions to the problems of the Soviet state on the basis of analyses of situations in which it was impossible for it to make the policy of the workers' state derive from the position that the latter should have had on the struggle of the world proletariat; the lack of historical experience that could instruct it in this respect did not allow it to grasp the reality of the situation in which it were acting. In both eras, the Bolsheviks concluded that it was necessary to retreat, to deal with the enemy, while affirming that they would have acted quite differently if one could expect revolutionary movements on the other fronts of the struggle of the workers of all countries. And each time, the retreat or the compromise found a complementary justification in the need to safeguard the proletarian state, not as a particular conquest of the Russian proletariat, or as a position "in itself", but as an instrument that could have intervened later when the working class of other countries had conquered new possibilities of struggle: The Bolsheviks thus believed they were fulfilling their internationalist duty, because they were safeguarding the proletarian state and preventing the enemy from destroying it, through a contingency that was temporarily favourable to it. But this whole tactic did not take into account the essential element, namely that the position occupied by the proletarian state acts directly on the process of struggle of the proletariat of each country and that the whole consists in taking the path that will favour the position of the working class in the mortal struggle that it must deliver to world capitalism.

In 1917-18, at Brest-Litovsk, the Bolsheviks had the choice between two fundamental criteria: either to link their policy to the maturation of revolutionary movements in other countries, or to exploit the war between the Central Empires and the Entente by bargaining for Russian support in either of the two constellations. It is obvious that this is the second path that the Bolsheviks should have taken if they had limited themselves to the photographic snapshot of the power of the German bourgeoisie, which was strong enough to surge its armies to attack the Soviet borders and the immediate inability of the proletariat of that country to break the scheme of capitalism. The other policy of the workers state could only emerge if one did not limit oneself to the political moment that accompanied the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and considered the perspective of contingency and the possibility of revolutionary movements in Germany. Indeed, ten months after the

signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, powerful revolutionary movements swept through Germany first, Hungary, Italy and, in general, all the other countries, giving the Russian revolution the only proletarian significance it could have, namely the first victory obtained by the world working class over the Russian sector, prologue to the victory on the world front. The events of 1919-21 made it clear that because the historical premises of October 1917 were solely international, it was only on the basis of the world working class struggle that the defense of the Soviet state against the attacks of German imperialism and all other countries could be envisaged. Of the two tendencies of the Bolshevik Party that clashed in the time of Brest-Litovsk, the one of Lenin and the other of Bukharin, we believe that it was the former that was oriented towards the objectives of struggle for world revolution. The positions of the Bukharin-led fraction that the function of the proletarian state was to deliver the proletariat of other countries through "revolutionary war" brutally clashes with the very nature of proletarian revolution and the historical function of the proletariat. It can in no way follow the path of the bourgeoisie that was able to triumph on the world stage with Napoleon building the French state through the victorious trekking of his armies whose real objective – from the historical point of view – was not to establish a European and world empire of France, but to accelerate the maturation of political conditions in other states in order to establish the French capitalist state in an international environment that would allow the victory of capitalism from the global point of view. The proletariat cannot, on the other hand, follow the other path followed by Bismarck and consisting not in a program of military expansion and conquest (Napoleon), but in rallying the "German nation" around the centralized bourgeois state. In the case of both Napoleon and Bismarck, we are witnessing a course of events that had as its axis the construction of capitalist states repeating, on the world stage, the opposition that is unleashed on the capitalist market between companies or trusts. These two contrasts have their origin in the contradiction revealed by Marx in his theory of value, in the capitalist mode of production, which leads to the impossibility of the realisation of the value of labour in a regime based on the division of society into classes. We do not have in mind here the particular case of Brest-Litovsk where the essential criterion which was to prevail was the one defended by Lenin making the attitude of the Soviet state depend on the position occupied by the German proletariat and also affirming that, in case of necessity, the Bolsheviks would withdraw to the Urals, in Siberia, until a

