

# REVOLUTION or WAR #16

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Capitalist Crisis and Bourgeois Offensive against the Proletariat

## International Situation

Gulf Coast Communist Fraction and IGCL Common Declaration about the Anti-Racist Protest in the USA (June 5<sup>th</sup> 2020)

The False Opposition Racism-Antiracism and the Treath for the International Proletariat

The Real Fight against Racism is the Fight against Capitalism:

Lenin, Attitude of the Workers' Party on Religion (1909)

Global Pandemia and Imperialist Competition (Internationalist Communist Tendency)

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## Struggle against Opportunism within the Proletarian Camp

Against Gossips on Social Networks and the Defense of Public Political Debate

## Debate within the Proletarian Camp

Debate on the Period of Transition:

Letter to the IGCL and some Elements of Response

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## Capitalist Crisis and Bourgeois Offensive Against the Proletariat

The capitalist crisis is here and now. Six months after the explosion of the pandemic and the crisis, the historical rupture is verified and is no longer in doubt, even for the most skeptical. The capitalist world is beginning to crack everywhere to the point that social revolts of all kinds and the threat of war are multiplying.

The economic crisis, expression and determining factor of the historical impasse of capitalism, can only deepen and worsen. No "V" or "L" shaped recovery, so much debated by bourgeois economists, is in sight. The lockdown and paralysis of more than half of world production was not a simple parenthesis that, once closed, would see a *normal* recovery of the economy, a *return to the situation before*. Proof if proof were needed that the Covid-19 pandemic was not the cause of the crisis. It only precipitated it and gave it some very special characteristics. Just as it can still hinder today the so-called *economic recovery* that the bourgeoisie hopes for without really believing in it. It is all very well to speak of recovery and revival, but the reality is that the open economic crisis is only just beginning.

### The Economic Recession Is Only Beginning

After an unprecedented drop in world GDP in the first half of 2020<sup>1</sup>, this *recovery* remains very timid. According to the bourgeois economists and media, global GDP will take some time to recover to its 2019 level in the unlikely case that no financial, stock market or speculative crisis breaks out in the meantime, blocking the international financial system and causing the generalized debt market to collapse. "Overall, this would leave 2021 GDP some 6½ percentage points lower than in the pre-COVID-19 projections of January 2020" (IMF<sup>2</sup>). Another unprecedented feature: no region, continent or country, including China, has been spared by the fall in GDP. Today, while work has resumed and the recovery should be vigorous to make up for the two months of paralysis if capitalism "were in good health," "the economic recovery remains sluggish in the United States" (lapresse.ca, August 28<sup>th</sup> 2020); in Germany, "industrial production grew by only 1.2% in July, while the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) was expecting a 4.5% increase. The production index remains 11.4% lower than in July 2019" (La Tribune, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> 20);

and in France, "the National Institute of Statistics, however, confirmed its forecast of a contraction of GDP of about 9% for the whole of 2020, predicting that 'at the end of the year, economic activity would still remain below its pre-crisis level' of about -4%" (idem, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> 2020)<sup>3</sup>. There is no doubt that the future economic data of the entire world capitalist economy, and of the various countries, will confirm the absence of a recovery such as would allow us to envisage a way out of the crisis, or even to erase, or at least alleviate, the dramatic effects of the crisis and the amount of the bill that will be presented to the international proletariat.

Unemployment exploded because of the widespread lockdown, but the end of it also did not allow a return to the previous employment situation. Far from it. In the United States, "we're still more than 11 million jobs down from where we were in February"<sup>4</sup> while the layoff plans, which are multiplying all over the world, are for the most part still to be implemented. The consequences are already terrible despite the state measures of partial employment urgently put in place by the various countries according to their historical "tradition", as social security coverage is stronger in Europe than in America or Asia, for example. The queues at soup kitchens and similar initiatives have exploded. Housing evictions for non-payment of rent or mortgage payments are beginning to multiply, particularly in America and Great Britain. The end of temporary income support to unemployed workers at the end of July in connection with the Cares Act passed in March in the United States, and which provides \$600 per week in benefits to the unemployed, will throw millions more proletarians out on the streets, jobless and homeless. Added to this catastrophe are the more than 800,000 deaths to date and the millions of Covid-19 patients, many of whom are having the greatest difficulty recovering, which the capitalist health systems have been unable to prevent and treat due to the lack of means, or even minimum health coverage in many countries. Needless to say, these deaths and illnesses mainly affect the poorest social classes. With the worsening crisis, how many more deaths and illnesses are still to come?

1 . More than 30% in the US and United Kingdom, 10 to 20% in Europe depending on the country.

2 . IMF, *A Crisis Like No Other, An Uncertain Recovery*, juin 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/06/24/WEOupdateJune2020>

3 . Canadian and French newspapers, translated by us.

4 . Paul Krugmann *New York Times, Gross Domestic Misery Is Rising* (Sept. 9, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/07/opinion/trump-economy-jobs.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>.

### The Unbridled Flight into Generalized Debt

And yet the states, especially the most powerful ones, have been quick to release trillions of dollars and euros to cope. The sums make one dizzy. A tiny part of this money has been dedicated to the immediate treatment of unemployment and business bankruptcies, particularly in Europe, in order to avoid a generalized social explosion. For the most part, these sums – for those already spent – were used, as in 2008 but on an unprecedented scale, to avoid a blockage of the financial system by preventing a succession of corporate bankruptcies and payment defaults. Finally, most of these sums will be used either for so-called recovery plans or to safeguard the financial system. In the first case, the states will be able to keep their hand in imposing the use of these funds and plans for the strengthening and concentration of each national capital in order to face international commercial and imperialist competition<sup>5</sup>, even if it means sacrificing the so-called *non-essential* sectors for the defence of national capital. In the second, public funds, although indispensable to keep the financial system afloat, will end up being lost – for the benefit of a few, of course – in the financial sphere and speculation. In fact, most of the capital provided by the central banks and actually "privatized", and which are in permanent search for profits, prove insufficient, and will prove increasingly insufficient, to generate the necessary rates of profit obtained from the realization of the surplus value extorted from the proletarians in the sphere of production.

But where does all this money come from? Out of nowhere, if not, in the end, from the issue of paper money, from money printing. The phenomenon is not new and has been going on since the end of the Bretton Woods agreements, the dollar as the reference currency pegged to gold, in 1971<sup>6</sup>. But

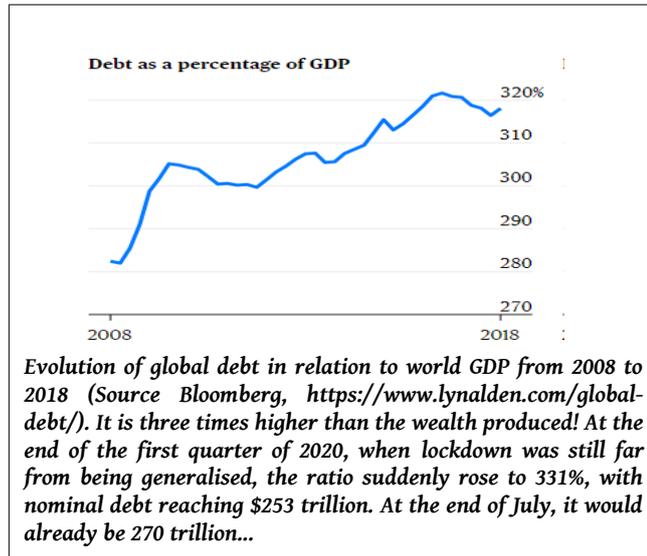
5 . "Boeing has been awarded a \$22 billion Pentagon pharaonic contract (...). If we still had any doubts about it, Boeing is well and truly supported at arm's length by the United States" (La Tribune, Sept. 14 2020), "The United States is investing heavily in quantum computing and artificial intelligence (...). Against the backdrop of the global race for 'quantum supremacy', while China is suspected of making huge investments in this field" (idem, August 8<sup>th</sup> 2020).

6 . It is in fact with the First World War and for its needs that

from immediate and punctual remedy, printing paper money and inflation of currency have become the rule. The result is that from 35 dollars, an ounce of gold rose to 1000 dollars during the crisis of 2008 and has now, following the pandemic, reached 2000 dollars. The risk of a collapse of the international monetary system thus accompanies the risk of a

collapse of the financial system. From being a remedy for the explosion of budget deficits and public and private debt<sup>7</sup>, the constant historical decline – independently of one-off rises and falls in the gold price – of the currency in relation to gold becomes in turn a contributing factor of deficits and debt. Since the crisis of 2008, central banks' policies of lowering interest rates – to the point of being negative! – and

Quantitative Easing (QE), which consists mainly in buying back public debt largely from the financial sector, banks and private funds, and which represents in fact and in the end a "socialization of losses and a privatization of gains", have only made it possible to avoid a brutal credit crisis, its freezing, a credit crunch, and the sudden paralysis of the financial system. The slightest major bankruptcy, of an over-indebted bank or company, risking a *pandemic* of bankruptcies or the explosion of a speculative bubble, is today likely to reproduce the financial crisis of 2008 with much more devastating effects. The current monetary policies carried out by central banks, the issuance of money through the repurchase of public debt, the QE policy, etc, as well as the rebound of public deficits, are not an answer, impossible to find today, to the fall in profits from



the main powers at war, United Kingdom, France, Germany, suspend the convertibility of their currency into gold. This suspension will be reintroduced following the 1929 crisis until the dollar, the Bretton Woods agreements of 1944, is the only currency still linked to gold and the other currencies are defined in relation to the dollar.

7 . The phenomenon, peculiar to the historical period of decadence of capitalism, budget deficits, indebtedness, then depreciation of the currency against gold in an attempt to settle the former, arose during the First World War and for its needs, and developed throughout the 20th century, relaunched by the 1929 crisis, accelerated for the needs of the Second World War, then became permanent, and finally increased tenfold from the end of the period of reconstruction, at the end of 1960-early 1970, until its current explosion.

productive capital, which is causing capital to flee more and more from the sphere of production to the increasingly speculative sphere of financial products and investments of all kinds and ... in particular on the debt market. Today, as an expression of the impasse, debt feeds debt. As the 2008 Nobel laureate Paul Krugman says, "*the 2008 financial crisis and the sluggish recovery that followed (...) demonstrated both that economic depressions are no time to obsess over debt and that slashing spending in the face of mass unemployment is a terrible mistake*"<sup>8</sup>. In short, the result is that credit, originally a factor in accelerating the movement of goods and the accumulation of capital, has become a factor in slowing down and braking or even an obstacle, because of the excessive burden of debt and its magnitude on companies and states. Credit is no longer at the service of capitalist production, but capitalist production has put itself at the service of credit and debt in order to avoid sudden collapse.

### **The Ruling Class Wants To Make The Proletariat Pay The Bill... And Impose War On It.**

The ever-widening gap between the value of the world's production of goods and the issuance of paper money and debt must, sooner or later, be bridged in some way. Therefore, capital can only make the international proletariat bear the cost of the bill if it wants to keep its system afloat as a minimum. But this will not be enough to resolve its fundamental contradiction at the source of the existing gap. Having more forces and means of production than its social relations can absorb, capitalism is forced to make the surplus disappear and this can only be done, because of its dimension, at the price of a massive destruction of value, i.e. of capital and labour, concretely only at the price of a generalized imperialist war. As in 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, but on an even broader and deeper scale. More destructive.

And this is where crisis and imperialist war combine to exacerbate antagonisms and class struggle. The bourgeoisie has no other choice, whether its capitalist leaders and governments are aware of it or not, than to present at the same time the bill of the crisis and the bill of the sacrifices necessary for the march to war, first of all those indispensable to privilege and develop the arms race, the production linked to it and militarism. From economic, the question becomes political. Its solution depends on the balance of power between classes, on the capacity of the bourgeoisie to subjugate the

proletariat, mainly at the political and ideological levels. For force and repression are not enough, and may even accelerate proletarian anger and conscience against the state.

### **The United States, Epicenter Of The Bourgeois Offensive**

It is exactly at this point in the historical course that we find ourselves. The capitalist ruling class is forced, pressed all the more by the economic catastrophe that is exploding today, to engage in massive confrontations against the entire proletariat. Recuperating and using legitimate emotion, anger and revolt in the face of the serial murders of blacks, but also whites, reds and yellows – since the category "skin colour" is imposed on us – it has launched its first large-scale offensive in the United States. It is there that the epicenter of the evolution of the relation of forces between the classes is now.

Colour and gender identity or *class identity*? The two are irreconcilable and opposed. The first denies and excludes the second. The first, which appeals so much to the petty-bourgeois students on university campuses, especially in the United States, is bourgeois, and its fate is the division and bloody defeat of the proletariat. Immediately, it diverts the exploited class from defending its living conditions in the face of the explosion of the crisis. The second is proletarian and its future is the unity of the proletariat and the exercise of its class dictatorship, i.e. the destruction of capitalism. It alone shows the way to the immediate response to the crisis. It is up to the proletarians of all countries not to allow themselves to be dragged behind democratic campaigns, whether in the name of any colour identity or otherwise, which can only divide them, subject them even more to capitalist exploitation and lead them to bloody defeats. It is up to the communist groups to make no concessions to this identity ideology spread by the forces of the left, by the leftists and anarchists, if they want to work positively for the workers' struggles that are bound to break out in the face of the exploding crisis, for the historical struggle of the proletariat and the real regroupment, that is to say in political clarity, of revolutionaries and for the constitution of the world party of the proletariat.

The slogans of the hour? No to sacrifices! No to identitarianism, and to divisions based on skin colour and sex! Yes to proletarian class struggle! Yes to class *identity* and unity in the struggle against capital!

September 10<sup>th</sup> 2020

<sup>8</sup> . *New York Times*, Coming Next: The Greater Recession, July 14<sup>th</sup> 2020.

