

REVOLUTION or WAR

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Can The International Proletariat Hinder The March to Generalized Imperialist War

International Situation

The Proletarian Camp and The War in Ukraine: on The Danger of Generalized Imperialist War

The Internationalist Communist Tendency's Call for "No War But Class War" Committees

Theses on The Significance and Consequences of the Imperialist War in Ukraine

Debate within the Proletarian Camp

Internationalist Communist Tendency's Letter on our Theses on The War in Ukraine

Contribution: Capitalism and Bourgeois Democracy

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(Our review is also available in French)

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Can The International Proletariat Hinder the March to Generalized War?

Four months the imperialist war is raging in Ukraine. Entire cities are devastated; millions of civilians, women, children, babies, old people, have abandoned their homes, fleeing the bombs; thousands of them are dead or wounded, traumatized for life; abuses and rapes are multiplying, adding to the terror; tens of thousands of soldiers have already been killed, both Ukrainian and Russian; hundreds of thousands of others are wounded, crippled, mutilated. These images of gutted buildings, destroyed bridges, haggard civilians in the middle of ruins, looking for water or supplies, remind us of the end of the Second World War; of Germany in 1945, Berlin, Dresden, Cologne; of the Channel and North Sea ports under rubble, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Le Havre; of the massive exodus of millions of refugees thrown from one country to another. For Europe, the awakening is difficult. Didn't the European Union and *economic integration* guarantee peace? But imperialist war has returned. Bloody.

However, it had never disappeared from the capitalist world. The ruins of Mariupol are not unlike those of Aleppo in Syria in 2015-2016; the influx of refugees at the Polish border crossings is not unlike that at the Turkish border crossings. It is a fact: imperialist war is a permanent fact of capital and imperialism. But to point out the *permanence* of imperialist war is not enough. All wars are not equal; they do not have the same magnitude; nor the same meaning; nor do they express the same dynamics and the same stakes. To limit ourselves to the two bloodiest wars of recent years, those in Syria and Ukraine, they appear in themselves to be just as barbaric, devastating, murderous and terrorizing as each other. Moreover, they involve the same protagonists, Russia on one side and the Western powers on the other, the latter united under the American aegis. In this sense, one can say that the imperialist dynamics and contrasts that were revealed in Syria led to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. There is thus similarity and continuity between the two.

But there is also a rupture, or rather a *qualitative leap* between the one and the other. The war in Ukraine marks the first act of the open and *forced* march to generalized imperialist war, the Third World War, the only answer or exit of capitalism to its economic crisis; and march in which each bourgeoisie, starting with the most powerful ones, is constrained, forced, to engage and to impose to its populations. Until then, the pushes, the dynamic or process, towards generalized imperialist war, were not direct, did not seem to drive in an immediate way the external and

internal policies of some and others. Certainly, the military staffs were already working on the return of the so-called “high-intensity war”, the very one that is taking place today before our eyes. Certainly, budgets and arms expenditure did not stop increasing year after year¹. Certainly, following the Covid pandemic and the shortages of medical equipment, the demand for a return to the production of so-called essential goods on national territory, i.e. “essential” to the defense of each national capital, marked a break for the centralization, organization and planning of the major axes of national production, which was indispensable and appropriate for the establishment of *war economy*. With the crisis and thus the competition to death between each national capital, the generalized war as a tendency and *in the making* already tended to dictate the course of events and policies.

But with the war in Ukraine, the question of generalized imperialist war becomes a direct element, a factor, of the situation to the point of precipitating the *conscious* decisions of the ruling class. “We’ll have to organize ourselves in a war economy for a long time” said, just yesterday, the French president Macron. The war in Ukraine provokes cascading reactions from every imperialism that the war in Syria had not, and could not, produce. Or at least did not require to produce. The most significant? The massive rearmament of Europe, starting with Germany, traumatized by the two world wars and the final catastrophe of 1945. The German decision is in itself another historical break. But it is the whole of Europe, right down to little Denmark, that has decided to boost military spending. Another historical rupture following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sweden and Finland, traditionally “neutral”, have decided to join NATO; and by the way, to reinforce its grip on Russia... that Putin was trying to loosen by invading Ukraine. In short, the danger and the dynamics towards the generalized imperialist war that the war in Ukraine expresses force everyone to revive the military defense expenditures and the armament industry; and above all, to look for political and military alliances provoking alignments and increased imperialist polarization. That is why we say that this is an important step of the march to generalized war.

At the same time, because of the war itself, the forced alignment of the main Western European powers, France in the first place, behind the United States allows the latter to further accentuate its im-

¹ . Global spending on nuclear weapons alone increased by 9% last year (Report of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, June 2022).

perialist and military pressure on China; around Taiwan and its straits. Similarly, and on a more local scale but no less significant to the dynamics at play, Israel, which had tried to act as an intermediary between Russia and Ukraine in March, no longer hesitates to bomb Damascus airport and to attack, in fact, the Russian presence in Syria. It is not only the imperialist polarization that the current war is reviving as never before since 1945, but also the pressures, threats and military interventions.

The imperialist and military gearing towards generalized war is engaged. It is not a question of pointing out the *permanence* of war under capitalism, “any abstract truth becomes an empty phrase if it is applied to any concrete situation”, Lenin used to say. But it is a question of understanding the course of events starting from the imperialist war as it develops concretely, historically, in the reality in movement, in order to be able to grasp the potentialities of response to this march to war and to release orientations and slogans for this struggle. For there is a potential response. For there is another element that intervenes in the historical equation: the reality, in movement, of the class struggle.

The war in Ukraine, first moment of the process towards the 3rd generalized imperialist war, obliges every national bourgeoisie to relaunch even more its economic and politico-ideological attacks against every proletariat. It is not only a question of presenting it the bill of the crisis but also and above all that of the sacrifices indispensable to the military expenses; for the proletariat in Europe for whom the rupture is brutal, of the implementation of the *war economy*, of the German rearmament, of the reinforcement of NATO and the deliveries of arms and supplies to Ukraine. Already, it is the one who is paying the price of the generalized inflation – especially of gas, petrol and cereals – and the intensification of exploitation in the workplaces that the crisis and the war, combining with each other, are causing. And it is precisely in these redoubled, concrete and well-targeted attacks for the war and on the living and working conditions of the international proletariat that the material and historical basis for a possible reaction, or even a *slowing down* of the course towards generalized imperialist war, lies. And this on all continents.

It is not a question of repeating and singing dogmat-

ically on every occasion, formulas that have been repeated for more than fifty years now, such as that *the proletariat is not defeated*, or that *it is not ready to accept the sacrifices for the war*. Insufficient and impotent, when it is not simply the traditional anarchistic and radical phrase of leftism.

The report drawn from the relation between war and class struggle is clear: the proletariat is powerless to prevent local imperialist wars, including today's war in Ukraine. This means that the international balance of forces between bourgeoisie and proletariat is

not in favor of the latter. But this objective, material observation does not say that this relation is fixed and that the struggle between classes no longer exists, or else would be put in parentheses until a hypothetical and sudden awakening, *the revelation falling from heaven*, of the proletarian masses. It is important to note what is the very dynamic, the movement, the



Ukraine ? Karkhiv ? Mariupol ?
No, Dresden 1945...

course, of this *dialectical* relation between the classes: **because of the war, and under the initiative and the offensive of the ruling class, the class struggle will exacerbate and intensify up to massive and historical confrontations**; and this, in the terms, the grounds and the timing that each bourgeoisie will try to impose. Then, we can start to see the concrete conditions of the various and successive stakes and battles that the bourgeoisie will lead against the proletariat and that the latter will not be able to avoid. Orientations and slogans will thus become more precise and the practical realization of the principle of proletarian internationalism will be defined according to the places and moments, as the class confrontation develops. It is precisely for this reason that we support the call of the ICT, and its political content, to the formation of *No War But Class War* committees.² The course of events will call for many other slogans. Inevitably. It is up to the communist groups to prepare themselves for this, starting from the reality, in movement, of the class struggle!

Revolution or War, June 14th 2022

² . See the ICT's Call in this issue.

International Situation

On the various appeals and statements from revolutionary groups since the invasion of Ukraine:

The Question of the Danger of Generalized Imperialist War

Since Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, there have been numerous statements from groups of the Communist Left that have remained faithful to proletarian internationalism. What appears from these revolutionaries' reactions, is that the main line of confrontation, or battle, within the proletarian camp turns around the recognition or the denial that this imperialist war in Ukraine is both an expression and a factor of capitalism's inescapable dynamic and pressure towards a generalized imperialist war; towards the Third World War. According to this confrontation, the claiming of proletarian internationalism takes concrete and efficient character for the proletariat's struggle, that is based on material historical facts, or remains just an abstract and transhistorical claim based on pure feelings and morality. Certainly, the second approach can't but pave the way to some kind of moral *pacifism* since it does not root internationalism in the very material ground of the dialectical relation between the process of imperialist war and the one of the class struggle, which is synthesized in the alternative of international proletarian revolution or generalized imperialists war, *Revolution or War*.

We'll leave aside the shameful case of betrayal of internationalist principles by the group *Mouvement Communiste*, which put forward the absurd position that the armed resistance in Ukraine is purely an expression of popular self-organization rather than the initiative of a state which has succeeded in coordinating arms resupply from the West and in militarizing society in the name of a sacred defensive war against Russia.

Thus, except this group and according to our knowledge, all of the components of the revolutionary camp, from its right to its left, adopted clear internationalist statements against the imperialist war in Ukraine, calling the proletarians to reject any participation on one side or the other. Within it, all the groups claiming the Communist Left called the proletarians to set themselves, more or less concretely, on the ground of the class struggle as the only response to develop faced with the imperialist war in Europe. Similarly, the so-called *Bordigist* groups – the different International Communist Parties – called

“the proletarians [to] not let themselves be taken in the trap of a so-called "humanitarian solidarity" which only serves the imperialist aims; they do not have to take sides with one or the other camp in conflict which are both its adversaries.” (ICP-Communist Program). Their insistence was on the slogans *“turn imperialist war into revolution”* (ICP-The Communist Party) and *“revolutionary defeatism against all bourgeoisies and against all bourgeois states!”* (ICP-The Internationalist)³. While we consider the orientation of *turning this imperialist war into revolution* relatively general for the present time, we do share the direct link that the latter group makes between the class struggle and the confrontation against war and the orientations put forwards: *“The only way to avoid other slaughters is through: 1. Refusal to accept economic and social sacrifices in the name of the "national economy"; 2. Organization of the struggle to defend the living and working conditions of the proletarians, in order to hit hard the war commitment of the bourgeoisie; 3. Open rupture of social peace and a decisive return to the methods and objectives of the class struggle, the only real internationalist solidarity of the proletarians in both the imperialist metropolises and the imperialist peripheries; 4. Rejection of any partisanism (nationalist, religious, patriotic, mercenary, humanitarian, pacifist) in favor of any of the imperialist fronts; 5. Strike actions up to the general strike against any kind of mobilization and war propaganda.”*⁴

Now, beyond these correct orientations and slogans for the proletariat and due to their basic position on the party and denial of the existence of any proletarian camp formed by various communist groups, they are unable to present any orientation towards making the consequent internationalist voice wider and more efficient and, **above all**, making this moment a moment of the fight for the party by proposing any initiative to the proletariat in which the other revolutionary and communist groups may gather their forces, or cohere, select themselves, precisely on the bases of these orientations and slogans to the class. Nevertheless, some initiatives and

³ . In order their respective websites: <http://www.pcint.org/>; <https://www.international-communist-party.org> and <https://www.internationalcommunistparty.org>.

⁴ . The Internationalist' leaflet, *In Ukraine as in the whole world, in the face of the imperialist war, the proletarian watchword once again must be: revolutionary defeatism against all bourgeoisies and against all bourgeois states!* February 21st, 2022.

calls have been made. Among them by the Internationalist Communist Tendency and the International Communist Current. Both remained true to proletarian principles in the face of the historical storm provoked by Russia's invasion. The basic difference between the two opposed political approaches, and actually of principle, lies on their positioning in relation to the central issue of our time: the perspective of generalized imperialist war.

The ICC Joint Statement of Groups of the Communist Left⁵

The initiative from the revolutionary groups we would characterize as opportunist, namely the ICC, Internationalist Voice, which the Instituto Onorato Damen joined, puts forward the permanence of imperialist war under capitalism and denies the unfolding reality of a consolidation of imperialist blocs. This point on *permanence of war* is a thinly veiled nod to Decomposition, the ICC's Trojan horse by which it introduces bourgeois idealism into the proletariat's revolutionary doctrine. After all, if war is merely to be understood as a permanent feature of capitalist society – which we do not deny but which is an ahistorical and abstract understanding – then we have reached a situation in which history is at a standstill. This view is coherent with the ICC's theory of there being a stalemate in the relation of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which would in turn have led to a new phase of capitalist decadence that they call Decomposition, a phase moreover in which the determining factor of historical development is no longer the struggle between the contending classes in society but rather the effect of Decomposition on society as a whole. With such a theory, which simultaneously manages to explain everything and nothing, one cannot equip the proletarian masses with the doctrine necessary for their emancipation because this theory makes it impossible to take into account the reality facing the proletariat, the real and increasingly present prospect of generalized war between nuclear weapons states. Therefore, this part of the proletarian camp's formally correct denunciation of imperialism and support for proletarian internationalism is undermined and rendered abstract and useless by the fact that they are unable to connect these correct principles to the concrete stakes facing the proletariat, making it impossible to base a coherent vanguard policy on such theories.