resumption of the revolutionary struggle in Europe. A further verification of Lenin's central point of view can be found in his analysis of the policy followed during the Red Army operations in Poland in 1920, which led him to conclude that Soviet policy at that time had facilitated the manoeuvre of the Polish bourgeoisie, which tended to mobilize the different classes in a front of nationalist resistance against the Soviet attack, and which was successful. But the guidelines set out by Lenin, where he considered it possible for the Russian state to weave between imperialist brigands and even accept the support of an imperialist constellation to defend the borders of the Soviet state threatened by another capitalist group, these general guidelines testify – in our opinion – to the enormous difficulty the Bolsheviks faced in establishing Russian state policy when no previous experience could arm them to lead the struggle against world capitalism and for the triumph of the world revolution.

It is not easy to determine what prevailed in Brest-Litovsk: whether it was the general consideration of pacing the march of the Soviet state at the pace of the struggle of the proletariat of other countries, or the other consideration that Lenin had expressed at that time : the intervention of the Soviet state on the front of inter-imperialist contrasts to take advantage of the support that one group of them would have been forced to give to the Russian state to defeat the other imperialist group. Therefore, we cannot say definitively whether the internationalist directive inspired the decision that was adopted in Brest-Litovsk or whether it was the state of necessity that determined the Bolshevik Party to accept the conditions of German imperialism²⁷. If we refer to the Red Army offensive in Poland in 1920, we must conclude that it is rather the second hypothesis which relates to Brest where the Russian state would have determined to accept the German diktat, not because of the situation which the German proletariat was going through at that time, but because of the military superiority of that country. In the end, the idea of the "proletarian state/capitalist state" opposition was born at the birth of the Soviet state. And this antinomy of states veils, from the outset, the opposition between classes, the only one that can inspire the action of the proletarian state in the same way as the action of other proletarian institutions: unions, cooperatives, class party.

We still have to say one more word about Brest. We have seen that, ten months after this event, revolutionary movements began in Germany and then spread to other countries, even though the Bolsheviks

had decided to accept Brest mainly because the international horizon did not present prospects for insurrectionary movements. The Bolsheviks' inability to determine the perspective of the contingency was by no means occasional, but depended on the conditions under which they acted, **that is, the impossibility of drawing from the theoretical field and principles the weapons that would allow them to go beyond the vision of the political moment, and foresee the perspective arising from the driving centres of the situation, the only ones that could explain the contingency itself.** The difficulty underlying the assessment of the situation in 1917-18 will become all the more apparent if we compare the extreme decision which emerges from Lenin's theses of April 1917, in a situation where, however, the balance of forces between the Bolsheviks and the enemy (in its various forms) was otherwise unfavourable as it was in 1917-18. As soon as Lenin arrived in Russia, despite being a minority within the party itself, armed as he was with an arsenal of principles acquired through a struggle that had lasted many years, he immediately grasped the meaning of the Russian reality and, despite all the momentary appearances, did not hesitate to draw up a programme of action which seemed to isolate the Bolshevik Party from the masses and movements of the moment, but which, in reality, corresponded directly to the evolution of the situations: Five months later, events were to confirm Lenin's plan of April perfectly. But in 1917-18 Lenin did not possess, on the problem of the Soviet State, that set of principles which had enabled him to understand the situation in the spring of 1917. We wanted to insist on this point to verify the thesis that we put forward, which consists in considering impossible the analysis of a situation if it is not based on principled considerations relating to the positions that the proletariat must occupy.