## International Situation

*The communiqué on anti-racist demonstrations in the United States, dated 5 June 2020, is a position we have taken together with the comrades of the Gulf Coast Communist Fraction. The article that follows it, written at the end of August, is a statement on our part on the political and international significance of the events and especially of the anti-racist campaign that followed them just a few days after the spontaneous explosion of the first street demonstrations following the assassination of G. Floyd.*

*Our willingness to issue a joint statement with the GCCF is based on the process of discussion, debate and political confrontation that we have been engaged in with the comrades for almost two years, on the political clarifications and agreements on principled positions that we have reached so far. Without prejudging the continuation of the process of political clarification and rapprochement, or even regrouping, the degree of political homogeneity we have achieved thus allows us to adopt common public political positions with the greatest possible clarity.*

### **Anti-Police Brutality Protests in the United States: Political Implications and Perspectives for the Working Class (Joint statement GCCF and IGCL)**

Since the horrific killing of George Floyd by officers of the Minneapolis police department, there have been protests in over one hundred cities in the United States. The people in these protests are rightfully outraged by this murder, which is the latest in a series of similar incidents. Adding to the outrage, the police in the US have been on a real rampage across the country, targeting looters, as well as brutalizing protesters and passersby. We cannot ignore the social reality of police brutality, nor of widespread anti-black racism, and particularly the latter's function in the history of American capitalism; to do so would mean to be complicit in chauvinism. We must express our solidarity with the victims of police brutality/violence and racist discrimination, while also attempting to highlight the shortcomings of the content and terrain of these struggles from the viewpoint of fighting against the intensification of both the exploitation of the working class as well as of state-repression. As communists, we offer an orientation that is on a working class terrain, the only one that is suitable for combatting capitalist domination and the bigotry that is part of the arsenal of ideological weapons used to maintain it.

Despite the sincere and justified fury in the wake of this brazen murder, as well as the apparent willingness on the part of many of the participants in these protests to physically confront the police, the protests are marked by several important weaknesses that are common to many of the inter-classist popular movements that we have seen over the past two years; primary among these are identitarianism and democratism. Regardless of these features, the political vanguard of the working class cannot ignore the reality of these protests just because they are not "pure" proletarian struggle. We must strive to provide a materialist explanation and draw the

correct orientations for the international working class. Important to note that the significance of these events extends well beyond the borders of the US. Already before the pandemic, many social revolts as well as working class mobilizations were developing worldwide that were repressed by riot police. Today, with the general economic crisis, we are in a period of massive class confrontations and social revolts; and the protests in the US are also part of this new world situation that capitalism is throwing us all in.

#### **The social role of the police**

The universal social role of the police is fundamentally to act as the guarantor of capitalist domination, rather than a vehicle for white supremacy, or racial supremacy in general; this leads us to conclude that acting upon the slogan raised by the protesters to "abolish the police" requires the abolition of the capitalist state as a whole. This, in turn, implies that the working class would seize political power and exercise its dictatorship over society. The alternative view, that police are fundamentally an instrument of white supremacy, leads straight to the conclusion that having black people in positions of power would be sufficient to change the character of police, which clearly has not been the case, as is evident from Obama's presidency. Many proponents of these trends of 'radical race politics' or black identitarianism will rebuke our position by asserting that they don't believe simply putting black individuals in positions of power will eliminate white supremacy, because their conception accounts for black individuals who are complicit in white supremacy; they may continue that they are only emphasizing how this system of oppression distinct from capitalism itself uniquely affects black workers. However, to divide the working class into a front of

particular identities with different interests is just the first step that inevitably leads to uniting with factions of the capitalist class on the basis of racial identity<sup>9</sup>. Ultimately, by leaving capitalist power intact, we would not be abolishing the police; we would merely be rebranding it, for example by giving it a democratic veneer.

It is informative, therefore, that one of the orientations that has prominently been put forward by the capitalist-left is that of an elected community board to oversee policing, or even replacing the police with a different bureaucratic-body that materially serves the same purpose but with a more “therapeutic” image. In practice, these boards would most likely be filled by former cops and the local petty bourgeoisie. In the same way that the right of individuals to vote for public officials does not do away with capitalist domination, neither would the right to vote for members of a community oversight board do away with the social role of police under capitalism, which is to enforce capitalist property relations.

### **The harmful effects of lumpenization and looting on working class consciousness**

When we speak of lumpenization, we refer to the process that has led many into the domain of petty crime, hustling, drug-dealing, prostitution, and other socially-useless activities; this is in great part a consequence of the large-scale de-industrialization of cities like Detroit. The tragedy is that this consequence of capitalist crisis makes the development of class consciousness more difficult and therefore makes it harder to fight against the very process that created this undesirable social phenomenon in the first place.

A typical activity of the lumpenproletariat in periods of unrest is looting, which has been a feature of the ongoing protests/revolt, due to its inter-classist character. Communists oppose looting, which is a

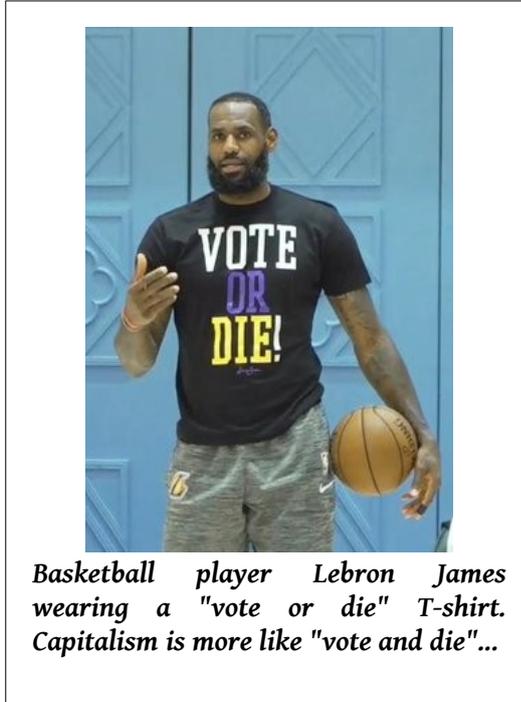
complete affirmation of capitalist logic, namely private/individual appropriation and destruction of productive-forces. To give one example, the destruction of large retail stores is totally alien to the interests of the workers, because it makes the infrastructure useless for any possible appropriation

by a collective body of workers, and enables a new round of exploitation of labor in the context of rebuilding in the aftermath of the destruction. In this regard, it has a similar effect as imperialist war; physical destruction of dead labor (factories, stores, infrastructure) enabling a new round of exploitation of living labor, which is the source of value in our society.

*“Modern capital, which needs consumers as it needs to produce ever more, has a great interest in letting the products of dead labor fall into disuse as soon as possible so as to impose their renewal with living labor, the only type from which it “sucks” profit. That is why it is in seventh heaven when war breaks out and that is why it*

*is so well trained for the practice of disasters. ... To exploit living labor, capital must destroy dead labor which is still useful.” (Murder of the Dead, Bordiga 1951).*

Some ultra-leftists have pointed to footage circulating the internet that depicts a mutual-aid setup appearing to freely-distribute goods salvaged from the looted shop, to prove that looting is a communist measure that produces class solidarity. However, though not bad in itself, activists salvaging debris from wreckage for redistribution does not demonstrate looting to be a proletarian act<sup>10</sup>. The looting can be said to have produced the mutual-aid setup in the same way a natural disaster could potentially produce mutual-aid in reaction, and those engaged in the setup must waste a lot of time cleaning up after the looters, taking safety precautions due to broken glass, leaks, exposed wires, and scraping together what may be left behind for distribution. Looting is clearly not part of the spectrum of workers’ struggle; it is completely opposed to it. Whether workers dissolve themselves into looting, or enlist



**Basketball player LeBron James wearing a "vote or die" T-shirt. Capitalism is more like "vote and die"...**

<sup>9</sup> . “To divide the class - and its vanguard - into identities; ethnic groups, types of workers with differentiated and even conflicting interests, is essentially no different from a call to join the army or a national movement to massacre the workers "of" another bourgeoisie.” - Emancipation <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2018-12-05/the-class-party-in-the-light-of-the-struggles-in-iran>

<sup>10</sup> . <https://twitter.com/sophnar0747/status/1266178599079510016?s=21>, <https://twitter.com/robertklemko/status/126686519989967488?s=12>

themselves in shop-keeper militias, they are being mobilized as cannon fodder for a battle between two opposing factions of the petty bourgeoisie (as the lumpenproletariat are, after all, merely the 'illegal' section of the petty bourgeoisie).

This episode is also a teaching opportunity to show the blatantly reactionary role played by anarchism and the adjacent theory of communization, the ideologies of the petty bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat. While anarchists and communizers promote looting and see in it de-commodification one commodity at a time (as if capitalism isn't a totalizing system), we reject it and see it for what it is: zero-price-imposed individual appropriation with no regard to the collective needs of the working class. What Rosa Luxemburg wrote on anarchism in the 1905 Russian Revolution still rings true today:

*"...what is the actual role of anarchism in the Russian Revolution? It has become the sign of the common thief and plunderer; a large proportion of the innumerable thefts and acts of plunder of private persons are carried out under the name of "anarchist-communism" - acts which rise up like a troubled wave against the revolution in every period of depression and in every period of temporary defensive. Anarchism has become in the Russian Revolution, not the theory of the struggling proletariat, but the ideological signboard of the counter-revolutionary lumpenproletariat, who, like a school of sharks, swarm in the wake of the battleship of the revolution." (Mass Strike, Rosa Luxemburg 1906).*

The ahistorical and idealist method of anarchism is irreconcilable with the materialist one that we use. Our method consists in analyzing the dynamic balance of forces between the classes, which enables us to provide orientations that correspond to the potentialities of the present moment.

### **The tasks of the working class and its vanguards**

Those groups on the Left that are merely glorifying the protests without pointing out its shortcomings are ultimately playing into the hands of the capitalist class in the US, specifically the Democratic Party. If this continues to be disorganized violence on an inter-classist terrain oriented around the single issue of police brutality, rather than the organized and conscious violence of the working class affirming its own collective interests, it could lead to the proletariat being provoked into a confrontation in which it lacks the indispensable political tools to effectively struggle against the state. This threatens to result in a bloodbath and mark a decisive step on the march towards generalized imperialist war with major consequences for the proletariat, not just in the US but worldwide.

We should not shy away from demonstrating the utterly reactionary character of organizations like Black Lives Matter, which aims to mobilize black workers behind the capitalist state and on a completely identitarian basis. In fact, two of their stated goals are to "vigorously engage our communities in the electoral process" and to "promote voter registration among Generation Z, the Black community, and our allies"<sup>11</sup>. The practical effect of BLM's activity is to strengthen the Democratic Party establishment and to disseminate the ideological poison of racial identitarianism, which has been one of the pillars of the Democratic Party strategy in recent years.

Black Lives Matter and the various activist-machines of the Democratic Party will only channel an anti-racist revolt against police-violence into an impotent petty-bourgeois terrain of consumer boycotts and cultural-representation, reinforcing a project for black business-owners/managers to gain the exclusive-right to exploit black workers, and for black professional-mangers (corporate petty-bourgeois) to wield their identity as leverage when competing with their white counterparts for salaried-positions in the corporate/state-bureaucracy. This is the petty bourgeois version of "anti-racism". In addition to reducing the justified anger against the repressive-apparatus to a struggle for "representation", there is also the prospect of the capitalist class simply substituting the old discriminatory strategy with ones that justify intensifying the exploitation of workers, especially rural workers, designated as 'racist' or 'backwards' by progressive-multicultural corporate-functionaries. Both Republican and Democratic factions of the American bourgeoisie enforce the two inverses of the segregationist/identitarian strategies of division.

These protests have a particular significance in the present context of a crisis of historic scale, and share some features with other recent revolts like the Yellow Vests or Chile 2019. At the time of writing, the unemployment rate in the US is approaching 25%, with more than 40 million Americans having applied for unemployment insurance. By adopting a dismissive approach to these and other inter-classist movements, the vanguard would be ceding the terrain to the reactionary, identitarian, and bourgeois orientations that are already present. However, to provide the correct orientations, it is not enough to merely repeat the talking points of the bourgeois critics of police brutality; we must challenge these critics and contest their leadership in order to lead workers onto an explicitly proletarian terrain. The task is to encourage mobilized workers to pass from

11 . <https://blacklivesmatter.com/blms-whatmatters2020-goals-and-focus/>.

riots to the mass strike organized by general workers' assemblies that resist police-repression/violence and racial discrimination on a unified-class basis. We see some tendencies towards this in New York and Minneapolis bus-drivers refusing to transport arrested protesters, and in Ohio food service workers refusing to fulfill orders for police<sup>(a)</sup>. The orientations that are characteristic of the proletarian terrain in the present period are **class solidarity without separation by race, an affirmation of workers' needs, refusal to work in unsafe conditions, seeking to connect with the wave of wild-**

**cat strikes that have spread in different parts of the world, and refusal to pay the price of the crisis by working more for less.**

We call on all workers and those who defend the communist program who want to really struggle against capitalism to gather around these proletarian orientations and the groups of the international Communist Left that put them forward.

IGCL/GCCF, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Note a : <https://www.theroot.com/minneapolis-and-new-york-bus-drivers-stand-up-to-cops-1843776847> and <https://www.foxnews.com/food-drink/ohio-taco-shop-controversy-cop-order-employee-walk-out>.