Why is this kind of statement, abstract internationalism, useless and even dangerous for the

⁵ . <https://en.internationalism.org/content/17159/joint-statement-groups-international-communist-left-about-war-ukraine>

proletariat? Why does it pave the way to petty bourgeois *pacifism*? Because denying the dynamic and the active action of the perspective of generalized Third World War makes it impossible to respond to the concrete situation and policies that the factor of generalized imperialist war in process is determining, such as the bourgeois class struggle against the proletariat, its terrain, its battles and its timing. The ICC rejected in 2007 at its 17th congress any perspective of imperialist generalized war because of the idealist and opportunist theory on Decomposition – “*the spectre of world war no longer haunts the planet*” because “*the new period opens the way [to] the destruction of humanity not through an apocalyptic war, but through a gradual advance of the decomposition*”⁶. This open betrayal of a basic position of Marxism and Communist Left makes it unable to understand the very stakes of the present imperialist war in Ukraine; in particular that it marks a step in the drive towards a Third World War. In particular, in the name “everyone for themselves” (the growing chaos provoked by decomposition) it excludes and even denies the reality of the (contradictory process) of imperialist polarization. Thus, the proponents of this denial are unable to understand and denounce to the proletariat the very stakes of such polarization in the national situations. and in particular in the specific attacks the workers will suffer, are already suffering. For instance, depending on the imperialist contrasts and alignments, the choice of the ideological themes that each ruling class will employ against its own proletariat won't be the same, nor be delimited in the same way. Already before the war in Ukraine, but reinforced with it, the ideological democratic theme for enlisting the proletariat of the *western powers* is quite clear: against *illiberalism* and *authoritarian powers*. Thus the democratic mystification for enlisting the proletariat to war is not defined the same as it could be in Western Europe still a few months ago. For instance, the *anti-Americanism* and *anti-Trumpism* traditional in France, but quite shared lately by Germany and other countries when these powers could “dream” to take distance and oppose the advances of the United States imperialism, has now faded away⁷.

⁶ . Resolution on the international situation of respectively the 17th (2007) and 15th (2005) congresses of the ICC. See the Internal fraction of the ICC comments at the time in *Communist Bulletin* 21 and 41 : http://fractioncommuniste.org/ficci_eng/b21/index-2.html and http://fractioncommuniste.org/ficci_eng/b41/b41_4.html

⁷ . We are not able here to reflect on how the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine may change the ideological theme that the Chinese bourgeoisie utilizes for attempting to enlist its own proletariat: for instance, it might be more difficult to present the USA as the unique warmonger.

The same goes for explaining and understanding the huge rearmament that the German bourgeoisie has decided to engage in urgency. The fact this 180 degree turn in imperialist German policy since 1945 has difficulties to find the political staff or bourgeois fraction to fully implement it to date – no doubt, it'll find the correct political staff – has, will have, consequences for the proletariat in Germany: it'll pay not only for the crisis but for this rearmament and the military production. As such, the terrain and the timing of the bourgeois attacks on the proletariat are *de facto* changing. It's up to the communist groups to respond to the real stakes and present orientations and slogans to fight back against the implications of such military spending and growing military industry on the proletarian conditions of life and struggle. As for the proletariat in Sweden and Finland, the terrain and the timing of the class struggle led by their own ruling class will "change" and be determined by the new and unexpected adhesion of these two traditionally *neutral* countries to NATO. The traditional policy of both state since 1945 against the proletariat, based on a *neutral* ideology and a pacifist mystification is now turning 180 degrees.

If only with this peculiar question of imperialist polarization, we can see how the imperialist war in Ukraine, not in itself, not because *war is permanent under capitalism*, but precisely **today**, in 2022, is an expression of the **present** drive towards generalized imperialist war, a product and a worsening factor and accelerator of it. It is the course or process towards generalized imperialist war, as the highest expression of capitalist economic crisis and dead-end, that defines, delimits, gives the concrete framework of the stakes, terrain and timing of the class struggle, the one the ruling classes are developing and leading against the proletariat, in every country and in accordance with their national history-tradition and present imperialist needs.

We could add to our argumentation the other dramatic contradictions and conflicts the step towards generalized imperialist war taken in Ukraine is actually presenting. For instance, the search for securing raw material access, gas, oil, but also of lithium or other *rare earths*, and even agriculture such as cereal is becoming more acute between the powers. In particular, beyond countries in Africa and America threatened by mass hunger, it becomes a crucial stake and worry for the European powers. Precisely because they are "trapped" by the war in Ukraine. Forced to cut the energy trade with Russia, they are incredibly and dangerously dependent on the United States as the war in Ukraine made them fully dependent on NATO at the military level, revealing so

the huge division of the European Union on its imperialist and military defense future. Thus, inescapably all this already has – it suffices to see the increasing inflation – and will have direct consequences for the proletariat. The same kind of war would have been – it could be some day but it'll be unleashed in the aftermath of the present war in Ukraine – possible through the invasion of Taiwan by China. But the direct implications and consequences of all kinds, particularly on the class struggle, would have been different – indeed not less dramatic and serious. Thus, the question is not to be opposed to imperialist war in general, because it is supposedly *permanent*, but to the present concrete process the generalized imperialist war is paving to this end.

If it was necessary, the imperialist war in Ukraine, the war in Europe, comes to confirm that it's not only the economic crisis in itself but the concrete bourgeois response, the dynamic towards generalized imperialist war, that determines, in the last instance, not mechanically, the different aspects of the situation. That makes those, such as the ICC, who reject the Marxist and Communist Left principle on generalized imperialist war as well as the actuality of the historical alternative, international proletarian revolution or generalized imperialist war, useless for the proletariat because it is incapable of providing concrete and efficient orientations and slogans in the relevant situations; and even more, it makes them dangerous because they'll increasingly be, first, subjected to and becoming, second, the vector of a *modern* pacifism within the proletarian ranks. An abstract and ahistorical call for "*the recognition that only the working class and its revolutionary struggle could put an end to the system that is based on the exploitation of labour power and permanently generates imperialist war*" (ICC's statement, underlined by us), because it is valid in any time, opens the door to some kind of *modern pacifism*, because it is not rooted in the very dynamic of the genuine class struggle process whose *historical course* is determined by the alternative revolution or war and the present drive and steps towards a Third World War.

Thus the reference and implicit call for a new Zimmerwald kind of conferences remains a pure phrase because the conditions for a Zimmerwald-Khiental set of conferences do not exist today as the ICT comrades pointed out. In particular, and without entering in the very situation of the proletarian camp today, its conformation, its opposing dynamics – in particular on the central question of the struggle for the Party – its strengths and weaknesses, means that we're not in a situation, as in 1914, where mass parties of the proletariat had be-

trayed from one day to another proletarian internationalism and left the proletarian masses who had confidence in their party totally lost and disoriented. By the way, it's curious, even ironic, to see the ICC who rejects any danger of generalized imperialist war, calling for a new Zimmerwald. Apart the fact it would serve it to attempt to exclude the so-called parasites from such an initiative, first and above all our group, to accept its ground would allow it to impose its rejection of the perspective and danger of imperialist war in the name of an artificial unity of the conference. Isn't this precisely what the *Instituto O. Damen* had to accept? Thus, in such a conference today, the ICC would play the role the centrist Kautskyists played within the Zimmerwald-Khiental conferences and would block the consequent internationalists of today, those who set their action in front of the dynamics and steps towards generalized imperialist war.

The ICT's Call for NWBCW Committees⁸

On the other side of the issue of the prospect of World War and the appreciation of the stakes, we have the appeal by the Internationalist Communist Tendency to set up struggle committees that aim to regroup workers on the necessity to advance their own class interests as a means to oppose the march to war. The reason we support this initiative is the connection made between opposition to imperialist war and working class struggle. Marx pointed out that it is what the proletariat is, and not what this or that proletarian believes or even what the majority of proletarians at a given moment believe, that determines its revolutionary character. This insight is perfectly valid in the present situation of aggravation of imperialist antagonisms. Opposite to the ICC, the ICT was prepared to face the situation because it remains on the clear-cut basic position and principle on the question of the generalized imperialist war. Its 2020 Platform enabled it to face correctly, that it as a genuine political vanguard of the proletariat, the historical step the imperialist war in Europe represents and its relation, implications, for the class struggle:

“Once again the question of imperialist war or the proletarian revolution is being placed on the historical agenda and imposes on revolutionaries throughout the world the need to close ranks. In the epoch of global monopoly capitalism no country can escape the forces which drive capitalism to war. Capitalism's ineluctable drive towards war is expressed today in the universal attack on the working and living conditions of the proletariat. The material conditions for an international proletarian struggle against their exploiters therefore exist.”

⁸ . No War But Class War committees : <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-04-06/no-war-but-the-class-war-a-call-for-action>

Whether the proletarians participating in strikes and struggles on their own terrain are aware of it or not, their struggles objectively oppose the drive to war and contain within them the germs of the revolutionary struggle necessary to put an ultimate end both to the ongoing wars that have been a permanent feature of capitalism since WWII as well as to prevent a slide into a catastrophic Third World War. For this to occur, the latent opposition to war objectively present in every proletarian struggle must be consciously assumed on a mass scale by the participants in the struggles, which requires the active intervention and leadership of the proletarian vanguard. In our view, this is the intent behind the initiative to set up No War But Class War (NWBCW) committees and we therefore support it to the extent that we are able. Since we have only modest resources, we cannot take a leading role in setting up these committees but we have and will continue to follow the ICT's lead in animating them by trying to push forward what we view are the correct revolutionary positions within them and opposing, for example, what are in our view incorrect or unclear formulations expressed in statements made by these committees.

In between these two positions in the proletarian camp on the question of war, there is a third , which is signed “Fredo Corvo-Anibal et Materia published on the blog Left Wing Communism⁹. Despite the fact it is unfortunately signed by individuals (and not political groups), even though well-known militants, we think important to mention it as a genuine expression within the revolutionary camp, both in its approach as well as its political content. In his welcome contribution, Corvo makes various criticisms of the two initiatives described above, the joint statement spearheaded by the ICC and the appeal by the ICT to set up NWBCW committees. Some of Fredo Corvo's critiques have merit, others seem to miss the mark. An example of the latter is the claim that the ICT sees the widespread devaluation of constant capital resulting from world war to be a conscious policy pursued by the capitalists/imperialists leading to a new cycle of accumulation, rather than a consequence of imperialist conflict in which each side seeks to gain a competitive edge by destroying the economic infrastructure of their rivals with the ultimate result that ruin is generalized. Fredo also reproaches the ICT's initiative for being exclusionary of other groups of the Communist Left and for being a “program-light” of the ICT. We think that any initiative to set up struggle committees by a revolutionary group will necessarily to some extent reflect the program of that group. Regarding the appeal being exclusionary, we point to the final line of the appeal: *If these points are a broad summary of where you stand we would like to hear from you.* This hardly sug-

⁹ . <https://leftdis.wordpress.com/2022/04/21/war-exploitation-and-capitalist-domination-how-and-why-confront-them/>

gests that unreserved agreement with every single line of the call to action is a necessary condition for participation. The appeal is more than an adequate starting point. FC's criticisms miss the central point, which is that the axis of polarization that is emerging in the proletarian camp is the question of generalized imperialist war. The ICC (representing the opportunist right wing) rejects this as a possibility. The ICT (on the left) sees it and tries to act accordingly. That being said, we can certainly agree with FC when he criticizes the widespread sectarian reflexes and urges us to refer to the statements of the proletarian camp on the question of war in Ukraine. This is precisely what we are attempting to do here.

Finally, we think it is worthwhile to address those groups that have a correct appreciation of the link between imperialist war and working class struggle but which prematurely announce the death and irrelevance of the historical groups of the Communist Left or deny the existence of a proletarian camp. Several years ago, when the group Emancipation was still called

Nuevo Curso, we supported and made our own their position on the *Party in the Making*. We took on board this formulation because it evokes regroupment as process involving a dynamic among the various components of the proletarian camp in relation to the ongoing struggles of the proletarian masses. If one is to be consistent with this viewpoint, one cannot prematurely declare the death of the Communist Left and decide instead to "build one's own chapel". We have criticized this approach, adopted previously by Controverses, elsewhere. This is where Fredo Corvo is exactly correct. The revolutionary groups must critically respond to the initiatives of the other groups and support those initiatives when they are correct. This is why we call on other groups of the revolutionary camp to support the initiative to set up NWBCW committees or to articulate why they do not support this initiative. That is the way to work towards the future International.

June 2022

Pamphlets (orders at intleftcom@gmail.com)

IGCL Platform

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Political Platform

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Against the Imperialist War, for the Class War Internationalist Call of the Internationalist Communist Tendency

We join the call of the comrades of the Internationalist Communist Tendency for revolutionaries faithful to proletarian internationalism to form "no war but the class war" committees. We are not joining this initiative in the name of some abstract internationalist principle that would be valid at all times and on all occasions. But because this appeal, of which we share every point, every sentence or so, is a first response to the threat of "more generalised war in a way not seen since 1945". If some could doubt until now that capitalism in crisis could only offer to humanity, ineluctably, the alternative of world proletarian revolution or generalized imperialist war, the war in Ukraine has made this perspective concrete and topical.

As the ICT says, this call to form committees "'Against the war, For the class war'" is an international initiative but not the International." The conditions for the latter are far from being met today. Likewise, any Zimmerwald-type internationalist conference during World War I would be largely premature because of the state, not so much of the historical situation itself, but, especially of dispersion and division, of the internationalist forces – if only because part of them rejects any prospect of a Third World War, thus making proletarian internationalism an abstract principle in itself that can only lead, at best, to the pacifism that the ICT's call rightly rejects.

For the time being, and given the limited reality of the proletarian struggles and the state of the revolutionary camp, it is a question of allowing "today's scattered revolutionary minorities to combine their forces and take the message of our need to fight back to a wider working class ." The goal is more modest but corresponding to the present situation and its possibilities. To the extent of our means, we make it our own.