The preceding considerations could easily be dismissed as abstract and worthless elucubration, since the whole problem would be reduced to very modest proportions and the retreat or offensive of the Red Army would be decided only by the military balance of power between the two armies in battle. In Brest, for example, an answer should have been given to an immediate problem and not in relation to the rise of the revolutionary movement in Germany, which was not to be declared until ten months later. We see in this the repetition of the old refrain that one always opposes to the Marxist currents: "Here is the situation, it is necessary to answer with a yes or a no, and especially to consider that the rejection of a compromise can bring down a proletarian institution, whereas its safeguard would allow tomorrow the struggle for the final objectives which would

27 . See, for instance, RoG #13, <http://www.igcl.org/The-Bukarin-Fraction-of-1918>.

thus have been provisionally set aside only to better struggle and win in the new circumstance". This **realism** has always accompanied the deviations and betrayals: in front of it, it is necessary once again to oppose the firm response of the communist proletariat which reveals the game of the opportunist: it is not a question of making the revolution at any moment; it is not a question either of refusing to recognize the necessity of a retreat when the circumstances impose it; it is simply a question of never linking the proletariat to forces which are fundamentally opposed to it. When a situation arises where the very existence of a proletarian organisation is at stake and the enemy can take advantage of circumstances that are favourable to it to deliver an attack directed towards its destruction, the real option before the working class is: either struggle or capitulation. In the first hypothesis, the victory of the enemy is only momentary because it results only from contingent balances of power, and capitalism cannot introduce – thank to its success – its agents into the proletarian movement. In the second hypothesis, it is not only the contingent situation that is prejudged, but also the future situation, and capitalism will have achieved the greatest possible victory because its reinforcement will no longer be quantitative and contingent, but qualitative and long-lasting; its apparatus of domination will have increased by one mesh – and the most dangerous one for the proletariat – because it will have installed a fortress within the proletarian movement itself.

The solution given by the Bolsheviks in Brest did not involve an alteration of the internal characters of the Soviet state in its relations with capitalism and the world proletariat. In 1921, with the introduction of the NEP and in 1922, with the Treaty of Rapallo, a profound change was to be seen in the position occupied by the proletarian state in the field of class struggle on a world scale. Between 1918 and 1921, the revolutionary wave that swept through the whole world was to be declared and then reabsorbed; the proletarian state was facing enormous difficulties in the new situation and the moment had come when – no longer being able to rely on its natural support, the revolutionary movements in other countries – it had to either accept a struggle in conditions that had become extremely unfavourable for it, or avoid the struggle and, by this very fact, accept a compromise that would gradually and inevitably lead it on a path that would first adulterate and then destroy the proletarian function that belonged to it, to bring us to the present situation where the proletarian state has become a mesh of the apparatus of domination of world capitalism.

We want immediately to speak out against the crude

position of delineating, in personal responsibility, the root causes of the reversal that has taken place between the revolutionary position held by the Russian state in 1917-21 and the counter-revolutionary position it now holds in 1935. Far be it from us to underestimate the consequences of the death of the leader of the revolution, but we are sure that it would be an insult to the memory of the great Marxist Lenin to affirm that the reversal of the position of the proletarian state and its passage to the service of capitalism depends on the fact that at its head was no longer a leader with exceptional and brilliant qualities, but Stalin, the envoy of the demon of degeneration and perversion. The real tribute to Lenin, on the other hand, is to say that even if he had been able to continue to live to work for the salvation of the world revolution, the same problems would have appeared, the same difficulties would have arisen: Lenin's last articles on cooperation reflect the new situation resulting from the defeats of the world proletariat, and it is not surprising that they could have been of use to the falsifiers who sketched out the theory of "socialism in one country". In front of Lenin, if he had survived, centrism would have had the same attitude it took towards the many Bolsheviks who paid through deportation, prison and exile the loyalty they wanted to keep to the internationalist program of October 1917. Lenin, his genius, his intransigence, his political firmness could not have overcome the social forces generated by a serious modification of the situation and centrism, in the person of Stalin, would have been able to overcome him also in the case – which has unfortunately been verified – where the world proletariat had to bite the dust in front of the enemy who could straighten the edifice of its regime through the support that its agents within the proletariat provided it.