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### **America: The False Opposition Between Racism and Anti-Racism and the Threat it Poses for the International Proletariat**

**W**e are witnessing a dangerous dynamic developing in the events in the United States. State terror has not been interrupted, far from it. People continue to be killed and maimed by police in blatant instances of excessive force. A recent outrage was the shooting in Kenosha, Wisconsin of a black man in front of his three children, which led to his paralysis from the waist down. Following the killing of G. Floyd by police in May, a widespread protest emerged whose geographic spread peaked in early June<sup>12</sup>. In Portland, Oregon protests have continued unabated since May. The Trump administration, after failing in its bid to deploy the US armed forces to repress the protests, has deployed federal agents to Portland, where these agents, apparently dressed in camouflage but bearing no insignia, have been arresting protesters without reading them their Miranda rights, in a clear intimidation exercise. These federal agents are supported by armed far right groups, which have basically received verbal support from Trump. People have been killed in clashes between protesters and right wing militiamen. A 17 year old Trump supporter and member of the far right militia Patriot Prayer shot and killed two protesters, wounding a third. More recently a member of Patriot Prayer was shot and killed.

These developments unfortunately give weight to the warning in our previous statement<sup>13</sup> with the GCCF about the danger that combative sections of the working class could be drawn into a bloody confrontation in the false opposition between

fascism and anti-fascism or racism and anti-racism, etc, which threatens to sabotage a proletarian response to the crisis of capitalism and the attacks on workers' living conditions that go with it. The working class is faced with lay-offs, reduced wages, worsening working conditions, mass evictions, all exacerbated by the raging pandemic, which in the US alone threatens to kill 400,000 by January<sup>14</sup>.

There has been the emergence of an "autonomous zone" free of police, the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ), in Seattle, Washington. In this autonomous zone, equal parts protest and cultural festival, an experiment in prefigurative politics was attempted with participants engaging in self-policing and community gardening, among other activities. Additionally, photos emerged of white protesters enforcing a racially segregated safe space for black people, in a striking example of *progressive* (sic) racial segregation. There is certainly a connecting thread between this racially segregated "safe zone" in the CHAZ, the farcical poster<sup>15</sup> put out (and later retracted after a backlash) by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture about a supposed "white culture", and the mandatory racially segregated workplace sensitivity training sessions in the US; all three have the objective effect of undermining solidarity based on class and substituting it with class collaboration. The CHAZ ended tragically when an armed protester acting as security for the protest killed two black teenagers in a case of mistaken identity. After this, the occupied protest was disbanded and the participants were no doubt

12 . <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>  
13 . <http://igcl.org/Anti-police-brutality-protests-in>.

14 . <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-united-states-coronavirus-deaths-projection-400000-by-end-of-year/>  
15 . <https://www.newsweek.com/smithsonian-race-guidelines-rational-thinking-hard-work-are-white-values-1518333>

demoralized that a protest set up to denounce police violence against black Americans would end with two innocent black teenagers shot and killed.

It is highly instructive to consider the scale and composition of the protests. According to a poll from a company that works with Democratic campaigns, Civis Analytics, 23 million people (9% of the total US population) participated in the protests until late June. The same poll found that the plurality of people participating were under the age of 35 and the most common income group were people earning more than \$150,000 per year<sup>16</sup>, roughly 2.5-fold greater than the median income in the US. This provides clues as to the target audience of Robin DiAngelo's book *White Fragility*, which argues that "progressive" white Americans benefit from and actively participate in systemic racism, and which is #2 on the *New York Times* Best seller list in the paperback non-fiction category at the time of writing. So what are the implications of these protests for the working class in the US and worldwide?



**Black militiamen of the NFAC (Not Fucking Around Coalition, sic!)**...

(Source photo newsthud.com)

In the time since the publication of our joint statement with the GCCF on the anti-police brutality protests in the United States, events have confirmed the active and reactionary role played by identitarianism and anarchism in the social struggles in North America. Despite being late in relation to the events on the ground – by the time we published our statement the co-option by the left of capital was already well underway – the statement had the merit of providing orientations that encouraged proletarians drawn to these protests to struggle on their own terrain and of warning that left identitarianism would be leveraged by the Democratic faction of the US ruling class. Below we will attempt to clarify our position on the ongoing events and respond to some criticisms we have received from comrades as well as from others

16 . Idem (NYT)

who occupy what we refer to as the "swamp" between leftism and the revolutionary milieu.

### **Bourgeois ideology and ideological campaigns**

Despite the confused and inter-classist character of the early protests, as well as the evidently sterile terrain on which they have ultimately settled, it is indisputable that they initially represented a spontaneous and popular revolt against decades of state terror. To argue, as some have in unpublished comments, that the events were entirely reducible to a bourgeois ideological campaign from the first day is to approach a truly conspiratorial view of the extent of ruling class control. On the other hand, we are aware that, despite the police being a repressive apparatus of the state whose role is to maintain a system of class domination, the terrain on which a response to police violence occurs matters. It is clear that the ruling class, particularly its left fractions, from the Democrat Party, to its hangers on such as *Black Lives Matter* and the radical leftists and anarchists, reacted rapidly and succeeded in imposing a bourgeois democratic terrain and a campaign focused on "defunding the police" and polarizing social antagonisms around the axis of race. Understanding that it would be impossible to abolish the police without abolishing the social relations that produce the necessity of its existence means that we can see through the mystified solutions offered by identitarianism, and we can see that only the proletariat can seriously challenge the state and its repressive apparatuses.



**... and white people marching and facing each other in the streets of American cities. They are all armed with machine guns and provoke each other in front of and with the consent of the police and the state.**

(Source photo stormfront.org)

A development during the CHAZ that was consistent with the argument in our previous statement that police cannot be abolished within the horizon of capitalism, only rebranded, was the hiring of the private security firms such as Fortress Security by

business owners in Seattle. According to a co-owner of one of these firms, the services of the company, whose employees largely have military and police backgrounds, were in high demand during the protest<sup>17</sup>. If the demand of the occupied protest that Seattle police funding be cut by 50% was granted presumably the market for these security firms would have expanded considerably in the city.

What has characterized many of the movements in recent days, in North America and elsewhere, has been the absence of the proletariat acting as an independent political subject. This would be expressed in its most mature form in the existence of a political vanguard of the working class actively intervening in working class struggles and able to effectively fight for an alternative through not only warning against the danger of letting the proletarians be dragged behind the bourgeois and leftist formations of the state, but also and above all calling on the proletarians to develop their own struggle as proletarians and not “Americans or black people”. A proletarian terrain alone can provide a clear and efficient response to the massive state repression and police killings. Neither has the proletariat been able to minimally defend its conditions of work and life except on a few occasions. It should not surprise us then that this vacuum, both in terms of proletarian political leadership by a political vanguard and the leadership of social struggles by the proletariat, has favoured the co-option of popular revolts against state repression by bourgeois factions and by leftism. Without the leadership of popular revolts by the proletariat, what is bound to occur is exactly what we have seen: symbolic protests by a minority of leftist iconoclasts, concerned above all with aesthetic, and either indifferent (if we are being charitable) or openly hostile to the working class as such. These iconoclasts’ activity consists in seeking to engage in street battles with armed proto-fascist militias and toppling statues, including of the leaders of the world’s second bourgeois revolution<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, we believe that there was a window of opportunity – early on in the protests when food service workers and bus drivers, for example, refused to comply with police – during which the proletarians drawn to the popular revolt could have been incited to move onto an explicitly proletarian terrain of strikes and class-wide demands, thereby

favouring the generalization of the struggle on a massive scale. By now, the potential of such an evolution has been definitively exhausted.

The absence of any significant movement of the proletarian class as such and any effective political vanguard means that the “default ideas” under capitalism – bourgeois ideology – are bound to bubble up and become prominent. The status of bourgeois ideology in its various forms as the “common sense” of the epoch does not fundamentally depend on the waging of ideological campaigns. Rather, ideology is a consequence of the reification of capitalist relations, the appearance of relations between people as relations between things. Because of this character of ideology, to claim that the task of the revolutionary vanguard is simply to clear away the mystification that obscures our view of reality is to severely restrict the scope of activity of the revolutionary vanguard and to divert it from its primary task, which is to become the effective leadership of the working class in struggle by providing orientations that correspond both to the immediate objective requirements of the struggle and the historic interests of the class. In situations of explosive class struggle, the bearers of the revolutionary orientations, eventually Party militants, must assume leadership of the organs set up by the working class to coordinate its struggle and eventually to exercise its class power. The working class will not “spontaneously” supersede capitalism if only its illusions were shattered because its illusions are, to a great extent, a spontaneous product of reification.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider that bourgeois ideological campaigns do not occur or are not significant. Here it is important to note that the class struggle is not merely to be understood as the working class struggle, but as the struggle between the classes. The ruling class also wages class war against the proletariat. To this end it relies on the repressive apparatuses of the state, the police and judiciary for example, but its arsenal also includes more subtle weapons, notably the ideological apparatuses (e.g. the mass media, the educational system, etc) and the leftist political formations that lead the proletarians into various traps. That is exactly what the US ruling class and its state apparatus is developing today against the proletariat, squeezing it from the left, the anti-racist Democratic Party, and from the right behind Trump, who presents himself as the defender of law and order, serving as a useful tool due to his provocative language and actions.

17 . <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/local-business/more-businesses-fearing-property-damage-hire-private-security-guards-in-wake-of-protests/>

18 . According to a revision of history now in vogue among the identitarian left in the US, the American Revolution would have had no progressive character whatsoever.

## The role and character of contemporary leftism in North America

The forms of leftism that we are confronted with today on this continent are anarchism and identitarianism. Maoism and Stalinism are simply not relevant anymore and even the political formations that formally adhere to the ML and MLM traditions have fully taken identitarianism (intersectionality, privilege theory) on board<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, we are disturbed to see the extent to which important groups of the Communist Left are adapting themselves to this new trend and flirting with anarchist and identitarian positions rather than clearly denouncing these formations and this identitarian trend as the concrete means by which the more combative section of the proletariat could be led into a dead-end or provoked into a bloody confrontation in the false dichotomy between fascism and anti-fascism, racism-antiracism, etc. We see, for example, the ICC reaffirming its previous distinction between “official” and “unofficial” anarchism, the latter being supposedly revolutionary<sup>20</sup>, and we have also seen the ICT defend the position that there is no fundamental, that is to say *class*, distinction between anarchism and Marxism, both of these traditions supposedly having revolutionary and counterrevolutionary currents<sup>21</sup>. This latter position opens the door to the conception that radical liberalism (aka anarchism) is today part of the working class movement and that Stalinism is an evolution of Marxism rather than its complete negation and betrayal.

To see the adeptness with which the Democratic and left factions of the US bourgeoisie are adapting and nurturing this identitarian trend for their own ends,

one can refer to Obama’s eulogy to the late John Lewis, former member of the US House of Representatives. Here he argued that “*ordinary people without wealth (...) can come together and overcome injustice*”, and he appealed to people to vote as one of the necessary conditions for nurturing democracy. There would be, according to him, an organic continuity between civil disobedience and elections. Recall that one of the stated objectives of the organization *Black Lives Matter* is to induce people of colour to vote. This leveraging of identitarianism is not a particularly new development either. During her 2016 election campaign, Hillary Clinton argued that systemic racism is at the very centre of the issues that combined to create the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. The lack of running water suitable for human consumption in Flint would be due to systemic racism rather than the structural crisis that has been ravaging global capitalism since the 1970s and that has been accompanied by militarism as well as erosion of living standards and infrastructure. We should fully expect that the Biden-Harris campaign will draw from the same identitarian playbook.

Moreover, the degree of sincerity of leftist militants, and their *apparent* radicalism, is proportional to the extent to which they are able to derail the proletariat, because what ultimately counts is not the sincerity of the individual militants but the objective effects of their politics put into practice. One of the objective effects of these politics may just turn out to be increased racial sectarianism. We are seeing mandatory racially segregated workplace sensitivity training in the US and various corporations – including McDonald’s, Amazon, H&M, and Levis, to name the best known – marketing themselves as socially responsible and racially aware by promoting BLM<sup>22</sup>. In the hands of the Democratic Party establishment and the corporate elites however this campaign would have little traction if it were not for the radical liberal identitarians (Antifa and BLM) that have the necessary credibility, due largely to the doubtless sincerity of their militants, to effectively occupy the terrain of struggle.

The danger some fail to see is left identitarians rallying proletarians onto a false terrain only to be smashed by the hammer of the federal intervention in conjunction with the right-wing militias. Later, perhaps under a Democratic administration, a series of laws “seeking to remedy racial inequality” is passed and a victory for progress is declared. A demoralizing defeat could have historical and international significance because of the

19 . As for Trotskyism, WSWS for example, has been somewhat of an exception in regard to the identitarian campaigns waged by the bourgeoisie, in that it wrote extensively to denounce them. This does not change its counterrevolutionary character, however, as evidenced by its thinly veiled support for Russian imperialism.

20 . “Ten years ago we wrote about internationalist anarchism. And we defended the internationalist tendencies within anarchism as an expression of proletarian internationalism.” And later on they quote the text from ten years ago: “a part of [the anarchist] milieu has sincerely aspired to the revolution and socialism, expressing a real will to finish with capitalism and exploitation.” (ICC, <https://en.internationalism.org/content/16885/acg-rejects-identity-politics-accepts-democratic-secular-state-israel>)

21 . “The real divide is not so much between Marxism and Anarchism per se, but between those revolutionaries who see a future as a cooperative collective one without classes and without a state and those who claim the title of Marxist or Anarchist but either defend a distorted version of capitalism, or are quite happy to pursue a lifestyle within it without challenging the bases of the state or class rule” (ICT, *Marxism and Anarchism*, <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2013-11-09/marxism-and-anarchism>).