The IGCL April 10, 2022

No War but the Class War - A Call for Action (ICT, April 7th)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is no isolated act. It is the beginning of a new period of imperialist competition which threatens more generalised war in a way not seen since 1945.

1. No country today is outside the capitalist system. The intensification of imperialist rivalry is a product of the still unresolved economic crisis of capitalism which is now decades old. In that time capitalism has been compelled to resort to many expedients to manage an economic crisis brought about by the fall in the rate of profit. What this has brought to the world working class is more intense exploitation, greater precarity of jobs and a continuing decline in workers' share of the wealth they produce. Not only is this system leading to war but its insatiable pursuit of profit is leading to the destruction of the planet.
2. But globalisation, financialisation and so-called neo-liberalism, all responses to the fall in the rate of profit, ended up in the dramatic bursting of the global speculative bubble in 2008. They have only spun out the crisis – not solved it. The contradictions of the system are mounting and no state is immune from them.
3. One of the most glaring contradictions is that the West transferred investment to low wage economies in the 1980s. The biggest beneficiary was China, which built its

economy through the massive exploitation of its low wage workforce to supply cheap commodities to ease the pressure on the dwindling incomes of Western workers. This cosy arrangement for world capitalism though began to fall apart as soon as China's economic rise began to compete with the US across the planet. A marriage of economic convenience hit the rocks and became more transparent after the speculative bubble burst in 2008, thus intensifying the already existing contradictions of the system.

4. The bursting of that bubble would have led to a global capitalist crisis not seen since 1929 if the states had not intervened to absorb the debts of the financial system. But quantitative easing has not solved the overall crisis nor has stepping up exploitation to inhuman levels. What capitalism requires is a massive devaluation of capital which goes beyond writing off existing assets and this requires generalised war. This propulsion towards a generalised war has been gathering momentum for some time. With fewer and fewer options open to the leaders of the world, there is less and less room for compromise on what are "national interests". The more desperate they become the more likely they are to use weapons of mass destruction which threaten the future of humanity (in even shorter order than the

very real threat posed by climate change). In fact the menace of global war is bound up with the environmental catastrophe that is already taking place as a result of the accelerating depletion of natural resources and the destruction of the environment by an increasingly crisis-ridden system.

5. The one force capable of preventing this catastrophe, and war in general, is the world working class, whose collective strength can first paralyse the war effort, then overthrow the capitalist order. Wage workers throughout the globe share a common material position as creators of the world's wealth which lands in the hands of their exploiters. As such, they have no country and no national interests to defend. They alone are in position to create a new classless society in which there are no states, where production is cooperative, and designed to meet the needs of all and not the profits of a few. Thus the conditions exist for a world community of freely associated producers where people give what they can and take only what they need.
6. To achieve this the working class needs to get organised, or perhaps, re-organised. In the daily struggle against wage cuts, etc., workers will be compelled to form strike committees, elected and recallable by all workers, to unite their struggle. But this alone will not stop the capitalists' attacks. Separate struggles in one sector or workplace are easily dealt with by the bosses and their union accomplices. Any strike committees need to unite into a wider class movement which can begin the process of overcoming the existing state.
7. It is inevitable that in this process some workers will come to recognise the dead-end of capitalist existence before others. It is imperative that the former organise politically on an international level in order to offer a clear way forward. This will not come about immediately, especially not after decades of decline in workers' struggles in the face of the capitalist onslaught. However, the situation today in Ukraine is a warning of what governments have in store for workers everywhere and we need to respond, not only to daily exploitation, but to the political plans of "our" leaders.
8. In the current situation of humanitarian disaster we have no illusion that a movement of the class can arise soon, even if history has now taken a new and desperate turn. We need to build something together opposed to both exploitation and war. Even if the current crisis in Ukraine ends up in some patched up deal, this will only sow the seeds for the next round of imperialist conflict. The invasion of Ukraine has already thrown Russia further into the arms of China and rallied NATO and the EU around the US and its aims.
9. Capitalism means war and it is capitalism that has to be stopped. We therefore propose to set up "No War but the Class War" committees wherever we exist and invite individuals and groups who oppose all nationalisms and recognise that the only war worth fighting is the class war to end capitalism and its bloody imperialist conflicts to participate in them. This will allow today's scattered revolutionary minorities to combine their forces and take the message of our need to fight back to a wider working class.
10. "No War but the Class War" is an international initiative but not the International. That will only come about when the class war develops into a movement capable of overthrowing the global capitalist order. It does, however, offer a political compass for revolutionaries from different backgrounds who reject all the social democratic, Trotskyist and Stalinist politics of either outright siding with one imperialism or another by deciding that one or the other is a "lesser evil" which should be supported, or endorsing pacifism which rejects the need to turn the imperialist war into a class war, thus confusing and disarming the working class from taking up its own struggle.
11. Finally, we must emphasise that this is not a call for pacifism, which is basically just a plea to return to "normal". The problem is about "normal" – it is the capitalist system itself which generates the forces that lead to war. Being against war without calling for the end of capitalism is like expecting capital not to produce profits without overthrowing the system of exploitation, when the latter is the necessary condition for existence of the former.

If these points are a broad summary of where you stand we would like to hear from you.

Comrades of the Internationalist Communist
Tendency

Theses on The Significance and Consequences of The Imperialist War in Ukraine

The following theses were discussed, adopted and published less than a week after the beginning of the imperialist war in Ukraine provoked by the Russian invasion. In addition to the defense of the proletarian internationalism – this war engages two imperialist camps and the proletariat must reject any participation or mobilization behind one of them –, we considered it our duty as political vanguard of the proletariat to provide as soon as possible elements of orientation and political lines of reference in front of the democratic, nationalist, militarist and warlike storm that was rising and for the period that is opening; and which will be marked by the march to generalized imperialist war in which capitalism seeks to precipitate us. The capacity of our group to quickly elaborate this text owes nothing to a particular merit or of a personal order, but essentially to the respect of the principles of Marxism and to the permanent fight of our group to remain in coherence with them. Despite its original programmatic positions, 2013, relatively vague since they just simply took up the basic positions of the ICT and the ICC - today we have an elaborated political platform -, one of the main orientations on which the IGCL was constituted and on which it has centered and developed all its activities, especially its intervention in the class and in the proletarian camp, was precisely on the perspective of the historical alternative Revolution or War and that of convincing that capitalism in crisis could only lead to a Third World War if it was not destroyed by the proletarian insurrection and dictatorship. Understanding and integrating that generalized imperialist war, as a perspective, is not only a product of the crisis of capital but also a determining factor of the very course of current events, of the events preceding in time this fatal outcome, allows us to understand the dynamics proper to imperialist rivalries as well as the one – the two are linked – governing the struggle between classes, namely the terms and grounds of the attacks that the different national bourgeoisies are forced to carry out against their own proletariat, not only to respond to the crisis – to make the proletariat pay for it – but also to prepare for the generalized war. Who will pay the bill for the generalized rearmament if not, in the end, the proletariat?

It is not by chance that, among the answers, comments and criticisms that we have received, we have decided to publish, following the theses, the letter that the ICT has sent us and which takes position on our document and its orientations. While waiting for a more complete and argued answer from our part, we are following it with some quick comments intended first of all to enlighten the reader and sympathizer of the Communist Left on the reality and the field of the divergence.

Theses on The Significance and Consequences of The Imperialist War in Ukraine (March 2nd 2022)

“Socialists have always condemned war between nations as barbarous and brutal. But our attitude towards war is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and of the Anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within the country; we understand that war cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and Socialism is created.”

(Lenin, The Principles of Socialism and the War of 1914–1915)

1) The historical alternative of revolution or war, the main factor of the situation

The thesis of communism – communism being the negation of all forms of socialism in one country in the Stalinist or Maoist fashion – according to which capitalism is war, as a principle in itself, is now becoming a reality. A dramatic reality. It is murderous for millions of Ukrainians and tens of thousands of young Russian conscripts and their families; economically devastating for the Russian proletariat and population; heavy with sacrifices for the whole of the European proletariat which, already paying for the crisis, will have to pay for the generalized rearmament of the "old continent"; and finally, the

consequences of the war in Europe will aggravate the economic crisis of capital with greater generalized misery on all continents. We can take up Lenin's 1915 thesis for today:

“The period of a relatively peaceful capitalism has passed, never to return. Imperialism has brought the working class unparalleled intensification of the class struggle, want, and unemployment, a higher cost of living, and the strengthening of oppression by the trusts, of militarism, and the political reactionaries, who are raising their heads in all countries, even the freest.” (Lenin, Draft Resolution of the Left Wing at Zimmerwald¹⁰, 1915)

¹⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/aug/>

For all those who continued to ignore it despite the aggravation of imperialist tensions and the growing militarization, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war in Europe lift the veil on the reality of the capitalist world today and the future it offers to humanity: that of generalized imperialist war. The year 2020 had marked the historical break, making the aggravation of the crisis – and thus of the exacerbated economic competition – the accelerating factor of imperialist tensions and polarization. In this sense, the degree reached by the crisis and the resulting impasse for capital, makes the dynamics of the generalized imperialist war, which was until then only a perspective playing an indirect role – if one can say so – in the course of events, a direct, immediate factor today of the policies, decisions, reflections of the governments and capitalist classes of each nation and imperialist powers. The war in Ukraine is its first clear and obvious illustration for all. It is also at the center of the concerns and policies of all governments. It becomes thus a direct factor of the policies led by each bourgeoisie against the proletariat, therefore a concern for all proletarians and an additional factor, become direct, of the class struggle.

The war in Europe confirms another fundamental thesis defended and carried by most groups of the international Communist Left. Humanity, subjected to the capitalist mode of production and to the dictatorship of the capitalist class, is faced with the following historical alternative: **international proletarian revolution or generalized imperialist war.**

2) Actuality of the imperialist war in Europe

“It seemed too unlikely that there could ever again be a war in the heart of Europe.” (the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, 25/2/22)

Imperialist war is at the center of Europe. The imperialist war comes to strike directly at Europe, the historical heart of capitalism, and therefore at the fractions of the proletariat that have the most historical experience. The real and undeniable Chinese-American central imperialist polarization of the last few years seemed to have shifted the central historical stakes, both imperialist and revolutionary – the class struggle – to the Indo-Pacific zone, with the old European continent marginalized and relegated to the background. The war in Ukraine and the consequences that it will have, and has already, on the international and particularly European proletariat brings Europe back to the center of the historical situation... both in terms of the imperialist war and

of the class struggle. Because, not only the war in Ukraine touches directly, including on their flesh, the proletariat of Russia and Ukraine, but it will also affect very quickly the proletariat in Europe. If only by an aggravation of the crisis provoked this time directly by the war, only a few months after the recovery – which was already running out of steam – of the world production after the lock-down because of Covid.

Crisis and war feeding each other and vice versa, in a spiral that is now going to accelerate, becomes today a reality lived directly by the international proletariat and, with it, by the populations. The relationship between the proletariat and the war becomes as direct as with the capitalist crisis, therefore an element and a factor of the situation and of the historical course. Due to the fact that it is now directly confronted with the war, that it is taking place in Europe, and due to its historical experience, the proletariat of Europe has and will have a particular, central responsibility in the massive confrontations that are taking shape.

3) Actuality of nuclear war threats in Europe

“Following his meeting with Emmanuel Macron on February 8, [Putin] explicitly brandished the threat to use nuclear fire: ‘We do not have the same power as NATO. However, we do have nuclear weapons.’ On February 24, the day of the invasion of Ukraine, he warned: those ‘who would try to interfere with us must know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead to consequences that you have never experienced before.’ To which the French Foreign Minister responded with a ‘Vladimir Putin must also understand that the Atlantic Alliance is a nuclear alliance’.” (French newspaper *Le Figaro*, 24 February)

The imperialist war that directly strikes the historical center of world capitalism brings the threat of nuclear war to the old continent. From being a *weapon of deterrence* as it was during the Cold War after the Second World War until the implosion of the Eastern bloc and the USSR, the possession of nuclear weapons by Russia, NATO, France and Great Britain is now becoming a *weapon of threat*.

It is all the more credible and terrifying because the existence of so-called tactical nuclear bombs, with a short range of action and consequences, provides a whole range and progression of its use which could "authorize" one of the nuclear powers losing ground in conventional warfare to venture to resort to it. The way to a catastrophic escalation to the destruction of humanity as a whole would then open up. The taboo of the use of nuclear weapons in Europe has thus fallen. *“We must completely reorient ourselves,*

says one NATO military official. *Not just with conventional forces, but also with our doctrine of nuclear deterrence.*” (*Der Spiegel*, *op.cit.*)

The question that is posed to the proletariat is not therefore its relation to the imperialist war in general, but its relation to the generalized and nuclear imperialist war; its relation to the perspective and to the social forces that carry the generalized war, that is to say the forces of capital, starting with the apparatuses of the capitalist state.