These two positions are equally false: the one that would like to find in October 1917, in the very principles of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the original vices that should inevitably lead to the current situation, and the other one that would like to formally separate the two periods of life of the proletarian state: the first one in Lenin's time, where everything worked perfectly, and the other one, which would have been corrupted by Satan, Stalin. **The distinction between the two periods exists, but in no way according to the personal qualities of the men who expressed them, but by the opposition between the very nature of these two situations, one of which is countersigned by the blossoming of revolutionary movements in all countries, the other by the resorption of the revolutionary wave and by the victory of the enemy who could – thanks to the defeats of 1918-21 – victoriously resist the revolu-**

tionary battles of Germany in 1923, of China in 1927, to mention only the most important ones.

These two periods are directly related to each other and we must clearly affirm that the fecundating germs of centrism are to be found in the conditions of ideological immaturity in which the international proletariat found itself when historical conditions presented it with the opportunity to destroy world capitalism. These conditions of immaturity are expressed by the isolation of the Bolsheviks within the proletarian movement where, nowhere else, the fractional work had been carried out that had allowed the Russian proletariat to find in the Bolsheviks the guide to their revolutionary battles. It does not seem that the lesson of the events is present today to the surviving communist militants after the devastation of centrism because, still today, apart from our fraction, in the other countries they don't prepare to the path that allowed the victory of the proletariat.

When the new situation arose in 1921, Lenin and the Bolsheviks confronted it with conceptions which – as far as the proletarian state was concerned – were an expression of the previous situation but were in no way the result of establishing the role of the workers' state in the reality of the world class struggle: In 1921, based on the immediate historical precedents, one had to conclude that it was necessary to defend, **in spite of everything**, the existence of the Russian state, since the latter had shown its revolutionary credentials by founding the Communist International. Lenin, in his study on the NEP, Trotsky in his report to the 4th Congress of the International, had to pose the central problem in the following terms: a battle is engaged between the proletariat holding – through the state – the economic levers of control and the other strata of the peasant and petty-bourgeois population: the victory will belong, in the end, to the one of the two antagonists who will manage to direct, in the way of its respective class, the indispensable economic recovery after the years of the civil war and the external war. In 1918, in his study on State Capitalism, Lenin had pushed back the exaggerations of the ultra-left on the real scope of the Russian revolution with a scientific analysis that laid bare the impossibility of obtaining great results because of Russia's backward economic state. In 1921, these same considerations led Lenin to the opposite view of the possibility of a socialist management of the proletarian state, even without the intervention of the proletariat in other countries. Lenin also asserted the inevitability of entrusting to reborn capitalism the function of defeating small-scale artisanal production, the peasant and merchant petty-bourgeoisie, whereas he believed

that he could – through the state – block the road to the restoration of capitalist power and direct the whole new economic course towards the construction of the foundations of socialism. This new conception of Lenin did not depend, as we have said, on a reduction of his internationalist conceptions, but on this consideration: the new situation taking away the natural support of the state, the world proletariat beaten by the enemy, it was necessary to keep the state during this intermediate period that separated it from a new wave of world revolution. Although we do not find in the texts of that time a theoretical demonstration of the contribution that the Russian state could make to the workers' struggles in other countries, even with the New Economic Policy, it is absolutely certain that the intimate conviction of the Bolsheviks was that they could, through the NEP, contribute, even more effectively than with war communism, to the revolutionary effort of the world proletariat.

The events that followed after 1921 show us that the opposition proletarian state/capitalist states cannot guide the action neither of the victorious proletariat nor that of the working class in other countries: the only possible alternative remains proletariat/world capitalism and the proletarian state is a factor of world revolution only on the condition that it considers that the enemy it must defeat is the world bourgeoisie. Even temporarily, this state cannot establish its policy according to the internal problems of its management, the elements of its successes or defeats are in the progress or setbacks of the workers of other countries.