22 . <https://www.businessinsider.com/mcdonalds-amazon-hm-donate-millions-to-black-lives-matter-movement-2020-6>

fundamental importance of the proletariat in the US in opposing the drive to generalized imperialist war by the US bourgeoisie. If combative sections of the US working class, which could otherwise go on to form the "factory vanguard" for example, were to be crushed on a false terrain and divided along racial lines, this could render any subsequent opposition to US imperialism's war drive inside the US itself, through strikes in sectors strategic for the war economy, far more difficult. It could impose a new balance of forces that would tend towards the resolution of the historical dilemma in favour of generalized imperialist war. To avoid this, the working class must mobilize on its own terrain because this way it can produce a mass struggle that directly threatens the fundamental basis of capitalist society, commodity production, and in the political domain ultimately poses the need for the exercise of state power by the proletarian dictatorship. In the struggles, the political vanguard of the working class must be clear in denouncing the insidious role of identitarianism and anarchism in derailing the proletariat and potentially leading it into impasses.

### **Concluding remarks**

The reproach that we spend too much time and effort demonstrating the reactionary character of leftism misses the crucial point that these are the ideologies with which the proletariat is confronted. The most significant false friend today is not Cold War era leftism, USSR defencism being obsolete, but precisely identitarianism and anarchism, the present bourgeois forms that aim to bring the proletariat behind the democratic mystification and the state, whatever the intentions of individual leftist militants. Today in the US this goes to the point of bringing the whole focus onto the Presidential campaign, the democratic terrain, for and against the "fascist Trump", to encourage everyone to vote. The above criticism of us also misses the point that the struggles, whether more or less explicitly proletarian or inter-classist ("popular"), whether in the streets or in the workplaces, regardless of their different natures and dynamics, are politically contested spaces in which the communist organizations and the Party should intervene to defend the historical class perspectives. As noted above, the terrain of class struggle is a decisive factor. The issue of the dynamic of class struggle cannot simply be reduced to a question of political leadership, even though this political leadership is ultimately a *sine qua non* of social revolution. The communist political organizations cannot change the class terrain of a mobilization by sheer force of will. We cannot change an identitarian

mobilization into a proletarian one, in the same way that it would be impossible to transform a nationalist movement into a proletarian mobilization.

There is a dialectical relationship between the objective historical situation and the subjective factor that is expressed in the struggles of the proletariat and the activity of the revolutionary vanguards. The influence of the latter on the proletariat is not simply a function of their numerical strength, but also of the correctness of the orientations put forward, the terrain on which the workers are mobilizing, as well as the objective historical context in which they act. Depending on the dynamics of the class struggle, on whether the bourgeoisie is forced by the crisis of capitalism to intensify exploitation (as it is now) or if there is a relative period of prosperity, if there is unfolding a natural or man-made disaster that the ruling class is responding to in a criminally negligent, incompetent, or callous way (as is the case currently), and a slew of other factors, not least of which are initiatives taken by the ruling class, the intervention of revolutionaries will be more or less influential on the course of events.

The aggressive and provocative policy of the US ruling class – through the use of the violence and identitarianism – represents a crucial battle in the period of massive class confrontations in which we now are. Instead of waiting for the proletariat to respond on its own class terrain to the capitalist economic crisis that the pandemic has made so sudden and brutal, it has seized the opportunity of the recent police murders of black people to take the political and ideological initiative to bring the inescapable social revolts and unrest onto its terrain of democracy/authoritarianism, racism/anti-racism, white privilege/black oppression, etc. In this first battle, whose political stakes go far beyond the US situation, the role of revolutionary forces is already a crucial point for the future and for the outcome of the massive international class confrontations that are developing.

Before we can seriously contemplate becoming an *effective vanguard*, a vanguard recognized as such by the workers in struggle and that is able to exert a *decisive* influence on the course of events, we have to achieve a principled unity among revolutionaries that can only be accomplished through a process of clarification of the objective historical interests of the proletariat and through a concurrent decantation of the revolutionary elements, which will go on to form the class Party, from the leftist and idealist swamp.

Stavros, September 7th, 2020

## The Real Fight against Racism is the Fight against Capitalism

We reproduce below a text by Lenin on the attitude of revolutionaries towards religion. The reader will be surprised to find a historical text, which should be in the "Texts of the Workers' Movement" section of our journal; just after our position on the anti-racist demonstrations in the US and in the world; just after our denunciation of the political and ideological recuperation of these demonstrations when they were not directly organized by the bourgeois forces of the left and of leftism, and of the anti-racist and democratic campaign to which these demonstrations very quickly gave rise. To aid understanding, we invite the reader who doubts our position on the question of racism and anti-racism, a modern and particular version of the false, because on the bourgeois terrain, opposition between fascism and anti-fascism, dictatorship-democracy, to substitute the words "religion" by "racism", "atheism" by "anti-racism", and "social-democrat" by "communist", and to reflect seriously on the argumentation and position put forward by Lenin. Needless to say, the same applies to the cohort of those, particularly in North America, who, on discovering it, make claiming the Communist Left the latest fashion and confuse its revolutionary class positions with the radical anarchist phrase and with leftist immediatism. It's up to the historical organizations of the Communist Left to bring them back political modesty, fewer empty phrases or posts, but to more historical reappropriation in connection with the classist struggle of the international proletariat.

We have removed those passages from the article that touched on the specific situation of 1909, in particular when Lenin argued against political opportunism within the then social-democracy on the religious question and atheism as it might have arisen in everyday life at the time, as well as on the situation in Russia at that time. On the other hand, another equally important subject, we have left the last part which illustrates the reality of the Bolshevik fraction at that time, made up of political debates and confrontations within its own bosom, and the declared will to bring its debates to the whole party – the proletarian camp today – and publicly in order to help the real political unity of the party of that time. Our current policy towards the proletarian camp is therefore not an invention. It tries to be in line with the tradition of the workers' movement, and particularly of its left-wing fractions. May all the pro-party forces of today's proletarian camp also be inspired by Lenin on this level.

### The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion (Lenin, 1909, extracts)

(...) Social-Democracy bases its whole world-outlook on scientific socialism, i. e., Marxism. The philosophical basis of Marxism, as Marx and Engels repeatedly declared, is dialectical materialism, which has fully taken over the historical traditions of eighteenth-century materialism in France and of Feuerbach (first half of the nineteenth century) in Germany—a materialism which is absolutely atheistic and positively hostile to all religion. Let us recall that the whole of Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, which Marx read in manuscript, is an indictment of the materialist and atheist Dühring for not being a consistent materialist and for leaving loopholes for religion and religious philosophy. Let us recall that in his essay on Ludwig Feuerbach, Engels reproaches Feuerbach for combating religion not in order to destroy it, but in order to renovate it, to invent a new, "exalted" religion, and so forth. Religion is the opium of the people—this dictum by Marx is the corner-stone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion.<sup>[1]</sup> Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches, and each and every religious organisation, as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class.

At the same time Engels frequently condemned the efforts of people who desired to be "more left" or "more revolutionary" than the Social-Democrats, to

introduce into the programme of the workers' party an explicit proclamation of atheism, in the sense of declaring war on religion. Commenting in 1874 on the famous manifesto of the Blanquist fugitive Communards who were living in exile in London, Engels called their vociferous proclamation of war on religion a piece of stupidity, and stated that such a declaration of war was the best way to revive interest in religion and to prevent it from really dying out. Engels blamed the Blanquists for being unable to understand that only the class struggle of the working masses could, by comprehensively drawing the widest strata of the proletariat into conscious and revolutionary social practice, really free the oppressed masses from the yoke of religion, whereas to proclaim that war on religion was a political task of the workers' party was just anarchistic phrase-mongering.<sup>[2]</sup> And in 1877, too, in his *Anti-Dühring*, while ruthlessly attacking the slightest concessions made by Dühring the philosopher to idealism and religion, Engels no less resolutely condemns Dühring's pseudo-revolutionary idea that religion should be prohibited in socialist society. To declare such a war on religion, Engels says, is to "out-Bismarck Bismarck", i. e., to repeat the folly of Bismarck's struggle against the clericals (the notorious "Struggle for Culture", *Kulturkampf*, i.e., the struggle Bismarck waged in the

1870s against the German Catholic party, the “Centre” party, by means of a police persecution of Catholicism). By this struggle Bismarck only stimulated the militant clericalism of the Catholics, and only injured the work of real culture, because he gave prominence to religious divisions rather than political divisions, and diverted the attention of some sections of the working class and of the other democratic elements away from the urgent tasks of the class and revolutionary struggle to the most superficial and false bourgeois anti-clericalism. Accusing the would-be ultra-revolutionary Dühring of wanting to repeat Bismarck’s folly in another form, Engels insisted that the workers’ party should have the ability to work patiently at the task of organising and educating the proletariat, which would lead to the dying out of religion, and not throw itself into the gamble of a political war on religion.[3] This view has become part of the very essence of German Social-Democracy, which, for example, advocated freedom for the Jesuits, their admission into Germany, and the complete abandonment of police methods of combating any particular religion. “Religion is a private matter”: this celebrated point in the Erfurt Programme (1891) summed up these political tactics of Social-Democracy. (...)

But anybody who is able to treat Marxism at all seriously, to ponder over its philosophical principles and the experience of international Social-Democracy, will readily see that the Marxist tactics in regard to religion are thoroughly consistent, and were carefully thought out by Marx and Engels; and that what dilettantes or ignoramuses regard as wavering is but a direct and inevitable deduction from dialectical materialism. It would be a profound mistake to think that the seeming “moderation” of Marxism in regard to religion is due to supposed “tactical” considerations, the desire “not to scare away” anybody, and so forth. On the contrary, in this question, too, the political line of Marxism is inseparably bound up with its philosophical principles.

Marxism is materialism. As such, it is as relentlessly hostile to religion as was the materialism of the eighteenth-century Encyclopaedists or the materialism of Feuerbach. This is beyond doubt. But the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels goes further than the Encyclopaedists and Feuerbach, for it applies the materialist philosophy to the domain of history, to the domain of the social sciences. We must combat religion—that is the ABC of all materialism, and consequently of Marxism. But Marxism is not a materialism which has stopped at the ABC. Marxism goes further. It says: We must

know how to combat religion, and in order to do so we must explain the source of faith and religion among the masses in a materialist way. The combating of religion cannot be confined to abstract ideological preaching, and it must not be reduced to such preaching. It must be linked up with the concrete practice of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion. Why does religion retain its hold on the backward sections of the town proletariat, on broad sections of the semi-proletariat, and on the mass of the peasantry? Because of the ignorance of the people, replies the bourgeois progressist, the radical or the bourgeois materialist. And so: “Down with religion and long live atheism; the dissemination of atheist views is our chief task!” The Marxist says that this is not true, that it is a superficial view, the view of narrow bourgeois uplifters. It does not explain the roots of religion profoundly enough; it explains them, not in a materialist but in an idealist way. In modern capitalist countries these roots are mainly social. The deepest root of religion today is the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour inflicts upon ordinary working people the most horrible suffering and the most savage torment, a thousand times more severe than those inflicted by extra-ordinary events, such as wars, earthquakes, etc. “Fear made the gods.” Fear of the blind force of capital—blind because it cannot be foreseen by the masses of the people—a force which at every step in the life of the proletarian and small proprietor threatens to inflict, and does inflict “sudden”, “unexpected”, “accidental” ruin, destruction, pauperism, prostitution, death from starvation—such is the root of modern religion which the materialist must bear in mind first and foremost, if he does not want to remain an infant-school materialist. No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of masses who are crushed by capitalist hard labour, and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until those masses themselves learn to fight this root of religion, fight the rule of capital in all its forms, in a united, organised, planned and conscious way.

Does this mean that educational books against religion are harmful or unnecessary? No, nothing of the kind. It means that Social-Democracy’s atheist propaganda must be subordinated to its basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited masses against the exploiters.

This proposition may not be understood (or at least not immediately understood) by one who has not pondered over the principles of dialectical

materialism, i. e., the philosophy of Marx and Engels. How is that?—he will say. Is ideological propaganda, the preaching of definite ideas, the struggle against that enemy of culture and progress which has persisted for thousands of years (i. e., religion) to be subordinated to the class struggle, i. e., the struggle for definite practical aims in the economic and political field?

This is one of those current objections to Marxism which testify to a complete misunderstanding of Marxian dialectics. The contradiction which perplexes these objectors is a real contradiction in real life, i. e., a dialectical contradiction, and not a verbal or invented one. To draw a hard-and-fast line between the theoretical propaganda of atheism, i. e., the destruction of religious beliefs among certain sections of the proletariat, and the success, the progress and the conditions of the class struggle of these sections, is to reason undialectically, to transform a shifting and relative boundary into an absolute boundary; it is forcibly to disconnect what is indissolubly connected in real life. Let us take an example. The proletariat in a particular region and in a particular industry is divided, let us assume, into an advanced section of fairly class-conscious Social-Democrats, who are of course atheists, and rather backward workers who are still connected with the countryside and with the peasantry, and who believe in God, go to church, or are even under the direct influence of the local priest—who, let us suppose, is organising a Christian labour union. Let us assume furthermore that the economic struggle in this locality has resulted in a strike. It is the duty of a Marxist to place the success of the strike movement above everything else, vigorously to counteract the division of the workers in this struggle into atheists and Christians, vigorously to oppose any such division. Atheist propaganda in such circumstances may be both unnecessary and harmful—not from the philistine fear of scaring away the backward sections, of losing a seat in the elections, and so on, but out of consideration for the real progress of the class struggle, which in the conditions of modern capitalist society will convert Christian workers to Social-Democracy and to atheism a hundred times better than bald atheist propaganda. To preach atheism at such a moment and in such circumstances would only be playing *into the hands* of the priest and the priests, who desire nothing better than that the division of the workers according to their participation in the strike movement should be replaced by their division according to their belief in God. An anarchist who preached war against God at all costs would in effect be helping the priests and the

bourgeoisie (as the anarchists always do help the bourgeoisie *in practice*). A Marxist must be a materialist, i. e., an enemy of religion, but a dialectical materialist, i. e., one who treats the struggle against religion not in an abstract way, not on the basis of remote, purely theoretical, never varying preaching, but in a concrete way, on the basis of the class struggle which is going on *in practice* and is educating the masses more and better than anything else could. A Marxist must be able to view the concrete situation as a whole, he must always be able to find the boundary between anarchism and opportunism (this boundary is relative, shifting and changeable, but it exists). And he must not succumb either to the abstract, verbal, but in reality empty “revolutionism” of the anarchist, or to the philistinism and opportunism of the petty bourgeois or liberal intellectual, who boggles at the struggle against religion, forgets that this is his duty, reconciles himself to belief in God, and is guided not by the interests of the class struggle but by the petty and mean consideration of offending nobody, repelling nobody and scaring nobody—by the sage rule: “live and let live”, etc., etc.