4) Dynamic of increasing imperialist polarization

*“On the fourth day of the war he unleashed on Ukraine, Vladimir Putin already had two feats to his credit on Sunday, February 27: he gave NATO back its *raison d'être* and he led the European Union to transform itself into an organization capable of providing military aid to a foreign country.”* (French newspaper *Le Monde*, editorial of February 28)

The war in Ukraine confirms and reinforces the imperialist alignments that were already underway. Given the unanimity of the Western powers against it, Russia can only move closer to China, its only (relative) support on this occasion, and strengthen the alliance already established with it based on common economic and geo-political interests, in particular vis-à-vis the United States and NATO¹¹ – we will leave aside Assad's Syria or Iran; as well as the prudent *neutrality* of India, another nuclear power. Nor does it mitigate the global imperialist contrasts, those of the new world polarization East-West *in the making*. So much so that the US Navy felt obliged to dispatch a warship immediately to the Taiwan Strait, thus warning China that, despite the war in Europe, US imperialist power was not letting its guard down in the Indo-Pacific area.¹²

But more importantly, the countries of Western Europe, including those most in favor of a European sovereignty independent, or distinct, from American influence, were forced to side with the United States and Great Britain, to the point of coming together, or even being forced for a country like France, to act under the banner of NATO. Militarily, politically and ideologically – Western democracies against “illiberals”, or even dictatorships, in the East – the war in Ukraine accentuates this ongoing polarization, thus blocking any immediate desire for European

autonomy, or even distance from the United States. Without prejudging the future of imperialist alignments, the current polarization dynamic, in its turn accelerated, constitutes a step – a particularly significant additional moment – towards generalized war. If the war in Europe has already led to an acceleration in the general dynamics of polarization, it has also provoked a turning point in the alignment of the continent's European powers. It is too early to know whether this turning point, an alignment behind the United States within NATO, including France, is short or long term. Even if it should prove to be short-term, momentary, the fact remains that the present polarization in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine represents an important step in the dynamics towards the constitution of imperialist blocs for generalized war. Indeed, history teaches us that this process is never linear, nor definitive, until the outbreak of war itself. The German-Soviet pact – or Ribbentrop-Molotov – was signed only on August 25, 1939, just a few days before September 1, 1939, the German invasion of Poland and the beginning of World War II, and marked a complete reversal of the USSR's policy of alliance with France and Great Britain in the name of *anti-fascism*. In this sense, it is not totally excluded that, in the long run, a European imperialist pole could finally emerge and propose another configuration than the one, the most probable today, organized around the Sino-American polarization, with a view to generalized war.

According to the imperialist configuration and its fracture lines, each proletariat, whether it is American, Chinese, European, or from other continents, will be subjected to attacks whose pro-capitalist, anti-proletarian nature will be the same, but whose intensity, terms and grounds will be differentiated. The war in Ukraine and the polarization against Russia that it provokes on the “old continent” implies primary responsibilities to the proletariat of the continent in front of the war and distinct stakes and possibilities, depending on whether it is from Russia, Ukraine or Western Europe.

5) The dilemma of the European bourgeoisies

“These spectacular German and European reversals will have long-term consequences. Faced with the tragedy of war on its doorstep, Europe is finally giving itself the means to behave as a geopolitical power. It is up to the Member States to consolidate this position: they are going to need it terribly.” (*idem.*)

Before the war broke out, the main European powers found themselves trapped, caught in a pincer movement, by the American-Russian polarization over the Ukraine issue. Once the Russian invasion underway, the countries of the European Union could only rally

¹¹ . We refer and call our readers to read the ICT article on this question : <http://www.leftcom.org/fr/articles/2022-02-16/ukraine-et-taiwan-points-chauds-d-un-monde-imp%C3%A9rialiste-troubl%C3%A9>

¹² . *“The USS Ralph Johnson, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, sailed through the Taiwan Straits on Saturday.”* (February 26th) (Chinese newspaper *Global Time*: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1253246.shtml>).

behind the United States within NATO. France, the country that most aspires to *European sovereignty* that is not dependent on America, took the lead by maintaining dialogue with Putin and speaking firmly, threatening Russia with nuclear fire in return. Taking advantage of the French presidency of the European Union and the command, since January, of NATO's Rapid Reaction Force, France is at the forefront of military measures and looking to impose a certain leadership on its European allies.

For the time being, the war in Ukraine has forced Europe to unite, overcoming the differences between the former Eastern bloc countries, anti-Russian and pro-NATO, and Western countries. The dynamics of polarization between China and Russia on the one hand, the so-called illiberal countries – a ready-made ideological theme to mobilize the proletariat of America and Europe –, and the Western democracies around the United States on the other hand, are reinforced by the war in Ukraine. For all that, and in front of the Russian military advance and threats, the European contradictions, in particular those of Germany hesitating to assume its historical role of world imperialist power, that is to say mainly on the military level, seem to be in the process of being overcome. The reflection and the choices that the German bourgeoisie will have to take, and seem to take with urgency, in the months to come will have heavy consequences for the America-Europe relation, the imperialist configuration to come and... for the European proletariat.

One of the difficulties for the bourgeoisies of Western Europe, i.e. of the historical center of capitalism, is to impose on the fraction of the international proletariat with the greatest experience of workers' struggle against the crisis and also against the imperialist war, the degree of submission indispensable to march to war. There is no doubt that this is also the main difficulty of the German bourgeoisie, due to its particular history. But the same is true for the other European powers, especially since the proletariat in these countries is not ready to accept the aggravation of misery and capitalist exploitation, nor the sacrifices necessary to develop the war economy and other war efforts. In an immediate way and as first consequence of the war in Ukraine, the proletariat of Western Europe is going to undergo the effects of the increase of the energy prices, of the gas in particular indispensable to heating, of an even stronger revival of the prices and of the effective fall of the wages. The immediate stake will be in the capacity of the proletariat of Western Europe to rise and react against this immediate impoverishment.

6) The rearmament of German imperialism

"In just 30 minutes on Sunday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz discarded decades of foreign policy tradition. His speech to German parliament marks an epochal shift." (Der Spiegel, February 28th)

The brutal decision to break with the foundations of German imperialist policy since 1945 was made in just a few days. Reluctant to face French pressure to clear the way for a European military power and hesitant about its consequences, in particular dedicating a large part of its budget to arms expenditure, the Russian invasion of Ukraine precipitated the decision of the German bourgeoisie. On February 25, the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* already headlined on the *"Military and Political Disaster : The Calamitous Errors of Germany's Russia Policy."*¹³ Its editorial of the same day defended that *"Europe must also strengthen its military power. A joint European defense policy is long overdue, also to make us less dependent on protection from the United States. (...) The Europeans must now defend ourselves by developing what French President Emmanuel Macron calls 'strategic autonomy'."* Then, three days later only, the decision to rearm German capitalism was adopted. *"Germany will increase, following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, its defense spending to reach more than 2% of its gross domestic product (GDP) per year, more than what NATO requires, announced Chancellor Olaf Scholz Sunday. "We will from now on, year after year, invest more than 2% of our gross domestic product in our defense," he said in the Chamber of Deputies, while the German army has suffered for years from under-equipment."* (Radio France Internationale, February 27)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine puts the German bourgeoisie under the obligation to assume its imperialist "responsibilities" in a more decisive way: breaking with what the international press calls a *taboo*, Germany has decided to send weapons directly to the Ukrainians, anti-tank rockets and Stinger surface-to-air missiles. *"This decision by Germany marks a political break. Berlin has been heavily criticized in recent weeks by the Ukrainian authorities for its refusal to deliver arms. The German government has always defended itself by invoking the restrictive policy followed by the country since the post-war period, banning exports of "lethal" equipment to conflict zones. However, this position has become less and less tenable politically since the Russian army invaded the country."*¹⁴

¹³ . <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/a-military-and-political-disaster-the-calamitous-errors-of-germany-s-russia-policy-a-c8b9818e-4bc2-4eb2-ac55-39e5790b29b2>

¹⁴ . RTL info Belgique (<https://www.rtl.be/info/monde/europe/invasion-de-l-ukraine-l-allemande-donne-finalement-son-feu-vert-a-la-livraison-d-armes-a-l-ukraine-1359929.aspx>)

The rupture and the decision are therefore historic for German capital. There is no doubt that German economic power will enable it to rapidly acquire a substantial military force that will allow it to hold the imperialist rank that history has endowed it with and, at the same time, deprived it of because of the two World Wars. This German rearmament already raises a number of questions, new contradictions: what will be Germany's place in NATO and vis-à-vis NATO? There is little doubt that this decision will push to resolve the dilemma of NATO or *European strategic autonomy*, as desired and pushed by France. Which choice of arms industry, European or American? What is the respective place of the German and French arms industries – to name but two – in European preparation for generalized war? What about the European programs, mainly German-French, of fighter aircraft and tanks of the future – the SCAF and MGCS programs? And finally, German rearmament will not fail to raise the question of the development of its own nuclear weapon, which no one doubts it will be able to acquire very quickly. The announced rearmament of Germany, if it were to be confirmed, would inevitably raise the prospect of an imperialist pole autonomous from the United States and therefore, in the long term, a rival to the latter.

From the point of view of the configuration of imperialist alignments and polarization determined and fed by the perspective of generalized war, the return of war to Europe and German rearmament put Europe back at the heart of the world situation, both on the imperialist level and in terms of the class struggle. For it is primarily the proletariat in Germany that will pay for the new imperialist and military policy of its bourgeoisie.

7) The European proletariat and war

“A real economic isolation of Russia will inevitably provoke in return a rise in inflation, a fall in growth, disturbances on the financial markets. (...) The truth must be told to European public opinion. (...) To think that we can influence Russia without sacrifices is an illusion. While the Ukrainian army, leaders and civilians are putting up heroic resistance to the Russian invader, the time has come for European political leaders to clearly face up to the price of solidarity and to prepare public opinion for it.” (Le Monde, editorial of February 26th 2022)

The bourgeoisie, in particular in these countries, will not be able to save itself, or avoid, confronting the working class frontally and massively. The announcement has already been made: the European proletariat will pay for this war, its consequences and implications, and therefore for those to come and to be prepared. The proletariat of Ukraine and Russia already pay it, including with their flesh. For

the rest of the proletariat of Europe already struggling with the bill of the crisis, aggravated by the paralysis of the production linked to the periods of lock-down in front of the Covid, the war in Ukraine is going to be the occasion for the bourgeoisie to accentuate even more sacrifices, over-exploitation and misery in the name of solidarity with the “Ukrainian people”, to prevent any future aggression of Russia, “for the defense of democracy against the dictator Putin” and for national unity.

If the international proletariat is as much affected by the crisis and by the necessities of preparation for the war which are imposed on each national capital, the proletariat in Europe finds itself in the first line because of the war in Ukraine. What is at stake in the immediate situation? The very beginning of the dynamics of workers' struggles against the effects of the crisis and the increase of the expenses of armament and infrastructures, concretizing itself by a growing inflation, the fall of real wages and the abyss of gigantic state deficits that it will be up to the proletariat to fill, will it be confirmed in front of the first consequences of the war, the increase of the prices of energy, therefore of the heating and the gasoline? Or will these first reactions be stifled by the shock and incredulity, if not terror, at the outbreak of war in Europe and the nuclear threats, then by the calls for national solidarity in times of war, including by the denunciation as unpatriotic, selfish, even terrorist, as it has been the case late November during the metal workers strike in Cadiz Spain? This is what is at stake in the immediate situation. In this sense, the question of war also plays directly on the class struggle. By doing so, as a factor of the immediate situation, it becomes also potentially a factor of proletarian consciousness and struggle. The war in Ukraine and its implications become an element of the massive confrontations between the classes that is on the agenda of the world situation.

The international proletariat, particularly in Europe, risks to be momentarily paralyzed by the outbreak of this war and to delay somewhat to return to the way of the struggle. This is the most probable hypothesis because of the omnipresence of the media, in particular of humanitarian order provoking a legitimate emotion in front of the massacre of the Ukrainians, and the hype of the democratic and war ideology. However, if it were to come to pass, the aggravation of the crisis, itself accelerated by the war, carries with it massive confrontations between the classes, if only because each national bourgeoisie cannot save itself from attacking and constraining its own proletariat, nor even leave it any respite or space. The imperialist war and its preparation force a total and totalitarian control and submission of the

proletariat and of the whole population. The current imperialist war in Europe will precipitate massive class confrontations.

8) The proletariat in Ukraine and Russia in face of war

In our leaflet of February 20th¹⁵, before the outbreak of the war, while trying to identify what could be the immediate proletarian answers to the war, we foresaw that the anti-war sentiment which seemed to animate the proletarians, and even the populations more widely, of Ukraine and Russia, would “*not be enough to stop the military confrontation if it should happen.*” Unfortunately, this was the case. At the very moment when the country is invaded, when the Russian tanks and air force crush everything that stands in their way, and when a nationalist resistance is imposed on the Ukrainian society, *a fortiori* if this resistance seems to win successes of the “little chickens against the Russian ogre”, any proletarian reaction in Ukraine itself is highly improbable. At least in the immediate future and as long as the war lasts. Nevertheless, the slogans for the proletariat in Ukraine remain the same as those for the rest of the international proletariat, knowing that they can only be against the current and not very audible for the moment. The slogans of rejection of national unity and rejection of defense of the Ukrainian nation are at least, and already, milestones for the awakening of the proletariat in Ukraine.

Even if unlikely at the time of writing, we cannot totally exclude that it will be different in Russia, including in the short term. If the Russian proletariat has not manifested itself in the last decades as an advanced fraction of the world proletariat, the adventure in which the Russian bourgeoisie with the Putin clan at its head has launched itself can provide it with the opportunity to wake up and intervene directly in the conduct of this war, that is to say to slow it down, or even to force Putin to stop it if it were to last because of the Ukrainian resistance. Certainly, if the country is in great danger of being totally invaded and militarily defeated in the coming days, the proletariat of Russia will not have the opportunity to intervene in the war itself. But, given the circumstances and the Ukrainian resistance, Putin will be forced to maintain a substantial armed force, and in fact an occupation, on the spot. In other words, the war will continue, in one form or another. So, the conditions for an awakening and an intervention of the proletariat in Russia, **essentially if not only from the defense of its living and working conditions which will be inevitably and strongly aggravated even more by the war effort and its consequences,**

weakening its own bourgeoisie and putting into action the communist principle of *revolutionary defeatism*, will be facilitated.