From a theoretical point of view, the new instrument possessed by the proletariat after its revolutionary victory, the proletarian state, is profoundly different from the workers' resistance organizations: the trade union, the cooperative, (...), and from the political organization: the class party. But this differentiation does not take place because the state possesses organic factors much superior to the other institutions, but on the contrary because the state, despite the appearance of its greater material power, possesses, from the political point of view, fewer possibilities of action; it is a thousand times more vulnerable to the enemy than the other workers' organizations. In fact, the state owes its greatest material power to objective factors which correspond perfectly to the interests of the exploiting classes but cannot have any relation with the revolutionary function of the proletariat, which will temporarily resort to dictatorship and will use it to accentuate the process of decay of the state through an expansion of production which will allow the very bases of the classes to be extirpated. In fact, the

state – even proletarian – is forced to intervene in a social, economic and political environment and, as a result, is threatened to be carried away by the realization of objectives that tear it away from its function, which can only be of an international order.

From a global point of view, this risk is once again present and in increased proportions because, whether it likes it or not, what immediately opposes it is the covetousness of other states competing for markets and by no means the capitalist regime in its social bases. A victory of the proletarian state against a capitalist state (giving these terms a territorial meaning) is in no way a victory of the revolution. We have noticed what Lenin said about the entry of the Red Army into Poland, where the military victory of Russia was to correspond to the weakening of the proletarian front and a possibility for the Polish bourgeoisie to build nationalist mobilization to straighten its endangered edifice. In 1930, the victory of the Soviet army against China over the Chinese East accelerated the dissociation of the Chinese proletariat and exposed the characters of the degenerated state which, in 1934, in the face of a much more powerful enemy, in the face of Japan, had to sell for a few thousand rubles what it proclaimed to be a bastion of the world revolution and which it had defended with the same fierce determination as the imperialists making China a spoils for their covetousness.

The economic and military fields can only be **secondary** and a detail in the activity of the proletarian state, whereas they are of an essential order for an exploiting class. The proletarian state can only be a simple factor of the struggle of the world proletariat and it is in the revolutionary battle of the working class of all countries that it can find the reason for its life, its evolution; to have believed that it was possible to maintain it, outside the workers' struggle of other countries, to have put forward this hypothesis, even provisionally, is to have laid the bases of the conversion which was later verified in the function of the Russian state, which became a pillar of the counter-revolution.

We have already said that the real function of the proletarian state manifested itself not in 1917, but in 1918-21, when the premises that had manifested themselves in Russia blossomed in all their magnitude and the revolutionary situation opened up all over the world; October 1917 was therefore only a harbinger of the storms that were brewing in the depths of capitalist society.

In 1921, the situation changes and we note, once again, the impossibility of proceeding to an analysis of reality outside of the considerations of principle that indicate the path that the proletariat must take

in order to be a factor in the evolution of contingencies towards the objectives that are at the end of the latter. The New Economic Policy is established because of the lack of revolutionary struggles in other countries, but this perspective was absolutely false because, in 1923, Germany becomes again the theatre of powerful revolutionary movements. But between 1921 and 1923 the new policy of the Russian state could not fail to influence the course of the German revolutionary movements where we see this striking contrast : the Bolsheviks who, with Lenin, had supported in 1917 the program of violent expulsion of all democratic and social-democratic forces, in a much more mature front of struggle for initiatives a thousand times more advanced, will be more to the right in the course of the revolutionary movements in Thuringia, Saxony and all of Germany than Zinoviev and Kamenev had been in October.

From a principled point of view, Lenin's positions contained in his study on the NEP remain today, in their entirety, with regard to the internal problems of the proletarian state. Only the events that followed it proved to us that **the antagonist of the workers state is only world capitalism and that the internal questions have only secondary value**. In 1921, Pannekoek wrote that the result of the NEP was a change in the internal mechanism of revolutionary struggle. It is a pity that at that time he confined himself to expressing the consequence of a political fact instead of embracing the whole situation to give the only possible conclusion: a principled basis for tactical problems, a basis that manages to build on the materials of October 1917 the positions capable of defeating capitalism in other countries. The limitation of Pannekoek's political horizon may explain his current fall into social democracy²⁸. But, today, the fractions of the left have an otherwise vast horizon: it is their duty to try to prove themselves worthy of the proofs of heroism given by the workers in all countries; it is their duty to draw on the grandiose events which followed 1921, in order to guarantee the fate of future revolutions and at the same time to establish the political conditions which could make the world proletariat the economy of a war before arriving at the new revolutionary situation.