It is from this angle that all side issues bearing on the attitude of Social-Democrats to religion should be dealt with. (...)

On the other hand, the tradition of bourgeois war on religion has given rise in Europe to a specifically bourgeois *distortion* of this war by anarchism—which, as the Marxists have long explained time and again, takes its stand on the bourgeois world-outlook, in spite of all the “fury” of its attacks on the bourgeoisie. The anarchists and Blanquists in the Latin countries, Most (who, incidentally, was a pupil of Dühring) and his ilk in Germany, the anarchists in Austria in the eighties, all carried revolutionary phrase-mongering in the struggle against religion to a *nec plus ultra*. (...)

Secondly, in the West, *after* the national bourgeois revolutions were over, *after* more or less complete religious liberty had been introduced, the problem of the democratic struggle against religion had been pushed, historically, so far into the background by the struggle of bourgeois democracy against socialism that the bourgeois governments *deliberately* tried to draw the attention of the masses away from socialism by organising a quasi-liberal “offensive” against clericalism. Such was the character of the *Kulturkampf* in Germany and of the struggle of the bourgeois republicans against clericalism in France. Bourgeois anti-clericalism, as a means of drawing the attention of the working-class masses away from socialism—this is what preceded the spread of the modern spirit of “indifference” to

the struggle against religion among the Social-Democrats in the West. And this again is quite understandable and legitimate, because Social-Democrats had to counteract bourgeois and Bismarckian anti-clericalism by *subordinating* the struggle against religion to the struggle for socialism.

(...) The discussion in the Duma group shows that the dispute about atheism has screened from it the question of the proper interpretation of the celebrated demand that religion should be proclaimed a private matter. We shall not blame Comrade Surkov alone for this error of the entire Duma group. More, we shall frankly admit that the whole Party is at fault here, for not having sufficiently elucidated this question and not having sufficiently prepared the minds of Social-Democrats to understand Engels's remark levelled against the German opportunists. The discussion in the Duma group proves that there was in fact a confused understanding of the question, and not at all any desire to ignore the teachings of Marx; and we are

sure that the error will be corrected in future utterances of the group.

We repeat that on the whole Comrade Surkov's speech was excellent, and should be circulated by all the organisations. In its discussion of this speech the Duma group demonstrated that it is fulfilling its Social-Democratic duty conscientiously. It remains to express the wish that reports on discussions within the Duma group should appear more often in the Party press so as to bring the group and the Party closer together, to acquaint the Party with the difficult work being done within the group, and to establish ideological unity in the work of the Party and the Duma group.

(<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1909/may/13.htm>)

#### Lenin's Notes

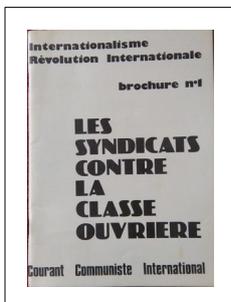
[1] See K. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*. Introduction. (K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow, 1957, p. 42.)

[3] See F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow, 1959, pp. 434-37.

### Pamphlets (orders at [intleftcom@gmail.com](mailto:intleftcom@gmail.com))

*Student Struggle and Assemblies of Neighbourhood* (Internationalist Communists - Klasbatalo)  
*La dégénérescence de l'IC : le PCF (1924-1927)* (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French)  
*Groupe des Travailleurs Marxistes (Mexique, 1938)* (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French and Spanish)  
*La question de la guerre (1935)* (International Fraction of the ICC, only in French)  
*Morale prolétarienne, lutte de classes et révisionisme* (IGCL from the IFICC, only in French and Spanish)  
*Unions Against the Working Class* (1976, reprinted from the ICC Pamphlet).

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



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

## **The Global Pandemic and Imperialist Competition (Internationalist Communist Tendency)**

We reproduce here an article from the Internationalist Communist Tendency on the world situation and the imperialist tensions, particularly between the US and China, that are developing more and more since the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that is breaking out. It clearly puts forwards the only alternative that capitalism imposes on society : generalized imperialist war or world proletarian revolution. This would be enough to welcome and support this statement at the very time when this Marxist thesis is rejected within the Communist Left itself, by the ICC of political opportunism for whom the danger of generalized imperialist war has disappeared with the "Period of Decomposition". Yet its interest does not stop here. It provides many elements and facts on the imperialist and armament policies of the United States and China and it argues that the main imperialist polarization will be between the US and China in the case of the outbreak of a world war. This is a question to reflect on and discuss. We invite all our readers to read it, as the article can only strengthen the communists' weapon of criticism, and to discuss it. The text is followed with a few comments of ours.

The IGCL

## **The Global Pandemic and Imperialist Competition (ICT)**

By any rational measure you might assume that a dominant sentient species when faced with global threats would pull together, pool resources and information and search for a mutual solution to the problem. But the coronavirus pandemic has confirmed what the climate change crisis already told us: that capitalism, even in its "globalised" form, is fundamentally unsuited to producing a coordinated response to tackle anything. On the contrary Covid-19 has been weaponised (as the pundits of the capitalist press like to say) as part of an intensification of imperialist rivalry in the competitive struggle between the two leading imperialist contenders.

In an article on this confrontation back in 2018, we wrote:

*"A major crash wiping out trillions of dollars would lead to a very deep depression and it's difficult to predict what the social consequences of this would be for capitalism. And with all other options exhausted, the prospect of global imperialist conflict will be all the closer. The current USA-China rivalry will be the axis around which any conflict will take place."*

Although not exactly a crash in the conventional sense, Covid-19 has already delivered a similar shock to the global capitalist system. One big enough to drive it into recession. Precisely how this will pan out in the end is difficult to say at this stage but "the future" seems to have suddenly got a lot closer. Last week the Chinese Communist Party condemned the European Union for trying to start "a new cold war". In fact this cold war really started some years back. What is now happening is that this "cold war" is hotting up as a consequence of the virus.

Since the 1980s the restructuring of manufacturing

in the West and the transfer of Western capital (mostly via banks in Hong Kong) to the low wage factories set up in China were the major response to the crisis of capital accumulation which had plagued the world economy since the end of the post-war boom at the end of the 1960s. The Chinese Communist Party, ever seeking to bolster its legitimacy, was only too happy to partially open its economy to Western capital. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" would really be state capitalism in alliance with Western capital. The situation seemed a win-win for both parties. Chinese growth rates were as rapid as any in the history of capitalism, whilst cheap Chinese commodities helped cushion the blow to the fall in income of workers in the West (which have declined or at best remained stagnant since 1979). Underlying it all however was the deregulated finance that the West went for to allow banks to fund all kinds of investments and speculation. The consequence was the increase in indebtedness of many of these workers as they took on loans and mortgages while banks stopped even checking to see if they could repay. The subsequent collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market sparked the financial contagion which led to the 2007-8 financial meltdown. This turned out to be both an economic and political turning point in international relations.

Whilst in the West the banks were deemed "too big to fail", and so were bailed out, in China the recognition that external markets were failing led to a massive injection of capital to stimulate the internal market. Both policies saved the system but at a cost. In the West a decade of austerity actually made the position of the working class even worse whilst Chinese growth rates have never recovered to the levels of the early years of this millennium and China now accounts for more than half of the

world's debt. In fact all that has been accumulated throughout the world are trillions of dollars in sovereign and personal debt. The system has limped on for the last 12 years in what Larry Summers has called “secular stagnation”. Or, as we have put it many times, they have stumbled into a new crisis without having fixed the last one.

### **The Impact of Covid-19**

Which brings us to Covid-19. As we wrote in Reflections on the Coronavirus the economic picture has dramatically worsened. China's growth rate had plunged to the lowest rate of increase in 27 years but the US is in no better shape.

*"China is economically on its knees. The latest data on the increase in GDP there gives a paltry 2.8%. The US is up to its ears in debt and deficit financing. It only survives by virtue of the supremacy of the dollar and the most powerful army in the world".* <sup>23</sup>.

In the face of the virus all the major powers have been “slow to react”. The reason is not hard to divine. All of them are worried about the damage to already fragile economies that would result from taking effective health measures. Policy was all about protecting their wealth rather than our health. It is no accident that smaller states like Ethiopia, Taiwan or South Korea, who are not high up in the imperialist pecking order, were the most effective in dealing with the first signs of infection. It also helped some of them that they had already seen, in recent years, other flu and coronavirus epidemics. They already understood that if they did not act immediately on the health issue (containment) later action (mitigation) would be even more damaging to the economy.

For the two greatest rivals on the planet, China and the US the pandemic has however become a war of words. Trump spent weeks calling it “the China virus”, and his Secretary of State, Pompeo, still does. Both sides have their own conspiracy theories which accuse each other of manufacturing the virus in a lab before unleashing it on an unsuspecting world, despite the fact that not a shred of scientific evidence exists for these theories. Not that this will concern either side. It's all part of a wider battle which began back in 2012.

### **From Globalisation to World Power Struggle**

Until then the Party had largely stuck to the stealthy policy of growth enunciated by Deng Xiaoping. One

of his permanent axioms after 1978 was taoguang yanghui (“we should conceal our capabilities and avoid the limelight”). In 1990 he still maintained that China had to be cautious in international relations:

*"We do not fear anyone, but we should not give offence to anyone either. We should act in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and never deviate from them."*

A couple years earlier Paul Kennedy in his *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* noted that Chinese defence spending had been falling for the 15 years before 1985 (at a time when the attempt to maintain the arms race with the US was bringing the USSR to collapse). He went on though to predict that it would not last. Quoting the *Economist* that

*"For [China's] military men with the patience to see [economic] reforms through, there is a payoff ... 10 -15 years down the line the civilian economy should have picked up enough steam to haul the military sector along more rapidly" he concluded that "It is only a matter of time."*

In fact the *Economist* prediction turned out to be pretty accurate. Since 2000 the *official military budget* (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\_budget\_of\_China) of China has skyrocketed. Since 2008 it has tripled in size. Additionally the real expenditure is estimated to be much higher as some expenditures are hidden in the budgets of other departments.

However, there was at first no discernible shift in the policy of trying to promote soft power and influence across Asia and Africa. That began to change when the Obama Administration announced in November 2011 that the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan would allow the USA to “pivot to Asia”, something confirmed in the January 2012 US military budget. Later that year Xi Jinping came to power in China using the increasingly repeated slogan of the “great revival of the Chinese nation”.

Over the next few years his crackdowns on corruption and dissent helped him to consolidate power by removing rivals. In 2013 he had also become President of China whilst in 2017 he had become the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong by removing any limit on his term of office. At its 19th Congress last year the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) even wrote his name into the party constitution. Enshrining "Xi Jinping Thought", based on the “original aspirations” or chuxin of Mao, in that document means that any challenge to the President is now a threat to CCP rule.

<sup>23</sup> .  
<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-05-06/reflections-on-the-coronavirus-and-economic-crises>.

At the same Congress, Xi outlined two grand objectives: from 2020-35, China will become a “fully modern” economy and society; this to be followed by a further 15 years to 2050, when China’s quest for national wealth and power will come to fruition as it assumes great power status. What all this really meant was that China was openly declaring a direct challenge to the US.

Well before Trump arrived on the scene relations were deteriorating. In 2015 Xi Jinping assured Obama that China would not militarise the artificial islands it was building in the South China Sea. Satellite photographs of Subi Island a year later showed an airstrip guarded by anti-aircraft and other weapons systems. On top of this open lie, the tolerance of Chinese industrial espionage or technology transfer demands, which were previously seen as a cost of investing in China, now became a much more negative factor for US bosses. Trump was thus able to portray the whole globalisation scenario as one where cheating China had “stolen US jobs”.

Obama and Hilary Clinton had also promoted the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with 10 other countries as a direct counter to Chinese influence in East Asia and beyond. Trump’s first act though was to pull the US out of the TPP (for no other reason than it was an Obama policy) thus gifting the lead in international cooperation in the region to the Chinese. China already had persuaded many US allies (including Britain) to sign up for its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and in 2017 formally launched, to great fanfare, its Belt and Road Initiative which threatens to turn Eurasia into China’s economic dominion.

Trump’s “America First” makes this even more feasible. Under Obama the US had played on its traditional strength as the leader of the “free world” which in the long run could marshal allies against a relatively isolated China. Trump, though, took to berating NATO partners for not paying their way, and threatened a trade war with Europe similar to the one he was touting on China. This did much to undermine US influence and some European states have even openly sought closer relations with China in recent years. The trade war Trump launched has not even achieved what he intended. Not only has China reduced its investment in the US from \$45 billion in 2016 to a mere \$5 billion in 2019 with all the impact that has on jobs, but US manufacturing in January 2020 had fallen into its worst slump in a decade. This is not helped by the fact that every Trump utterance increases financial panic so there is a flight to the dollar which only makes US exports more difficult to sell abroad. With Covid-19 entering

the scene the 20 month trade war was put on hold in January.

But the hostility has, if anything, only intensified.