Already, and even if they are not proletarian reactions, the capacity of thousands of pacifists to mobilize and demonstrate in the streets of the Russian cities, in spite of a violent and systematic repression, illustrates the weakness of the Russian state apparatus and the lack of enthusiasm, to say the least, of the population in general. And, indirectly, the hesitations and divisions that run through the ruling class. How many enthusiastic demonstrations to defend the “motherland”? To our knowledge, none. Putin and the Russian bourgeoisie, at least the fraction gathered around the Putin clan and the current oligarchs, have embarked on an adventure whose magnitude and risk they had probably not assessed. At the time of writing, the invasion of Ukraine is getting bogged down, at least meeting unexpected – including by Western military and experts – military resistance and every day that passes weakens the power in Moscow. It is still too early, seven days after the beginning of the war, to know if the announcement of a thousand Russian soldiers killed is verified or not. But there is no doubt that if the number of casualties increases and the war is prolonged, the situation in Russia will quickly become explosive.

In this hypothesis, which is probable even if not certain, the proletariat in Russia, with its miserable living conditions, would then have an opportunity to fight both for the defense of its living conditions and to slow down, if not paralyze, the armed and bloody hand of its own bourgeoisie.

Today, and contrary to what the Russian military offensive might suggest, the weakest link in the chain linking imperialisms, including opposing ones, has become Putin's Russia.

9) Workers' struggles and communist slogans in face of war

Today, if the international proletariat is powerless in an immediate way to stop the war in Ukraine and, more broadly, the dynamics of imperialist polarization and generalized war, it is nonetheless part of the equation that the bourgeoisie will have to solve. The imperialist war and the nuclear threat strike at the very moment when anger and revolt against the aggravation of misery and capitalist exploitation emerge everywhere and are expressed in workers' struggles, which are certainly still too timid and limited. Crisis and war appear at the same time. In this way, the bourgeoisie will not be able to play one to justify the other to counter any revolutionary wave, if it is to develop: pacifism at the price of economic sacrifices as was the case in 1918-19. Prosperity – the

¹⁵ . <http://igcl.org/Ukraine-faced-with-the-threats-of>

end of mass unemployment – at the price of war as in 1939. It is in this that we can say that capital and the bourgeoisie find themselves in a situation of historical fragility. Recognizing this historical weakness does not take away from the reality of the strength of state power and the weakness of the reactions and dynamics of proletarian struggles today. On the contrary, this historical impasse confronting capital can only make the dominant classes even more determined to defend their class power at any cost, including the worst, and make class struggles into bitter and bloody confrontations.

There is only one way to face the dynamics towards the generalized imperialist war: that of the workers' struggles against the crisis and the implications of the march to war on the proletarians' living and working conditions. In an immediate way, as we said, the Russian war effort and the economic sanctions of the Western powers will aggravate the situation of the proletariat in Russia, which was already strongly deteriorated. If, at the time of writing, no dynamic of particular struggles seems to emerge in Russia, it remains that the divisions which appear within the Russian society in front of the invasion of Ukraine, including within the bourgeoisie, and even within the state apparatus, can favor the outburst of workers' struggles... on the condition that they are not deviated onto the democratic ground of an anti-Putin, anti-dictatorship opposition, which can appear at any moment.

The main slogans? In Russia? No to the sacrifices and the war effort against Ukraine! In the face of the explosion of prices due to the war, massive struggles and strikes! Solidarity with the proletarians of Ukraine under the bombs! Proletarians of Russia: remember the strikes and demonstrations of February 1917! Against the imperialist war led by its own bourgeoisie, revolutionary defeatism!

In Europe ? No to the sacrifices imposed by the crisis and the preparation for generalized war! No to the sacrifices for the rearmament of Europe! Against inflation, misery and over-exploitation, present and future, mass workers' struggles! Against the war in Europe and the nuclear threat, extension and international generalization of struggles and strikes! Faced with the false alternative of war for democracy and against the Russian dictatorship of Putin, only one alternative: the revolutionary perspective of communism! Long live proletarian internationalism!

On the other continents: capitalism is preparing and leading us to imperialist and nuclear war, only international workers' struggles and the perspective of communism can oppose it. In the immediate future, we must follow the example of the petrochemical

workers in Iran, or of Kelloggs or John Deere in the United States, strikes and extend to all sectors for class demands. All united for the defense of our living and working conditions, whatever the corporation or the sector, whatever the color of skin or gender distinction. No alliance or unity with our own bourgeoisie, whether in the name of the defense of democracy or national unity! Extension and generalization of struggles!

10) The war in Europe and the need for the communist party

The outbreak of the war in Europe already provokes, and will provoke even more, the awakening of new revolutionary forces and a political and militant decantation within those that already exist. Groups, circles and individuals of the revolutionary camp, the one that succeeds in reaching the principle of proletarian internationalism, and of the proletarian camp, the one that expands proletarian internationalism to revolutionary defeatism against its own bourgeoisie, to the workers' insurrection and to the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat, are experiencing, and are going to experience, a verification of their revolutionary political commitment and convictions and a verification of the validity of their political positions in the face of the war and the historical situation. Already, within the proletarian camp, and more particularly within the Communist Left, the currents and groups¹⁶ that reject the alternative of revolution or war and any danger of generalized imperialist war, find themselves largely powerless and disoriented in the face of the situation that is opening up. For the time being, the only thing they have left is the abstract affirmation of the principle of internationalism. The contradiction due to the forgetfulness of fundamental Marxist principles can only be overcome by internal crises, or even explosions, or by the more or less rapid agony of what will inevitably become – if it is not already the case – small sects.

In the opposite direction, the war in Ukraine has allowed the forces of the Communist Left which could still remain sometimes evasive, hesitant, not fully convinced, as for the historical alternative and, even, as for the perspective of generalized imperialist war, of Third World War, to recover and to clearly display the stakes of the current situation. The war, today the war in Europe, is a factor of consciousness for the proletariat, and also a factor of political clarification for the communist groups. A process of decantation and selection within the proletarian camp is thus opened, which can only lead in the long run to its reconfiguration, an indispensable prerequisite

¹⁶ . As the International Communist Current for instance.

to the constitution of the world political party of the proletariat. It is particularly significant to note that the line of division between the forces fighting for the party, the *pro-party* forces as Lenin called them, and the *anti-party* forces, overlaps the line opposing those who continue to defend the position of principle according to which the alternative that capitalism presents is that of international proletarian revolution or generalized imperialist war and those who turn away from it, ignore it, or reject it.

The war, just like the crisis, as most of the groups of the proletarian camp underline it, affects now directly the proletariat as much on the level of its conditions of life and exploitation as on the level of the conditions, timing and ground, of its struggles. The immediate demands and objectives of the workers' struggles are going to be directly determined by the question of the war, in front of the demands of sacrifices in the name of national effort and unity and for the necessities of the generalized armament and of the revival of the war economy. Now, the concrete answers, orientations of struggle and adapted slogans, as well as the evaluation of the immediate relations of force allowing the choice of these demands according to the possibilities of fight they offer, raise the question of the minorities of proletarians able to define them, to carry them and to defend them, in the struggles, in the strikes, in the assemblies, in the demonstrations; that is to say, in the period which has opened and which the war in Europe comes to confirm: that of the massive confrontations between the classes. Given the presence of the war in Europe, each dominant class of the "old continent" can only

engage a frontal offensive against its own working class; that is to say, against the fractions of the international proletariat having the most historical experience in front of the war and in front of the revolution, knowing undoubtedly more than the others the traps of democratism and *anti-fascism* and, above all, having at their disposal the main – to this day – communist minorities and who are the most attached to the communist program and to the historical experience of the proletariat.

From theoretical and general, the existence of the party and its capacity to make its orientations and slogans adapted to the situation, to its stakes – in particular the imperialist war – and to the relations of forces between the classes, be taken in charge and realized by the proletarian masses in struggle becomes a practical political question. And which will not be long in becoming urgent, at the risk, in case of impotence and absence, of precipitating the historical defeat of the international proletariat, a physical and bloody, political and ideological defeat, and of opening wide the highway towards the generalized holocaust. Let there be no doubt about it: the terror and the bombardments under which Kiev, Kharkov or the cities of Donbass are today, the bloody massacres that are falling on the population of Ukraine will become the norm and the common lot of all humanity.

The war in Europe begins to specify the conditions and the terms of the decantation of the forces which must fight for the constitution of the party. It makes this struggle the priority.

The IGCL, March 2nd 2022

ICT's Letter on Our Theses on The Imperialist War in Ukraine

Dear comrades,

We have read your text (Theses on the War in Ukraine) and noted with pleasure that there has been a positive evolution of your positions, beginning with the necessity of the world party of revolution as an indispensable tool in the class confrontation for overcoming capitalism. This is certainly not the first time you have posed this question, but now it seems to us that there is an additional emphasis.

Correctly, then, you relate the escalation of imperialist tensions and the war in Ukraine, with the deepening of the crisis, which, precisely, pushes the various bourgeois factions to increase their aggression, according to the most "classic" logic of imperialism.

These are, no doubt, the positive aspects, but there are others in your "Theses" that leave us very perplexed, because they reflect, in our opinion, analyt-

ical methodologies that are both mechanistic and idealistic at the same time. Put in still other terms, a schematism emerges from the "Theses" that risks giving a misrepresentation of the current tendencies, making your document misleading for the purposes of a communist orientation of the proletariat, that is, today, of minorities and individualities – not necessarily proletarian – who place themselves on the terrain of anti-capitalism.

You assign a central role to Europe, both in the current imperialist clash – a prelude perhaps to future ones – and in the class struggle, that is, to the proletariat in that part of the world. No one denies the enormous importance of the European continent – it is almost a platitude – but to state categorically that the European scene is the main terrain on which the bloody game of imperialism is played is a gamble and puts the other scene of the imperialist clash, the Chinese one, in the background. You yourselves mention it, but do not emphasize enough its primary

importance.

Similarly, for you, the European working class has a special place, so to speak, in the revival of the class struggle and in the fight against the war, because this segment of the world proletariat would have more historical (class) experience than any other proletariat. This, too, is a questionable schematization, for we know well how the last few decades have produced profound changes in the class composition and political "memory" of the "European" proletariat. It is not useless to recall that, in more recent years, some of the most significant episodes of workers' (workers' in the broadest sense: wage-earning) struggle have taken place outside Europe, and, therefore, aprioristically assigning the "primogeniture" of the class struggle to the European proletariat runs the risk of lapsing into idealism, of being crushed by the glorious revolutionary past of the working class of the old continent, of failing to take into proper consideration the anti-capitalist potential of other sections of the world proletariat. If you mean to say that especially in Europe there are communist nuclei that keep revolutionary praxis (theoretical-political method, etc.) alive, that is one thing, but their extreme numerical weakness means that they are, in fact, unknown to our class and, for the time being, without any real possibility of influencing the course of events. This does not mean, *ça va sans dire* [that's goes without saying], that we must resign ourselves and wait "Bordiguistinally" for better times, devoting ourselves in the meantime only to theoretical analysis, but that we must be clear about the extremely bumpy path in which – for as long as we can remember, by the way – we are moving; renunciatory fatalism as well as headlong rushes lead nowhere. Incidentally, it is no coincidence that recently our positions are gaining interest in areas that had never been touched – or had been touched to a marginal extent – by the theoretical-political activity of the "Italian" Communist Left, in which we have our roots, a reflection of a social, if not class ferment that is in some respects new. That it is the European proletariat that will play the role of first violin or at least give the "A" to the concert of the class struggle, is a possibility, without any doubt, perhaps the most probable, but not a certainty: to make a joke, *"the spirit blows where it will"*, Thomas Müntzer used to say, but we would add that for it to be productive in a revolutionary sense it needs an instrument that will pick it up and point it in the right direction. But such an instrument – the party, the new international – is all to be constructed and, as things stand, even if the proletarian "spirit" were to blow stronger in Europe, it would in fact find no one to direct it against the bastions of capital,

neither here nor elsewhere, and the bourgeoisie, would succeed with greater or lesser difficulty, in remaining master of the situation.

Here is another point in your document that leaves us very doubtful and which gives off, if we must be honest, the unpleasant odor of fanciful theorizing à la ICC. In point 5, you state that the bourgeoisies of Western Europe have difficulty *"to impose on the fraction of the international proletariat with the greatest experience of workers' struggle against the crisis and also against the imperialist war, the degree of submission indispensable to march to war."* Unfortunately, it seems to us that this is not the case; on the contrary, we see that for about half a century our class has been suffering every attack coming from the bourgeoisie without responding or without responding adequately. The reasons are many, we know them – not the least of which is the loss of hope in an alternative world to that of capital, following the collapse of "Soviet" state capitalism passed off as "real socialism" – but the fact remains that, so far, the bourgeoisie is handling exploitation and oppression of the working class with relative ease. If we are then to give some credibility to the war bulletins, that's the TV news, with which the "Western" mass media daily mangle so-called public opinion, bangs of the Ukrainian proletariat have rushed to the defense of the homeland. Whether this is true or not, it remains that, barring episodes unknown to us, there has been, at the moment, no mass opposition to the war, of the class as such, either in Ukraine or in Russia and, unfortunately, not even in the "West." In the face of the war in Ukraine, not only are the Russian and Ukrainian proletariat fighting for their respective bourgeoisies, but in old Europe, so far, when something has moved, it has been in a pacifist sense, i.e., "no to war" but yes to the peace of capital, without understanding that capital itself is the cause of wars. For that matter, so far, never in history has the labor movement been able to prevent the outbreak of an imperialist war (it has been able to stop it, though...), even if it is the only subject that can do so, once as now, but that does not mean that it cannot happen nor, much less, that the very weak communist forces should not work to that end: on the contrary! Without their active presence in the class, the class could certainly be set in motion, but having said that, we would remain stuck with one of the two factors of the revolutionary dialectic. We know very well that the class mobilizes even without the presence of the revolutionary organization – how many times in history this has happened! – we know very well that crisis, and even more so war, can give very powerful "kicks in the ass" [alternatively: jolts] to a numbed, disoriented and frightened class, which

plays the role of "class for capital" almost without a word, but it is not automatic that this happens. Above all, it is not automatic, indeed!, for its most combative sectors to become "class for itself" i.e., to acquire revolutionary consciousness, if precisely they do not enter into dialectical relationship with the communist vanguard, which they politically nurture and by which they are politically nurtured. The

problem is always that, but to solve it we must not be guided (only) by our hopes, for otherwise these may become illusions, nor by schematisms, which make us unfit for the role to which we aspire as vanguards of the international revolution.