In the second part of this chapter, we still have to deal with the economic problems of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for which Marx first, then Lenin, left us some principles that we have to confront with lived experience.

(To be continued)

(*Bilan*, April 1935)

28 . [This assessment on Pannekoek will be corrected in the following article, Note from the Éditions Smolny].

Text of the Workers Movement

Where to Begin ? (Lenin, 1901, Extracts)

At the very moment when capitalism is exposing to the world the misery and massacres it promises us, where to begin? Quickly, we are running out of space: given the situation of dispersion of the proletarian camp, which can be compared to the situation of the Russian social democrats in 1900, the following article by Lenin serves as a reference and guide: the regular review as a collective organizer and "arousing (...) a conscious a passion for political exposure".

In recent years the question of "what is to be done" has confronted Russian Social-Democrats with particular insistence. It is not a question of what path we must choose (as was the case in the late eighties and early nineties), but of what practical steps we must take upon the known path and how they shall be taken. It is a question of a system and plan of practical work. And it must be admitted that we have not yet solved this question of the character and the methods of struggle, fundamental for a party of practical activity, that it still gives rise to serious differences of opinion which reveal a deplorable ideological instability and vacillation. On the one hand, the "Economist" trend, far from being dead, is endeavouring to clip and narrow the work of political organisation and agitation. On the other, unprincipled eclecticism is again rearing its head, aping every new "trend", and is incapable of distinguishing immediate demands from the main tasks and permanent needs of the movement as a whole. This trend, as we know, has ensconced itself in *Rabocheye Dyelo*²⁹ (...).

Rabocheye Dyelo, of course, mentions Liebknecht's name in vain. The tactics of agitation in relation to some special question, or the tactics with regard to some detail of party organisation may be changed in twenty-four hours; but only people devoid of all principle are capable of changing, in twenty-four hours, or, for that matter, in twenty-four months, their view on the necessity—in general, constantly, and absolutely—of an organisation of struggle and of political agitation among the masses. It is ridiculous to plead different circumstances and a change of periods: the building of a fighting organisation and the conduct of political agitation are essential under any "drab, peaceful" circumstances, in any period, no matter how marked by a "declining revolutionary spirit"; moreover, it is precisely in such periods and under such circumstances that work of this kind is particularly necessary, since it is too late to form the organisation in times of explosion and outbursts; the party must be in a state of readiness to launch activity at a moment's notice. "Change the tactics within

twenty-four hours"! But in order to change tactics it is first necessary to have tactics; without a strong organisation skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times, there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illumined by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics. (...)

In other words, the immediate task of our Party is not to summon all available forces for the attack right now, but to call for the formation of a revolutionary organisation capable of uniting all forces and guiding the movement in actual practice and not in name alone, that is, an organisation ready at any time to support every protest and every outbreak and use it to build up and consolidate the fighting forces suitable for the decisive struggle. (...). In our opinion, the starting-point of our activities, the first step towards creating the desired organisation, or, let us say, the main thread which, if followed, would enable us steadily to develop, deepen, and extend that organisation, should be the founding of an All-Russian political newspaper. A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct that systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which is the chief and permanent task of Social-Democracy in general and, in particular, the pressing task of the moment, when interest in politics and in questions of socialism has been aroused among the broadest strata of the population. Never has the need been felt so acutely as today for reinforcing dispersed agitation in the form of individual action, local leaflets, pamphlets, etc., by means of generalised and systematic agitation that can only be conducted with the aid of the periodical press. It may be said without exaggeration that the frequency and regularity with which a newspaper is printed (and distributed) can serve as a precise criterion of how well this cardinal and most essential sector of our militant activities is built up. Furthermore, our newspaper must be All-Russian. If we fail, and as long as we fail, to combine our efforts to influence the people and the government by means of the printed word, it will be utopian to think of combining other means,