### **Xi’s China**

Xi’s rule in China has been accompanied by an extension of the power of the state and the CCP. Increased surveillance of citizens, creating a new “Great Wall” around the internet to control its traffic and the massive gulag that is Xinjiang to clamp down on Uighur protest are well-known facts of existence in China. They were most forcibly brought to the world’s attention when the regime attempted to get its puppet rulers in Hong Kong to accept a new extradition law.

The attempted introduction of this law last year led to massive protests (initially involving nearly a quarter of the territory’s population). These protests did not come out of a clear blue sky. The “umbrella movement” of 2014 had occupied parts of the city for 77 days in 2014 in opposition to the first interference in Hong Kong’s electoral procedures. It failed, but in 2015 five Hong Kong booksellers were “disappeared” for some weeks. Their crime was to sell books banned in the CPR containing details about the private lives of leading CCP members like Mao and Xi. This was a violation of Hong Kong’s limited autonomy and thousands demonstrated against the detention of the booksellers in 2016. These were the precursors to last year’s massive demonstrations against the formalisation of such extraditions. To be sure there were also social grievances of many young people in Hong Kong in those demonstrations. In the course of them graffiti appeared which equated “Chinazi” with “AmeriKKKa” but in the end the issue was about preserving or even restoring what was left of Hong Kong’s special status under the “one country, two systems” idea. The Chief Executive Carrie Lam was forced to rescind the extradition law but the protests continued around 5 democratic demands and the waving of the stars and stripes, before petering out as the coronavirus pandemic struck. But the demand for independence for Hong Kong has featured more and more as the struggle has gone on.

For the CCP Hong Kong poses a special problem. Two thirds of inward investment to China comes via its banking sector. Attempts to replace it with Shanghai and even Macau, have been of limited success. However, despite all the protests and violence of 2019, investment via Hong Kong continued to rise. This seems to have emboldened the regime to go further and use a loophole in Hong Kong’s Basic Law

to impose a new security law on the territory on 28 May. This will ban any incitement to independence and can be used against almost any form of dissidence. It has put Hong Kong and the issue of democracy on the front line of US-China imperialist relations. The US has not been slow to use “the democracy card” to regain some of the initiative it has so recently lost and stitch back together a “western alliance”. It has now openly sided with last year’s demonstrations in Hong Kong “in defence of the rule of law”. In this it has found welcome support in the declaration from legislators in 23 countries condemning China for undermining the original UK withdrawal agreement. More concretely, the British government has now offered the visa free entry for 12 months to British National (Overseas) Passport holders. This carries the possibility of citizenship applications further down the road to 2.8 million in Hong Kong. The US has now threatened to end Hong Kong’s special trade relations with the US although it is not clear who that will hit most – China or Hong Kong. China has not been slow to retaliate in this propaganda war with reference to the current turmoil over racist policing in the US by repeating “I can’t breathe”.

But it is not the only issue which has stirred the imperialist pot. The propaganda war over the origins of the Covid-19 virus has once again involved trade. The drive for an investigation into the origins of the pandemic has been spearheaded by Australia with the support of 61 other states. But it has led the Chinese to show that it is not just Trump who can use economic power for political ends. China has already stopped importing barley and meat products from Australia and the mining industry, who back the Morrison government, are already worrying about their exports.

### **Taiwan and Missiles**

All of these, though, pale by comparison with what has been happening in the South China Sea. For the last month the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has been conducting a live fire exercise involving a battle group of ships based round their original aircraft carrier, the Liaoning. Whilst it has been doing this, the US has deliberately sent its warships to carry out “freedom of navigation” voyages through the seas off China on seven different occasions. The latest of these on June 4 coincided with the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer, USS Barry, not only carried out a “freedom of navigation” operation in the South China Sea, but even launched a missile during

its own live fire exercise. According to the Chinese propaganda outlet *The Global Times* it was then chased away by PLA ships but it seems more likely that it just sailed through despite the provocation.

The Barry might have been responding to another issue in dispute – the status of Taiwan. Earlier the same day the PLA released pictures of an amphibious assault by tanks on a beach on the coast of China opposite Taiwan. It also followed the swearing in for her second term of office of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party’s Tsai Ing-Wen as president of Taiwan on 20 May. These manoeuvres come in the wake of threats by top PLA general Li Zuocheng that if negotiations with Taiwan on reunification ultimately fail then they will “resolutely smash” the independence movement. He went on to underline the recent hardening of China’s attitude,

*"Today's China is not the previous frail old China ... We do not promise to abandon the use of force, and reserve the option to take all necessary measures to stabilise and control the situation in the Taiwan Strait."*

Part of this new confidence comes from the fact that China, not being a signatory of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, has been able to build up its intermediate range missiles over the last few years. The Treaty bans the development of any missile (whether nuclear or conventional) with a range between 500 and 5,500 kilometres. The US pulled out of the Treaty last August, citing the development of a new Russian missile as the cause. However the move also allows it to address the “missile gap” that it perceives with the PLA which is estimated to have over 2,200 missiles at its disposal, most with a greater range than those of the US. This year it completed building 80 new ships to add to its fleet (equivalent to the entire British fleet).

Backing this up is China’s satellite capacity. According to one defence publication this gives it a sophisticated system for targeting its weapons.

Some of China’s satellites include several payloads that are almost certainly for military purposes, such as electro-optical sensors, synthetic aperture radar and electronic intelligence technology. The country also uses a constellation of Naval Ocean Surveillance System satellites providing persistent coverage of water surrounding China. These capabilities can also support targeting for China’s anti-ship ballistic missiles, and with sufficient numbers and integration, they could provide real-time target triangulation data to build up a robust picture of a target’s location to ultimately generate a targeting approach.

This is the beginning of a new arms race and represents a real escalation of the rivalry between China and the USA. In global terms, as we have pointed out many times, the US faces no real military challenge to its power. However, raw military power is not all, as Iraq and Afghanistan so clearly demonstrated. Furthermore in regional terms China, at least on paper, has the firepower to contest its own backyard. Its DF-17 missile is said to be able to penetrate any missile shield the US might like to deploy. This in itself is a shift in the balance of terror in the region. For decades the US has had some 400 military bases in the Pacific, more or less surrounding China. Now it has begun to think of stepping up its strategy. No longer constrained by the INF Treaty it plans to equip its marines with Tomahawk cruise missiles as well as develop new missiles to re-establish its dominance in the Western Pacific.

The struggle for control of the seas around China is now well and truly on and the artificial islands which China has been building to assert its sovereignty over greater swathes of the South China Sea could become the next theatre of war. The Chinese can argue that all they are doing is building up their defence. They (so far) have no missile programme aimed at the US mainland although there is now talk of it. The *Reuters* report underlines though the threat that China feels from the US military presence in the region.

In a statement to Reuters about the latest U.S. moves, Beijing urged Washington to “*be cautious in word and deed,*” to “*stop moving chess pieces around*” the region, and to “*stop flexing its military muscles around China.*”

A further significant underlying factor is the realisation by both China and the US that they both need to step up production of semi-conductors. China has been trying to boost production for some time without notable success and the US produces only 12% of the world’s chips. Taiwan and South Korea supply both in huge quantities and thus sit in the middle of the “tech cold war”. TSMC, the Taiwanese foundry company that actually makes the chips to others’ designs, has recently been lured to the US to build a small plant in Arizona. One of TSMC’s biggest customers is Huawei and the suggestion is that this is to give them some compensation for cutting out at least some supplies to Huawei. This is definitely an area to watch.

And whilst tech competition ups the ante in East Asia, the rivalry is not just confined to the Chinese littoral. It is global. Whilst China was attempting to woo the disaffected members of the EU, like Italy

and Greece to its side, Pompeo was rushing to Israel to ensure that a Chinese firm did not win a significant contract which was then out to tender. The Israeli coalition government did not disappoint its paymaster.

### **Barbarism or Socialism**

We are entering new territory. We cannot yet know the outcome of the current recession brought about by the coronavirus pandemic. What we do know is that across the world states will keep on absorbing debt in order to hold the entire capitalist structure together. What seems certain is that a new centralisation and consolidation of capital will take place. This will cost jobs and thus make it easier for the system to ramp up its attacks on the working class in terms of greater exploitation and greater job insecurity. And it will still not be enough to revive profitability. This crisis may lead to the depreciation of many capitalist values but it will not lead to the “creative destruction” described by the Austrian economist Schumpeter (in his backhanded compliment to Marx’s analysis that periodic economic crises were absolutely essential to capital accumulation). In Marx’s times those crises, and the cycles of accumulation which followed, were relatively short, but in the post-1914 world the amount of capital that is involved is so massive that nothing less than the cataclysm of a war can destroy enough capital to allow a new cycle of accumulation to begin.

We have been at the end of such a cycle ever since the post-war boom came to an end in the 1970s. And though many commentators now scratch their heads at the way Trump is undermining the world order by pulling out of this or that treaty or this or that institution (today the World Health Organisation) the US has in fact been undermining the world order it set up at Bretton Woods in 1945 ever since 1971. One of Trump’s heroes, Nixon, simply abandoned the deal that the dollar would be pegged to gold, and ushered in a new situation which meant that the US did not have to cover its dollars with the gold in Fort Knox, but could print them for a world which felt compelled to take them. Adam Tooze, the current doyen of capitalist commentators, spells out how we got here.

*"If our own world has a historic birthplace, it was not in 1945 but in the early 1970s with the advent of fiat money and floating exchange rates. The unpalatable truth is that our world was born not out of wise collective agreement but out of chaos, unleashed by America’s unilateral refusal*

*any longer to underwrite the global monetary order."*

For nearly half a century the US has built up all kinds of deficits with impunity and there has been no single power in a position to challenge it. Now a new and more aggressive China is increasingly doing so and this coronavirus crisis has upped the ante. There are many who are claiming that the crisis is going to lead to a different world, a more caring, greener capitalism. Tooze, though lacking a Marxist materialist analysis, disabuses them:

*"The crisis goes deep. It is not surprising that there should be calls for a new institutional design. But we should be careful what we wish for. If history is anything to go by, that new order will not emerge from an enlightened act of collective leadership. Ideas and leadership matter. But to think that they by themselves found international order is to put the cart before the horse. What will resolve the current tension is a power grab by a new stakeholder determined to have its way. And the central question of the current moment is whether the West is ready for that. If not, we should get comfortable with the new disorder."*

No prizes for working out who the "new stakeholder" might be. We are approaching a historical crossroads and it seems in the last few

months at an increasingly rapid rate. If the working class is not stirred into further collective action across the globe soon then as we wrote in March

*"... the solution of the solutions (the second) will be a "beautiful" war that would destroy everything in order to rebuild everything, giving the capitalist system the economic space for a new cycle of accumulation" (ICT, op.cit.).*

This will not be a regional war like those in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya or the Sahel but one with global reach gradually embroiling much of the planet. It would be

*" ... a war which would destroy just about everything, giving the capitalist system economic room for a new cycle of accumulation " (May Day 2020 statement of the ICT : <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-04-29/may-day-2020-against-the-virus-that-is-capitalism.>)*

The consequences are too horrendous to contemplate, but it is their creeping barbarism or our potential to create socialism that remains the historic choice. For our part we will continue to argue within the working class around the world that the only war worth fighting is the class war to bring down this infernal system once and for all.

Jock (CWO-ICT), June 14th 2020

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## **A Few Comments of Discussion and Reflection about the ICT Text**

**A**s we said in the preamble, the article by the comrades of the ICT clearly reaffirms the historical alternative of revolution or war, and this, for us, is the essential point that distinguishes the groups of the Communist Left that remain faithful to its lessons and, more broadly, to Marxism. Among the various contributions and points of interest and discussion, we wanted to note and return to the thesis that in *"the prospect of global imperialist conflict"*, that is, if the proletariat failed to oppose it, *"the current USA-China rivalry will be the axis around which any conflict will take place"*. This is a question all the more important because it breaks with past schemas of classical, historical imperialist configurations that had prevailed in the history of capitalism and previous world wars. Such a case, a US imperialist bloc opposed to a Chinese one, would see for the first time in history no country of the historical European centre of capitalism, and thus of the proletariat, playing the leading, imperialist role of a military bloc. This deserves our attention for a

few comments and reflection, if only because such a scenario would partially and relatively set new conditions, and even potentialities, of the international proletariat's response to the march to generalized war and its outbreak. It would also require the communists to take into account this new imperialist configuration for their understanding of the course of events as well as the definition of their general and particular orientations of their militant intervention within the inevitable class confrontations.

The last decade has indeed seen a rise in China's power on the world stage not only as an industrial and commercial power, but also as an imperialist and military power. The article provides a series of facts that support and verify the reality of China as a world imperialist power and the main, if not the only, serious military rival to the U.S. in the long run. It seems that only China can really respond to America's economic, commercial and political unilateralism and diktats and can impress, or even

push Trump back from time to time. No other historical capitalist power, no western European powers, nor Russia, appear to be capable to dispute even at least the US leadership. The leading European industrial and economic power, Germany, for instance, seems to be powerless, even panic-stricken, in the face of the now *predictable* Trump and all willing to give in to any American ultimatum that would target its industrial exports, of automobiles for example, to the United States.

For our part, our [Theses on the historical situation](#)<sup>24</sup> written in 2013 (*Revolution or War #1*), rejected the possibility of a China that could aspire to become the head of the imperialist bloc opposed to the American bloc which, in all likelihood, will bring together the other major Anglo-Saxon powers in the event of a 3rd World War. They are already doing so in local conflicts and rivalries. This was the profound significance of Brexit, for example. Our theses maintained the prospect of an increasing imperialist polarization, leading to the blocs formed and necessary for the war, between the USA and a continental Europe grouped around Germany. In 2003, the war in Iraq launched by Bush had seen a clear-cut fracture between the USA and Great Britain on the one hand and continental Europe, Germany and France joined by Russia and China on the other. The polarization was clear and sharp and the rest of the world had had to position itself behind one side or the other. Today, the situation is reversed and the imperialist tensions arising from the Covid-19 crisis see a Europe caught between America and China, incapable of displaying a truly autonomous imperialist policy and above all capable of polarizing and mobilizing behind it as in 2003.