Internationalist Greetings,

ICT, May 4th 2022

Awaiting for a Response from Us

*Due to lack of space, we will not be able to respond to the comrades' letter in this issue. Their criticism concerns two points. The first is the insistence of the theses on the return of Europe to the forefront of the historical situation, both on the imperialist level and in the class struggle, which would make us forget-underestimate the reality of the fundamental Chinese-American antagonism. We do not believe that there is a real divergence between us here. In fact, the theses try to underline and warn the international proletariat of the historical significance of the war in Ukraine and in Europe. The fact that the first conflict marking an important step towards the generalized war does not oppose China and Taiwan, which was a probability, but Russia and Ukraine, makes Europe the epicenter of the situation **for the moment** and challenges in the first place the proletariat in Europe; a proletariat having like the others its own historical experience; experience which is certainly the richest of all the other fractions of the world proletariat to this day; experience which does not prejudice in any way its capacity to fight en masse in the period which is coming, knowing that for the moment it is largely absent – the ICT is right on this point. To display this does not mean that we exclude in advance any reversal of the international situation, making Asia the epicenter of the situation **at another moment**, or even a whole period, and the Pacific Ocean the main theater of the imperialist polarization and of the generalized war if it were to happen. Nor that the proletariat in China and Asia cannot take the initiative of an international revolutionary wave in the face of a war that would affect it directly, as the Russian proletariat did in 1917. If there is a divergence on this point, it lies rather in the fact of establishing the probability – and not the prediction – of the events to come according to the analysis of the present events and their dynamics, which are determined by the perspective of the generalized imperialist war and the class confrontations that the bourgeoisie cannot fail to impose. For the moment, because of the war in Europe and the historical experience of the proletariat of the continent – material and historical facts – we consider more probable **a mass proletarian reaction to the war** starting from Europe than from America, Asia or Africa. This probability is neither a prediction, nor does it exclude in an absolute way that it could be different, the situation remaining the same elsewhere – there are also, for example, material elements indicating a dynamic, of course still timid, of proletarian reactions to the crisis in North America. And there lies the second point of criticism of the ICT.*

It expresses a real divergence. For the clarity of the reader and so that he can find his way around, we can roughly say that it touches on the contradictory debate that the PCInt-Battaglia Comunista and the ICC had developed at the end of the 1970s around the question of the historical course – the same one that the ICC of today abandoned at its 23rd Congress in 2020. For our part, and trying not to repeat the idealist and dogmatic failings with which the ICC could often understand and carry this question at the time – much of the criticism that Battaglia Comunista made at the time was correct – we take up the concept and, we hope, the method that must accompany it, the one that the comrades of the ICT have always judged and labeled as idealist. Beyond the historical debates between the PCInt and the ICC, the reader can also refer to the exchange between the ICT and ourselves that we published in 2019 in Revolution or War #11¹⁷ on this question. We will try to take up this debate in the next issue of the journal.

*For the time being, we shall be content to salute the political effort and concern of the ICT on this occasion and to give it as an example. They can only help us to clarify, or even correct if necessary, our own approach and understanding. **But above all**, debating, confronting, specifying and clarifying the points of agreement and disagreement, on essential questions, here the method of analysis and understanding of the historical situation that defines – and will define – orientations and slogans according to the time and place, **is an integral part of the process and the struggle for the constitution of the party of tomorrow**. It is not only the program and the principled positions that the party will have to clarify and on which it will be constituted, but also the general orientations and the tactics that will result from them. To regroup is also to debate and confront positions around the main forces of the communist Left and around its programmatic and political corpus.*

The IGCL, June 2022

¹⁷ . See our critical position on an ICT article in Revolution or War 11 (<http://www.igcl.org/About-the-ICT-text-A-Decade-since-435>) and its response <http://www.igcl.org/Response-of-the-ICT-February-8th>).

Contribution: Capitalism and Bourgeois Democracy

We publish here after, next page, the third and last part of the series of contributions on Communism and Community and Marxism and Knowledge from previous issues. This part has raised some criticisms in our midst.

The first is the direct link that the contribution establishes between the passage from formal to real domination of capitalism on the one hand and the development of bourgeois democracy on the other. For those comrades who disagree, the formal domination of capitalism corresponds to the extraction of absolute surplus-value and to the labor process linked to manufacturing as opposed to the factory and then to large-scale industry; the latter corresponds to the extraction of relative surplus-value and to real domination. The 4th and 5th sections of Capital develop this question at length. However, by establishing an automatic link between the form of domination and the development of bourgeois democracy, the contribution actually situates, however vaguely, the passage from one to the other at the earliest in the middle of the 19th century. Yet, for K. Marx, “that form of co-operation which is based on division of labour assumes its classical shape in manufacture. As a characteristic form of the capitalist process of production it prevails throughout the manufacturing period properly so called, which extends, roughly speaking, from the middle of the sixteenth century to the last third of the eighteenth century.”¹⁸ This results in positions that are not shared by all the comrades: “Between primitive European accumulation and the authoritarian regimes of the Eastern bloc in the 20th century, there is in fact more of a difference in form, linked to the different eras, than in substance”; or still, “England is much more democratic today than it was in the 18th century.” This last point brings us to the second criticism.

It points to false formulations that reveal an abstract, non-historical approach to dealing with "democracy". It is presented several times as only conservative or only guarantor of the social order: “Democracy is the political form par excellence of social conservation”, “The dynamism of democracy aims above all at socio-political conservation, at maintaining the strict political status quo”...

Finally, the contribution quotes a passage from the 1952 text Invariance of Marxism of the ICP-Communist Program on the question of the party taking the following position: “The dictatorship of the proletariat, for us, [is] the organized historical force that, followed at a given moment by a part of the proletariat, and not necessarily by the majority, expresses the material pressure that blows up the old bourgeois mode of production...” For those comrades who disagree with it, it contradicts the platform we have just adopted according to which “effective political action and leadership of the party are realized when the proletariat seizes en masse, and then puts into practice, the orientations and slogans of the party, the insurrection itself and the class dictatorship...” and which defines the workers' councils, the soviets, as “organs of the insurrection and organs of the class dictatorship.”

Nevertheless, we publish this controversial text in our midst as it is. It will certainly call for answers in the next issue.

The editorial committee

¹⁸ . The Capital, Volume 1, The Production of Relative Surplus-Value, chap.14, The Division of labour and Manufacture, 1. The Dual Origin of Manufacture, Penguin Classics.

Capitalism and Bourgeois Democracy

Democracy is a concept mobilized by all the political currents on the left and the right of the political axis. Henceforth, any political discourse can only be judged as rational within the framework of the norms that govern democratic practice. Thus, for example, democracy can be used to legitimize both imperialist policies, in the name of the principle of humanitarian intervention, and "decolonial" policies, in the name of the principle of the right of a peoples to self-determination. Similarly, American Trumpists and other right-wing extremists invaded the Capitol, symbol of democracy in the United States, to protest an attack on democracy – an alleged electoral fraud – while Democratic Party supporters protested the riot in the name of defending and preserving those same democratic institutions against a supposed fascist coup.

We see many bourgeois commentators theorizing that democracy is a kind of blank slate, a framework within which one can then choose the direction that society should take. This conception of democracy as a regime that is indeterminate *a priori* leads to the need to add an adjective to democracy that would help determine it *a posteriori*. Thus, the bourgeois left is usually critical of what it calls bourgeois or liberal democracy and opposes to it forms of democracies qualified sometimes as radical, direct, participatory or wild. Inversely, the right will usually be critical of the forms of democracies that it will name plebeian to oppose the necessity and the effectiveness of the liberal and representative democracy. Having noted this, we will attempt in this contribution to analyze democracy in itself, without any other adjective. The question we will ask ourselves is whether democracy is really an unsurpassable horizon and a principle exempt from all criticism. By reappropriating the political tradition of the Communist Left, in particular the so-called "Italian" one, we will demonstrate that democracy is not the ready-made path to human emancipation¹⁹. By force of circumstance, we will be led to glimpse what form of society can surpass democracy as a superior mode of social organization.

Origin of bourgeois democracy

From the Marxist perspective, it would be quite incorrect to imagine democracy as a principle that, having first been invented in ancient Greece, disappeared momentarily from human consciousness

during the Middle Ages, only to return with boldness in modern societies. The liberal democracy of modern societies has its own history. To try to understand it as adequately as possible, it is not a matter of referring to great invariant and transhistorical ideals, but rather of analyzing the political manifestations of social life as the result of the specific configuration of social relations.

The bourgeois democracy is thus born through a revolutionary struggle against the type of society which preceded it directly in history: the monarchic regime and the mode of production which founds it, namely feudalism. Thus, each of the basic principles of democracy can be conceived as dialectical negation of the respective basic principles of feudal society. To the traditional darkness of the medieval thought, one opposes the modern philosophy of the Enlightenment. To the social status designated by the birth of feudalism, one opposes the modern equality of citizens. To the religious faith, one opposes rationality and the scientific method. Finally, to the government of one, the monarch, one opposes the government of the people, democracy in short.

At the ideal level, that is, at the level of human consciousness, the dialectical opposition between absolute monarchy and democracy was presented in the following way:

"The old political doctrines based on spiritualist concepts or even on religious revelation claimed that the supernatural forces which govern the consciousness and the will of men had assigned to certain individuals, families or castes, the task of ruling and managing the collective existence, making them the repositories of "authority" by divine right. To this, the democratic philosophy which asserted itself at the time of the bourgeois revolution counterposed the proclamation of the moral, political and juridical equality of all citizens, whether they were nobles, clerics or plebeians. It sought to transfer "sovereignty" from the narrow sphere of caste or dynasty to the universal sphere of popular consultation based on suffrage which allowed a majority of the citizens to designate the leaders of the state, according to its will²⁰."

Once again, it would be unfortunate to represent the history of the birth of bourgeois democracy as a simple battle between different ideas from which democracy finally emerged victorious. What we usually think of as the transition from traditional to modern societies was basically the revolutionary

¹⁹ . See also our text « "Democracy" is the Working Class' s Main Enemy » in *Revolution or War #2*.
<http://www.igcl.org/Democracy-is-the-Working-Class-s>

²⁰ . « The Democratic Principle », <http://www.sinistra.net/lib/upt/compro/liqe/liqemciecee.html#Dem>.

transition from one mode of production, feudalism, to another, capitalism. As ideological superstructures of modes of production, monarchy accompanied feudalism, while democracy is the alter ego of capitalism.

Marx's view of the relationship between monarchy and democracy is interesting in this regard. He was originally from Germany, a country that was still under a regime of absolute monarchy at the time. Marx's first militant actions were within the democratic and republican movement. In the philosophical circle of the Young Hegelians, a liberal circle to which he critically belonged, the Prussian monarchy was usually characterized as a non-political regime. Indeed, politics was the private affair of the monarch and his immediate entourage. Civil society, on the other hand, was alien to all political life. In terms borrowed from Hegel, Marx would say that it was cut off from the political community, i.e., that the whole of the non-dominant social classes, from the peasants to the artisans to the bourgeois, had no possibility or right to participate in political life. For the young Hegelians, the democratic movement around 1848 had to somehow bring civil society into the political community, which in our contemporary terms means establishing the power of the people by overthrowing the power of the monarch.

It is possible to consider with Marx the nature of politics as being linked to social conflicts, more particularly to class conflicts. After all, "*the history of all hitherto existing society*" is precisely "*the history of the class struggles*"²¹. Feudal society is thus for Marx of a non-political nature in that it forbids civil society any possibility of contestation and protest. On the contrary, democracy is *the political society par excellence* since it allows all the classes of the society to take part in the social confrontations.

The struggle for the constitution of a democratic regime was thus of fundamental importance for Marx. Indeed, the political emancipation and the accession to the political community that the bourgeois revolutions allowed made possible the reorganization of the power relations between the social classes. The aristocracy now driven out of power by the bourgeoisie, a new struggle was announced within modern society: the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

In his writings around 1843-1844, Marx presents democracy as the last form of *political* emancipation, a position that most modern liberals could share.

²¹ . Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, « Chapter I. Bourgeois and Proletarians », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>.

Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the Last Man*, expresses a similar idea with his concept of the end of history. But Marx already goes beyond the liberal point of view by affirming that the political emancipation that democracy puts in place is only a formal emancipation. It is not yet the real and radical emancipation: human emancipation. Marx brilliantly shows that democracy emancipates the citizen, this abstract being modeled in the image of the individual capitalist entrepreneur, instead of emancipating the concrete human being. According to Marx, with political emancipation, "*man was not freed from religion, he received religious freedom. He was not freed from property, he received freedom to own property. He was not freed from the egoism of business, he received freedom to engage in business*"²². In other words, the political emancipation that democracy sets in motion is not an emancipation of human beings from the relations of domination and exploitation that overwhelm them, but rather a liberation for capital from the obstacles that can harm its domination. In short, despite the establishment of formal juridical-political guarantees, such as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, bourgeois society is still traversed by class antagonisms and social relations of exploitation.