29 . The *Rabocheye Dyelo* (The Working Cause) was an "Economist" publication.

more complex, more difficult, but also more decisive, for exerting influence. Our movement suffers in the first place, ideologically, as well as in practical and organisational respects, from its state of fragmentation, from the almost complete immersion of the overwhelming majority of Social-Democrats in local work, which narrows their outlook, the scope of their activities, and their skill in the maintenance of secrecy and their preparedness. It is precisely in this state of fragmentation that one must look for the deepest roots of the instability and the waverings noted above. The *first* step towards eliminating this short-coming, towards transforming divers local movements into a single, All-Russian movement, must be the founding of an All-Russian newspaper. Lastly, what we need is definitely a *political* newspaper. Without a political organ, a political movement deserving that name is inconceivable in the Europe of today. Without such a newspaper we cannot possibly fulfill our task—that of concentrating all the elements of political discontent and protest, of vitalising thereby the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. We have taken the first step, we have aroused in the working class a passion for “economic”, factory exposures; we must now take the next step, that of arousing in every section of the population that is at all politically conscious a passion for *political* exposure. (...).

The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organisation will naturally take shape that will engage, not only in local activities, but in regular general work, and will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary party to influence these events. The mere technical task of regularly supplying the newspaper with copy and of promoting regular distribution will necessitate a network of local agents of the united party, who will maintain constant contact with one another, know the general state of affairs, get accustomed to performing regularly their detailed functions in the All-Russian work, and test their strength in the organisation of various revolu-

tionary actions. This network of agents will form the skeleton of precisely the kind of organisation we need—one that is sufficiently large to embrace the whole country; sufficiently broad and many-sided to effect a strict and detailed division of labour; sufficiently well tempered to be able to conduct steadily *its own* work under any circumstances, at all “sudden turns”, and in face of all contingencies; sufficiently flexible to be able, on the one hand, to avoid an open battle against an overwhelming enemy, when the enemy has concentrated all his forces at one spot, and yet, on the other, to take advantage of his unwieldiness and to attack him when and where he least expects it. Today we are faced with the relatively easy task of supporting student demonstrations in the streets of big cities; tomorrow we may, perhaps, have the more difficult task of supporting, for example, the unemployed movement in some particular area, and the day after to be at our posts in order to play a revolutionary part in a peasant uprising. Today we must take advantage of the tense political situation arising out of the government’s campaign against the Zemstvo; tomorrow we may have to support popular indignation against some tsarist bashi-bazouk on the rampage and help, by means of boycott, indictment, demonstrations, etc., to make things so hot for him as to force him into open retreat. Such a degree of combat readiness can be developed only through the constant activity of regular troops. If we join forces to produce a common newspaper, this work will train and bring into the foreground, not only the most skillful propagandists, but the most capable organisers, the most talented political party leaders capable, at the right moment, of releasing the slogan for the decisive struggle and of taking the lead in that struggle.

In conclusion, a few words to avoid possible misunderstanding. We have spoken continuously of systematic, planned preparation, yet it is by no means our intention to imply that the autocracy can be overthrown only by a regular siege or by organised assault. Such a view would be absurd and doctrinaire. On the contrary, it is quite possible, and historically much more probable, that the autocracy will collapse under the impact of one of the spontaneous outbursts or unforeseen political complications which constantly threaten it from all sides. But no political party that wishes to avoid adventurous gambles can base its activities on the anticipation of such outbursts and complications. We must go our own way, and we must steadfastly carry on our regular work, and the less our reliance on the unexpected, the less the chance of our being caught unawares by any “historic turns”.

Lenin, 1901

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.