Our theses of 2013, already debatable at the time of course, seems today apparently not very credible in the face of the emergence of China on the one hand and in the face of the difficulties, hesitations, divisions, contradictions, even fears, that the main continental European bourgeoisies seem to be experiencing, to even minimally display and develop united and autonomous imperialist policies. Moreover, no country, not even France, even though it has nuclear weapons, has a military defence capable of competing even for a few days or hours with US nuclear fire. And the reluctance of many European countries to commit themselves to a European defence of their own, including in the framework of NATO, which French President Macron declared to be "*brain-dead*" before the Covid-19 crisis, does not argue in favour of the emergence of a minimum common military power in the short

or medium term. Far from it. No doubt this is an issue for the major European bourgeoisies, German and French in the first place, which the historical rupture caused by the outbreak of the crisis and the new imperialist requirements it imposes will force them to confront seriously if they want to maintain themselves as leading imperialist powers in the coming confrontations. As the article by the comrades of the ICT notes, even China, though much more powerful today, is not capable of competing directly and head-on with the United States militarily. From this point of view, it still remains a regional rather than a global military power despite the increasing speed of development of a powerful navy. The only imperialist power that could possibly pose a military threat is still Putin's Russia, which inherited nuclear weapons from the former USSR. The rapprochement of economic and imperialist policies between Merkel and Macron, the recovery plan for which they are campaigning in the European Union, in the face of the crisis may initiate a firmer "European" imperialist assertion, but the road to the establishment of a European defence with the capacity to compete at a minimum is still long, including in the case of a rapprochement and an alliance with Russia and even China. The assertion of our 2013 theses therefore seems to be contradicted. At least at first glance. However, in our view, the question remains open, including within the IGCL itself. We invite and encourage all groups of the Communist Left and all sympathizers and readers to reflect on this question, to develop their arguments, to comment on the different positions, including criticizing our position contained in our Theses on the International Situation of 2013 on this point.

The reader may question the importance of such a discussion. Let us reassure her/him, it is of a secondary nature and does not call into question the political homogeneity of our group, nor the unity of view that should prevail among the forces faithful to the traditional lessons and positions of the Communist Left regarding the historical alternative of *revolution or war*. He/she can also question its interest from a militant point of view, from the point of view of the struggles of the proletariat. In our opinion, it is due to the fact that the understanding of the very conditions, and the anticipation if possible, of the development of imperialist rivalries not only can allow the political vanguards of the proletariat to keep the compass in the turmoil of events, here imperialist rivalries and conflicts, but also to apprehend the dynamics of the relation of forces between the classes as well as possible. Indeed, the proletariat is not only

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24 . <http://igcl.org/Theses-on-the-Historical-Situation>.

confronted with a class war led by the bourgeoisie to make it pay for the crisis of capitalism but also to make it pay and sacrifice itself even more for imperialist and military policies, for the preparation of the generalized war. The question of imperialist war, like the crisis, is a factor of proletarian struggle and consciousness. Concretely, and without abstract speculation, the European, American and Chinese proletariats, to limit us to them here, do not have the same historical experience, nor the same political capacities, in the face of war and class struggle. The "success" or the state of progress of the imperialist affirmation of this or that national capital and the implementation of economic, social and political state policies, serving this objective and with a fundamentally and brutally anti-proletarian character, will not express exactly the same international and historical balance of power between the classes according to the countries where they take place. Would the situation of China playing today the role of 1930s Germany on the imperialist level have the same significance from the point of view of international class struggle as the defeat of the German proletariat then? We don't think so.

From this point of view, the article of the ICT only affirms, rightly but insufficiently in our opinion, the historical responsibility of the proletariat without defining its concrete terms and conditions. The crisis that is breaking out and exacerbating capitalist contradictions and imperialist rivalries is forcing the world bourgeoisie in all countries to redouble its massive attacks against the proletariat to a point that our generations have never known. International capital is launching into massive economic and political confrontations against the international proletariat. So the question is not: will there be class confrontations, struggles and strikes? They will inevitably take place and, no doubt, **simultaneously on a world scale**. The real question is: will the proletariat succeed in resisting the bourgeois offensive, avoiding the political and

ideological traps and dead-ends and defeats in order to assert its own perspective and class autonomy? This is already the question before it, particularly in the U.S., but not only, with the anti-racist and democratic demonstrations in which the left and leftist forces, from the Democratic Party to the radical Anarchist phrase passing through the *Black Lives Matter*, widely reported by the U.S. and international media, are already trying to drag it down following the murder of G. Floyd by the Minneapolis police. The ability of the U.S. and international bourgeoisie to turn the legitimate outrage and revolt at the violence of **its own police** into a defence and support of the state and democratic mystification, while at the same time drawing along many young people in revolt, says a lot about the risks to the proletariat of any concession or conciliation to these bourgeois-democratic themes whatever radical the language may appear. In an immediate way, it has allowed for the moment to divert the attention of the proletarians from the unemployment which explodes and from the exploitation and working conditions for those who still have a job, which are getting worse; and from the fight against capitalist exploitation in the time of the coronavirus and the crisis. Without being the only one, the degree of adherence or rejection by the US proletariat in particular, and more generally by the international proletariat, of these campaigns on the democratic and state terrain will also be an element in being able to appreciate the capitalist dynamic toward generalized war and the conditions of imperialist polarization. This is why to reflect and try to determine today how the imperialist polarization tends to develop, keeping away from any schematism of course, is the responsibility of *the party in the making* if it wants to **really** become the party of the proletarian vanguard, the one called to lead the struggles of the revolutionary class.

RL, July 2020

## Struggle against Opportunism within the Proletarian Camp

### Against Gossip on Social Networks and for Public Political Debates

Social networks, Facebook and others, have given a new dimension to the petty-bourgeois politics of gossip and slander that have always prevailed in circles peripheral to the revolutionary camp, even the Communist Left. The phenomenon is not new. Lenin combated it in his time as we can see in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. Normally, we do not pay attention to the sclerotic circle spirit of the Internet networks, the *circle spirit 2.0.*, where individualism and informality reign supreme.

However, the avalanche of slanders and insults of recent times, particularly since our position on anti-racist demonstrations in the United States, mainly on North American networks, compels us to make a point of reassuring those, sincere, who could be influenced and discouraged by the extravagance of the remarks and the hostility that emerges from them. Moreover, these practices always have a more or less deleterious effect on the proletarian camp as a whole, especially when they affect one of its recurring weak points: its sectarian reflexes. For example, and leaving aside our supposed racism or other nonsense, many people attribute to us hidden and manipulative intentions behind our willingness to debate, confront and clarify the positions of other communist groups – even though this practice is standard for anyone who seriously refers to the history and experience of the workers' movement. Let's take two posts in particular which, compared to most, have at least the merit of being understandable. According to the first one, adorned with many "likes" (that is to say!), by publishing and translating articles of the ICT and Nuevo Curso, the IGGL would seek "to flatter the ICT just as it does with Nuevo Curso-WO-GCCF [when in fact] it wants to weaken and divide it". We would even "blackmail" the ICT by criticizing the weaknesses of its international regroupment policy. Another individual urged us to "... stop your silly game of trying to flag up differences between the CWO and Battaglia comunista". He accused us of attacking the ICT because, in translating its May Day statement into French and Spanish, we had noted in a footnote that the English and Italian versions differed on the characterization of the generalized imperialist war. What an ignominious attack, isn't it! Even as we reproduced this leaflet on our website, we saluted it and took it up on our own account. At the very moment we were claiming that we wanted to distribute it massively. If a reader who has understood this quite *sophisticated dialectic* is kind enough to explain it to us, thank you in advance. This

is where the ravages of the *circle spirit 2.0* lead. They make individuals politically stupid, petty, narrow-minded and... so far removed from the **historic** fight, let's remember, for the world party of the proletariat.

These practices and the use of psychological and personalized criteria in the political relations between communist groups offer a privileged terrain for opportunist and liquidationist forces such as the ICC of *Decomposition* and *Parasitism*. The fact that the ICC is rushing into the breach opened by considerations of a psychological, non-political nature, the very terrain of its theory of parasitism, should come as no surprise to anyone: it had announced this at its last international congress and we had warned the whole camp (see RG #12<sup>25</sup>). It is necessary to recognize in this "quality" the liquidator ICC is consequent. It steadfastly pursues its objective of destroying the proletarian camp. This is why it is necessary to call on the *pro-party* forces of the camp, organizations, groups and individual sympathizers or militants, to reject this terrain of networks and approaches of a personal and psychological nature in order to judge the positions and real political *intentions* of other communist groups. Let us be read and judged on what we write. **No**, we do not reproduce the texts of *Nuevo Curso* or the ICT, or others, as an opportunistic tactic, to coax them, flatter them or gain their sympathy. **No**, we do not continue to defend the fact that the ICT is still the only material force in a situation where it can exercise its historical and international role as pole of regroupment in order to blackmail it (incredible, isn't it?).

**Yes**, we will continue to debate and try to confront publicly the different positions as we are trying to do in our own ranks. With or without the other communist forces. This is a necessity for us. But so is it for the other communist forces, whatever they may think, and even if it must disturb the daily routine and the comfort of absolute certainties. Debates and political confrontations are the blood that must irrigate the communist political bodies. Otherwise there is a risk of thrombosis. Ultimately, it is a matter of life and death. As for the radicalized petty bourgeois of the networks, who confuse window-breaking and looting with class violence, Seattle's free zone with revolution, gossip with methodical debates... let's not waste any more of the little space we have.

June 2020

25 . <http://igcl.org/Balance-sheet-and-Perspectives-of>

## Debate within the Proletarian Camp

### Debate on the Period of Transition between Capitalism and Communism

We publish here a response by comrade Fredo Corvo to our presentation in issue no. 13 of this journal, in October 2019, of his introduction to the *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution of the "Dutch" GIK of the 1930s*. Since then, a new English translation of this text has been published in book form and is therefore available on the Internet. The frank and direct exposition of the divergence can only help the younger generations to reappropriate the lessons and debates of the Communist Left about the transition period between capitalism and communism.

### State Capitalism: Historical Mistake or Means for proletarian Dictatorship? A first reply to the IGCL on the 'Fundamental Principles'

Dear comrades of the International Group of the Communist Left,

Thank you for publishing in *Revolution or War* no. 13 (October 2019) a greater part of my article *The G.I.C. and the Economy of the Transition Period. An Introduction*, not only in English, but also in Spanish and French<sup>26</sup>. In your introductory notes, you recognize the discussion on the state of the period of transition between the Dutch and the Italian Communist Left and you exclude from a serious debate, as I have done, the 'communizers'. At the same time these notes reveal some of your positions that cannot remain unanswered.

For the present period, you exclude "from the communist field any measure of state capitalism". But in the same sentence you state "that capitalist measures may have been necessary for the class dictatorship in Russia". I have no intention to remake history, and therefore I can only agree that Lenin and the majority of the Bolshevik Party thought state capitalist measures necessary. But were they? For the making of a communist future, it is important to know for sure, without 'may be', if state capitalist measures are a possibility. A possibility that you didn't only leave open in your introductory notes, but as well in your recent pamphlet on the "Saving the Planet"-movements<sup>27</sup>. ( 2 ) To know for sure, we have the experience in Russia that shows that "class dictatorship", that 1) On the Period of Transition between Capitalism and Communism, 'RoW' no. 13. This was published in 'A Free Retriever 's Digest' Vol. 3 Issue #4 October – December 2019 as well. The complete article can be

read on the latter's blog: part 1, part 2 and is available there as a downloadable pdf. At the Left-dis website our introduction is also available in German, French and Dutch. 2) IGCL, "Saving the Planet" Requires the Destruction of the Capitalist State and the Exercise of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat! (September 20 th , 2019) you rightly bring forward as the primary question, was absent in the 1920-ties. The elimination of the workers from controlling the factories, in total agreement with Lenin's state-communist position in 1917, had already prepared the counterrevolution, by replacing the dictatorship of the proletariat (through the councils, an organization of the masses) by that of the party (a minority).

Of course this is a lesson that only could be learned after the counterrevolutionary shift of power took place. But this lesson is actually still denied by many under the cover of juggling with the words 'economic' and 'political', as you often do [yourselves]. Specially the 'Bordigists' defend the substitution of the power of the proletarian masses by the party as a means of 'holding on' till the world revolution would continue and save the 'proletarian bastion'. The question is not whether Lenin, in contradiction to his State and the Revolution, in the 1920s saw that state capitalism was non-socialist, but whether it was indeed as you claim "a means to fight small production" or a means to maintain... the party in power, as Lenin overtly declared.

Instead of understanding class relations, you focus on ideas of that time: "Comrades may disagree with the measures taken by the Bolsheviks, but then it will be necessary to take a position on the debates of that time. Did the populists, the socialists-revolutionaries or the Mensheviks advance more appropriate, more revolutionary positions? For our part, we fully claim the positions of the Bolsheviks." (RoW)

It is not the GIC or me who would like to make "appreciations" about Lenin or the Bolsheviks, or

26 . *On the transition period between capitalism and communism* in RG#13 (<http://igcl.org/Origine-et-signification-des>). The full article is available in English on the website of *The Free Retriever Digest*, the October-November 2019 issue [All footnotes are Fredo Corvo's].