Democracy tries in an illusory way to unite in its political community a society which remains fundamentally torn by social antagonisms. It tries to unite opposing social poles under the aegis of a formal unity that it calls people or nation. But in practice, it is impossible to harmonize and pacify social conflicts unless the social classes that are at the origin of these same social conflicts are abolished revolutionarily. But this is certainly not the objective of democracy. On the contrary, it aims at maintaining conflicts within a certain acceptable framework so that the dominant class can perpetuate its domination without too many problems.

The fact that Marx participated in the struggle for democracy in the middle of the 19th century and that he affirmed the necessity of democracy as a transitional form of the struggle for emancipation brought about its share of confusion, with certain opportunist currents in the workers' movement even using Marx's arguments to try to adapt socialism to the principles of bourgeois democracy. But as early as 1843, Marx explicitly placed himself on the terrain of communism, and thus outside the defense of democracy for the subsequent cycles of struggle that would see the direct confrontation of the prole-

²² . Karl Marx, « *On The Jewish Question* ». <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/index.htm>.

tariat and the bourgeoisie. This is expressed, among other things, by the fact that against liberal democracy, Marx does not defend any real democracy, but proposes the human community, radical emancipation, in short, communism. In this sense, Marx is certainly not a radical democrat, but rather the most radical and revolutionary critic of democracy.

Principles of bourgeois democracy

It would now be useful to show how this radical critique of democracy is articulated by examining how Marx conceives of the two great principles of democracy: freedom and equality. The political distance between Marx's thought and the democratic traditions is best expressed in his conception of the two fundamental principles of democracy.

First, we must introduce a distinction in method. The liberal democratic tradition thinks of freedom through the prism of the individual. According to Marx, this conception of freedom requires first that the human being be separated from their *gemeinwesen*, i.e., from their communal being, and that thus the isolated individual be historically created and separated from other individuals. Since these socio-historical conditions are achieved precisely through the emergence of capitalist social relations, Marx asserts that

“Liberty, therefore, is the right to do everything that harms no one else. The limits within which anyone can act without harming someone else are defined by law, just as the boundary between two fields is determined by a boundary post. It is a question of the liberty of man as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself”²³.

Marx thus makes here an implacable critique of the nature of individual freedom dear to democratic regimes. It is interesting to see how Marx presents freedom using a metaphor in relation to space (the stake between two fields delimiting a *property*). He makes a strong conceptual association between individual freedom and private property, both of which are the foundations of capitalism.

Still from the methodological point of view, Marx conceives freedom from the point of view of the totality of the human community, that is, in the relation of human beings to the state on the one hand and the relation of the same human beings to nature on the other. Marx often presents freedom as a principle antithetical to any form of state. He put forward the following aphorism: *“The existence of the state is inseparable from the existence of slavery”²⁴.* Obvi-

ously, a nuance must be made here. When Marx speaks of slavery, he is not referring specifically to slavery as a trade and a mode of production, for example the exploitation of Africans and their descendants in the United States, but more generally to any situation of unfreedom, that is, any relation of domination or exploitation, including of course capitalist social relations. In other words, where there is a state, there is no freedom for humanity. Marx thus conceives the realization of freedom not in the ever-increasing extension of individual liberties that a democratic state would guarantee, but in the revolutionary abolition of the state.

Another aspect of Marx's conception of freedom concerns the relationship between humanity and nature. Here, the dialectical relationship is expressed in the opposition between necessity and freedom. According to Marx, as long as humanity is not able to control its social relations and its relation to nature, it is subject to the domination of natural constraints. In other words, where there is hunger, there is no freedom for humanity. Again, Marx does not locate freedom at the level of the individual. He locates it in the relation that a communist society would be able to establish between humanity and nature. This is how he intends to settle theoretically the opposition between necessity and freedom:

“In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite”²⁵.

and Social Reform. By a Prussian », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/08/07.htm>.

²³ . Karl Marx, « On The Jewish Question », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/index.htm>.

²⁴ . Karl Marx, « Critical Notes on the Article: The King of Prussia

²⁵ . Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 3*, « Part VII. Revenues and their Sources Chapter 48. The Trinity Formula », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch>

Instead of being dominated by natural necessities, humanity having conquered freedom would be able to establish a harmonious metabolism with nature to meet all human needs. It is interesting to note that in this passage Marx makes a kind of foray into the future by presenting from his analysis of capital a description of what a communist society would be like.

The same methodological distinction that we first drew between the bourgeois and Marxist conceptions of freedom holds equally for the concept of equality. Liberals think of equality as the equality of all citizens before the law. In other words, the law is the same for all individuals. This conception is again the dialectical negation of the tradition of the Middle Ages, where the treatment of an individual depended on his or her social status. For example, to simplify matters, we can say that there was one law for the class of lords and another for the class of serfs. In bourgeois society, on the other hand, the law is the same for everyone, whether the person is a billionaire or unemployed.

For his part, Marx pays little attention to the notion of equality between individuals. From his point of view, *“they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal²⁶”*. The methodological bias of liberal theory - an ideological bias that aims at perpetuating a regime of exploitation - is thus once again to start from the abstract and isolated individual to build its juridico-political edifice. Marx's critique of the social relations of exploitation and domination does not stem from the inequality considered as natural between individuals, but rather from the configuration of society into dominant and dominated social classes. In other words, inequality is not individual, i.e., between individuals, but social or more precisely between classes. Through the liberal prism, one individual is stronger, more intelligent, more entrepreneurial, etc., than another individual, which explains their well deserved superior social status. In the Marxist conception, it makes no sense to compare individuals without considering the society that produced these same individuals. More simply, taking our example above, the first individual is inserted into certain social relations, they belong to the class of capitalists, whereas the second is equally inserted into certain social relations, they belong to the class of proletarians. The conceptions that individuals give themselves of their own social positioning are only ideological justifications *a posteriori*, such as the myth of the self-made man. Society

48.htm

²⁶ . Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>

produces and reproduces social classes that are fundamental to the functioning of its mode of production.

It makes no sense, then, according to Marx, to seek to equalize individuals who form antagonistic social classes and where one class exploits another. Continuing Marx's non-democratic tradition, *The Democratic Principle* – a key text of the communist left – asserts that

“The Marxist critique of the postulates of bourgeois democracy is in fact based on the definition of the class character of modern society. It demonstrates the theoretical inconsistency and the practical deception of a system which pretends to reconcile political equality with the division of society into social classes determined by the nature of the mode of production²⁷.”

Equality before the law is only formal because this same equality sanctions the exploitation of one class by another. Thus, Marx does not propose to widen even further the equality of individuals or citizens, nor does he propose to equalize the social classes, as the opportunist socialists inspired by Lassalle in their Gotha program wrongly proposed. On the contrary, Marx makes the proposal to abolish social classes. In the same way, Marx castigates the socialists of his time, such as Proudhon, who gave themselves the task of realizing and finalizing the ideals of the bourgeois revolution which, according to them, had been betrayed by the bourgeoisie:

“What this reveals, on the other side, is the foolishness of those socialists (namely the French, who want to depict socialism as the realization of the ideals of bourgeois society articulated by the French revolution) who demonstrate that exchange and exchange value etc. are originally (in time) or essentially (in their adequate form) a system of universal freedom and equality, but that they have been perverted by money, capital, etc. (...) The proper reply to them is: that exchange value or, more precisely, the money system is in fact the system of equality and freedom, and that the disturbances which they encounter in the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realization of equality and freedom, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom²⁸.”

The abolition of classes would make it possible to materialize socially the following communist adage: *“From each according to his ability, to each according to*

²⁷ . « The Democratic Principle », <http://www.sinistra.net/lib/upt/compro/liqe/liqemciecee.html#Dem>.

²⁸ . Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, « Notebook II – The Chapter on Capital, Section *Simple exchange*. Relations between exchangers. *Harmonies of equality, freedom, etc. (Bastiat, Proudhon)* », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch05.htm#p239>, Emphasis is from Marx.

his needs²⁹.” From the point of view of the liberal tradition, this principle is inegalitarian. In effect, some individuals with greater abilities will give more to the community while other individuals with greater needs will take more from the community. The Communist Left thus comments on this apparent contradiction, sending a sharp arrow at Stalinism in the process:

“In economics as well we have long since dispelled the stupid opinion that Marxism is to do with equitable economic contribution and retribution, even as a demand for the future. Under communism not only will the relation between effort and consumption always be unequal, but whether it is or not will be a matter of complete indifference³⁰.”

In fact, the contradiction that is resolved here is the contradiction between individuals and society, between individual interest and general interest. Individuals are different, they have certain talents, certain intrinsic strengths or weaknesses. But these differences should not be significant or stigmatizing because all individuals belong to the same human community. And it is this same human community, once realized, that will be able to allow each individual to manifest the totality of their capacities and to satisfy at the same time all their human needs, which is what real human emancipation is.

The rise of capitalism and the rise of bourgeois democracy are inseparably linked. While it is true that capitalism did not appear in a directly and perfectly democratic form and that some capitalisms have been, for particular reasons in history, totalitarian regimes - from Pinochet's Chile to Nazi Germany - it is fundamental to note that the natural habitat of capitalism remains democracy.

It is important to distinguish two distinct phases in the history of capitalism. The first phase, which Marx calls the formal domination of capital, and which includes the process of primitive accumulation, refers to the phase in which capital emerges and dissolves the old traditional social relations. To do this, capitalism necessarily takes a rather authoritarian and undemocratic form. Examples include the censitary suffrage in most of the young Western democracies of the 18th and 19th centuries, or the establishment of English workhouses in the same period. But even the Russian Gulag and the Chinese Great Leap Forward appear as equally authoritarian

forms of the emergence of national capital. Between primitive European accumulation and the authoritarian regimes of the Eastern bloc in the 20th century, there is in fact more of a difference in form, linked to the different eras, than in substance.

Once capitalism enters its phase of real domination, i.e., once it has successfully destroyed all the old social forms and established its absolute domination over social relations, it can let go and thus become more and more liberal in the modern sense of the term. If we take our examples mentioned above, England is much more democratic today than it was in the 18th century. Similarly, Russia and China are also much more democratic than they were in the mid-20th century, despite the fact that these are regimes that are considered undemocratic by the West. However, this progress of democratic institutions in history should not be conceived as the constant and indefinite progress of the democratic ideal. On the contrary, it is the result of *the progress of capitalist development*. In other words, the strong link between capitalism and democracy lies precisely in the interaction between the economic competition between individuals intrinsic to capitalism on the one hand, and the competition between the same individuals in the public arena concerning the decisions to be taken, a fundamental characteristic of democracy, on the other.

Capitalism and democracy also share another important characteristic that expresses their intimately linked nature. That is the integrating dynamism. Like capitalism, democracy integrates all that is external to it. Any social group that is oppressed and thus feels outside the political community of democracy can challenge the current social order. Whether it is the proletariat, women or oppressed peoples, the strength of democracy lies precisely in its ability to promise citizenship - rights, a voice, an end to discrimination, recognition, etc. - to all those who challenge the current social order. But the flip side of this promise is precisely the obligation for the newcomers to the big democratic family not to contest its dogma and especially the mode of production that this dogma protects: capitalism.

This integrating dynamism characterizing both democracy and capitalism is really their mode of existence. The dynamism of democracy aims above all at socio-political conservation, at maintaining the strict political *status quo* as to substance while ensuring a constant and unlimited dynamism as to form. The dynamism of capitalism, on the other hand, is rather situated at the socio-economic level. Indeed, the very logic of capital accumulation always pushes it to produce more and faster than before. It must

²⁹ . Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>

³⁰ . « Carlylean Phantoms », https://www.quinterna.org/lingue/english/historical_en/treadovertime/114_1953_carlylean_phantoms.htm

constantly surpass its own limits, otherwise it will sink into its own immediate contradictions.

It is then ironic to see some leftist apologists of democracy advocating and valorizing the dynamism of democracy as a means of emancipation. What they cannot perceive because of their political positioning is that the dynamism of democracy is of exactly the same nature as the dynamism of capitalism, which Marx had already strikingly described in 1848:

“Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind³¹.”

Capitalism and democracy go hand in hand. It makes no sense to reject the former by basing one's argument on the principles derived from the latter.

Political effects of democracy

We have seen the conditions of emergence of bourgeois democracy as a superstructural form of the establishment of the domination of the capitalist class at the end of the Middle Ages. Although the great bourgeois revolutions never established democracy in its pure form, the ideals carried by these revolutions were informed by the founding principles of democracy, i.e., the notions of freedom and equality. We have then shown how these two important notions are equally notions derived from capitalist social relations.

Now, once democracy has been established, the question remains as to its concrete socio-political effects. From the point of view of the radical Marxist tradition, democracy is far from being the privileged means of human emancipation. On the contrary, it is one of the most powerful forms of social conservation. Indeed, other regimes such as the traditional absolute monarchy or modern totalitarianism, which could be described as non-political in accordance with Marx's thought as explained above, were not so effective in controlling and repressing social contestation that was external to them. These regimes were obliged to opt for continuous violent repression, which then produced even more contestation.

The case of democracy is quite different since it accepts and integrates all contestation. On the condition that protesters abandon their criticism of the order – of capitalism specifically – they are absolutely entitled to enter the democratic political community. Democracy always extends the circle of its political community to more citizens. This has the effect of almost instantly disarming social conflicts into the framework of what is acceptable for the established order.

But there is an even more fundamental aspect to the inherently conservative character of democracy once it has played its revolutionary role against feudalism. Marx and Engels defended the view that

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it³².”