27 . "Saving the Planet" Requires the Destruction of the Capitalist State and the Exercise of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat ! (IGCL's leaflet, September 20<sup>th</sup> 2019, <http://www.igcl.org/Saving-the-Planet-Requires-the>).

even to remake history, it is the game of “RoW” to defend certain positions in these historical debates. If we want to learn something from these debates, we must first understand that the Bolshevik party as a28 A Free Retriever's Digest whole, at that time, was no longer proletarian internationalist as it was during the First World War, but had become the leading party of a state that exerted a real bourgeois dictatorship over the working class in Russia. As a bedazzled Lenin admitted in 1921:

*“The machine's slipping out of our hands. It's like someone's at the steering wheel, but the machine doesn't go where he directs it to go, it goes where somebody else directs it, something illegal, unlawful, coming from God knows where, some speculator, private capitalist or whoever. The machine absolutely doesn't go where the driver wants it to go ... Who's leading who? I doubt very much that one can say, that the Communists run this machine. If one wants to tell the truth, then we don't lead it, but it leads us.”<sup>28</sup>*

State capitalism has not been the result of Russia's isolation, but has been the consequence of a theoretical weaknesses, the crucial fault of identifying state capitalism with socialism, or with a measure on the way to socialism or world revolution. I believe men should not be judged on the basis of their ideas but on their actions and their position in the relations of production. The reverse method is idealism. Only when we consider the possibilities of regroupment and we have to draw class lines, we should recognize certain theoretical weaknesses as inevitable and within the proletarian camp. But never when we draw lessons from history. RoW, by “defending” Lenin risks losing the vital lessons that the Communist Left has drawn from state capitalism, from the class - party - state substitutionism, from the need for the future International Party to be guided by the vanguard of regions still dominated by capital, and not by that of the proletarian citadel.

You believe that the question of the state in the period of transition, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and what it means for leading production and distribution, is still an “open question”, exactly like the ICC. As far as I know, all major organizations that refer to the Communist Left, except the nearly dead ICC, defend the positions of Marx and Engels on the association of free and equal producers, and the recognition that

the councils are the finally found organizational form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. That your “group does not have the means today to make a clear-cut statement” is no excuse; this is a question of priority, which you hide behind a sup 3) Lenin, quoted by the GIC (1935-edition), Ch. II: The social-democratic “revision” of Marxism, e) Waged work and state communism; Lenin, "Werke", Volume XVIII – 2, p. 35 and 43. posed ‘political’ question. You say reading my introduction reinforces the positions of Bilan. You cite the GIC, suggesting that it is not very far from the direct democracy dear to anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists. Well, you could read Lenin, quoting him out of context, and accuse him of anarchism as well: “*Simultaneously with an immense expansion of democracy, which for the first time becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people*”<sup>29</sup>. ( 4 ) Then you flee, being silent about the relationship between dictatorship and democracy, into the higher phases of communism, in which – the GIC agrees – democracy will be abolished with the abolition of classes and the state: “A classless society will be able to function harmoniously without the democratic mechanism”. However, the point is a different one: after the revolution, will there be democracy alongside with dictatorship, as Marx, Lenin and the GIC agree, and how about ‘the government over people’ and the ‘government over things’? The GIC is clear: ‘the government over people’ will wither away with the classes, the state, with dictatorship and with democracy as complementary aspects of the state. However, democracy as a form of ‘government over things’ will remain, according to the GIC. Certain Bordigists, and some councilists, believe that after the revolution there is only dictatorship, violence and terror, and no democracy whatsoever. I believe this is wrong, dangerous and in contradiction with Marx, Engels and Lenin. What is your position?

It is understandable that you couldn't elaborate your positions in an introduction of one page to another introduction. I hope you find the time to continue this discussion on the state of the period of transition on the basis of what the GIC really meant. As in 1916, the revolution may be nearer than we believe. You risk to be empty-handed towards a vital question of proletarian revolution.

Fredo Corvo, January 10, 2020

28 . Editor's note: the comrade takes up the quotation made at the time by the GICs. We have taken the English version of Lenin's quotation, which may differ depending on the translation on marxist.org. It is the political report presented to the 11th Congress of the Russian CP, March 1922.

29 . [https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/state\\_rev/ch05.htm#s2](https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/state_rev/ch05.htm#s2)

## Some Elements of Response and Status of a Discussion

We recently had interesting discussions with comrade Fredo Corvo on the transition period, especially on the work of the Dutch council communists on this particular issue. The reader can refer to the latest issues of our journal to pick up the thread of the discussion from the beginning. Otherwise, to summarize the main points, comrade Corvo has translated into English some texts written in the 1930s by the Dutch group GIC, including one we published in *Revolution or War*, which he believes shed new light on the theoretical contribution of this group. For the comrade, the Italian left (the journal *Bilan*) has thrown the epithet of councilism over the work of the GIC without understanding its real essence, thus distorting the debate from the 1930s to the present.

Our response to comrade Corvo was very simple. The new translations of texts by the GIC bring nothing new to the table and in fact reinforce in every respect the historical criticisms that the "Italian left" has brought to the council communist current. Having set the context, let us now answer the questions and arguments of comrade Corvo contained in his last letter of January 10, 2020.

The comrade challenges us on three main aspects: state capitalism, the role of the Bolsheviks and democracy.

Corvo warns us against defending state capitalism and the dangers of such a position. However, we do not defend state capitalism as an abstract principle that is valid at all times. Certain measures that take the form of economic centralization under the aegis of the state are necessary under specific conditions. These conditions were the outbreak of proletarian revolution in a momentarily isolated and economically underdeveloped country. What historical examples do we have? Germany in 1848 and Russia in 1917, among others. These two examples are comparable to the extent that these two different historical periods had similar aspects: economy lagging behind the countries of the most developed capitalism, a cowardly bourgeoisie delaying its revolution, the birth of a modern proletariat. The result was a single tactic: to push for

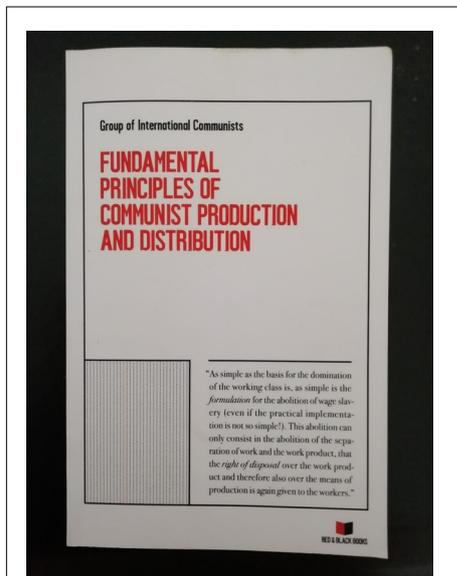
the development of capitalism while advocating revolution and its extension in the advanced capitalist metropolises. State capitalism was not only necessary for these two historical examples, but it was the only revolutionary and Marxist tactic.

But this tactic was never intended as an end in itself. Indeed, Lenin is clear that state capitalism is not socialism<sup>30</sup>, a distinction that Stalinism will later erase with the mystification of socialism in a single country. That said, the conditions of the time are now absolutely exhausted in that capitalist industry has managed to invade probably the entire globe. Therefore, today, state capitalist measures are no longer on the agenda. By the way, in parentheses, Corvo asserts that state capitalism was not a necessity to remedy isolation, a position we defend, but the consequence of a theoretical weakness. If

this is the case, and to be consistent with the logic of the comrade's arguments, he would have to repudiate the Communist Manifesto and, why not, abandon Marxism! In fact, if the tactics of state capitalism are the result of a theoretical error, it should not be attributed to poor Lenin. Already, in the Manifesto, this "theoretical error" appears since Marx and Engels put forward a "state capitalist" orientation for Germany in 1848<sup>31</sup>.

Concerning the Bolsheviks, Corvo ventures to say that they paved the way for counter-revolution as early as 1917 by eliminating the control of proletarians over factories. Here we find again the classic theme of councilism: Lenin only paved the way for

Stalinism. We will not bother here to respond to this



Reprint and new translation of the Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution.

30 . "Nor, I think, has any Communist denied that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism, and not that the new economic system is recognised as a socialist order". Lenin, « Left-wing » Childiness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>

31 . We make a reference to the following part of the Communist Manifesto : "Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State."

myth propagated as much by liberalism as by anarchism. It is easy to find in our pages and in the pages of other groups of the communist left (ICC, ICT, ICP) a refutation of this tenacious myth that refuses to die, among other things because it is defended by elements within the proletarian camp itself, such as comrade Corvo. And if the Bolsheviks are no longer internationalists as early as 1917, what about the 3rd International founded in 1919? Was it born counterrevolutionary? To judge Bolshevik policy, we do not restrict ourselves to what was happening within the four walls of the factories in Russia. This is quite secondary and is the result of a rather anarcho-syndicalist concern<sup>32</sup>. The central aspect of Bolshevik politics was the program of extending the revolution to the world level. On this point, the Bolsheviks were again and again in the vanguard.

It should be noted in passing that Comrade Corvo uses the term "state communism". From the Marxist point of view, the union of these two terms is a political oxymoron. But its use here is revealing. Indeed, the terms "state communism" or "authoritarian communism" have a very precise origin. They were used by the Bakuninists in their struggle against the Marxists in the First International. To what can "state communism" be opposed if not... libertarian communism?

Finally comrade Corvo asks us to take a stand on democracy. We cannot agree with Fredo Corvo's tendency to oppose dictatorship and authority on the one hand and democracy and freedom on the other. This has more to do with the anarchist tradition, which is only the radical version of the great political family of liberalism. For us, the revolution does not get its legitimacy from a majority of votes<sup>33</sup>. In the same way, the workers' councils should not be the proletarian version of parliaments. In other words, the proletarians did not copy the parliamentary rules and then label their actions "proletarian democracy". For us, the revolution must be massive in numbers to ensure that it can materially destroy the old world. But the massive aspect is enough. The revolution does not have to stop at every moment to check whether the majority of proletarians are behind it. This is the difference between a materialist conception of

revolution and a democratist conception.

For us, democracy is neither a principle nor a fetish. It is therefore necessary to be very careful in its use, all the more so because the counter-revolution will always be able to hide its intentions under the deceptive garments of democracy<sup>34</sup>. In spite of everything, it is ridiculous to think that the proletariat will be homogeneous and purely revolutionary on Day 1 of the revolution. There will inevitably be diverse tendencies, disagreements and even contradictions within the class. In the absence of unanimity and in the presence of disagreements, settling debates in general assemblies, making decisions, appointing delegates to workers' councils can often require votes and the use of the means of "proletarian democracy". As such, this use of proletarian democracy is not a principle but a means and a moment in the struggle for the generalization of workers' struggles and the revolutionary unity of the proletariat.

Robin, July 2020

32 . See our texts on the journal *Kommunist* which criticize the famous "workers' control" in *Revolution or War* issues #13 and #14.

33 . Whose caricatured expression can be found in Spartacus' 1918 program: "The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat's conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League."

34 . "As to pure democracy and its role in the future I do not share your opinion. Obviously it plays a far more subordinate part in Germany than in countries with an older industrial development. But that does not prevent the possibility, when the moment of revolution comes, of its acquiring a temporary importance as the most radical bourgeois party (it has already played itself off as such in Frankfurt) and as the final sheet-anchor of the whole bourgeois and even feudal regime. At such a moment the whole reactionary mass falls in behind it and strengthens it; everything which used to be reactionary behaves as democratic." (Letter from Engels to Bebel, december 11th 1884).

## Summary of the journal from July 2019 (#12) to May 2020 (#15)

### **#12 July 2019 Special Issue On the Proletarian Camp and its Future**

The Battle for the Reconfiguration of the Proletarian Camp is Launched

*Struggle for the Party*

The Report of Activities for the 2nd General Meeting of the IGCL

The Report of the 1st Congress of Emancipación (Nuevo Curso)

Our Statement on the 1st Congress of Emancipación

The New "Points of Unity" of the GCCF Some Rapid

Comments on the GCCF "Points of Unity"

*Struggle against Opportunism*

Letter to the group Internationalist Voice

Statement on the 23rd Congress of the ICC : To Introduce the Poison of the Theory of Parasitism

Historical and Theoretical Impasse of the ICC

Theory of the Decomposition (Internal Fraction of the ICC, 2005)

### **#13 September 2019**

Class Struggle and Historical Future

*International Situation*

Leaflet : "Saving the Planet" Requires Capitalism's Destruction and the Exercise of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

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

Look Back at the Yellow Vests Movement in France

Greetings to Klasbatalo's Affiliation to the Internationalist Communist Tendency

*Debate within the Proletarian camp*

On the Period of Transition between Capitalism and Communism

### **#14 February 2020**

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

*International Situation*

International Proletarian Struggles

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

Correspondence : The Question of Working Class Demands

The Strike at the General Motors in the USA (Workers Group)

Wave of Strikes in Finland (ICP-Le Prolétaire)

*Debate within the Proletarian Camp*

How to Join the IGCL and a Communist Group?

Gulf Coast Communist Fraction's Response to the IGCL

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

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

*Text of the Workers Movement*

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

### **#15 May 2020**

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

*International Situation*

1 st Communiqué (March 15th 2020)

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

2 nd Communiqué (March 19th 2020) Coronavirus and Crisis, The Tragic Responsibility of the Communists Against the Virus that is Capitalism (May Day Statement of the Internationalist Communist Tendency)

What is America Trying to Do? (Nuevo Curso, May 12th 2020)

*Debate within the Proletarian Camp*

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

Spain 1936: Can There Be a Proletarian Revolution without Insurrection and Destruction of the Capitalist State? Excerpts of Bilan #18 (April 1935) on the "Proletarian State".

*Text of the Workers Movement*

Where to Begin? (Lenin, 1901)

## OUR POSITIONS

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

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

## OUR ACTIVITY

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

## OUR ORIGINS

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