If this passage has become a commonplace of the "academic Marxism", by dint of repetitive quotations, its critical content towards democracy is left in a blind spot. Indeed, if the dominant ideas of a society are always the ideas that the dominant class peddles thanks to its material and ideal power, democratic competition in the public space will necessarily validate every time to the dominant class. It is therefore easy for pro-capitalist thinkers to fetishize democracy. It is a political joust in which the class that imposes the rules invariably emerges victorious by force of circumstances.

This lends further weight to the argument that democracy is the most effective regime for maintaining the current social order. According to Lenin,

“The growth of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries has provoked the bourgeoisie and their agents in the workers' organizations to convulsive efforts to find theoretical arguments in defense of the rule of the exploiters. Among these, particular emphasis is placed on the rejection of dictatorship and the defense of democracy³³.”

³¹ . Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, « Chapter 1: Bourgeois and Proletarians », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007>

³² . Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *A Critique of The German Ideology*, « B. The Illusion of the epoch : Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm#b3>

³³ . Lenin, *Thesis on Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship*, 1st congress of the Communist International, March 1919, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/mar/comintern.htm>.

The current of the Communist Left, whose break with democracy was more than assumed, tried to deploy the Marxist critique of democracy in all its breadth from the passage quoted above from *The German Ideology*: “Bourgeois electoral democracy seeks the consultation of the masses, for it knows that the response of the majority will always be favourable to the privileged class and will readily delegate to that class the right to govern and to perpetuate exploitation³⁴.” If democracy is the political form *par excellence* of social conservation, it is therefore necessary to find the way of emancipation elsewhere.

But is this other way not precisely in the alternative conceptions of democracy proposed by the different variants of the bourgeois left such as direct democracy, participatory democracy or radical democracy? The Marxist critique of liberal democracy is equally valid for all kinds of direct democracy. Indeed, the various alternative conceptions of democracy keep and valorize all the presuppositions of liberal democracy, freedom and equality, but try to correct its bad sides. This is as true for advocates of proportional representation who want perfect representation as it is for advocates of direct democracy who reject the very principle of representation. The criticism of representativeness is quite superficial in that it overlooks the nature of democracy which, under the illusion of the equality of citizens, valorizes the existence of social classes and consequently the exploitation of one class by another.

Democracy has for more than a century served as a pretext for the various bourgeois lefts – from the most liberal social democracy to the most radical anarchism – to try to preserve capitalism during its worst political crises. One has only to think of the First World War, when the German socialists went to war against the Allies with the justification of defending German civilization against the Russian barbarians, while the socialists of the Allied countries also went to war to defend, for example in the case of France, republican and democratic values, against Teutonic barbarism. In both cases, the German and French socialists abandoned the Marxist perspective to defend their own national capital, and this with the pretext of defending “true democracy”. The Communist Left analyzed the relationship of the democratic left to the revolution in this way:

“Thus, instead of developing a Marxist action and propaganda, that is to say, fighting all bourgeois, religious, nationalist and democratic conceptions, nine tenths of the socialist militants have turned into a chorus of crying men

lamenting the contradictions of priests, rulers and demagogues unfaithful to their promises. And this is how the traditional socialist movement ended up trying to save bourgeois ideologies from bankruptcy instead of taking advantage of it to move forward victoriously³⁵.”

This is exactly what differentiates the conceptions of radical democracy from the radical critique of democracy. The former perceives certain problems related to the exercise of democracy and tries to solve these problems in accordance with the democratic logic itself. In doing so, it perpetuates and renovates bourgeois ideologies, of which democracy is the foundation. The second, on the other hand, tries to use the moments of crisis of the bourgeois ideology as well as of democracy – one has only to think of the Paris Commune, the October Revolution or May '68 – to engage in the way of the social revolution. But the revolutionary way is not the way of the infinite perfection of the principles of the democracy, it implies on the contrary a clear rupture with these principles, rupture of which the Communist Left expresses clearly the nature:

“The dictatorship of the proletariat, for us, is not a consultative democracy transposed inside the proletariat, but the organized historical force which, followed at a given moment by a part of the proletariat, and not necessarily by the majority, expresses the material pressure that blows up the old bourgeois mode of production in order to open the way to the new communist mode of production³⁶.”

In other words, it is not important for the revolution to be the expression of a majority will, but it must be sufficiently massive to be able to materially overthrow the old world and let the new one arise.

Let us go back for a moment to the etymology of the term democracy. It designates the power of the people. Now, as we have seen previously, the people as a gathering of equal citizens is an ideological fabrication historically specific to the capitalist class. The people so dear to bourgeois revolutionaries is in fact torn by class antagonism. Therefore, communism aims not at reinvigorating the people by perpetuating their internal class conflict indefinitely, but at abolishing social classes. The abolition of the classes which compose the *demos* is at the same time the abolition of this same *demos*. By abolishing the *demos* which is historically created by the process of separation of the human beings from their social being (*gemeinwesen*), corollary to the division of the society

³⁴ . « Party and Class », <http://www.sinistra.net/lib/upt/compro/lipe/lipedbiboe.html>.

³⁵ . « Le rapport de force des forces sociales et politiques en Italie », chap. in *Communisme et fascisme*, pp. 54-66, Lyon, Éditions Programme communiste, 2001, p. 56. Our translation. Emphasis is from us.

³⁶ . *Invariance du marxisme*, Lyon, Éditions Programme communiste, 2009, p. 46. Our translation.

in classes and of which the capitalism is the apotheosis, the revolution establishes the human community. The new society would therefore no longer need any separate power to function:

“When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class³⁷.”

This is exactly what Engels expressed when he took up the Saint-Simonian idea that *“the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things³⁸.”*

But if there is no more political mediation or democracy, how will society function? Who will decide? Indeed, the citizen of today's democratic society is struck with the same vertigo at the idea that a future society could function without anyone formally making decisions as the aristocrat of the Middle Ages who was told that an assembly of rational citizens should make decisions instead of the King and God. The question is badly posed since it is always on the ground of politics. It is possible, from the materialist analysis of capitalist society, to glimpse relatively concretely how a classless society would function:

“Now the communist mode of production will make disappear all social antagonisms, all divisions and oppositions that tear humanity apart. It will make disappear automatically all domination, all coercion, all authority distinct from society. It will therefore make all forms of power disappear, even that “truly democratic democracy” of which the petty-bourgeois dream. For the “ideal” democracy itself can only be a form of oppression, the manifestation of social antagonisms. It is human society itself which, without any apparatus of direction or coercion, will direct and regulate its own activities. How will this happen? It is difficult for us to grasp it now, walled in as we are in a class society, but it will be simply and spontaneously by a dif-

fuse mechanism which will permeate all social life, which will be social life, human life. It would be the devil if humanity did not manage to make its own needs known to itself³⁹!”

In fact, the discipline of anthropology⁴⁰ has already given us a variety of very concrete examples of hunter-gatherer societies that functioned in exactly this way, that is, without separate political power. The overcoming of democracy by communism, the extinction of political power, in short the establishment of the human community, would thus close the loop of the historical arc that separates the past communism of the narrow communities of hunter-gatherers and the future world communism, making the class society a short but tragic parenthesis for humanity.

Robin, 2022

³⁷ . Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, « Chapter 2: Proletarians and Communists », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

³⁸ . Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, « Part 3: Socialism, chapter 2: Theoretical », <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm>.

³⁹ . « La société communiste », *Programme communiste*, Numéro 17 (1961), p. 20. Our translation.

⁴⁰ . Let's think first of all of Morgan, of course, whose work Marx and Engels greatly appreciated. But we can also consider with a certain critical distance the works of Clastres, Sahlins, Testart, Darmangeat, etc.

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OUR BASIC POSITIONS

- The IGCL considers and defines all its activities, both internal and external, in relation to and as moments of the struggle for the constitution of the world political party of the proletariat, indispensable tool for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society.
- In addition to intervening in the proletariat's struggles, the IGCL leads this struggle especially in the international proletarian camp. This camp is composed of revolutionary political groups defending and sharing the class positions of the proletariat, in particular proletarian internationalism and the necessity of the class dictatorship of the proletariat.
- The IGCL claims the First, Second and Third Internationals and the struggle of the left fractions within them. In particular, it claims the struggle of the left fraction of the CP of Italy within the Communist International against its Stalinist degeneration and for the programmatic contributions that it has been able to develop and pass on to this day.
- Only the proletariat, exploited and revolutionary class at the same time, is able to destroy capitalism and to establish communism, the classless society. The consciousness of this revolution, the *communist consciousness*, is produced by the historical struggle of the proletariat. So that it can materialize, defend and develop itself, the proletariat produces communist minorities who organize themselves in parties and whose permanent function is to carry this communist consciousness and to return it to the whole proletariat.
- As the highest expression of this consciousness, the party – or, in its absence, the communist fractions or groups – constitutes and must assume the political leadership of the proletariat. In particular, the party is the only organ that can lead the proletariat to the insurrection and to the destruction of the capitalist state, and to the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- The party is organized and functions on the basis of the principles that govern the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, *proletarian internationalism* and *centralism* as moments of its international unity and struggle. From the start, the party constitutes, functions and intervenes as an international and centralized party. From its very start, the IGCL constitutes, functions and intervenes as an international and centralized group.
- The party, as well as the IGCL, bases its program, its principles, its political positions and its action on the theory of *historical materialism*. By explaining the course of history through the development of the class struggle and by recognizing the proletariat as the revolutionary class, it is the only world view that places itself from its point of view. It is the theory of the revolutionary proletariat.
- Only after the victorious insurrection and the disappearance of the bourgeois state will the proletariat be able to organize itself as a ruling class under the political leadership of its party. Its class domination, the dictatorship of the proletariat, is exercised by means of the workers' councils, or soviets. These can only maintain themselves as a unitary organization of the proletariat if they become *organs of the insurrection* and *organs of the class dictatorship*, that is to say, by making the party's slogans their own.
- The dictatorship of the proletariat consists in using the class power of its mass organizations, the councils or soviets, to abolish the economic power of the bourgeoisie and ensure the transition to a classless communist society. The state of the transition period, of the class dictatorship, between capitalism and communism is destined to disappear with the disappearance of the classes, of the proletariat itself and of its party, and the advent of the communist society.
- Since the First World War in 1914, generalized imperialist war and state capitalism have been the main expressions of the historical phase of decadence of capitalism.
- In face of the unceasing development of state capitalism, the proletariat can only advance the research for its unity in all its struggles, even the most limited or localized ones, by taking charge of their extension and generalization. Every workers' struggle, even the most limited, confronts the state apparatus as a whole, against which

the proletariat can only advance the perspective and the weapon of the *mass strike*.

- In the era of dominant state capitalism, the trade unions as a whole, the leadership as well as the base sections, are nowadays full-fledged organs of the bourgeois state within the working class milieu. They aim at maintaining the capitalist order within its ranks, at framing the working class and at preventing, counteracting and sabotaging any proletarian struggle, in particular any extension, generalization and centralization of proletarian fights. Any defense of the trade unions and trade unionism is counter-revolutionary.
- In the era of dominant state capitalism, all fractions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called workers', "socialist", "communist" parties, leftist organizations (Trotskyists, Maoists, Anarchists), or even those presenting themselves as anti-capitalist, constitute the left of the political apparatus of capital. All the tactics of popular front, anti-fascist front or united front mixing the interests of the proletariat with those of a fraction of the bourgeoisie, only serve to contain and divert the struggle of the proletariat. Any frontist policy with left parties of the bourgeoisie is counter-revolutionary.
- In the era of dominant state capitalism, parliament and electoral campaigns, and in general bourgeois democracy, can no longer be used by the proletariat for its affirmation as a class and for the development of its struggles. Any call to participate in the electoral processes and to vote only reinforces the mystification presenting these elections as a real choice for the exploited and, as such, is counter-revolutionary.
- Communism requires the conscious abolition by the proletariat of capitalist social relations: commodity production, wage labor and classes. The communist transformation of society through the dictatorship of the proletariat does not mean self-management or nationalization of the economy. Any defense of one or the other is counter-revolutionary.
- The so-called "socialist" or even "communist" countries, the former USSR and its Eastern European satellites, China, Cuba, Vietnam, or even Chavez's Venezuela, have only been particularly brutal forms of the universal tendency to state capitalism. Any support, even critical, for the so-called socialist or progressive character of these countries is counter-revolutionary.
- In a world now totally conquered by capitalism and where imperialism imposes itself on every state, any national liberation struggle, far from constituting any kind of progressive movement, is in fact a moment in the constant confrontation between rival imperialisms. Any defense of nationalist ideology, of the "right of peoples to self-determination", of any national liberation struggle is counter-revolutionary today.
- By their very content, the *partial* struggles, anti-racist, feminist, environmentalist, and other aspects of everyday life, far from strengthening the unity and autonomy of the working class, tend on the contrary to divide and dilute it in the confusion of particular categories (race, gender, youth, etc.). Any ideology and movement that advocates *identitarianism*, anti-racism, etc., in the name of the *intersectionality* of struggles, are counter-revolutionary ideologies and movements.
- Terrorism is an expression of social strata without a historical future and of the decomposition of the petty-bourgeoisie, when it is not directly the emanation of the war that the States are permanently waging against each other. It always constitutes a privileged terrain for the police manipulations and provocations of the bourgeoisie. Advocating the secret action of small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which is conditioned by the conscious and organized mass action of the proletariat.
- The IGCL fights, from today, so that the future party is constituted on the programmatic basis of the principles and positions that precede. The formal constitution of the party is necessary at the latest when the intervention, the orientations and the slogans of the communist groups or fractions become permanent material elements of the immediate situation and direct factors of the balance of power between the classes. Then, the immediate struggle for the formal constitution of the party is necessary and becomes urgent.